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15th Assembly



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Debates and Questions



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ADJOURNMENT.....3003

Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

VISITORS
MacKillop Catholic College

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Years 10 and 11 Legal Studies students from MacKillop Catholic College, accompanied by their teachers. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Fong Lim

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

Leave granted.

STATUTE LAW REVISION AND REPEALS BILL
Serial 40

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled Statute Law Revision and Repeals Bill 2025, Serial 40, and table the explanatory statement.

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

The purpose of a statute law revision Bill is to make minor and technical amendments to various Northern Territory laws, including correcting grammatical and typographical errors, rectifying omissions, updating superseded sections and generally tidying up ambiguities and inconsistencies. Amendments proposed in these types of Bills and, indeed, the Bill we are considering today, do not constitute substantive changes to the law or to government policies.

From time to time the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel will draft a statute law revision Bill as part of an ongoing process and produce a new Bill as often as required. They are used as a way of essentially tidying up the statute book in a streamlined fashion. A further benefit to these types of Bills is that they can be used as a vehicle to repeal legislation that is spent or otherwise defunct to maintain and ensure the currency of the statute book.

The Statute Law Revision and Repeals Bill 2025 follows the general pattern of statute law revision Bills by revising and correcting the laws of the Northern Territory in minor respects. While some of the amendments have been identified and suggested by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, others were raised by individual agencies as part of a consultation process undertaken by the Attorney-General's Department.

The Statute Law Revision and Repeals Bill 2025 provides for the revision of 46 different pieces of legislation and subordinate legislation and the repeal of over 230 amendment Acts.

A majority of the amendments in the Bill are relatively self-explanatory. For example, various pieces of legislation have had their references modernised or updated, such as amending the references in multiple Acts from the previous '*Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975*' to the '*Administrative Review Tribunal Act 2024* (Cth)' to reflect the updated reference of the recent 2024 Commonwealth Act. However, I would like to draw members' attention to a number of other amendments.

The definitions of 'Commonwealth administrative laws' in a number of Acts are also being amended to update existing references to Commonwealth laws, including in the *Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2012*.

The Bill amends the *Building Act 1993* to amend the definition of 'building practitioner' to specify which parts of that Act the definition applies to, and which was not clear previously. Another amendment to that Act is to omit the term 'registered builder' and insert 'building practitioner' in line with current terminology.

The Bill amends regulation 2 of the Mental Health and Related Services Regulations 2009 to update the currently outdated list of applicable corresponding law of other jurisdictions.

The Bill amends the *Power Retail Corporation Act 2014* to repeal sections 10 to 12 of that Act which relate to a generation restriction period which has now expired and not been extended. These provisions are now redundant and no longer capable of having effect.

The *Government Owned Corporations Act 2001* is being amended to repeal section 8 to improve clarification and interpretation and address an inconsistency with section 30 which resulted in overlapping powers with slightly different requirements.

Schedule 1 of the Bill amends various provisions throughout the statute book to correct outdated references, clarify and modernise drafting language. For example, the Bill inserts notes into relevant provisions of the *Planning Act 1999* to note that section 139A of that Act applies to the publication of required notices thereby clarifying that publication can be done electronically and removing the outdated reference to publishing in physical newspapers.

Schedule 2 of the Bill repeals over 230 amending Acts from the years 1990 to 1995 and which are still unnecessarily on the statute book, despite having served their purpose of amending their respective primary Acts. Repealing these Acts creates a more streamlined and orderly statute law book by repealing expired amendment Acts and thereby making it more transparent and accessible to Territorians.

Overall, I note that this Bill amends various provisions throughout the statute book to correct outdated references, clarify and modernise drafting language and repeal defunct legislation. Statute law revision Bills are an essential component in ensuring that the Northern Territory's legislation remains accurate, reliable and of the highest possible standard.

I am pleased to commend this Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

TEACHER REGISTRATION (NORTHERN TERRITORY) LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 41

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, Serial 41, and table the explanatory statement.

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

This Bill amends the *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004* and the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Regulations 2004.

With this Bill the government is taking action to deliver on its commitments to keep and attract teachers, fix education and get kids back to school. It also aligns with the government's priority to rebuild the economy and a commitment to ensuring government services are operating effectively, efficiently and delivering value for money for Territorians.

This Bill achieves mandatory registration of all qualified teachers teaching in education and care services and other provisions that boost child safety.

The Bill provides the legislative framework to achieve this commitment with minimal regulatory burden, by extending the legislative framework that already exists for registering primary and secondary school-trained teachers to early childhood-trained teachers.

A range of evidence was drawn on to inform the reforms, including numerous reviews and reports on teacher registration conducted nationally, as well as a public consultation process on implementing early childhood teacher registration in the NT that was conducted in 2024.

The Bill provides for a model where all qualified teachers will be recognised equally for the purpose of teacher registration. This model of reform promotes equity across the teaching profession, reduces red tape, is cost-effective, negates duplication and will not require separate resources or processes to implement.

Extending professional registration to qualified teachers teaching in education and care services will ensure those teachers have been fully assessed against fit and proper person criteria. Recognition is also given to the crucial role early childhood teachers play in shaping a child's development, providing a foundation for future success.

Harmonising registration requirements and elevating the status of early childhood teachers through registration will improve the mobility of early childhood teachers; improve workforce flexibility; assist attraction and retention; and, ultimately, safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of children attending early childhood education and care services.

The safety of our children whilst they are in the care of others, whether that be in our schools or while attending early childhood education and care services, is amongst the highest of priorities for all Australian governments.

Further to fast-tracking the mandatory registration of all teachers teaching in early childhood education and care settings, the 2023 review of child safety arrangements identified systemic safeguards needed to improve protections for children. This included a need for jurisdictions to address information-sharing gaps that currently exist between teacher registration authorities across jurisdictions. This Bill includes provisions that will address these gaps.

A provision is included that enables the Teacher Registration Board to share information kept on the register of teachers with teacher registration authorities in other jurisdictions. An amendment is also included that will enable the board to proactively share relevant information with teacher registration and teacher regulatory authorities if the board reasonably believes the sharing of the information will prevent harm to a child.

This Bill further achieves efficiencies within existing processes and aligns the NT with national standards for teacher registration. The NT has further committed under the national workforce strategy to align teacher registration processes with the Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia. This includes aligning minimum qualification, currency of practice and English language proficiency requirements with those implemented in other jurisdictions. Aligning with the national framework will reduce red tape for teachers registered in other jurisdictions, making it easier for the NT to attract these experienced teachers to boost the Territory's teacher workforce.

The Act and regulations currently contain provisions that make teacher registration cumbersome and duplicative.

Currently, there is confusion as to whether Aboriginal languages are captured as a specialist subject eligible for an employer to apply for an authorisation to employ an unregistered person to teach. An amendment is included to clarify that all languages other than English, as opposed to foreign languages, will qualify as a specialist subject for this purpose. This amendment will support remote schools by providing more flexible employment options and will also support children and their families by ensuring their education is culturally appropriate and relevant.

Further to this, an employer will now be able to apply for an authorisation to employ an unregistered person to teach a specialist subject for up to two years, removing the previous calendar year restriction. This amendment reduces unnecessary red tape and creates flexibility for schools trying to fill specialist positions such as VET trainers; Aboriginal teachers teaching specialist language and culture programs in schools; or specialist music teachers, to provide another example.

Currently all teacher registrations expire at the end of the calendar year. The 31 December expiry date has proven problematic in the past due to the teacher registration renewal and fee payment process for all teachers occurring during an extended holiday period with shutdown times and public holidays. The Bill includes an amendment to remove this legislated requirement. The amendment will enable the board to determine in policy any future expiry date for teacher registrations if the overall term does not exceed the timeframes specified in the legislation for the relevant registration.

This Bill will also strengthen the regulatory integrity of the Teacher Registration Board and the office of the board.

A key part of rebuilding the economy is this government's commitment to ensuring its services are operated with transparency, integrity and efficiency. The current legislation does not clearly define the relationship between the board, the department and the minister. As such, there has been confusion around roles and responsibilities of both the department and the board, including who manages the director and staff of the office of the board, and how performance and policy directions are set and monitored.

Included in this Bill are urgent reforms that will clarify the minister's power to set policy, performance and accountability expectations for the board, and the department's responsibility to ensure the board is appropriately resourced and the accountability of the director of the board is upheld. This reform does not introduce new policy but, rather, clarifies the current intent of statute, contract and practice. Additional

amendments have been included that promote the independence of the board and prevent ministerial and departmental interference with respect to the board's power to regulate the teaching profession in accordance with the Act.

By progressing this legislation we are taking strong action to protect children, address longstanding governance issues and deliver on our government's election promises to rebuild the economy and fix education by securing the teaching workforce for the future.

I am pleased to commend this Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I do not want to miss a step because all the standing orders and sessional orders have been changed in regard to the scrutiny committee. I want to see whether that is what the minister will add next. If not, I understand that this is my time to take that opportunity.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for report by 20 November 2025.

You jumped the gun.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, keep that in mind for the future.

Ms Uibo: We are worried that we will always miss our spot because there have been some big changes to scrutiny in this parliament.

Mr Edgington: We are always open to scrutiny.

Ms Uibo: Until you are not; until you change standing orders so we cannot …

Madam SPEAKER: Cease interjecting, please.

Motion agreed to.

TOURISM NT AMENDMENT (INTEGRATION OF NTMEC) BILL
Serial 42

Ms BOOTHBY (Tourism and Hospitality): Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled Tourism NT Amendment (Integration of NTMEC) Bill 2025, Serial 42, and table the explanatory statement.

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

This Bill integrates the roles of tourism, hospitality, event management and promotion, creating a new statutory entity called Tourism and Events NT, which replaces the Northern Territory Major Events Company Pty Ltd and Tourism NT and establishes a new tourism and events advisory board. This Bill amends the *Tourism NT Act 2012* to rename the agency, expand its functions and repeal provisions made redundant by the integration.

As a government we have identified there should be a strategic and seamless coordination of major event planning into the development of tourism in the Northern Territory, and that there needs to be a better alignment through integration of the tourism and event roles and functions between Tourism NT and the Northern Territory Major Events Company. The Bill proposes an amendment to bring together these two powerhouse entities to better promote the Territory's tourism and events offerings. It aims to ensure the new entity has the power to perform both the tourism and events function in an efficient manner.

The new entity will be an evolution of Tourism NT, incorporating responsibility for attracting and delivering major events as previously undertaken by NTMEC. It is intended that Tourism and Events NT retain a flexible and nimble approach whilst delivering a more strategic and cost-conscious combined operation.

Tourism and Events NT will be guided by a new advisory board, replacing both the previous NTMEC board and the Tourism NT Board of Commissioners. The new Tourism and Events NT Advisory Board will provide forward-thinking leadership. We want innovators, connectors and thought leaders who can provide

transformational advice, anticipate national and global trends and help shift the dial for the NT economically, reputationally and experientially.

Events will now join Tourism in providing accountability to government through clear reporting and oversight requirements. Annual reporting obligations will continue, ensuring transparency in how public funds are invested to grow tourism and deliver for Territorians.

An expression of interest process to participate on the advisory board opened on Wednesday 24 September and closes on 22 October 2025. We anticipate appointments will be made with effect from 1 January 2026. The current Tourism NT board will support the transition until 31 December 2025.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication of staff across both Tourism NT and the NT Major Events Company. Their professionalism and collaboration have ensured a smooth transition as we move towards a unified organisation.

There are significant benefits for the tourism and hospitality sectors in having one entity responsible for both destination and event marketing. Opportunities to expand ticket sales through tourism distribution avenues are already being realised, which will assist to build more financially sustainable events and contribute to rebuilding the Territory lifestyle. A consolidation of social media audiences across previously different brands provides for a stronger and more consistent message, along with a greater reach. This will assist the Territory's positioning in interstate and international markets.

This reform builds on industry consultation and aligns with the CLP government's vision through its Rebuilding the Economy and Restoring the Territory Lifestyle strategies. By bringing two skilled teams together under one brand we can market the Territory more effectively, attract more visitors and deliver stronger economic returns. Importantly, by showcasing the Territory lifestyle we can encourage more people to call the Territory home.

This reform also supports the Territory's growing population. The latest ABS figures show the NT's population grew by 1.3% in the year to March—above forecasts—adding around 3,500 people. Tourism and Events NT will build on this momentum by strengthening the NT's reputation as a great place to live, work, visit and invest.

The integration is already delivering practical results since we announced the intention in March this year. These include:

- major event tickets are now available through travel trade channels, bundled with accommodation, flights and tours

- cross-promotion of tourism and events, expanding reach, including the sellout T20 International cricket match

- NT events are now featured in Tourism NT agent and media programs, boosting exposure with global buyers.

To top it off, by our tourism and events teams working together, we won the MXGP Global Award for Best Promotion of a Round at the MXGP Awards in Darwin. Darwin won against everybody in the world. This grand prix event delivered in spades, with 58% of attendees coming from interstate and overseas.

Tourism Central Australia Chair Patrick Bedford has said the creation of Tourism and Events Northern Territory marked an exciting milestone for the Territory's tourism future:

> *By having one coordinated organisation, we will be far better placed to grow visitation, support local businesses, and deliver events that truly showcase the richness and quirkiness of the Northern Territory …*

He said:

> *Our collective focus is to provide a powerful and authentic reason for visitors to come to the NT and stay longer.*

Tourism Top End Chair Chris Chaffe has said this is:

> *… an important strategic alignment between two powerhouse organisations.*

He said:

> *Bringing these two organisations together will create efficiencies and ensure better delivery of major events for the Northern Territory …*

He said this:

> *… enhances the importance of large events that the Northern Territory Government supports financially, as we know these large events have major economic value for our tourism businesses.*

National tourism industry leaders have also welcomed the move. Journey Beyond Executive General Manager Sales and Partnerships Alicia Triggs said:

> *It's a natural fit for Tourism NT and NT Major Events Company to come together under the new banner of Tourism and Events NT. At Journey Beyond we have proudly partnered with both teams for many years. Tourism and events are intrinsically linked, each one strengthens the other, creating a strong driver for visitation.*

Journey Beyond has:

> *… long valued the support of Tourism NT in promoting our iconic and immersive experiences across the Territory, from The Ghan and Outback Spirit Tours to Darwin Harbour Cruises, the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, and our network of remote camps and lodges. In addition to our regular itineraries and schedules, we also proudly curate unique travel experiences and partnerships that align with the Territory's vibrant events calendar, maximising seasonal opportunities and enriching the visitor journey.*

She went on to say Journey Beyond is excited to continue its:

> *… strong partnership with Tourism and Events NT to showcase a must-visit destination, both nationally and globally.*

AAT Kings Group CEO Ben Hall said:

> *… events and tourism are natural partners and together are a marketing powerhouse.*

Mr Hall said:

> *We have seen tourism and events combine and grow this sector in many other Australian States in recent years, so this initiative is a sensible one for the Northern Territory, creating better synergies and wider reach for all to benefit from.*

He said:

> *The merger will help draw more people to the NT and encourage them to stay longer and experience more.*

This Bill reflects the CLP Finocchiaro government's practical approach to rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle. It is about getting the structure right, focusing on delivery and ensuring that every tourism dollar works harder for the Territory.

There is universal support for these reforms from the tourism and events industries.

I am pleased to commend this Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

Ms BOOTHBY (Tourism and Hospitality): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for report by 20 November 2025.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL REPORT
Backing Small Business

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, I present the ministerial report on Backing Small Business, notified on 13 October 2025.

Backing Territory businesses is in our Finocchiaro CLP government's DNA. There is no question that small business, which comprises 96% of all Territory businesses, is the heart and backbone of the Territory's economy, employing tens of thousands of Territorians, driving innovation and strengthening our communities. Small business is the engine that drives growth, innovation and community prosperity across every region of the Territory. That is why we are backing small business.

It is October, which means October Business Month (OBM) is in full swing. Established 31 years ago by the Perron CLP government, OBM 2025 is delivering a packed program of events, including opportunities for businesspeople to hear from inspirational speakers, participate in focused workshops and seminars and network with like-minded business owners. It is a practical approach to supporting our business community to build capacity, resilience and connection and, most critically, grow our economy.

With the theme Play to our Strengths, OBM 2025 has more than 200 events and professional development programs being delivered across the Territory, each designed to support businesses to grow, innovate and collaborate.

Long distances with our sometimes challenging natural weather events—for example, our monsoon season, which has the ability to adversely impact supply chains into remote locations—can drive significant differences in the cost of doing business. As well, as a small jurisdiction, business growth cycles are heavily influenced by major projects, making planning a little more challenging for businesses and investors. That is why the OBM 2025 program focuses on three key areas—digitalisation, workforce and resilience—providing practical advice to assist Territory businesses, particularly those in regional or remote areas, to deal with those challenges.

Time and again Territorians have demonstrated that we are a jurisdiction of entrepreneurs and problem-solvers who overcome adversity and challenges through innovation and, at times, sheer tenacity. Our government is proud of our history in supporting Territory businesses through OBM. OBM 2025 is on track to exceed the success of OBM 2024, which had 4,900 registrations for its 182 events, with 94% of participants giving the 2024 OBM a big thumbs up.

OBM is not the only initiative of our government that supports our Territory businesses. Whether in energy, Defence, tourism, agriculture or digital services, Territory businesses are open to taking on a challenge, stepping out of their comfort zones and looking for new ways to compete and expand their businesses so it is beholden on our government to support them in their endeavours.

As part of our government's commitment to support Territory businesses to thrive, I recently led a delegation of 20 businesses to the 2025 World Expo in Osaka to explore new markets, foster new relationships and strengthen economic ties with Japan. As well, three of the businesses participating in the delegation, along with two other Territory businesses, were selected as suppliers to the Australian pavilion, which is an incredible achievement. Even more exciting, a number of the businesses that participated in the delegation have reported they are now in discussions to export their products to Japan. Although it is early days, this is an incredible outcome.

The success stories of these businesses—from brewers and artists in Alice Springs to exporters in Darwin—and their willingness to step outside their comfort zones, proudly putting the Territory on display on the world stage at the World Expo 2025 Osaka, was a clear demonstration of Territorians' entrepreneurial spirit and the competitiveness of Territory businesses' products and services.

Our priority in supporting small business is plain and simple: make the Territory the best place to do business, a place where business can thrive and businesses can play to their strengths and be competitive; where business is regulated only when needed and sensibly; where payroll taxes encourage businesses to grow and train their team; where they can find the workers they need; where there is connectivity and infrastructure that levels the playing field in aviation, digital, roads, and energy and water inputs; and where opportunities are unlocked for businesses to capture.

To deliver on our vision of being the best place to do business a whole-of-government approach that enables business to grow, invest and play to its strengths has been embraced. Most Territory enterprises are lean

hands-on operations. More than half are sole traders and partnerships; a quarter employ between one and four staff; and only 4% employ more than 20 workers. The profile of Territory businesses underscores the importance of targeted programs that reduce administrative burden, support digital adoption and create conditions for growth.

Over-regulation is one of the greatest barriers to growth for small business. It was therefore critical that regulatory processes be reviewed to ensure compliance requirements were proportionate, predictable and transparent. That is why our government established the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce in November 2024 to report back to government in June 2025.

The taskforce found that complex and inconsistent regulatory processes across government added cost and delays without improving community outcomes. Seventy recommendations for improvement were made, with 60 accepted to be implemented by our government and the remaining 10 accepted in principle. Of the 60 accepted, 48 will be implemented by the end of this financial year which is evidence that our government acts decisively.

We are also cutting red tape for our incorporated associations through a tiered reform of the *Associations Act 2003* and delivering governance training that builds capacity in the not-for-profit sector.

We are applying a risk-based approach to regulation, focusing resources on higher-risk activities and reducing requirements for low-risk ones.

Agencies are being directed to simplify forms, enable electronic lodgement and publish clear timeframes. They have been tasked with reducing approval timeframes for business-related applications by 50%.

Making the Territory the best place to do business also means ensuring that Territory businesses win their fair share of government work. To support that we are undertaking the most comprehensive procurement reforms in more than a decade, simplifying processes, reducing red tape and improving feedback to tenderers.

The first tranche of reforms went live on 1 October 2025, streamlining procurement under new tier 1 and tier 2 thresholds for low-risk, readily available and commonly used goods and services. This modernises procurement, making it easier, faster and, most importantly, fairer to do business in the Territory and putting Territory businesses first.

We also appointed the new Territory Procurement Champion, who will back local businesses, resolve complaints independently and help drive more local contracts.

A competitive business environment requires a competitive tax setting that supports, not stifles, growth. For small enterprises even modest changes in payroll, licence or compliance costs can determine whether a business hires another worker, invests in new equipment or simply stays afloat. A competitive tax environment will ensure the Northern Territory remains the best place to do business.

That is why we increased the payroll tax threshold to $2.5m and introduced full payroll tax exemptions for eligible apprentices and trainees, directly supporting local skills development and helping employers take on and train young Territorians. This threshold—the highest in the nation—ensures that about two-thirds of Territory employers pay no payroll tax at all. For those above the threshold, the rate remains among the lowest in the country, providing certainty for businesses planning to expand their workforce. This policy directly rewards job creation and skills investment and complements our investment in vocational pathways and the workforce strategy, ensuring businesses are not penalised for investing in people.

In addition to payroll tax relief our government continues to review licence and regulatory fees to remove unnecessary duplication and reduce costs for small operators. Through targeted fee waivers during business startup phases and digital transformation of licence renewals, we are simplifying compliance and improving cash flow for small business.

We are also delivering a range of initiatives to assist businesses to improve their competitiveness and resilience. The Territory Business Advisors network provides practical guidance to thousands of enterprises each year, ensuring that help is local, timely and free.

The Aboriginal Business Development Program and partnerships with regional organisations are supporting enterprises that combine economic independence with cultural heritage and local employment. This is economic empowerment in practice.

We are also supporting innovation and productivity through targeted grants and partnerships. During 2024–25 the Business Acceleration Program assisted 47 CEOs to identify growth opportunities and overcome business challenges. Together they forecasted 44% higher revenue and 15% more jobs. Nine Business Innovation Program grants were awarded, projecting $383m in revenue growth and 336 new jobs. Our Business Growth Program provided $574,000 to 107 firms to expand operations, building capacity and creating jobs in every region.

We are fostering innovation ecosystems through initiatives such as The Array and the Horizon Angel Investor Network, linking Territory startups with investors and mentoring.

Through our partnership with the Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre we are funding 16 local projects worth $8.75m, building high-value manufacturing capacity and creating skilled jobs.

Circular economy programs are delivering recycling infrastructure valued at more than $9m across urban and regional centres, diverting 75,000 tonnes of waste from landfill and supporting new industry growth. These projects show how innovation and sustainability can go hand in hand.

We are also changing culture. A government that enables business must replace ‘no unless proven’ with ‘yes if safe’. Agencies have started implementing performance standards for responsiveness and training officers to provide facilitative advice rather than procedural barriers.

A thriving small business sector needs a capable and available workforce. To that end we have established the Office of Workforce Development to coordinate planning across industry, training providers and government.

We are also connecting local people with local jobs. We have delivered and boosted the WorkerConnect platform, supporting a talent pool of more than 16,000 workers and 690 Territory employers. We have prepared community workforce plans to inform stakeholders on nine remote community clusters in Central Australia. These plans provide information on workforce development, job outcomes, remote training delivery needs, remote training hubs and mobile training unit activations.

Our government continues to invest in infrastructure that reduces costs and expands opportunity. By improving logistics and reducing transport costs we give small businesses a fairer playing field. Enabling infrastructure in partnership with industry for regional supply chains, freight corridors, energy networks and industrial precincts will unlock investment in manufacturing, agriculture and critical minerals.

For small business, connectivity—physical and digital—is not a luxury; it is an operating necessity. Digital connectivity is being strengthened through collaborations with Telstra, Google and NEXTDC, with projects such as the $400m Darwin–Adelaide fibre link and the seven-megawatt NEXTDC data centre providing critical infrastructure for the digital economy.

Our work in increasing air connectivity continues with the Territory Aviation Attraction Scheme extended through to 2028, underpinning new flight routes and boosting market access.

Our support for small business is outward looking. Trade and investment are integral to diversification and resilience. To this end our Finocchiaro CLP government is actively connecting local enterprises with new markets through delegations and partnerships across Asia and the Pacific.

Our trade, investment and opportunities division is supporting 41 active investors and a private sector pipeline of 75 projects which are valued at $119bn. These investments have the potential to support 19,000 construction jobs and 6,600 ongoing positions. Two co-investments through the Paspalis Co-Investment Fund—Salty Games and Go Locum—illustrate how government partnerships can catalyse innovation and export growth. We provide pre and post-market entry support through the TradeStart adviser program to troubleshoot challenges and refine market entry strategies.

It would be remiss of me not to thank the amazing team members at the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations who have embraced our government’s agenda and are working tirelessly to make the Territory the best place to do business, where a business can be competitive, there is connectivity and infrastructure that levels the playing field and opportunities are unlocked for businesses to capture.

Our support for small business is absolute. The future for small businesses in the Territory as we work together with them to rebuild our economy has never looked better.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I welcome the minister's report. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, making up nearly 95% of all businesses across the Northern Territory. Behind each of these businesses are Territorians—individuals, mums and dads, families, friends and business partners—who make it all work and have displayed enormous drive, ambition and vision to set their own path.

Starting a business, as many people in this House know, comes with enormous risk. You are putting yourself, your finances and your reputation on the line to provide a service to the community. It takes courage, hard work and commitment to excellence. Across our communities Territorians have taken the significant step of setting up their own enterprises. Each has their own story to tell on how they got started, the challenges they faced and what drives them every day to continue. They are stories of tenacity, resilience and seeing vision through the enterprise of hard work.

When you combine all those stories across the Territory you start to build a picture of the beating heart of the Territory's economy. From the cafe owner who remembers your order every day to the tradie who turns up promptly to your house and finds that bathroom leak that has been driving you mad, the graphic designer who turns around your urgent job as quickly as they can and the training provider who helps you to skill up to take that next step in your career and business, Territorians have been going above and beyond to provide quality services for fellow Territorians, quality advice and quality support across the NT.

These Territorians do not look for a handout, but governments play an important role in supporting our businesses to thrive, whether that is supporting them to take their first step, to take their next step to grow their business or by removing the barriers in the way of their success that government has the ability to do. This means ensuring we have a pro-small business regime in the Territory where businesses can access well-targeted business growth support or advice on how to navigate the regulatory environment and where investment in infrastructure projects is strategic and enables businesses to thrive no matter where they are located.

It is critical that the government keeps an eye on the ball across our key sectors, including construction, mining, the service industry, tourism, agriculture, Defence and retail, each of which has unique needs and context, which requires the government to work in partnership with our businesses and big industry and listen to what they are telling them.

I acknowledge that this government's decision to increase the payroll tax-free threshold for businesses was a good move. That has been supported across the business community, but a number of decisions this government has made fly in the face of the rhetoric about supporting small business, particularly in regional and remote communities, including Alice Springs.

It is pretty rich for government members to stick up their heads to talk about supporting small businesses in the same week that they ripped a phenomenal amount of funding and a huge project out of Alice Springs. A couple of days after the whole government was in Alice Springs, to do it from afar in Darwin on the radio was a disrespectful move by the CLP. Many jobs and businesses have been lost. This government has thrown many years of work down the gurgler just to catch the next headline, unfortunately.

The CLP does not get that in order to grow the economy, particularly in a regional place like Alice Springs, to allow our small businesses to not only survive but also thrive, there needs to be a plan. The CLP does not need another media release or Facebook post; it needs a plan, a vision—some idea of where it wants to take the Territory, particularly an important part like Central Australia. This lot, unfortunately, do not have any of that. Nowhere is that more obvious—it is in plain sight—than in the lack of a plan for Alice Springs. I would gladly be corrected if the CLP can provide a plan for rebuilding the economy of Central Australia. I would be happy to be corrected if it will do that work, but it has not done it in the last 12 months. Imagine simply taking money out of the art gallery project without having an alternative plan in place for the town.

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge your advocacy in wanting this project, and the disappointment of not having anything. The government simply said, 'We are not doing the project, and we are not diverting, transferring or looking at something else into which we can put our energy and efforts'. That has probably been the kicker in this decision.

The disappointment is in cutting the project via radio by the Treasurer, an Alice Springs member, without the guts to face the people of Alice Springs and not having an alternative plan. That is probably the icing on the sour cake.

What have small businesses said about this decision? We know that they are not happy, and many have spoken out already. There is a lack of respect, particularly when the Tourism minister when asked in

Question Time about what else will happen for Alice Springs dismissed the importance of providing an answer for the third-largest population in the Northern Territory. Perhaps the government is saying that the gallery would have been everything for the town. It would have been an amazing game changer.

I acknowledge that Labor delays meant this project had not got off the ground, but it does not mean that the CLP should give up on the people of Alice Springs. That has been clear. We cannot change the past, but the CLP has darkened the future of Alice Springs, Central Australia and the economy. I see some members smirking. The small business owners who made plans two or three years ago to invest in buying property and moving location to capitalise on that game-changing project—where are they now?

I would love to be corrected. Have CLP members met with those small businesses and said, 'Sorry, we axed this massive plan, but we have another plan and here it is. Sorry you have wasted two or three years of pre-planning the future of your business and livelihood because we have decided to make this radio announcement because we are too scared to do the hard work. We are too scared of failure, so we will not do anything for Alice Springs'? I would love to be corrected if they have bothered to go to small business owners to hear the stories of the years of planning those people made about the future of the economy in Alice Springs. There is nothing.

CLP members are good at putting out media releases, Facebook posts and little videos of their team dinners and family dinners together around the Territory—whatever—but they are not good at planning for the economy, which they promised in August last year they would do. That is more than 12 months ago, when they won government. There is nothing for Alice Springs. Need I say more?

Because Alice Springs has been abandoned, the business community is also feeling the pinch. All I can say, having seen and heard the disappointment, is please make a plan, because you have not yet shown the people of Alice Springs what your vision is for Central Australia.

Turning to Arnhem Land, residents in Nhulunbuy are concerned because they have been left in the dark by the CLP's lack of care and attention to a plan for Nhulunbuy post-mining. The CLP should be disgraced because it has done nothing. It has not talked about Nhulunbuy or East Arnhem Land. What is the government doing for the economic development of a large region of the Northern Territory and for the small businesses that operate in Nhulunbuy and the surrounding communities of East Arnhem Land? I have no doubt that other members of the Gove Peninsula Futures Reference Group are doing their bit, but the government is dropping the ball on the Nhulunbuy transition. It has cut funding from the project and the Nhulunbuy township. People are concerned that the government is running away from responsibility for Nhulunbuy altogether.

The CLP needs to come clean with traditional owners who have small businesses. Just in the last week two esteemed Aboriginal businesses from East Arnhem won a Chamber of Commerce award and, just last night, Blak Business Awards.

This is an economically important part of the Northern Territory, but there is nothing from the CLP about the future planning of the economy for Nhulunbuy. It would be devastating for the entire Northern Territory if the government turned its back on the businesses and communities of East Arnhem Land. I strongly encourage it not to do this.

I turn to Jabiru. We know that, sadly, the CLP has bad form in turning its back on our regions. Jabiru is an unfortunate example of what the CLP has done in the past. Jabiru and Kakadu had money ripped out without warning, consultation or even a follow-up visit to tell people about these big decisions that will affect the future of small businesses. The community in Jabiru and that region have been put on the backburner and dismissed.

We talked about the transformation of Jabiru from the mining town it was to the ecologically sustainable tourism town that it is planning to be, but without warning $20m was pulled out of the Bininj resource centre that was intended to be a central part of new tourism, offering the town a way forward as a tourism and service delivery hub.

That transition project in Jabiru is another project that the CLP dropped the ball on. Guess what? CLP members can go to Jabiru pretty easily; it is only two hours from Darwin, where they all sit. All they care about are Darwin and Palmerston. It is a two-hour drive on a double-lane bitumen road, so they can do a day trip; they do not even have to stay overnight. CLP members could go to Jabiru and talk to people and businesses in the township and the park to find out what the government needs to do to support them.

Another thing the CLP dropped the ball on is micro economies and economies of scale when it comes to regional and remote opportunities. Please take that up. Go out and listen. The Member for Arafura would be keen to give you contacts so that you can do your homework properly. I see that the Member for Barkly is interested; he will go out. He is not afraid to travel in the bush, whether it is on a dirt road or a bitumen road. Let us see whether the rest of the CLP members will take it up. I am not sure whether the minister has bothered to go out to Jabiru, yet she talks about small businesses.

Do not even get me started on cutting the $20m Gunbalanya health clinic. That is a disgrace.

Construction is one of the biggest industries in the Northern Territory. The construction industry supports hundreds of other businesses and thousands of Territory jobs, but it is the biggest loser from the government's $1bn infrastructure budget cut. That is $1bn of work gone for small businesses, leaving them no opportunity to grow, enhance or sustain their businesses. That cut has affected local jobs. Small businesses that form part of the supply chain have been impacted by the short-sightedness of the CLP. The CLP members think they know better than every person who works in the industry, is an expert in their field or runs a business; therefore, they do not recognise the impact of their massive decision.

People in the construction sector are waiting for communication from the government about what has been significantly downsized in the capital works program. The government does not care about the bush because it cut a lot of projects from the bush. That is easy for government members to defend because all of them, other than three or four, live in Darwin. I have spoken with people in the construction industry over the last couple of weeks. The government has not explained the process and the impact on businesses if it does not have a pipeline of works. That is the construction industry's core business—its bread and butter. I hope that the government gets its skates on and gives the construction industry those answers. The government talks about backing small businesses, being honest, transparent and accountable, having integrity and building relationships, so it is critical that it does this.

The construction industry is at a standpoint. The CLP's favourite line is that it will not accept the status quo. The CLP is not, because it is ripping out money. The status quo is changing, unfortunately for the construction industry.

The local sourcing of materials makes a huge difference to the construction industry, given that demand for sand, crushed rock and gravel is on the rise for housing and road projects—when there are projects from the government. It is critical that these materials are of the highest quality to withstand our harsh conditions and extreme weather. It is incumbent on government to ensure that construction businesses can source these materials for their projects.

Construction businesses need a pipeline of works to plan for, so they know whether to keep people or lay them off. This has a huge impact on the Territory's economy. Should a business continue to employ three people or let one go? Those decisions affect individuals, families and the Territory economy. If the government does not support small business jobs that has an impact on other businesses, service delivery and providers.

The tourism and hospitality sector is another critical economic driver. The Territory has one of the highest proportions of employing tourism businesses and the share of total employing businesses in Australia. These businesses range from large firms to micro tourism providers that offer authentic Territory experiences. The Territory has more than 2,500 tourism-related businesses and about half of these are considered to be small or microbusinesses. From offering escapes to iconic and world-class assets like Kakadu and Litchfield National Park to beautiful overnight stays in remote parts, like Banubanu in East Arnhem Land, these businesses offer real Territory experiences which are special.

The sector supports a number of jobs and small Aboriginal businesses, on country or in town, offering an insight into the oldest continuous living culture in the world. That truly unique experience is the major tourism drawcard in the Northern Territory. Many of these businesses are family run and they play an important role in their communities.

Last night at the Blak Business Awards an award winner was Bawaka homelands tourism business, a Yolngu business run by Timmy and his family. It is a fantastic story, with a lot of *yindi djama* (hard work, big work) to have an amazing tourism product.

Members of the CLP government, please get off the bitumen and on the dirt track and support those small businesses. Find out what else you need to do support businesses, particularly in very remote settings.

Individual small businesses do not have big buying power, but how they impact each other in a small setting is unique to the Territory. We want to ensure that the CLP government focuses on how it can boost our small businesses and support them rather than impacting them by cutting things, like $1bn from the infrastructure budget.

The CLP government is a master at press releases and spin. Today there was a report about cost-of-living pressures having a significant impact on Territory businesses, individuals and families, so we want to ensure that the CLP does not put its head in the sand and think that things will get better on their own and does not hide away and not answer questions about what it is doing.

The payroll tax scheme has been welcomed, but there is much more to do. We want to hear more about those plans so that we can share, celebrate and challenge them to get the best for our Territory businesses. When our small businesses thrive it has a positive impact on the rest of our economy.

Power prices and all those overhead costs have an impact. Madam Speaker, you are business owner, so you understand the ebb and flow of the business world. We want to ensure that the government is doing everything it can for small businesses so that it is the backer of small business; at the moment it is failing to do so.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, I affirm this government's unwavering commitment to the powerhouse of our economy: Territory businesses. They are the heart, backbone and the beating pulse of prosperity in the Northern Territory. Backing them is not just policy for us; like the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations said in her statement, it is in our government's DNA.

It was interesting to hear the Leader of the Opposition publicly state today how important small business is in the Territory, given the damage Labor did to business over the last eight years of its term in government. I am determined to speak frankly and touch on the failure of the previous Labor government to support businesses across the Territory.

It is no secret that for years Territorian entrepreneurs and workers have faced a tough environment marked by rising costs, workforce shortages and limited government assistance. What did the Labor government do? It largely ignored pressing issues and implemented policies that failed to address the needs of our business community. Under Labor's watch, business closures rose dramatically and many small and medium enterprises struggled to stay afloat. The lack of a focused economic strategy, inadequate support for workforce development and the failure to tackle spiralling cost pressures left too many Territorians out of work and too many businesses closing their doors.

Instead of backing the backbone of our economy—small businesses and local entrepreneurs—the Labor government allowed uncertainty, red tape and a lack of meaningful investment that choked business potential. The Labor government's neglect extended to critical sectors, whether it was neglecting infrastructure, failing to attract investment or not providing the incentives businesses needed to grow and create jobs. Its inability to respond effectively to the unique challenges of the Territory from geographic remoteness to workforce shortages ensured ongoing economic stagnation and hardship for many.

We heard time and again from industry bodies and business owners that they needed a government that listened, acted and understood the challenges on the ground and would support businesses with practical relevant measures. Unfortunately, those calls went largely unanswered during Labor's tenure.

Under our CLP government with a new approach to a renewed commitment, businesses in the Northern Territory can look forward to real support. We are already seeing the benefits of our action and what it is bringing to businesses in the Territory. This government is focused on cutting red tape, offering payroll tax relief, attracting skilled workers through improved migration programs and investing in infrastructure that unlocks economic growth.

From Darwin to Alice Springs and from the Barkly to East Arnhem our businesses underpin jobs, spark innovation and inspire community growth in every region. Nowhere is this more evident than in the vibrant electorate of Fannie Bay. Situated in the inner northern suburbs of Darwin, Fannie Bay includes bustling commercial precincts like the Parap shopping village, The Avenue shops and surrounding business area, the Coconut Grove business precinct, Fannie Bay shops, East Point restaurants, the famous Mindil Beach Sunset Market, Mindil Beach Casino and Resort and the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens, just to name a few.

Fannie Bay is an urban electorate that supports a diverse business community, ranging from dynamic small enterprises to established service providers. Fannie Bay's business landscape reflects the Territory's broader strengths. Many enterprises are sole traders or small businesses, and they are all integral to the local economic and community vitality. These businesses contend with typical challenges such as distance and supply chain pressures, yet they thrive thanks to the entrepreneurial spirit that defines our electorate and the people behind the scenes.

Our government's initiatives, like streamlining regulations, providing tax relief and investing heavily in connectivity infrastructure, are designed to empower places like Fannie Bay. Fannie Bay stands as a shining example where economic opportunity, community lifestyle and sustainable growth intersect. By making the Northern Territory the best place to do business, we support Fannie Bay's businesses to remain competitive, resilient and confident amid evolving challenges. Despite distance, cost pressures and supply chain challenges, our entrepreneurs continue to prove that the NT is a place of innovation and opportunity.

Small businesses drive our prosperity. They create jobs, boost local investment and sustain regional communities. They make up 96% of Territory enterprises. Our business entry is higher than the national average, underscoring strong confidence and entrepreneurship across construction, real estate, professional services, transport, warehousing, health and social assistance. More than half of our small enterprises are sole traders or partnerships, and a quarter employ between one and four staff. In our regions, from Central Australia to Big Rivers, small businesses keep towns alive.

Our goal is simple: make the Northern Territory the best place to do business. That means sharpening competitiveness, making regulation sensible, ensuring reliable infrastructure and unlocking opportunities through major projects, procurement and trade. We are cutting red tape and halving approval times, pushing clear timeframes and introducing e-lodgement. Our 'yes if safe' approach ensures decisions are fair, fast and consistent.

The NT already offers Australia's most competitive payroll tax settings with the highest threshold in the nation. We support competitiveness with programs that deliver real results. These initiatives have projected hundreds of millions in revenue and created hundreds of new jobs. Our $3m Cyber Invest and Biz Secure initiatives safeguard digital and physical resilience.

A capable and available workforce is essential. DAMA III is delivering skilled workers, while WorkerConnect and Study NT connect employers and talent, contributing millions to our economy. Training expos and settlement assistance are ensuring workers stay and succeed.

We are expanding markets through procurement reforms and trade missions to our Asian neighbours, positioning the Territory as Australia's gateway to Asia. This investment pipeline includes 75 projects worth $119bn, supporting tens of thousands of jobs. New agreements on critical minerals and energy supply chains reinforce our role as a trusted partner in the Indo-Pacific.

The message is clear: we are rebuilding the economy and backing Territory businesses to be competitive, connected and confident. With a population of about 6,100 electors in Fannie Bay, every business matters and every job opportunity counts. Our government's agenda ensures that from the vibrant markets of Parap to the tech innovators of the Darwin Botanic Gardens precinct, local entrepreneurs have what they need to succeed.

Together we are building a strong, connected economy, with Fannie Bay as a vital part of its future. Through streamlined regulation, tax relief and investment in innovation and connectivity, we are delivering our promise to make the Northern Territory the best place in Australia to do business.

Previous Labor governments in the Northern Territory believed in controlling every aspect of our economy and community. They expanded bureaucratic red tape, imposed heavy regulations and sought to centralise decision-making power in government hands instead of empowering businesses and individuals to make their own choices and innovate. They chose to micromanage, stifling growth and creating uncertainty. This controlling approach hampered entrepreneurial spirit and weighed down our local economy with unnecessary constraints. True economic growth comes from trust, freedom and support, not from government trying to control every detail.

Our message is clear: businesses in the Northern Territory deserve more than lip-service; they deserve a government that backs them fully and delivers certainty and security. That is the future we are building—a future the previous Labor government failed to provide.

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I thank Minister Cahill for highlighting the often unsung heroes of our economy, our small business owners. They are the risk takers, innovators and doers, working hard to make a great life and get ahead for themselves and their families.

As Treasurer I am acutely aware that the nearly 17,000 small businesses that call the Northern Territory home are the lifeblood of our economy. Small business matters to this government.

When the CLP was elected the Territory was in disarray. Small businesses were bearing the brunt of a broken economy where the only things booming were crime and incompetence. It was a sad state of affairs that had to change fast, and change it did under a CLP government.

Labor's idea of economic growth was taxing business out of existence. Our plan is growing businesses, creating jobs and investing in the Territory's future. We started with staff. It is hard enough to find and hire great staff so it makes no sense to add another tax barrier. My constituents were loud and clear in saying, 'Get out of our way to hire'.

The CLP did what made the biggest impact—giving NT businesses the highest payroll tax-free threshold in Australia. We increased it from $1.5m to $2.5m. This was a game changer for many businesses and meant there was one fewer barrier to deal with. As a result two-thirds of businesses with wages below $2.5m pay zero payroll tax. While we were at it, we provided full exemptions for apprentices and trainees.

We are making the Territory the place to be. Thousands of people are asking where they can live with better opportunities and lifestyle. We are broadcasting loud and clear every day, 'Come to the Territory; come to the place of opportunity.' Under our Rebuilding the Economy strategy we are making the Territory the best place in the nation to live, work, invest and grow a business.

We continue to work hard to deliver $2m a year for workforce attraction and skilled migration. There is $88m for tourism promotion and, in some cases, hooking in travellers who have decided to call the Territory home. There is $120m on training and higher education so that those in the Territory can be skilled up and provide those skills back to the Territory, helping to grow our economy and small business.

Our next focus was on procurement reform. We were told procurement was too complex and difficult and for time-poor businesses it took too long to get things done. With a fresh approach the CLP has modernised and simplified procurement, making it easier for government to buy directly from Territory businesses without a formal quote process, speeding up the time in which they are paid by us. We increased the purchasing caps to sensible levels. Tier 1 moves from $15,000 to $50,000 and Tier 2 moves from $100,000 to $200,000. This reflects the changing scope and dynamic of the Territory's economy and purchasing. This was long overdue and will make things easier for businesses to work with government and for government to procure from our local businesses.

We reduced red tape for Territory businesses and government contract managers. We have given a voice to the Territory Procurement Champion, helping to drive more local outcomes. We know that under the previous government procurement and dealing with government became difficult. It loved to introduce red tape, beige tape, green tape—all sorts of colours of tape. We are committed to removing that tape and making it easier for people to do business in the Territory. We were out there listening to businesses.

We are continuing to fund new programs that help tackle the insidious effects of crime and antisocial behaviour because unless we deal with crime and antisocial behaviour, we cannot have a strong economy or grow it. They are simple fundamentals, which the previous government did not understand.

Biz Secure continues to help Territory businesses with financial support to improve the safety and security of their facilities against break-ins and crime. We only have to look at what happened over the last eight years. In the four years that I was in opposition a number of businesses came to me complaining about the crime epidemic in Alice Springs and the issues that they were forced to go through. Repeated break-ins and damage were hurting their bottom line to the point that they could not get insurance to fix doors and windows and were having to pay that out of their pocket.

This means those businesses have to put up their costs because they cannot bear them alone. Their costs have to increase which affects the average person on the street. We talk about cost-of-living issues, and that was one of the things that was driving the cost of living up. Businesses had to pay to deal with the issues of crime and pass those costs on to the consumers who had to pay the price.

We are helping with not just windows and doors but also the vulnerable laptops and services powering business. It is a shocking fact that the average cost of a cyber attack is $50,000. A recent high-profile corporate case shows that no-one is immune. Not every small business has the resources of big industry to firewall their networks, but our government is providing great help for small business to firm up their defences. The CLP Finocchiaro government is backing businesses against cybercrime with the $1m Cyber Invest Business Program. Small and medium businesses can apply for up to $10,000 to cover the cost of eligible services. This has not been done in the Territory before. They can apply for that to either strengthen their cybersecurity or test their resilience to a cyber incident. That includes training to educate their staff to be better prepared for a cyber attack, because no-one is immune.

On training and education, we are giving great access to ideas through October Business Month. This year's theme—Play to our Strengths—focuses on digitalisation, using artificial intelligence to implement technology; workforce attraction and talent retention; and resilience in businesses. This has been a resounding success, giving small businesses broad workshops and insights to the end of October. It is pleasing to see businesses throughout the Territory having those opportunities to participate and engage in October Business Month. In my home of Alice Springs, I have been given great feedback on the diversity of topics covering AI, cyber support, budgeting, increasing productivity and managing staff.

We are continuing to rebuild the economy. After the economic death spiral of the former government, the Territory is now on the right path. We have the fastest-growing economy in the nation. We are seeing increased investment in construction of new dwellings. We have the highest increase in loans for new dwellings anywhere in the country. It shows that what we are doing is right.

Through our HomeGrown and FreshStart housing grants we are getting people to stay in the Territory by giving them the opportunity to build and own their first home, which is difficult to reach in some southern states. We are doing the hard work to get people into the Territory to grow small business and put down roots. It is important for the Northern Territory to get people to come and live here and either start a business or work for a small business because those businesses are the backbone of our economy.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, as a longtime champion of our small and medium business sector I am pleased and happy to speak in support of the ministerial report. I congratulate Minister Cahill for updating the Assembly on our government's efforts to back small business—fantastic!

As the former Deputy CEO of the NT Chamber of Commerce I have been on the public record many times, including in statements I have made in this Assembly, saying that small to medium businesses are the heart and soul of this economy. I stand by that. These businesses deserve a government that is focused on creating a business operating environment that allows them to thrive and grow and, in doing so, employ more local people and support local families.

Unlike the previous Labor government our government is focused on creating this positive business environment by delivering our three major election commitments. We put it in our plan and I will pull it out again. You will remember our commitments: reducing crime; rebuilding our economy; and restoring our lifestyle. All of those are interconnected. If we achieve them, they will make a more positive business environment?

Without going through all of our initiatives delivered so far—of which there have been many, including those highlighted by the minister in her report—I remind the Assembly that we delivered our specific election commitments, which have already been touched on.

One of those was to remove the payroll tax for small businesses so that they can create jobs and grow. We did that by raising the payroll tax-free threshold for the first time in 13 years, from $1.5m to $2.5m. The Labor government did not do anything about that; it just left them languishing. It did not have the foresight to think about it.

We exempted apprentice and trainee wages, who will also be exempt from payroll tax as part of this new threshold, saving thousands to invest in growing Territory apprenticeships and traineeships.

As the minister also alluded to, we have sped up business approvals and cut red tape to take away unnecessary administrative burdens and make doing business easier. That is what we needed to do. We had to get government out of the way and let business thrive.

I have spoken many times in this Assembly about the need for government to have strong local procurement policies. I am on the record for criticising the former City of Darwin Council for reducing its local content

weighting from 30% to 20%. As I said in this House, if there is any level of government that needs to support local business I believe it is local government. I can only hope that the new City of Darwin Council, with a new Lord Mayor and new councillors, looks to rescind this flawed decision and take a leaf out of this proactive CLP Territory government book and start backing our small business sector again.

I will focus on how small businesses in my electorate are going, because their views are important to me. I need to stay engaged and listen to them, and I do. From the outset, the day after the election, there was a significant increase in optimism. I walked around the Karama shops on the Sunday and people were smiling. They thought, 'Thank God, we might get back on track again'.

A lot of businesspeople I talked to during the campaign were looking to close or relocate interstate, particularly if we were not elected. Luckily, they decided to stay here and grow. That is fantastic.

I have been doing mobile offices in my electorate, going out each morning to key places. I have been to O'Loughlin College, the Malak shops and other places in Moray Street. The mobile offices are great. People, including business owners, come and talk to me. I was in Moray Street, and a young fellow came up. I did not know him, but he sent me an email. I will quote a bit of his email:

'Good morning, Brian

'It was nice meeting you today. This is Paul from Moray Street in Karama. I commend how you stand outside in that heat.'

It is pretty hot in the mornings there. He goes on:

'As mentioned, I am just a sole trader operating a small local business. I am happy to say business has picked up, which increasingly doubled since the Liberals came into play and your office showed up.'

They are his words, not mine. I will quote them in my next newsletter because I want people to hear what the businesses are telling me.

He has an issue with workforce. He cannot get the staff he needs and he has an injury. He has a lot of work, but he cannot do it. Workforce is a challenge. The minister is working on that. He asked whether there was any government help, and I referred him to the minister's agency. Maybe it can help him with the Small Business Champions. The problem is that he has a lot of work but he does not have enough workers. This is the challenge we must get on to. Getting our economy going and creating a safer community will make it easier to build up our workforce.

Another thing I need to talk about is the interconnection with crime and making safer communities so that people want to stay. I put out a Facebook post the other day when I was asked the Chief Minister about how we are going with the police and so on, particularly around Karama and Malak. The feedback from that has been good. I know we have a long way to go, and we are not there yet, but I get feedback like this, 'Thanks, Brian. Karama is feeling much safer lately.' I am sure people in other electorates are giving similar feedback. We are feeling safer; we have a long way to go, but people can see the tide is turning and that there is a positive government which wants them to go ahead. I say thank you. People urge us to keep the course and not pander to others who want us to back off. We need to stay the course because we are on the right track.

I walk every street of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon to deliver my newsletter. I will be hand-delivering my fourth one in November, which I am drafting now. I promote local businesses in my newsletter. I give a big shout-out to them. Not all my businesses operate in Karama, Malak or Knuckey Lagoon, but they are owned and operated by people and families who live there.

I will give you examples. There is the Pizza King at Hibiscus, as the member for Wanguri would know; Tessie lives in Malak. Lyndall's Haircare—she lives in Knuckey Lagoon. Bruce's Charcoal Chicken is at Nightcliff—the Member for Nightcliff is not here—and he lives in Kalymnos Drive in Karama.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 1; I ask you to ask the member to withdraw. You cannot state that a member is out of the Chamber. He needs to retract that statement. He mentioned that the Member for Nightcliff …

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I will take it back; I did not realise it was a problem. I withdraw.

This business is in the electorate of Nightcliff. I give tribute to Bruce and Alex who live in Kalymnos Drive. It is very good.

These are great businesses, and there is a range of others. John the affordable plumber is doing well. He tells me the business is going great.

Ahma Rasa Cafe in Winnellie—the owners live in Malak—probably would not have been set up under a Labor government, but it was under this government because there is a positive business environment.

I congratulate our small business sector. I congratulate the minister and our government for getting behind the private sector. We need to do more of it.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I am proud to speak on backing small business, which is in this government's DNA because the CLP is the Territory party. We support the Territory and have done for many years—coming on 50 years now—and always will.

My dad was a small-business man. My mum was a teacher at Batchelor and dad was a farmer. He started off in cattle, but the market changed. When the bottom fell out of that market he looked around. He pivoted and got into chook farming.

This was in the 1980s in the days before long-distance refrigerated trucking was a commodity. He got into chooks, so as I grew up every night we always fed and moved the chooks and got the dead ones. When they got too old we would feed them to the pigs. When the pigs grew up we butchered them and had bacon for dinner. The only thing we did not use was the pig's squeal. Twice a week we loaded up dad's truck with the eggs and took them to Darwin. In the 1980s they did not have a long shelf life. When I was a kid every night we would wash, pack and grade eggs; the whole family was in on it. We were always working.

We had to balance the budget. My dad constantly watched the money. He and spent a lot of time away from us down on the farm. Twice a week he went to Darwin. He would go to Fresher and drop off his 10 boxes of eggs and drive all around town. A lot of people knew my dad—the Ah Toys, the Chins and a lot of the Greek people—because he would go to their homes and drop off the seconds that he could not sell to Fresher to go to Woolies. He would drop off eggs to small businesses, people who ran cafes and people who had large families and did not want to pay the commercial rates. He was a big part of the community, and small businesses are part of the community. They have to be.

A small-business person is a sole trader; their entire life is caught up in their business. If something happens to that business and it goes under, it is not like when you have a job and chuck it in for another job and move on. That is not a big deal. If you are a small-business person and your business goes under, that is heartbreaking.

I remember the day dad had to retire, and that was really hard. Do you know what? He never actually retired. He kept chooks until he passed away. He could never stop working. All he could do was slowly scale down. That is what small business does.

Small businesses sponsor our sports teams. When I go to see the Raiders I see that the backs of the players' shirts are covered in small businesses. They are the ones reaching into their pockets and handing out. I will not name them, but you do not see large multinational companies on the shirts. You see businesses like CoolDrive on them.

It was a bit rich of the Opposition Leader in her contribution to suddenly discover the importance of small business now that she is in opposition. After eight years the Labor Party has finally discovered the importance of small business. What a revelation after eight years of watering down the laws, crime going out of control and businesses having to turn their shops into fortresses.

I still remember the stories in the media. This is what we must rebuild and counter after eight years of mismanagement. Businesses in Alice Springs had to trade with their doors locked because if they left them open people would run in and steal their produce.

Mr Burgoyne interjecting.

Mr KERLE: Yes, the Member for Braitling remembers, and I am sure the Member for Namatjira remembers. What a shame—businesses having to trade with locked doors under the previous government. What a tragedy. Not under this government; hopefully all the businesses can have their doors wide open so that customers are free to walk in and that the families who run businesses are confident that they will not be taken advantage of

by criminals who should be facing the consequences of the previous crimes they had committed but were released by a government that put the sensibilities of criminals before the rights of victims.

I could go on about COVID lockdowns and mandates forcing businesses—if they did not comply with the order, they could not go to work and had to shut down their business. Red tape came out over and again. When asked about compensation the former government said, 'We will set up another government department to help you deal with the bureaucracy that we impose on you'.

Have a look at the red tape and ask: do we really need that? Is this helping? Who is this helping? If the answer is no-one, let us get rid of it. Let us have a risk-based framework. What a revelation. If it is safe, say yes. When something is new there is a tendency to say, 'New things are scary. I do not know whether we can allow that.' I could go on and on.

Small business is not in the DNA of the Labor Party. The Labor Party loves big businesses because big businesses have unions. They have unionised members, so Labor loves nothing more than to have a big business it can push down on to the employees. All the employees are unionised and pay union fees, and then the unions donate to the Labor Party. The organisers hand out cards for the Labor Party at election time. If the Labor Party had a choice between small businesses and big businesses, it would choose a big business every time because it knows that it can get into bed with the big businesses, force them to unionise and drive down the wages and conditions of the employees, which has happened many times. There are many court cases where this has happened.

I will not talk about that anymore because I want to talk about small businesses in Palmerston. There are a lot of fantastic small businesses in Palmerston. It is a lot easier for a large organisation like the government or the Palmerston Council to be agile when using small businesses. If you are dealing with one large contractor and they cannot fulfil the job, suddenly you are in a world of pain.

I have advocated for the City of Palmerston to change its landscaping procurement practice from having one or two large suppliers covering the entire jurisdiction to having it broken up and using a lot more landscapers. There are a lot of sole-trader landscapers available in Palmerston. If a guy with a trailer and a ride-on zero-turn mower—there are lot of these guys around—does not deliver there are no worries because someone else will do it …

Mr Howe: But he will not join a union.

Mr KERLE: Exactly right, Member for Drysdale.

We will have the best service and the best lawns in the Northern Territory. I think it is a fantastic idea.

Wilson's landscaping is a fantastic, local, family-run small business. Wilson's is passionate about helping Territorians because it goes out of its way to employ people who are exiting Don Dale jail to give them a chance to get started.

The Koffee Deck in Bellamack is a new cafe. The owners are local people—a teacher and police officer—good on them.

Jacob Reynolds from Freedom Property has grown that business from nothing, and now he is running a real estate company all over Darwin.

Well done to Jazz at Fresh Point.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, some people in this Chamber have accused me of being anti-business; on the contrary, I speak as someone who ran my own small business for more than 30 years. I understand what running a small business means.

I now am lucky enough to be the representative of an electorate, in which I have always lived, that is incredibly lucky to have a huge number of thriving small businesses, as well as struggling small businesses, that work to make our community the wonderful place it is. I will talk a little about some of those small businesses.

I reckon Johnston has the best food in Darwin. Not only are we lucky enough to have Rapid Creek Markets, which is the best place to be on any Sunday, but we also have in Millner Vangie's Kitchen where you can get the best caramel flan you might ever have—Filipino food—and Caramella Patisserie with amazing Greek cakes and coffee. I shout out to Raj at Memories of India, who is also a great supporter of the community,

and the wonderful Sommi and his family at the Sa-Bai Thai Takeaway. I shout out to the Big Bites NT Cafe and Restaurant because it has the best Vietnamese iced coffee in Darwin as well, if anyone wants to try it—salted cream iced coffee. It is bad for your cholesterol but delicious for everything else.

The Sabine Road shops have been run by Leo and Hing for over 20 years, where you can get everything you need and things you may never have heard of. There is also a halal butcher, an Indian grocery store, a massage place, a hairdresser, a tax agent and a laundromat.

All these businesses do not just sell goods or services; they provide jobs, connections, a sense of belonging and support for the local community. Just as we have heard in this Chamber, it is not the big businesses that support local communities; it is these small businesses that go out on a limb over and again and sponsor the soccer team, the footy team and help kids get to where they need to go. As the member I express my ongoing gratitude to them.

At Rapid Creek there is Greenies, an organic shop run by Ursula and Greenie. Happy Foodland is another iconic Darwin store run by the Lee brothers. When I checked in with them about how they were feeling about safety in the community they said, 'Do not worry about us, love; we have a cricket bat behind the desk.' They feel safe as they feel they know what they do. We have Rapid Cafe with Japanese cuisine. We recently lost the owner of that cafe tragically. Hey Dhal is an Indian takeaway run by the wonderfully community-minded Noel and Christine who also go out on a limb over and again and work hard to make sure that if someone has nothing to eat they will have food. The Greek Men's Club is where I get plenty of advice all the time along with my Greek frappe. That is the competition coffee for me in Johnston. There is another halal butcher and Pho Bistro & Grill, a Vietnamese restaurant run by Hannah and John.

Where my office is there is a Sri Lankan supermarket; a hairdresser; Sarah Lyn Lingerie run by the infamous Vivienne Lee; the Domino's Millner franchise which also works hard to support local community and offers work to young people who need to get a leg up; and Kerry's Massage. I am grateful to often wear the dresses from I Screen Art, which is owned by Irene, who lives in and runs her business out of Johnston. There are gyms and Mt 8848, a Nepalese cafe.

In Jingili there is a corner shop run by Nelson Lee, selling *yapa* skirts and clothing; Tanoy Filipino shop; Jay's Fish and Chips; and Petra's Raw Cakes.

At the Moil shops the Indian grocery run by Dipla and Pradeep is visited 99% by people who are outside my electorate because apparently it is the best Indian grocery in the Top End. People might remember they experienced a ram raid mid-last year. There was quite a lot of media about that. People would be glad to know that they are now feeling like things are much better for them.

In Alawa there is Antony's fish and chips; Saffrron Indian takeaway; a yiros shop which might be winning the Johnston hot chips competition for the best hot chips in Darwin with feta and oregano; and the Greek bakery.

There are heaps more local businesses. Like the Member for Karama, I spend a lot of time walking around my electorate. Every week I have a mobile office outside a different local shop. Every Sunday I am at Rapid Creek Markets. When I heard that this ministerial report was coming up I checked in with some of the businesses to see whether they wanted me to share anything.

The sentiment was mixed. Many people shared what the Member for Karama said, that a year ago they were feeling hopeful, but now they feel like they are struggling. They feel that their businesses are struggling and their customers are leaving. I will quote from one small business owner who expressed what many said. For the record, this person wanted me to also say that they were a strong and proud CLP supporter, so this is not bashing the government. They said:

'Small businesses in the Territory are actually going backwards. There are pockets of retail that are going well but the majority is just awful. Many of my customers are leaving Darwin because of what is going on here. I do not feel like enough is being done.'

I salute the resilience of every small business owner in Johnston and beyond. I recognise their hard work and commitment. I hear from this government that it wants to support community and small businesses are central to community. I agree with that.

I want to make sure that whatever work we do recognises the needs of every Territorian—every small business owner and the people who use those small businesses—and builds real community safety so that our communities can continue to thrive. We need to put things in place that mean people are not choosing

to leave the Territory. We need to make sure that the approaches we are taking and the laws we are making, whether it is around community safety and harmony, are based on things that will work to build a strong, thriving Northern Territory into the future.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, the ministerial report for Trade, Business and Asian Relations highlights how the Country Liberal government is backing Territory businesses, especially small businesses that form the heart of our local economy.

As a Territory-born person this is all I have ever known. Small businesses are the heart of our Territory. Businesses are not just numbers on a page. They are families, livelihoods and the pulse of our communities like Wanguri, Leanyer and Muirhead. These are the suburbs where mums and dads run cafes, there are the electricians and other tradies who build our homes and the local professionals who create opportunities for all our young Territorians.

Small businesses make up 96% of enterprises in the Northern Territory. When my father first came to the Northern Territory it was 100%. It is an amazing feat that we still have 96% of our small businesses here in the Territory. Our business entry rate is 17%, which is higher than the national average and proof that Territorians are resilient, entrepreneurial and optimistic regarding their future.

Wanguri and the northern suburbs data shows that there are more than 1,150 registered small businesses spanning construction, real estate, healthcare and professional services. More than half of these are sole traders and partnerships and around a quarter employ between one and four staff, showing how vital microbusinesses are to keeping our economy ticking.

This is not just about businesses; it is about people. Each of these small businesses represents a family who has chosen to back themselves, to invest in the Territory and employ fellow Territorians. I will name a few of the businesses in the Wanguri electorate.

One is Chris Williams Retail & Manufacturing Jewellers. Member for Goyder, if you do not have your wedding rings made, I suggest you pop along and see Chris, who makes wonderful handmade jewellery.

There is Greenfield Blooms and Gifts; Nails Paradise; Leanyer Plumbing Pty Ltd; Di-Core Drilling; Milestones Early Learning Centre; Murraya Children's Centre; Dragonfly Play and Learn Pty Ltd; and Leanyer Newsagency.

The Member for Karama tried to claim Pizza King. The food is cooked onsite at the Hibiscus Shopping Centre and the staff know my regular order.

Territory Butchers is a great example. From his shopfront at Hibiscus the owner has expanded to the Oasis Shopping Village. His business is growing and thriving. He could also be making more headway into the Hibiscus Shopping Centre and expanding there.

There is also the Mudhouse cafe; Q Framing; Wanguri Supermarket; Estelle's Florist; and the newly renovated Bill's Bar and Grill, formerly known as Dolly's.

We have franchises that are run by families from the community such as Brumby's bakery, H&R Block, Hibiscus Day & Night Pharmacy and Elders Real Estate.

I thank those business owners for continuing to invest and back their businesses to keep the economy moving and provide employment.

The latest CommSec State of the States report shows that although the NT economy faced national headwinds, business confidence and population stability are still improving. Employment has strengthened and our economic growth ranking has climbed, driven by private investment and new business creation. Retail spending and new dwelling commencements are on the rise and are clear signs of renewed momentum. For the first time in years small business sentiment in the Territory has moved into positive territory, Member for Johnston, with businesses reporting high turnover expectations and stronger growth confidence than at any point under the previous Labor government. Let us be honest: the last eight years under Labor were lost years for small businesses in the Territory, particularly the Wanguri electorate.

Labor talked about supporting local businesses, but in Wanguri, Leanyer and Muirhead, families saw little more than red tape, rising costs and the fall in confidence. Labor failed to listen to the business community, cut the approval times that strangled new projects and keep our workforce in the Territory, driving skilled workers south and leaving our small operators struggling to find staff. Labor promised to make the Territory the easiest place

to do business, but under its watch it became the hardest. Businesses told me directly that they needed government to get out of the way; instead, they got layers of regulation, uncertainty and indecision.

In just one year our Country Liberal Party government has restored confidence and momentum. We have a clear and consistent message: the Territory is open for business again. Through the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce we have tackled duplication, halved approval times and introduced e-lodgement systems that simplify and speed up business applications.

We also delivered tax relief. The Territory has the highest payroll tax threshold in Australia at $2.5m, meaning two-thirds of our employers pay no payroll tax. That is more money in the hands of small business owners, which they can reinvest in jobs, training and growth.

For the businesses I mentioned earlier and all the other businesses in the Wanguri electorate, this government is providing pathways to grow and improve the numbers on their balance sheets and to give them confidence that they can continue to keep their businesses open.

I thank all the businesses in Wanguri for sticking by us.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

QUESTION TIME

Government Leadership

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

Since coming to government you and your ministers have insulted doctors for standing up for children, implied public servants were ungrateful for voting down your pay deal, attacked the Police Association for standing up for police officers, slammed lawyers for doing their jobs, used minority groups as a political football and told Territorians that if they did not agree with you they should leave. Territorians expect their government to stand up for Territorians and not tear them down. When will you stop chasing cheap headlines and start behaving like a leader?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I will tell you what has been torn down: it was the Territory under nearly two decades of Labor. It just about ripped the guts out of this place. How do we know that, Opposition Leader? It is because long-term Territorians were leaving in droves. All of us have personal stories of people who were packing up and leaving because they had given up all hope on this place.

Crime was totally out of control and people did not feel safe to go to the shops, walk on the streets or even send their kids to school. The economy had crashed after promise after promise of projects that were never delivered; the rubber never hit the road. Our lifestyle was being eroded by a government that was more interested in social engineering than just letting people live their lives in peace. Labor went after religious schools and our lifestyle and refused to deliver on election commitment like increasing hunting reserves. Wasn't that a good one? Where is it, Opposition Leader? Nowhere.

Do you want to talk about ATSIAGA? You had a decade in which to build it, and you did not lift a single grain of dirt.

Do you want to know who tore down the Territory? It was you. You were a government minister for the better part of two terms, and you failed Territorians which is why they elected a CLP government in August last year.

There is a clear and distinct difference in the way in which we govern. We are out across the Territory listening to our communities. We are disciplined and focused on the platform we took to the election and delivering our election commitments, which are all around reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our beautiful lifestyle.

Today students from MacKillop College visited me. That school is in my electorate. I said to those kids, 'Government should not be in your life telling you how to live it; that is for you. They are decisions for you and your family and what is in your best interest.'

Territorians need to know that the government has the scaffolding there when they need it. When people call 000 they want to know someone can come. If they have a loved one who is sick they want to know the hospital will take them. They need to know there are good schools for their kids and that roads will be built and maintained. That is what a government does. However, Labor was so focused on other things and chasing its own pipedreams that it forgot at its core what it was there to do—support everyday Territorians to live their own good life.

We make no apology for the decisions we have made or the way in which we govern. This is about making sure that we put the everyday Territorians' right to be safe, have a job and live a good life above everything else.

School-based Policing

Mrs ZIO to CHIEF MINISTER

It was pleasing to hear the Minister for Education and Training's announcement last week about police Aboriginal liaison officers in our schools. As someone with a background in the education sector, it is great to see such innovative approaches being introduced in our schools to support student wellbeing and deliver our election commitments.

As part of our strategy to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle, we went to the election with a promise to expand school-based policing, increase school attendance and ensure the safety of both students and teachers. Can you outline how this initiative is being rolled out and how it delivers on those election commitments?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know how passionate the Member for Fannie Bay is about young people. She believes in their future and her education background means that she is keen for more Territory kids to get to school and achieve their dreams. The schools in her electorate are beautiful, providing a nurturing, supportive environment to lift up our kids and let them know that they have a strong future in the Territory.

Through her extensive experience in getting kids to school the Member for Fannie Bay knows that if kids are not in school they are not learning. Education is a key to their future; it is fundamental to their success moving forward and their ability to have a good life, look after their family and achieve their dreams. At the end of the day, what do we want for our kids? We want them to be the best version of themselves. We want them to aspire and dream, fight for things and explore the world. We want all these things for them and for them to be happy. Education is fundamental to all that.

We have the most incredible people across the Territory in our Aboriginal liaison officers. They are a critical part of the Northern Territory Police Force. These incredible people bridge the cultural gaps between Aboriginal communities and the police, providing important mentoring and support. They are well respected across the Territory.

We have used the opportunity to have our fantastic ALOs in schools. Over the next four years we want to increase that to 40 Aboriginal liaison officers. We have started that program already, with two ALOs in Katherine at Katherine High School and MacFarlane Primary School.

I give a huge shout-out to Ethan Woods-Alum who has been an ALO since 2023 based at Katherine station. He is a long-term resident of Katherine and was recognised as Katherine Citizen of the Year in 2023 and 2024. Not just once, but twice; he is that amazing. A NAIDOC Citizen of the Year and a youth mentor, Ethan is incredible. He speaks Jawoyn and Kriol. He is supporting kids to get to school and making sure that families understand the importance of their kids going to school.

I also give a huge shout-out to ALO Sylvia Maroney. She became an ALO in 2023, in a different squad from Ethan. She is a long-term Katherine resident from Binjari community, which I have been to with the Member for Katherine. Sylvia also speaks Jawoyn.

These incredible people want to give so much to the Northern Territory. We are excited about this program which delivers our election commitment to expand school-based policing, and we are proud of this model.

This is on top of the work we are doing with school attendance officers who have a different but important role. In Term 3 we issued 81 infringements and more than 437 compliance notices, which is fantastic because if kids are not in classrooms they cannot learn.

We are proud of the Aboriginal liaison officer program. We cannot wait to see it reach that full complement of 40 in four years' time.

CLP Government-initiated Projects

Mr YOUNG to the TREASURER

Your government is quick to put out press releases and social media posts celebrating projects that were approved and started under the former government. Can you name a single project that has been initiated under your government?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Daly's question gives me plenty to talk about, but I will start with some of the things that Labor did not deliver, beginning with ATSIAGA.

Mr Maley: You have only three minutes, Treasurer.

Mr YAN: I know; I need about three hours to describe that debacle.

For eight or nine long years the people of Alice Springs waited for that gallery and did not get it. I would like to ask Labor members what they delivered for Central Australia in their last term of government, but I can tell you what we have delivered because that is the premise of the question from the Member for Daly.

Let us talk about the HomeGrown and FreshStart grants, the most generous housing grants in the country. I have stats that I will gladly read out because it gives us an idea of what is taking place with one of the projects that we are delivering. More than 1,000 people have applied for these grants. For the $10,000 grants there have been 809 applications; 192 for the $50,000 applications; and 103 for the $30,000 grants. That is as at 13 October, which is only a few days ago, and that continues to grow. I believe we have now hit 1,100.

We have driven our economy forward. That is what the Member for Daly is talking about; he asked me as the Treasurer about what we are doing for the economy. I can give him other facts. Under Labor there was not a lot happening; our economy went backwards.

The number of Territory housing finance commitments by first homebuyers has increased by 23%. We are leading the country. The number of Territory housing finance commitments increased by 15.9%, which is the second highest rate in the country. Territory job vacancies grew by 13.7% to 5,800 over the year to August. That high job vacancy rate indicates that people are looking for workers to take up jobs, which shows a growing economy. We are seeing our population increase.

Look at the announcements we have made and the projects that will be commencing over the next 12 to 18 months. We have been in government for 12 months. We cannot just pluck things out of thin air. Those opposite did that; they would do these announcements and projects by press release.

There is the multicultural centre in Alice Springs which will commence next year; the roads package, which I spoke about at length yesterday; the Alice Springs Library; the Gillen sports oval; and, in Darwin, the Palmerston special school. The work has been done, and the planning is underway. It will be delivered for the people of Palmerston over the next few years.

Those opposite need to hang their heads in shame for what they did not do.

Mango Industry

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for AGRICULTURE and FISHERIES

Mangoes are iconic to the Northern Territory. The mango industry is the largest horticultural commodity in the Territory with the industry contributing more than $128m to the economy. During harvest it employs more than 3,000 workers. Territory mango farmers produce 52% of the Australian crop. With an estimated

210,000 trays and 100,000 cartons of mangoes being sent to the WA market from the NT in 2024, can you tell the Assembly how this government is providing certainty to this export line?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Goyder is passionate about mangoes. I have seen him eat a mango, and he does a good job. He went to the great school of Taminmin College and would have seen mangoes every day on his way to school. Mangoes are a part of the rural area.

Our government is committed to action, certainty and security. We have locked in long-term access to the Western Australian market for our mango growers, delivering certainty for growers ahead of the 2025 harvest. The newly endorsed interstate classification assurance protocol (ICA-69) replaces a previous trial agreement between the NT and WA known as CTM-01 with a permanent, nationally recognised process for sending mangoes to WA.

This new process allows our four mango varieties—Honey Gold, R2E2, Calypso and Kensington Pride—to be exported to WA, using an alternative treatment option to help manage fruit fly. Managing fruit fly is a key part of the new ICA-69 agreement. We thank our Western Australian counterparts for the work done with my department in getting this agreement over the line. Biosecurity is everyone's responsibility. We need to follow guidelines to make sure we do not spread any pests or diseases into WA.

The new ICA-69 provides certainty for growers and gives them reliable long-term pathways to send those four mango varieties to WA, while continuing the CTM-01 agreement which applies to South Australia. We are making sure that mangoes grown here can go to WA and across Australia.

This approval is a game changer for Territory growers. The Territory harvests the majority of Australia's mango crop; 52% of the nation's mangoes were grown here in the 2024–25 season. That is 27,500 tonnes or 3.9 million trays picked from orchards stretching between Darwin and Mataranka.

By securing access to the market and investing in research into mango twig tip dieback, our government is safeguarding the long-term viability of our mango industry, delivering certainty for growers, protecting jobs and reinforcing our place in Australia as the leading mango producer.

The Member for Goyder has been speaking to growers, listening to their concerns and making sure he is across what needs to be done. He talks to me and writes me lots of letters. Hopefully, this agreement will stop those letters. He is a fierce advocate for the mango industry and does a great job.

Long live mangoes in the Northern Territory.

Corrections – Transgender Inmates

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS

Can you confirm that the Corrections policy on the management of transgender, diverse and intersex prisoners continues to align with anti-discrimination laws, despite the Chief Minister trying to claim otherwise in her haste to appeal to One Nation voters?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, that is a classic example of how opposition members are trying to politicise women's safety. They are making sure that this is a political football.

I support the Chief Minister's stand on her policy in relation to protecting women in custody. Our government policy is clear: male prisoners will not be housed with female prisoners. Women's safety and dignity come first.

From the first day in office this government took decisive action on women's safety in prison, and it is contained in our master plan. We will build two women-only prisons to move women out of the male population and into an area where it is safe, good for their dignity and, most importantly, allows for good solid rehabilitation because we want to ensure that female and male prisoners have a good chance for rehabilitation.

We worked hard to remove women from watch houses in Alice Springs and Darwin. The former government allowed women to be locked up in watch houses with men in cramped facilities, and did nothing about it. If

Labor wants to talk about women's safety that is a classic example of how it failed women in the Corrections system. They popped them into the watch house, locked the door and said that it would be all right. It took the community to vote out Labor and when we came into power, we stopped that because we are about women's safety.

We are also opening a women's bail transitional care facility in Alice Springs where women who come out of custody have somewhere to go to start rebuilding their life and have wraparound services to support them to come out as better people. This is about rehabilitation. We know that just putting people in prison does not work, so we want to ensure they have access to training and rehabilitation.

The Chief's words set a clear and enforceable operational standard ensuring every placement decision upholds women's safety. Women's safety is our number one priority. Prison placement decisions must ensure that no prisoner's safety or dignity is compromised when they are in custody. Men will not be accommodated in women's prisons—full stop.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! The question was specifically about whether the Corrections policy aligned with the anti-discrimination and sex discrimination laws. The minister has not answered it, and I want to hear the answer.

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you have 44 seconds.

Mr MALEY: I commend the Chief Minister for leading the nation on this issue. Recently Victoria announced a review into its processes.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. He went straight back to his notes. I want to go back to the actual …

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, you can hardly call two points of order within five seconds and think that is proper and within the standing orders. The minister has 35 seconds to get to the relevant part of the question which you have demanded he do. Whether it is to your liking is another matter.

Mr MALEY: I am answering the question because this is about women's safety. We are ensuring that women are not just locked up in watch houses and the key thrown away like the previous Labor government did. We are making sure that our policy meets the expectations of the government and the community. If it is not clear enough, we will make changes. Women's safety is our paramount consideration. We want to comply with all the laws of the nation, all the laws of the Northern Territory …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: There is no point of order, honestly. Minister, have you finished?

Mr MALEY: Yes, I have.

Veterans' Health and Wellbeing

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for VETERANS

The Northern Territory has a rich Defence history and a strong relationship with its Defence community. Enhancing the health and wellbeing of our veterans is at the heart of ensuring this important community feels heard and seen. I was lucky enough recently to attend the Darwin heats of the Veteran Games at Robertson Barracks. Robbo barracks is the home of 5/7 RAR, which the Member for Drysdale is intimately acquainted with. I saw inspiring and competitive veterans take on amazing physical challenges.

Can the minister provide an update on this important initiative aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of veterans in the Northern Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it was great that visitors were welcomed to the barracks on the day to cheer on their teams. Veterans Engagement and Support within the Department of People, Sport and Culture is committed to ensuring the best outcomes for veterans and their families in the Northern Territory. Under Operation Thrive the Northern Territory Government is ensuring the veteran community feels supported and seen, and it funds initiatives which support overall health and wellbeing.

On 22 August 2025 the first Veteran Games Regional Heats were held in Darwin at Robertson Barracks. I thank the Member for Blain for being there and supporting our wonderful veteran community. This exciting event was the first time the Veteran Games has been hosted outside the Gold Coast. The Veteran Games is a proactive health initiative designed to address the key findings from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. The games brought together current and ex-serving members of the area to compete in a series of specially designed military-style events to promote connection as a community and recognise and celebrate elements of their military identity.

As the Minister for Veterans I was proud to have contributed $20,000 to hold the heats in Darwin. It did not end there; the Finocchiaro government further supported the heat winners, the 5th/7th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, to attend the final of the Veteran Games on the Gold Coast, with another $20,000 from Operation Thrive.

Over the weekend hundreds of current and former Defence personnel battled it out in the most competitive Veteran Games to date in Numinbah Valley in Queensland. Thirteen teams representing the Army, Navy and Air Force from the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, the ACT and Victoria competed in a series of military-inspired challenges designed to test endurance, teamwork and problem-solving. The Veteran Games included events such as stretcher carries, rock climbs, obstacle courses and, in a show-stopping finale, the tug of war. This year's tug of war was the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, and our NT team came second. I am pleased to report in addition to placing second in the tug of war, they took out the win on the obstacle course and placed fourth overall.

The Veteran Games is a tangible outcome of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. As the Minister for Veterans I firmly state that we are committed to our response to the royal commission, which we will release online later today. I encourage the veterans community to continue to support the outcomes.

It is this supporting investment that contributes to restoring the Territory lifestyle and ensuring that veterans remain engaged, supported and valued members of our community.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Senator Tyron Whitten

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Senator Tyron Whitten, Senator for WA from Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party. On behalf of all members, welcome to the Northern Territory Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

Corrections – Transgender Inmates

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for YOUTH, SENIORS and EQUALITY

The Chief Minister has been caught out misleading Territorians about prison policies on gender-diverse inmates. As the minister for Equality will you intervene if she forces the Department of Corrections to introduce unsafe policies that breach anti-discrimination and sex discrimination laws?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Department of People, Sport and Culture is working on the policies. We believe all Territorians should be treated equally regardless of their race, religion and gender. The CLP government is committed to ensuring the Territory is a safe place that provides equal opportunity for all Territorians.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please.

Mr CHARLS: The restoring lifestyle strategy sets out a clear direction to champion the Territory's identity as a vibrant and inclusive place to call home and build a life.

The Gender Equality Action Plan is built around fairness, safety and inclusion, and that means recognising that every environment is different. In some settings, particularly in high-risk environments like Corrections

facilities, decisions must balance inclusion with safety. That is entirely consistent with the plan's focus on keeping people safe, respected and free from violence.

Major Events – Shoulder Season

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for MAJOR EVENTS

The shoulder season has traditionally been a quiet time for the Territory's tourism and hospitality businesses, but in recent weeks we have seen events like the AFL Masters National Carnival, which the Member for Fannie Bay participated in; the MXGP; and an update on the Alice Springs Masters Games to bring visitors, vibrancy and spending across the Top End. Territory businesses say they can feel the difference, with visitors staying longer and spending more. Can you update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro CLP government focus on rebuilding the economy is helping attract visitors, support jobs and strengthen the Territory's lifestyle all year round?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I hope the Member for Wanguri got out to the MXGP a couple of weeks ago—I think I saw her there, having a great time. She is right; the Territory generally has quite a short tourism season in the Dry Season, because that is when it is nice and cool. We know the Territory is a wonderful place in the shoulder season, in the Build-Up, and in the Wet Season.

Our government wanted to share with the rest of the world what it is like in the Territory during our shoulder and off seasons, and we did. The MXGP, at the end of September, drew in 36,000 people across the weekend, which is amazing.

Ms Uibo: Good Labor initiative, that one. Well done.

Ms BOOTHBY: I pick up on the Leader of the Opposition's interjection. She tries to claim it as a Labor thing. Do you know what Labor did?

Ms Uibo: It was. You complained about it when you were in opposition.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, silence!

Ms BOOTHBY: Labor signed up to a deal to build a track and budgeted $1.5m. That was all it did.

When we came to government and looked at the paperwork we saw that it had blown out to $8.15m, so as a new government we asked, 'Do we go ahead with this or can it do something else?' We decided to back the Territory and Territorians, find the money and get it going, but we had to work together across Tourism and Major Events to make sure it was the best promotion we have ever had. Guess what happened? We won the award for best promotion of the MXGP in the world. That is how we do it.

We do not sit there and do business cases worth $1.5m when, clearly, it is nothing like that. That was disgraceful.

I will continue to talk about what has been happening in this shoulder season. It is October and we have just had the AFL Masters games, which brought 1,500 people to the Territory for nine days. Those people played a couple of games and had a great time, but then they went out, drank, ate and did tours. That filled up our town; all the tourism and hospitality venues were full to the brim with people absolutely loving it.

Pina from Wharf One said that she was feeling the vibe around town because of the AFL Masters games. Lola's Pergola, the Gully Cafe, Courtyard by Marriott—I went there last weekend and chatted with them. They were also telling me they have seen a big difference in this shoulder season, compared with previous years under Labor.

I will talk about another major event, the Alice Springs Masters Games. We had the 'one year to go' event last weekend with Nathan Buckley, the ambassador. Already 500 EOIs have come through for participating in the Masters Games. Remember that Labor did not want to do this; it kept postponing the games and finally brought it back for a bit but was not that interested. We are committed to the Alice Springs Masters Games; we believe in it, know it is great for the town, tourism and people who love sports. We will keep pushing to make sure it is the best Alice Springs Masters Games we have had yet.

Election Commitments – Barkly Councils

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

During the 2024 general election you promised your constituents eight new community and town councils: Ali Curung; Alpurrurulam; Ampilatwatja; Borroloola; Elliott; Ti Tree; Epenarra; and Tennant Creek.

I seek leave to table the documents.

Leave granted.

Mr YOUNG: Your office has done no costings, scope of operations or timeframes. Are you walking away from your own election commitments or have the Chief Minister and Treasurer left you stranded at the Cabinet table with no funding to develop them?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, listening to the Member for Daly yesterday and today it is obvious he does not know much about local government. We made it clear going into the 2024 election that we would be all about empowering remote communities. We know that under the failed local decision-making policy of the former government little was achieved for remote communities. We will work with remote communities across the board; that is what we committed to. We want to empower local government.

Let me give you a history lesson, Member for Daly; you only have to go back to 1 July 2008. We had good small councils operating across the Northern Territory. On 1 July 2008 many people in this Chamber would not have been here, but on that day the Labor Party scrapped every local community government council in the Northern Territory. Not only did it scrap local councils; Labor took away local decision-making in communities across the Northern Territory.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Mr EDGINGTON: Labor took away every leadership structure in those communities. Amalgamating councils, which Labor did on 1 July 2008, took away opportunities to deliver local jobs through housing, sport and rec, night patrols, civil works and municipal works; that was all scrapped at the local level. This is important because …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. It was specific to the eight community and town councils I listed in the question. Will you bring those eight communities in your electorate the new community government and town councils that you promised them?

Madam SPEAKER: The minister has a minute to go.

Mr EDGINGTON: I remind you again, Member for Daly, that Labor took away councils across the Northern Territory. It took away the leadership structure in every community. Part of our consultation, getting out and about and speaking to communities, is about restoring leadership in communities. That is something Labor does not like to see because Labor wants to control the communities and take away the decision-making and autonomy of traditional owners and elected people in communities. We want to restore an opportunity for people in local communities to be elected to lead their communities.

Moving forward …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: I know what you will ask. Minister, can you make it relevant to the eight communities the Member for Daly asked about?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, we have commenced talking to many communities across the Northern Territory, including in the Barkly. We will pursue what we promised, which is to empower communities.

Digital Connectivity

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for CORPORATE and DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

You may be aware that approximately 15% of my electorate involves Indigenous residents who often have family and friends visiting them from remote areas. The Northern Territory is vast and beautiful, but it lacks digital connectivity for many Territorians living and working in those remote areas. Schools and remote areas have always struggled with reliable connectivity to access educational resources. Some of our communities have limited to no access to any type of connectivity. Can you provide an update to the Assembly on how our government is improving digital opportunities in the Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Finocchiaro CLP government is continuing to unlock the Territory through strong partnerships. We understand that access to reliable, modern online connectivity is a foundation for full participation in modern Australia. It is critical for accessing services such as healthcare, education and news. It is increasingly essential in running a business.

In July this government, along with the Australian Government and Telstra, announced more reliable phone coverage in the iconic Kakadu National Park. Telstra installed two macro—not micro—towers at Jim Jim ranger station along the Arnhem Highway. Small cell sites were also installed at various other sites in the region. This is a game changer for Territorians and visitors who can now call for help if they need to, along with posting the selfies they are taking whilst out in that region.

We also have the Regional Connectivity Program. We have co-invested $150,000 to deliver new and improved internet access to a range of Central Australian communities. Benefiting from our advocacy are Haasts Bluff, Mulga Bore and Willowra, just to name a few.

Mr Edgington: The land of opportunity.

Mr BURGOYNE: The land of opportunity—there is a bit more coming for the Barkly.

That is roughly 450 remote residents who now have better access to services. As part of this existing co-investment program with Telstra, we have improved coverage in a range of remote homelands, including Bonya.

The good news does not stop there. We are investing in our schools to improve technology, which I know the Member for Katherine and Education minister will be all too happy to hear, through delivery of the Schools Connectivity Uplift Program. This $4m per year program provides telecommunications upgrades to NT schools over four years and supports closing the gap in digital inclusion. Across the Territory 138 schools are experiencing up to 50 times faster access to online learning resources. Ampilatwatja School in the mighty Barkly has up to 200 megabits per second. That is faster than what I get at my house. Originally the school had a speed of five megabits per second. We are also enhancing wireless network coverage in schools at a cost of $2.8m per year.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: this is all part of our year of action, certainty and security. We are investing in better connectivity because no matter where you live in this great Territory, our government is backing you. We are rebuilding a stronger and fairer economy and community for all.

Fuel Tanks – Leaks

K McNAMARA to MINISTER for LANDS, PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT

You knew the US military fuel tanks at Project Caymus were failing and not fit to be filled. You had seen evidence that there were still leaks, yet on 4 September you made a public statement that the fuel tanks were safe and ready to use. For two weeks after you approved the fuel tanks your department sent correspondence stating that the tanks were still leaking. This is a serious ongoing breach that puts workers and our harbour at risk.

The members' code of conduct says that ministers are required to be honest with and not mislead the public. You have clearly misled the public and this Assembly, contradicting information from your department which is saying that there are still leaks. Are you saying that your department is wrong? How can the public trust you when you have misled it on such a serious breach?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I could pull out from the standing orders how inappropriate that question was on so many levels in regard to some of the allegations that have just been thrown across the Chamber, but I am bigger than that. I will answer the Member for Nightcliff's question. It stoops to a new low, but that is what we have come to expect from The Greens.

I have provided Crowley Australia with a building exemption under section 65(1A)(a) of the *Building Act 1993* for the fuel facility at East Arm, based on independent verification that its tanks meet the requirements of the National Construction Code and the relevant Australian Standards prior to the operation of the facility. This exemption determines that occupancy certification is not required because this effectively resolves the matter of the building permit. This was all because the former Labor government failed to give it the appropriate building permit. It does not approve the operation of the tanks or their use as a fuel storage facility. This is regulated through the work health and safety legislation. I think that some people on the other side are greatly misinformed.

With respect to environmental impact there is no evidence of fuel leakage or groundwater contamination. Repairs and inspections have been certified by a qualified and certified inspector, and compliance and repair standards have been confirmed. This work was completed before the tanks began taking fuel. That is very important.

The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment continues to regulate environmental monitoring and compliance under Crowley's environmental approval. The reports provided to the environmental regulator in regard to the release prevention barrier, including an engineering report, are not related to my ministerial decision under the *Building Act*. That is also very important. That decision was supported by a structural engineering report regarding …

K McNAMARA: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; part of the question, for which we still have not heard an answer, was: are you saying then, given everything you just said, that the information from your department was wrong? It is saying that there are still leaks.

Madam SPEAKER: Please continue, minister.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to listen carefully to the answer which I am providing.

Recent media reports have conflated the structural engineering report provided to support the *Building Act* decision with the engineering reports provided to the environmental regulator.

If anyone—this is important—has any proof of environmental harm please report it to the NT EPA. That is the proper process. Do not come into this parliament and try to grandstand because this is not the place for that.

Mini Paralympics

Mr HOWE to MINISTER for PEOPLE, SPORT and CULTURE

Yesterday Darwin held its first Mini Paralympics. Can you explain how events like this support young Territorians with disability to get involved in sport? What does this event mean for inclusion in the Northern Territory? How does it fit into the government's broader efforts to create pathways for emerging Paralympians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Mini Paralympics is all about opening doors for young Territorians of all abilities and showing them what is possible through sport.

Yesterday Darwin hosted its first-ever Mini Paralympics at the Darwin Netball Stadium, giving children and community members with disability the opportunity to experience Paralympic-style sports in a fun and inclusive environment. This is about more than participation; it is about creating genuine pathways for our future Paralympic stars.

We have seen how successful this initiative has been in Alice Springs, where 37 young people took part in the first event of its kind. These athletes are now pursuing competitive opportunities through the NT Sports Academy's Para Futures program.

One of those athletes is 14-year-old Quade Stone, who discovered wheelchair basketball at the Alice Springs Mini Paralympics and dreams of representing Australia at the Brisbane 2032 Olympics.

Another incredible story is Briseis Brittain from Ramingining, who is living her dream, having competed for Australia at the World Para games earlier this month and is working towards Los Angeles 2028.

Stories like Quade's and Briseis' show exactly why this initiative matters. When young people see that there is a place for them in sport regardless of ability, it builds confidence, pride and ambition.

Our government is proud to support programs like this through our partnership with the Australian Sports Commission and Paralympics Australia. With nearly $900,000 invested through the Australian Sports Commission's supercharge multi-sport pathways initiative, we are helping to deliver more opportunities, better access and stronger pathways for the next generation of Territory Paralympians.

Inclusive sport changes lives, and the Mini Paralympics is proof of that. It is about celebrating ability, breaking down barriers and showing every young Territorian that their goals are within reach.

Rental Housing Affordability

J DAVIS to MINISTER for HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Noting that this week is National Anti-Poverty Week, NTCOSS, the peak body for social services in the Northern Territory, has released a new fact sheet showing the NT has the second-highest rent costs in Australia. A sole parent with two children on JobSeeker in Alice Springs spends 69% of their income on rent. More than 5,400 people wait over a decade for social housing with only 197 houses available. The NT has the most acute social housing shortage in Australia.

NTCOSS has called for four specific actions: raising income support advocacy; expanding the NT Concession Scheme; increasing social housing stock; and strengthening rental protections. What action is the CLP taking to address this?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, our government is investing in housing in not only urban areas but also remote areas.

Housing has been a longstanding issue in the Northern Territory. Homelessness rates are 12 times the national average. In urban areas it can take eight to 10 years to put somebody into a public house. This is what we have been left with after eight years of a Labor government which failed to invest in public housing across the board.

Last year we built 222 homes in remote areas to try to increase the stock across the board. We are working with the federal government and the joint steering committee, which consists of land councils and Aboriginal Housing NT, to deliver further housing in remote areas.

We have been focusing on a number of cost-of-living issues. One thing we put in place—we heard about it before—is the HomeGrown Territory Grant which offers $50,000 for first homebuyers. There is also the $30,000 offer for existing home owners if they buy or build a new home.

We are focused on freeing up rental properties by encouraging first homebuyers to invest in the property market. More than 1,000 applications have already been received for the First Home Owner Grant, and this is a huge investment by first home owners in the Northern Territory. Investing in their first home takes people out of the rental market. Hopefully over time we will see some of those rental properties freed up.

Member for Johnston, we are in a situation where housing wait times are eight to 10 years, and that is what we were faced with coming into government.

In 2025–26 there is about $1,900 in electricity subsidies through the community service obligation to maintain prices below supply. Eligible households get additional energy bill relief of up to $150.

The crux of the issue is yes, we are investing, but we cannot turn this around straightaway after eight years of failed investment by the Labor government.

Screen Industry

Mr PATEL to MINISTER for TOURISM and HOSPITALITY

We have seen the Territory's screen industry making headlines recently from the international success of the Central Australian film *Kangaroo* to major global productions filmed in the Northern Territory. The creative industries showcase our incredible landscapes and talent to audiences around the world while supporting local jobs and businesses. Can you update the Assembly on how this sector is helping to rebuild the economy and promote our unique Territory lifestyle at home and abroad?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, lots of families live in Casuarina, and they have a cinema complex on their doorstep. I highly recommend all those families see *Kangaroo*. It is a fantastic movie. I am not just saying that because I am a proud Territorian and the minister who looks after Screen Territory; it genuinely is a good movie.

I think that it will be the next big Australian thing. I say that because it has been shown in 300 cinemas all over Australia and across the world, including some of the key market areas for our international visitors. That is a great plus for the Territory.

It has already generated $4.32m in direct NT spending, employed 193 Territorians and engaged 150 local businesses. That goes to show that you can have creativity and commerce working hand in hand to help rebuild the Territory. We are proud of that.

The other proud moment with the film *Kangaroo* is that its producer, Brindle Films, was named the Chief Minister's Northern Territory Exporter of the Year 2025. It is amazing to see a production company that is exporting a film with iconic Central Australian landscapes across the world win that special award.

Central Australia has been shown around the world, which is great, but we also have *Top End Bub*, the sequel to *Top End Wedding*, which is showcasing the Top End across the world. It supported 200 Territory jobs and 400 local businesses which is fantastic.

We locked in $3.6m as part of our first budget earlier this year because we believe in the screen industry. It returns a huge amount of capital on our investment to Territorians. We back that industry.

We are also backing the wider arts sector. Our Minister for Arts is always out and about talking to people in the sector. We have committed $27m directly towards the arts, which includes $25m over five years to support leading strategic arts organisations across the Territory. I commend the Minister for Arts for that good work. When creative arts and commerce come together you can grow the Territory, and we were elected to rebuild the Territory economy.

We are proud of the work that Screen Territory and all the people in the arts sector are doing.

Aged-care Beds

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for LANDS, PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT

On Tuesday your Health minister blamed elderly Territorians for his failure to reduce pressure on our hospitals despite 30% extra funding from the federal government. He failed to mention that your CLP government cut $12m from the budget for land servicing, development and design of a 120-bed residential aged-care facility in the Palmerston regional health precinct. The federal government has put up $60m for this project which is out for an expression of interest.

Why is your Health minister blaming aged-care patients for your government's failure to manage the hospital system while pulling your funding for this much-needed project?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I will defend the Lands, Planning and Environment portfolio any time it comes up. Our Lands and Planning department has been getting on with the job. I recently announced the new suburb name of Asche. When I was out there, I saw trucks and dirt moving. Do you know what is happening out there? This land is serviced and ready to go. Do you know who has not come to the party? It will not be a shock to

anyone in this parliament—Luke Gosling. I do not know what those opposite are doing or where Luke Gosling is. The last time I saw him, he was trying to travel overseas to get out of here.

Territorians want to know when we will see the $60m to deliver aged-care beds in the Northern Territory. Whether it is at Old Timers in Alice Springs or at the new Palmerston area of Holtze, we need aged-care beds. The Minister for Health has spoken at great length.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The $60m from the federal government has been allocated for the expression of interest. The question was: why have you cut $12m from the land servicing budget?

Madam SPEAKER: He has plenty of time to answer this.

Member for Braitling, it is not parliamentary to refer to another member of parliament by their name, even if they are not a part of this parliament. Luke Gosling is the Member for Solomon.

Mr BURGOYNE: I forget sometimes. We do not see him much down my way in Alice Springs.

In regard to the Member for Solomon and aged care, it is important to understand—the Minister for Health spoke about this—that at any time across the Northern Territory, 80 people are taking up beds in our hospitals. This is a serious issue for families. I have seen it firsthand, and it is not something to laugh about.

Our government will get on with this, but we need the federal government to work with us. While it holds the keys to $60m of investment, we are getting on with ensuring that land is available. Put the money into our account and we will start building it.

This goes for a range of topics across the Northern Territory. When the federal government does not release funding, great projects fall over. That is a real frustration for everyone no matter where they live in the Northern Territory.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, he still has a minute left. I know you will say relevance. He has not specifically got to exactly what you have asked …

Mr YOUNG: It is just the $12m he cut we want to know about. Minister, why did you cut $12m?

Madam SPEAKER: I am hearing you. Let the minister continue.

Mr BURGOYNE: In relation to the Member for Daly's question, we are investing money in making sure land at Holtze is ready to go. I cannot make that any simpler or plainer. We need the Member for Solomon to get on to his federal mates and make sure that $60m is released so that we can deliver these beds. A lot of talk has happened in regard to this, but we have not seen any action.

I have spoken about the people who are in hospitals now. We want to get them out of hospital and into dignified aged care so that we can save $40m a year on the resources that are going into caring for those people in our hospitals.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: You will not get what you want, clearly, but you can continue.

Mr YOUNG: Yes, that is fine. Standing Order 110; relevance. Minister, why did you cut $12m out of the budget for land servicing? Otherwise this project would be up and going.

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you will be uninterrupted.

Mr BURGOYNE: We are delivering our promises in regard to this. We need the federal government to deliver its side of this promise.

Manton Dam Return to Service Project

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Territorians understand how important water is to our unique way of life, whether it is keeping us hydrated and healthy on hot, humid days; getting our ovals and fields ready for football, cricket, rugby or any other grass field sports; or keeping our gardens green during the Dry. Although it might not always be top of mind for Territorians, we all benefit from having a reliable and secure water source. Meeting the Territory's water needs now and into the future is a key priority for this CLP government. I understand that water demand in the Darwin region is projected to double by 2050, reaching 100 gigalitres annually. What steps is the government taking to ensure Territorians continue to have access to the water they need to sustain our unique Territory lifestyle?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Fannie Bay knows how important water is to Territorians.

As the Member for Fannie Bay pointed out, the water demand in the Darwin region is expected to double by 2050. That is why this government is committed to proactive measures to guarantee Territorians have the water supplies required to safeguard our unique Territory lifestyle.

Recently I announced, along with my colleague the Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure, that the Manton Dam return to service project is progressing well. Returning Manton Dam to service is an important part of securing the critical capacity needed to ensure enough water is available to meet Darwin's future demand. The project will reactivate the dam originally built in the 1940s and integrate it back into the region's potable water system so that Territorians have an additional source of drinking water.

This project is a $189m investment jointly funded by the Australian and Northern Territory Governments. It will deliver an additional 7,300 megalitres of safe drinking water into the Darwin supply each year, directly strengthening water capacity and increasing resilience against lower yields at other storages during drought and higher evaporation periods.

Works include refurbishment of the intake tower, a new pumping station and a 22-kilometre pipeline connecting Manton Dam to Strauss where a modern water treatment plant is being constructed. These upgrades together enable reliable, high-quality water to be delivered into the regional network.

The return to service of Manton Dam has played a vital role in not only securing our water future but also supporting more than 130 jobs in delivering the project. The principal contractor, Exact Contracting, is a proud Territory-founded company from Alice Springs. It has confirmed that more than 70% of the workforce on this project are local workers. That is real investment into Territory businesses, jobs and families.

This project is more than just infrastructure; it is a cornerstone of rebuilding our economy and ensuring that Territorians can continue to enjoy our unique Territory lifestyle now and well into the future.

I thank the Member for Fannie Bay for her question because water is important to every Territorian.

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

REORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 59, I move that the Assembly now considers Government Business Order of the Day number 1.

Motion agreed to.

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 28

Continued from 30 July 2025.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I speak in the strongest possible terms against the CLP government's Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill. Let us be clear that this Bill does not promote fairness, equality or inclusion. This Bill strips Territorians of hard-won protections, rolls back decades of progress, throws away many years of community engagement and consultation and sends a dangerous message that discrimination is welcome in the Northern Territory. The CLP thinks that this is a good idea.

Madam Speaker, when the former Labor government introduced its Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill, you posed the question: why is the government doing this? I replied:

> *… because we believe in fairness, equality and inclusion. We are doing this because we believe that Territorians deserve anti-discrimination legislation that meets the needs of our community.*

Equal treatment and equal opportunity for all Territorians is what Labor believes in—a Territory where every person, no matter who they are, is afforded equality of opportunity and equality before the law.

This Bill undoes all of that. The amendment Bill, which was introduced and will be passed by the CLP government, removes protections against conduct that offends, insults, humiliates or intimidates and replaces them with a narrow test of inciting hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule. This test is so narrow and vague that in Estimates the Attorney-General could not give a clear example of who this amendment will protect. Does the Attorney-General know what this amendment means in practice? Does the government know?

In this case it is not clear that those across from me understand what it means. It means that Territorians must endure abuse, slurs, vilification and humiliation until it crosses an extreme threshold. The bar will be set so high that it will be easy to subject Territorians to discrimination, intimidation, humiliation and harassment without recourse or protection from this behaviour.

Madam Speaker, now that this CLP government is rolling back the former Labor government's anti-discrimination laws, which took decades to build and were considered a nation-leading blueprint of what modern, diverse and inclusive anti-discrimination legislation should look like, I cannot help but echo the question you asked the former Labor government: why is the government doing this?

We are seeing a world where the incidence of hate speech is rising and every other jurisdiction in this country is strengthening its laws to offer its people protections against increasingly divisive speech and activity in the community. This government, which consists of multicultural members—some of whom are immigrants—is removing laws and protections that will keep them safe from vilification and discrimination. Who is this legislation for? The government cannot pinpoint a single freedom curtailed under the current law—not one. Therefore, I repeat: who is this legislation for? Who is not being protected by the current law?

This amendment is not about protecting or restoring a way of life for Territorians; it is legislative abandonment and a slap in the face to the Territory's greatest strength—its diversity, inclusivity and equality. By changing this Act CLP members are telling us that they are not interested in upholding their ethical duty to protect Territorians from harm. In fact, it is the opposite; they are showing us their lack of commitment to building a safer and more inclusive community. It is unethical to remove protections from vulnerable populations.

Two years ago the former Labor government delivered the most comprehensive anti-discrimination protections in Australia. Since then there have been no adverse consequences that would warrant these amendments. The sky has not fallen in since that legislation changed. The CLP is disrespecting its responsibility to govern properly, disrespecting Territorians and wasting everyone's time by attempting to fix something that is not broken.

This is an exercise that will simply water down hard-won protections, weaken legislation and open the floodgates to hate speech. The CLP thinks that it is acceptable to discriminate against our Aboriginal Territorians, rainbow communities, multicultural communities and Territorians living with a disability, not to mention survivors of domestic and family violence.

The CLP's handling of this amendment Bill has been a shambles from the beginning. Since the Bill's introduction the government has been unable to clearly explain to Territorians why it is doing this. From the get-go the CLP butchered the amendment process by telling the community one thing and pursuing another.

The lack of proper, genuine and meaningful consultation with the community and with Territorians who will be affected by these changes is a disgrace. The CLP has failed to listen to experts and those with lived experience. Territorians deserve better than this. They deserve a government that will act in the best interests

of all Territorians, not a government that compromises protections designed to safeguard them. The failure of the CLP government to consult on this Bill is shameful.

The decision to wind back anti-discrimination protections unnecessarily is shameful. It is categorically false to suggest that the current anti-discrimination laws curtail freedom of speech; that is a lie.

These amendments put us out of step with the Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act*, undermining the purpose of anti-discrimination law—equality and opportunity for all. The CLP is choosing to back those who want to denigrate, marginalise and abuse Territorians rather than protect our diverse population. These archaic amendments will exacerbate social inequalities and contribute to discrimination. At its best the CLP decision to amend the *Anti-Discrimination Act* is politics designed to divide.

Territory Labor believes religious schools have the right to uphold, teach and enshrine their religious beliefs and values. We are concerned that discriminating against a potential employee, even cleaners and gardeners, on religious grounds is an unnecessary step. These amendments give faith-based schools the legal right to turn away any Territorian who does not share their religion—not just teachers but also gardeners, cleaners and receptionists. In many small communities where the only school is a faith-based school this will slam the door shut on jobs and opportunities for even local Aboriginal people. They will be turned away from the only school in their community.

From the CLP's announcement of its plan to amend anti-discrimination laws, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, our hardworking unions and the community groups tell us that these amendments are carve-outs which strip away rights and undermine the purpose of anti-discrimination law.

Sally Sievers, the CEO of the Northern Territory Council of Social Service, stated that these changes will leave Territorians less safe and that we need to protect what we have built together. She said:

> *Finding workforce in the Territory is hard enough—why would we reintroduce legislation that could restrict the pool of workers even further?*

Scott Cowen from the Australian Services Union stated:

> *It's entirely hypocritical for the NT Government to on the one hand say that it wants to take steps to improve community safety while simultaneously using its power to remove the legal protections for some of the most vulnerable people in our society.*

These amendments leave the door wide open for covert discrimination against LGBTQIA+SB Territorians and others who are already vulnerable, like those living with a disability who receive high levels of discrimination in the Northern Territory already.

The CLP's amendments are regressive, unnecessary, unethical and misleading at a time when hate speech is on the rise and every other jurisdiction is strengthening the laws to safeguard against increasingly divisive speech and activity in our community. The Territory is strongest when it is inclusive, protects the vulnerable and values diversity. This Bill takes us backwards, weakens protections, legitimises prejudice and tells Territorians that they must tolerate discrimination.

Our communities are asking for leadership on safety, cost of living, jobs, housing, health and maternity services. This government has chosen instead to drag us backwards into a culture war. When will the CLP stop playing games and scapegoating our vulnerable groups to suit their agenda? There is no place in the community for anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, transphobia, ageism, sexism and any other divisive and frankly disgusting rhetoric. This government is showing us that time and again it does not respect Territorians and it does not understand. CLP members think they know better than those who have lived experience. CLP members think that they are experts. This political smokescreen, the amendment Bill, demonstrates just this.

Territory Labor does not stand for this. The Territory Labor opposition stands for strong, safe and inclusive communities; a Territory that backs one another, stands up to protect vulnerable people from harm and supports equality, respect and human dignity.

Territorians deserve better than what has been put forward. This is a backward step, and we should not support this Bill.

Almost two years ago to the day this parliament passed Australia's most comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, seen as a gold star for protections in this country. It was a moment many were incredibly proud of. It was contemporary legislation that stood up for every Territorian and said that there is no room for hate or discrimination. It was legislation that protected our community members living with a disability, my communities, my family, First Nations Territorians and members of the rainbow community—so many people were protected by that legislation.

Others may say that legislation had no effect, but it did. It sent a strong message to everyone across the country and the Northern Territory that regardless of who and where they were, they mattered and needed to be protected and that there was a bar that was not out of reach in order to stand up for our vulnerable communities. It said that there were appropriate channels for people to be protected, cared for and defended. It was the first piece of legislation in the world to defend the rights of sex workers. The positive duties and protected attributes matter to Territorians.

Not one Member of the Legislative Assembly can stand and tell me why this legislation needs to change as a result of a direct impingement on a Territorian. Has there been an increase in the last two years in the number of complaints before the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner as a result of this legislation? No, there has not been.

Why are we debating changes to legislation that is not broken and has not impinged on any person in the Northern Territory and which has afforded far-reaching protections for all Territorians? We are listening to a government that is stripping away and watering down hard-fought protections.

This journey did not just happen; there were many discussion papers, forums and workshops. Draft exposure Bills were put out at the time for feedback on the process.

The new government has been in power for more than 12 months and has said that it is open, transparent and accountable. I acknowledge that the CLP made these commitments as part of its election campaign, but since then it has been unable to articulate why.

The government refused to send the Bill to a scrutiny committee to allow those members to determine whether a hearing would be required. The government has the numbers on that committee, so the committee could have decided not to send it out for public consultation or to have a public hearing, but could at least have briefings from the commissioner and other relevant stakeholders. The government chose not to do that.

Fast-forward to when the Attorney-General said that the Bill was being deferred to have further consultation, not with every Territorian but a select few whom the Attorney-General chose. Today we have been told that there are no further amendments, and the Bill is back before us.

Today is a dark day for many people in our community. People are continuing to ask: why water down those protections? It is hard for many people in this place to put themselves in the shoes of another. There are only five people in this parliament who are Aboriginal. There are only a few people in this parliament who come from a multiculturally diverse background and who have emigrated to Australia. As far as I know, I am the only person from the rainbow community in this parliament. However, we are discussing laws that impact the core and essence of one's being without including them in a consultation process about winding back things that will protect them.

We hear comments such as, 'You should be able to make a joke'. You should not be able to make a joke at the expense of someone because they are a woman, gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or from another country and have emigrated to Australia. That is not the Territory that I and everyone I know wants because modern societies do not discriminate against people's race, religion, sexuality or identity. We see government members who constantly come in here and ridicule, pinpoint and hijack people's identities and use them for their own gain.

We could be here all day talking about this. I acknowledge that everyone will have, in some way, shape or form, a different story to talk about, but I am disheartened that this government has ignored meeting with major stakeholder groups to talk about a number of the changes.

I acknowledge that the Northern Territory Attorney-General met with members of the rainbow community at various times. They feel that their issues were ignored in those meetings, but I thank her for at least making the time to meet with them. As of tonight they will have to think differently about their protections and rights, as do Aboriginal and multicultural Territorians and victims of domestic and family violence.

The protected attributes sections are important, and we are thankful that they are staying, but why change something that is not broken? Why open the door to bigotry and hate speech? Why legislate to make it okay to hate? Why make it okay to legislate to discriminate?

When we passed the legislation two years ago a huge number of community members reached out to not only the government but also the members of the opposition and Independents at the time. Some of them said, 'Thank you. I am a teacher who works in a religious school. I feel comfortable to come out now.' They felt comfortable to identify that they are in a lesbian relationship, are with a partner, are trans or are bisexual. People said, 'I can live my life and be true to myself'. Today that has been taken away. They are being put in the position where their very being could cost them their job. As a result of this, a school will be able to produce a written document to say, 'Yes, while this person might be of the faith if they are also in a same-sex relationship we can discriminate against them for employment purposes'.

Think about the remote Northern Territory. In many communities there is one school and it might be faith based. I have a few of them in my electorate, and they do a great job. However, imagine you are an Aboriginal person who is either not religious or from the rainbow community, and you want to get a job. There is only one school and you are a qualified teacher, but you may not be able to work in your community, where you come from and where your ancestors and creation story comes from, because someone says that you are not fit to work at that school because of an ethos or a values set. That is discrimination. It does not matter how you try to package it.

We had people asking about the government's changes—'If it is a faith-based organisation that says it delivers education, can it discriminate against me because of my sexuality or my religion?' The problem is that these changes have not been clearly articulated to our community and it is creating uncertainty.

People have campaigned for many years. I thank Top End Pride, the Northern Territory Aids and Hepatitis Council, the Sex Workers Alliance, our hardworking unions, the medical associations, education unions and the hundreds of Territorians who have spoken about this. I acknowledge that some faith-based schools said, 'We will not use the changes to discriminate. We have built that into our enterprise bargaining agreements.'

This government's changes are not necessary. Where we are today is better than where we were two years ago when we debated our Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill. For the last two years we have rolled out the positive duty and those important protections. Education and information sessions were rolled out across the Northern Territory. We have not had an increase in complaints before the commission about people's rights being impinged on because of these changes. This tells you that the current legislation is working. It is protecting vulnerable, marginalised people.

Every Territorian is protected under the current legislation and every Territorian has the right to go to the commission to seek support or to lodge a complaint if they feel as though they have been discriminated against, so why are we changing it?

I am looking to hear tangible examples of why the legislation needs to change. I am all ears if I legitimately have an example of why, who and how the current legislation has impacted negatively on someone in our community. We hear time and again that these changes are about free speech; they are not.

The current legislation is about vilification and discrimination and making sure that we have strong protections to stand up for our community members when they cannot stand up for themselves.

I acknowledge that the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission has done a fantastic job over the last few years to roll out important work about positive duty and protected attributes and what they are because this stuff matters.

By a simple vote in this parliament the decision to wind back anti-discrimination protections unnecessarily will happen. It is categorically false to suggest that the current anti-discrimination laws curtail freedom of speech; that is not true.

This is huge. Although the gallery might not be filled to the top with people, I know that many people are listening today and people will hear over the coming days and weeks about these changes and will be trying to understand what that means for them. To those people: I stand with you.

We will continue our work, advocacy and journey to restore the protections that are about to be stripped away from every Territorian because this is not good enough, and there is no reason for it. Every Territorian deserves to feel safe, live a life free of discrimination, love who they want to love and not be shamed or

discriminated against for loving that person. Territorians deserve to feel comfortable to go out in the community and not have to worry about being subjected to hateful, racist and bigoted behaviour.

Disability is the number one complaint to the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission. People who are living with disability in our community are the vulnerable Territorians who have the number one complaint before the commission. They are people who will be able to be easily discriminated against as of tomorrow under this legislation. Let us take a moment to think about that.

Many of us debate things and then we leave; some of us talk to our communities and others move on. People from marginal and vulnerable communities cannot move on; they must live every day and be subjected to horrible comments, behaviours and discrimination, which is not good. That is not the Northern Territory we need to be promoting or the Northern Territory that I want to be talking about. I want a Territory that is free from discrimination and bigotry and embraces anyone and everyone from all walks of life and all life choices, no matter who they are and where they come from. That is important.

I oppose the amendments to the *Anti-Discrimination Act*. Do not change something that is not broken or hurting anyone. People who are encouraging this, go home and look at yourself in the mirror and ask, 'Why do I need to do this? Why do I need to feel like I am freer to be hateful and discrimination against someone?'

For the last two years this legislation has been doing its job, protecting people, defending the most vulnerable in our community and providing an appropriate course of action if action is required for investigation, substantiation and referring matters. The Anti-Discrimination Commission has functions that enable it to bring together aggrieved parties for mediation, to have a hearing, talk about it and work together to overcome the difference. Today with this Bill we are saying, 'There is no need for that. I want to be able to make a joke about you in the pub while I'm having a few beers and chucking them back and it be okay.'

The threshold in this Bill is so high that it will never be met. This means people will see more discrimination under this change. That is not the Territory we want.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I do not intend to talk for too long, but this is an important Bill.

I recognise, as most people in here do, that there are legitimately different views on this Bill. That is acceptable. We are a democracy; some people think one way and other people think another way. Having said that, as with much legislation introduced in this Assembly, I think we need to look at it from a point of view of policy balance.

The policy pendulum varies from the extreme left to the extreme right, neither of which I follow. When developing policy and associated legislation we need to take a commonsense approach that reflects our community's expectation and desire, which I believe generally takes us towards the centre. My decisions in this Assembly are strongly influenced by the views of the overwhelming majority of my electorate, noting that it is unrealistic to expect that we will ever have 100% agreement. I do not see that happening, but we can get a majority saying, 'This is where we think we want to go'.

Before I speak about this Bill I will reflect on the various reducing-crime Bills that we introduced in our first year of government, including bail reform, minimum mandatory sentences for assaulting frontline workers and increased police powers. I recall that we had views for and against the introduction of these Bills. That is legitimate; we are allowed to have that. Although I appreciate the concerns raised by those on the opposition benches, who oppose the introduction of these Bills, I am confident that we had the support of the majority of Territorians to proceed, including those in my electorate. They wanted improved community safety. I must admit that I think only the CLP was willing to genuinely act on this rather than ignoring them. We might have centre left and centre right, but it was the community expectation that drove us, and we were confident that what we were delivering was the balance of what the community wanted.

Guess what? It is just over one year since I was sworn into this Assembly along with others on 15 October, and the sun still comes up in the morning and sets in the evening. It has not been doom and gloom because we introduced what we believe the community wanted. We are going forward.

As I flagged in my response to the ministerial report on backing small business I believe that the majority of Territorians—definitely those in my electorate of Karama—are feeling much more optimistic about the future of the Territory with the CLP government in power. They have a much better future; they can see it for their families and kids going forward. To me, that is a good thing.

What does this Bill do? I will quote this because I want to get it right:

> *The Bill does not remove protections from the* Anti-Discrimination 1992 *(the Act), rather retains and expands upon the protections currently available under the Act. The amendments proposed by the Bill are intended to enhance protection of vulnerable communities from hate-speech and discrimination.*
>
> *Vulnerable communities consist of all people and groups with a protected attribute under the Act, which include for example, race, religion, age and sex.*

The Bill, first of all, amends the protection against vilification by simply replacing three words with another set of three words. It replaces:

> *… the words 'offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate' with 'incites hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule of' a person or group because of a protected attribute … The effect of this is that the protection is incitement based rather than requiring a threshold of harm to be established …*

I will go back to the issue of offence later.

The Bill inserts a new section to:

> *… reintroduce an exemption for religious educational institutions operating in accordance with a doctrine of a particular religion to discriminate in the area of work on the ground of religious belief and activity and in good faith to avoid offending the religious sensitivities of a reasonable person of the religion.*

Note it is 'a reasonable person':

> *The exemption allows a religious educational institution to:*
>
> - *preference employing persons of the same religion; and*
> - *establish requirements of the conduct for persons employed in the workplace;*
>
> *but only where the elements of the religious doctrine are set out in written policy …*

In my electorate and adjoining areas there is a number of faith-based schools, including Catholic senior and primary schools and an Islamic college. I believe these schools deserve the right to employ teachers and staff who share the values of their faith to deliver cohesive learning in line with the shared values of their own families.

If I choose to send my child to a faith-based school I expect that faith-based school to share the values of why I am sending them there. If I am a Catholic sending my child to a Catholic school, I would hope that Catholic values come through. If I am Islamic and I am sending my child to an Islamic school, I would hope the values of the Islamic faith are shared at that school. This applies to every faith-based school. There are Lutheran schools and a range of others.

It is important to note that the religious exemption recognises that religion is a protected attribute under the Act and that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief can at times intersect with other fundamental rights, such as the right to non-discrimination and equality. Where fundamental rights intersect a balance must be struck to preserve both rights to the highest degree possible. That is what the religious exemption seeks to do.

The amendment to the vilification prohibition responds to concerns that prohibition based on offensive behaviour overly limits the freedom of speech, while the incitement-based protection is better understood by the community.

I am a strong supporter of freedom of speech; it is part of my DNA. People should be able to speak. I do not have to agree with what they say and I can be against what they say, but I fundamentally respect their right to say it. We have to be careful where we go in limiting that.

The amendment to the vilification prohibition makes it clear where the right to freedom of speech is limited, being where conduct such as hate speech is capable of inciting hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule of a person or group with a protected attribute. The vilification prohibition continues to protect against hate speech and retains the mechanism by which a person or group may seek recourse against an individual for

conduct that constitutes vilification in the Act. Therefore, we have not removed all these protections; they are there. We have just changed the emphasis slightly.

As I said, I think we are in the centre. During the development of this Bill the Attorney-General was lobbied by many groups. Some wanted us to go harder. That is their right. They said, 'You are not going far enough; you have to go much further.' We said, 'Hang on, we are not too sure about that; we will come back.' Some did not want us to do anything. We said, 'You are not listening to the majority feedback we are getting'.

We need to respond to the community. The Bill may not be perfect—we can discuss it in consideration in detail—but I think we have struck the middle, and that is a good thing. We will not get agreement on all sides, but I think we have taken a good middle course, and I understand why we are trying to get freedom of speech back in there and religious rights for faith-based schools.

I will finish on the concept of offence and free speech. I mentioned in an earlier speech that I had a mobile office in Malak. I set up in the morning—fine. A lot of people came up to me and said, 'Hello Brian, it is good to see you'. However, one car coming up Darwent Street and turning into Malak Crescent, where I was, had a trailer on and the window down, and the driver asked, 'Are you getting paid to stand there?' I said yes and he said, 'Eff off'. Was I offended? No—others may have been—because it was his right to express his view. I may not like him saying it, but he was entitled to say his view. I will stand by his right to say his view. I wish he had stopped to talk to me; that would have been good. As one of my colleagues said, I should have told him, 'I hope you have the day you deserve, sir', and just let it go. It reminds me of the old saying, 'Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me'. Some people may take some things hard, but they must learn to deal with it because people have the right to say it.

Let me reassure everyone that when this Bill is passed—I am sure it will be; there may be changes, and I will not pre-empt what will happen—some people in this House may not support it, but I am confident that the majority of Territorians will support enhancements for free speech and religious rights. I think they see that as a commonsense approach.

I could not resist this. The Member for Gwoja was passionate, and he got me thinking. I listened to the concerns raised by the Member for Gwoja when he did not like the idea of people being able to make jokes—I say again 'jokes'—that touched on nationality, sex or race. If that is the case we may as well get rid of all our fantastic comedians who have entertained us over the years, including Billy Connolly, Dave Allen, Spike Milligan and of course the magnificent John Cleese. I remember many Irish jokes in my time. Does it mean all our 'an Irishman, a Scotsman and an Englishman walk into a bar' jokes have to stop? Surely not. On that note let me go back to the magnificent John Cleese, as I am finishing with a quote from him:

> *Here's a definition of Wokeism: There are people just sitting there, who are deliberately waiting, for the thrill of being offended.*

I get offended sometimes, but I will not take it too hard. I can move on. I hope other people do too.

This Bill is in the middle ground. It is an important Bill that touches on an important topic.

I commend the Bill.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I support this Bill. I would love to speak about how important it is to protect freedom of speech so that people can engage in robust debates without fear of being hauled through processes and potentially hauled before the courts for their speech, as we are seeing happen in the UK for people who made silly posts on social media, but I will not speak about that today.

Instead I will focus on something a lot more relevant to my electorate of Blain, which is the freedom of faith-based schools to go about their business and employ teachers—which we all know is hard enough to do in the Northern Territory—who align with their beliefs and doctrines so that they can educate the students in line with parents' expectation that the teachers and the school will have a faith-based approach as an intrinsic part of that education. Those schools need the freedom to focus on delivering a high-quality faith-based education without having to worry about accidentally stepping on a landmine and ending up in court because they did not tick a box.

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School is a K–6 school in the suburb of Woodroffe in Palmerston. It is a fantastic primary school. I believe that the Chief Minister may have attended that school when she was a little whippersnapper. It is an amazing school.

Emery Avenue has been in the news for not the best reasons, particularly last year. We are slowly working through those issues. Unfortunately under the previous government the school had to cancel an end-of-year dance due to safety issues. I would love to say that those issues are all in the past, but we are not quite there yet. However, we are in a much better place than we were last year.

Sacred Heart is a faith-based school. There is a Catholic church on the school grounds which has regular masses. It is an integral part of school life that students attend mass at the church on the school grounds. I have attended a couple of those masses, as I believe the Member for Brennan has. There is a rich tapestry of life at that school.

Good Shepherd Lutheran school is in the wonderful suburb of Gray in the Member for Drysdale's electorate. One of my good friends unfortunately is no longer in the Territory. She and her husband had to move away from the reign of terror of the previous government because they were unable to sustain their lifestyle here. She was a fantastic teacher at that school. At the start of every year the school has an open day where it welcomes people from all over Palmerston and Darwin to enjoy the fete and stalls it puts on. It is a great school.

Palmerston Christian College is a K–12 school—I believe it is in the Member for Nelson's electorate—in the suburb of Marlow Lagoon, which is adjacent to my electorate. It is a fantastic local school. It even hosts Zion, one of the churches we have in Palmerston. There is an intimate relationship between that school and a faith-based group. The previous Member for Blain was a principal of that school many years ago before he was preselected to run for Blain.

Mackillop Catholic College is not in my electorate; it is in Spillett. It is a fantastic college. We had a large group of its Year 10 students here today. I had the honour of accompanying them upstairs to meet the Chief Minister and take photos. They were in the gallery.

I have sat with the principal of that school, and I was incredibly impressed by what an earnest, decent and hardworking man of faith he is. This is someone who wrestles with many issues. For his own safety he had to put CCTV in his office so he can be sure that if there are any allegations of impropriety, everything in his office is recorded for his own protection. I will not go into too much detail because that is his story, but he shared with me how he has wrestled with finding teachers, how hard it is to find teachers in the NT and how the school navigates the tension between seeking people who align with the school's faith-based agenda versus the candidates of the highest quality. I will come to how that is resolved later in my speech.

Outside of Palmerston is Marrara Christian College, which I believe is another K–12 school. Many of my friends went there over the years. That is not as much of a traditional Catholic school, but it is a high-quality faith-based school nonetheless.

There is Good Shepherd College in Howard Springs for Year 7 to 12 students. There is O'Loughlin Catholic College and, I am sure, many other faith-based schools in the Darwin area and down the track that I have not had the opportunity to get to know yet.

All the schools I have listed so far are in the Christian tradition, but that is not the only faith-based religious tradition that we have in the Territory; we also have the wonderful and rich Islamic faith. There is a mosque in my electorate, in the suburb of Moulden. Every Friday people are there praying. They have regular feasts and celebrations in accordance with their calendar. I have been to Eid with my colleagues. They are solid, hardworking people with a great deal of character and integrity.

The Islamic faith in Darwin has the Australian International Islamic College in Berrimah. I think that school started with somewhere in the order of 32 students. I have to check where enrolments are up to now; I hope it is doing well.

Faith-based schools are everywhere in the Northern Territory, particularly in our regional areas and remote communities. They are an integral part of the fabric of our society.

As a father of three boys, I want the best education for them that I can possibly get. I have wrestled with the thought of sending them to a public school, a faith-based school or a non-denominational private school. For our family, personally, we settled on sending our kids to a local public school because we thought it would be good for them to be exposed at the primary school level to the hurly-burly of ideas. For our circumstances, that was the decision we made.

I understand that a lot of parents and families choose to send their kids to a faith-based school because they consider the fact that the school has an explicit faith-based agenda which carries a lot of things with it. If you

have not ever read the Sermon on the Mount—those sections of the New Testament where the prophet Jesus of Nazareth delivers the sermon—and you think religious people are full of hate, I encourage you to read it. Go and read it, and try to find any hate in there. I have read it, and I cannot find any. There is only love. In my discussions with faith-based schools there is a lot of love.

Parents who choose to send their kids to faith-based schools need to know that there will be a moral theme to their children's education, which is not just about numeracy and literacy, history and all the good stuff that kids learn, and that the school is free to have an unapologetic embrace of its faith and religious principles. If the school is founded on the Judaeo-Christian tradition it will be able to talk about Jesus and the Christian tradition without anyone being offended. If it is a Catholic school, it will be able to talk about saints. I am not a Catholic, so I do not know much about what Catholics talk about.

Parents need to be assured that if they send their children to a faith-based school that their children will come away with a faith-based education. This means the school needs to be free to choose its teachers. In my discussions with principals of faith-based schools they have been open that they do not want to exclude someone on the basis of a protected characteristic. They want the best teachers available who are willing to ascribe to the values of the school, but at the same time principals need to be safe; that if they make a decision and someone has a protected characteristic, they will not end up in court simply because they are a target. Faith-based schools these days, unfortunately, walk around with a great big fat target on their backs. Principals need to focus on education and running their school according to their faith as best they can without worrying about defending themselves in court if they choose the better candidate when the other candidate has a protected characteristic and makes a complaint.

I support this Bill. I support rights. I support strengthening the *Anti-Discrimination Act* to give certainty and security to parents and staff of faith-based schools in the Northern Territory.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Mr Deputy Speaker, along with my Territory Labor colleagues I will not support the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill 2025. To be blunt and honest, this is a sad day for the Northern Territory. Those opposite have chosen to go down the path of implementing amendments, particularly to section 20A of the Act, that are regressive and unnecessary.

In the past months it has been clear in our public discourse that hate speech, discrimination and vilification are on the rise. Only a couple of months ago we all stood in this Chamber and condemned racism in all its forms, but now we are debating legislation that affects some of the most vulnerable people in our society. For what purpose—to strip them of their basic protections from vilification in a public place?

Other Australian jurisdictions have strengthened laws against divisive speech and activity in the community. Who could they look to for those strong laws? Until today it was the Northern Territory.

The laws passed by the former Labor government in 2023 were nation leading and designed to protect Territorians from public conduct likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate on the grounds of race, sexuality, gender, disability, religion and a range of other attributes. The former Labor government brought in these legislative changes following an extensive consultation process with stakeholders.

Those opposite claim to have consulted, but it has been limited and without genuine intent. We witnessed this upon the introduction of this legislation when the CLP government bypassed the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for the 27th time. This is the committee that the government set up at the start of its term. It was forced to pull this Bill last month at the eleventh hour because it had failed to properly engage with stakeholders regarding its amendments. The government was taken by surprise, despite requests from the Members for Gwoja and Johnston who were willing to undertake the work as members of the committee. The CLP government refused to subject its legislation to the scrutiny test, thereby rejecting transparency and accountability. It is truly shameful that the CLP has such disregard for the processes it pretended to be so proud of early in its term.

It is also disheartening that the CLP government is disregarding stakeholders' deep concerns. The community's rejections of its reasoning have been loud and clear. Apart from the Attorney-General's poor attempt to conflate being offended by a glass of water with the type of vilification faced by vulnerable members of our community this rhetoric is base and populist, drawn from the gutter of Trumpian-like discourse.

During the Estimates process, I asked the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner the following question:

Do the existing NT legislative framework and protections effectively respond to preventing racial vilification and discrimination?

The commissioner responded:

The current version of the vilification provision in relation to section 20A is sufficient for our purposes in terms of meeting the needs of vilification in the Northern Territory, hence there was no need to look into amending or repealing it. From the commission's perspective, the current provision in section 20A is sufficient.

The commissioner also went on to say in the Estimates process:

The current version of section 20A, the vilification provision, I think is one of the strongest pieces of vilification law that is already in place. It is highly visionary in terms of where we are going with that reform. I think it is one that, and perhaps this is an opinion piece, we need to protect in the Northern Territory. Any other version of the vilification provision would be watering it down. What we say at the commission is that the current version holds, and it is the strongest piece of vilification law that we have in Australia and there is no need for further amendments to that provision.

Given the laws as they stand relate to eliminating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for all Territorians, the CLP government is turning its back once again on the evidence and those with expertise. The Attorney-General is sick of hearing about the evidence-based policies, to her shame.

At a time when we are seeing Nazi protests down south, in Darwin we heard the Minister for Multicultural Affairs quote Nazis in this Chamber and then tried to defend it by saying, 'No, you all misheard that. You are misquoting me. Do not worry about that. It is just a misunderstanding.' He could not even have the humility to apologise for his comments.

The Member for Karama, in an adjournment speech on Thursday 27 March 2025—I pick up why he supports this Bill because this lays it out—stated:

In between sittings I had the opportunity to go to a 50th school reunion in Melbourne, which was fabulous; that shows everyone how old I am compared with these youngsters. I had not seen people for 50 years, and it is amazing that within five minutes it was like we had never left. We were picking up the same conversations; the same dirty jokes I used to tell them, we are still telling now; and the same observations we made about women then, we are making now.

That is what your own member, the Member for Karama, quoted in here. Do you support that quote, Attorney-General? Silence. You do or you do not. Do you support that from the Member for Karama?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Daly, direct your conversation through the Chair, please, not directly to the minister.

Mr YOUNG: Clearly, she is rattled by it, but that is what the Member for Karama said in this Chamber about women. It is disgraceful. I would assume …

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! No interjections, please.

Mrs Zio: Pot kettle black.

Mr YOUNG: The Member for Fannie Bay just piped up, clearly supporting the quote from the Member for Karama, unless she denounces the quote in her speech. I hope she would because they are disgusting. It is disgraceful in this day and age that the Member for Karama thinks that his quote is all right, to come in here and degrade women. How disgusting! You should be ashamed of yourself, Member for Karama.

Hateful rhetoric towards vulnerable communities is on the rise, and it is beyond me as to this government's reasoning. Laws surrounding discrimination need to reflect our modern values and expectations, especially how we treat others in public places. Therefore, I cannot and will not support this legislation.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Mr Deputy Speaker, I understand that there are changes to this law that are significant but that it does not revert to the laws from 2022. Instead, this Bill brings changes to Labor's amendment, watering down protections that were created in 2022.

Section 20A currently prohibits conduct in a public place that is likely to offend, insult or humiliate a person or people because of an attribute. This Bill amends section 20A and removes 'offend, insult and humiliate' and replaces it with 'incite hatred towards, serious contempt for or severe ridicule of'. This waters down the intentions of the 2022 changes that the Labor government made.

In 2025 we need stronger protections. We need both layers—the changes that the Labor Party brought in 2022 and the changes that the CLP is bringing in now—but we also need to take the breaking of these laws much more seriously.

If the CLP government wanted to bring a Bill to amend the Act once again, it should have been done properly with a thorough review and consultation. This Bill should have been sent to the scrutiny committee for community consultation.

Today in the Northern Territory we can feel high levels of discrimination. We know that there are serious and entrenched uses of discrimination in the NT, and many people feel that these problems are growing. The Anti-Discrimination Commission is tasked with the job of investigating discrimination, and there must be real consequences that lead people and institutions away from following toxic cultures. When these cultures become normal they allow vilification and highly offensive and damaging language and behaviour to occur.

Many people in this Chamber will understand the impact of discrimination at a personal level. A person is deeply harmed by offensive behaviours of discrimination. I personally have felt this deep hurt, so it is important that we protect people by creating laws that set a high standard and say that discrimination will not be tolerated and penalties will be enforced.

For this reason, I cannot support this Bill. I agree with the vilification laws bringing the NT law into line with other jurisdictions, but other jurisdictions such as Queensland also have made serious vilification a criminal offence, and that is missing from this Bill.

I understand that since 2022 there have been only three complaints made to the commissioner in relation to public conduct that was offensive, humiliating or intimidating. The implementation of this law has not opened the floodgates to numerous complaints or shut down free speech, as the CLP suggested it would.

I would like to see both the offensive behaviour and vilification sections adopted within the Act.

I would also like to see the government sending a clear message that discrimination is not okay. There is a message coming from the government that it does not want to infringe on freedom of speech and people should be allowed to be offensive in public and not be concerned about it. This message began in 2022 when the CLP opposed the Labor Bill.

Three years later we clearly see that the Bill's changes were okay and did not impact on freedom of speech. Despite this, the CLP has chosen to amend the Act. The story it tells is about freedom of speech and the freedom to offend people, but the story should really be about the importance of protecting people. This government is yet to begin talking about the safety and protection of all people in our communities.

I will speak briefly about new section 35B. This section inserts an exemption for work in religious educational settings. I do not oppose religious schools being able to recruit staff who align with the faith of the school community, but I also believe that they can employ people of any faith. I oppose the idea that any school might discriminate against people for other reasons, and I hope that section 35B(2) would not allow this to happen.

I have concerns that schools may take this section further by saying that they will not employ a divorced teacher, a single-parent teacher, a gay teacher or an Aboriginal teacher who still participates in traditional ceremonies because I understand that section 35B may allow pathways for this. As a Christian, these examples go against the teachings of Christianity that I understand, which are that Jesus teaches us we must be accepting and compassionate towards one another and that it is not our place to judge. I have concerns that section 35B may discriminate against people for who they are and cause harm.

Things have changed from 2022 to 2025, and this Bill was an opportunity to improve the laws. Although it retains some of the intention of the 2022 Labor Bill, overall it has failed to bring the strong improvements that we need in 2025.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Lauren Moss

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of the former Member for Casuarina Lauren Moss. Welcome, Lauren.

Members: Hear, hear!

J DAVIS (Johnston): Mr Deputy Speaker, I speak in strong opposition to the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill 2025. Before I address the specifics of this Bill, I want to speak to an issue raised by the Member for Karama. He said the job of government is to listen to the middle, to follow the median voter and to respond to the loudest voices or the most powerful interests. That is not the job of government. That is not leadership; that is followship.

Ms BOOTHBY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! That is not what the Member for Karama said so I do not think the member should verbal him unless she knows exactly what he said. We could get a rush on Hansard if you want to check what he said, but that is not what he said.

J DAVIS: I am happy to rephrase that if needed; that is fine. I understood that the Member for Karama said that the job of government is to listen to the majority. I am happy to check on that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Johnston, while you are checking, you might just withdraw in the meantime.

J DAVIS: Sure, that is fine. I am happy to withdraw it while it is checked.

The true measure of government is not how it treats its comfortable majority; it is how it protects the most vulnerable. Those who have no voice, no power and no protection except what the law provides. We have an obligation, not just a political option but a moral obligation, to protect the most vulnerable members of our community and not to pander to powerful interest groups.

This Bill is a clear example of a government abandoning that obligation. This Bill is not abstract; it is not theoretical; it is not just about words; it is about people's everyday lives. It represents a serious step backwards for human rights in the Northern Territory. It proposes to roll back protections that Territorians fought hard for and should be proud of which ensure safety, dignity and equality in our workplaces, schools and communities.

These proposed amendments will affect people throughout the Northern Territory, including people in this Chamber. If you have a child who is gay or gender diverse this Bill will make it harder for them to feel safe at school or in their workplace. If someone in your family is a person with disability they could face humiliation in public without protection from the law. If you have a parent or grandparent who speaks English as a second language they could be abused for the way they speak and find they have no recourse. These are not special interest issues; they are family issues and the issues of our community. They are about whether our children, parents and neighbours are treated with dignity in the Territory that we are all proud to call home.

When protections are stripped back it does not just affect other people; it affects us all. At some point in our lives each of us or someone we care about can face exclusion or discrimination for who we are, what we believe or how we live.

We have heard that this Bill seeks to replace our harm-based model with an incitement model. This means that conduct will be unlawful only if it incites hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule. This is not just three words changing or a technical adjustment; this is a fundamental weakening of protection against hate speech. Conduct that offends, humiliates or intimidates based on race, religion, sexuality or gender could now be considered as lawful unless it meets this very high threshold.

Let us be clear about what that means in practice. Under our current laws if a young person with disability has slurs shouted at them on a bus, that is unlawful. If an elderly person is verbally abused in public because of who they are, they have protection. If hateful graffiti is scrawled on a school or community building, that is covered. With these amendments, those acts may not be unlawful because they do not incite others to join in. The reality is this is not protecting free speech; it is giving a green light to everyday vilification and hate that causes real harm in our community.

The Anti-Discrimination Commissioner has been clear:

> *Any other version of the vilification provision would be watering it down.*

He said that the current protections are the strongest we have in Australia and that these amendments are unnecessary and symbolically harmful. He also said:

> *These amendments do not restore balance, they strip away rights and undermine the very purpose of antidiscrimination law—equality of opportunity.*

This Bill extends to faith-based schools. It would allow schools to refuse to hire people of other faiths or impose workplace rules based on doctrine. This means that a Jewish teacher could be denied a job at a Catholic school and a Muslim or Hindu applicant could be refused purely because of their faith; highly skilled experienced professionals could be excluded for no reason other than belief. It also means schools can tell staff what they can say about their family, their sexuality and even their private lives. That is not religious freedom; that is state-sanctioned discrimination.

Despite these far-reaching changes, the government refused to send this Bill to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee. It did, however, send the Animal Protection and Related Legislation Amendment Bill and the Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Legislation Amendment (Expansion of CDS and Other Matters) Bill—two uncontroversial pieces of legislation—for proper review. Territorians are left with the message that the government believes animals deserve scrutiny and safeguards, and how bottle caps are treated deserves scrutiny and safeguards, but whether you are safe from discrimination in your workplace and in public does not.

Many people contacted me concerned about the lack of legitimate and meaningful consultation on this Bill and the fact that it was not referred to a scrutiny committee, and asked whether there was a way they could communicate their concerns. In response to this request, I established the Community Scrutiny Forum where I invited people to provide submissions and undertook to provide a report to the Attorney-General and the parliament about those submissions. I delivered the community scrutiny forum report to the Attorney-General and every member of this Chamber on Monday this week, so all have had plenty of time to review it. The fact that it is left to an Independent member with no resources to undertake this process that the community is calling for, which should have been done by the parliament, should make all of us question this government's commitment to transparency and democracy.

I also provided the report to the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. He responded in writing:

> *Thank you for sharing the outcomes of the Community Scrutiny Forum and for your leadership in ensuring the community's voice was heard when the Bill was not referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee (LSC) as it should have been. Your efforts in facilitating this parallel process have provided valuable civic transparency.*
>
> *After reviewing the Forum's report, I provide the following observations on behalf of the Anti-Discrimination Commission (ADC):*
>
> *…*
>
> *ADC agrees with Recommendations 1 and 2 of the Community Scrutiny Forum namely, to retain the current vilification provisions in section 20A and to reject the reintroduction of religious exemptions in new section 35B.*
>
> *…*
>
> *The ADC appreciates the Forum's advocacy in upholding principles of equality and fairness under the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act 1992.*

I seek leave to table this letter.

Leave granted.

J DAVIS: The Community Scrutiny Forum report, which everyone in this Chamber has a copy of, summarises submissions made and from those submissions recommends, as the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner reflected:

> *Section 20A should retain its current threshold of 'offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate. This ensures that the law continues to capture the serious, commonplace acts of vilification that undermine dignity, safety and equality in the community.*

Recommendation 2 is:

> *New section 35B should be discarded so the reintroduction of an exemption allowing religious education institutions to discriminate against employees based on religion will not be legislated.*

I seek leave to table the Community Scrutiny Forum report.

Leave granted.

J DAVIS: To ensure these views are heard within this Chamber, I will quote some of the submissions the forum received. The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency submission said:

> *Weakening these protections sends an alarming message to the community about the behaviour we consider acceptable in this jurisdiction and how little value is placed on the experiences of those impacted by vilification.*

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service submission said:

> *… that the proposed amendments will make Territorians less safe …*

It called for the current protections in the *Anti-Discrimination Act* to be retained. It also highlighted the lack of wide consultation on these changes and cautioned that allowing religious educational institutions to discriminate will have profound negative impacts.

The NT Mental Health Coalition expressed concerns:

> *… that materials have not been made readily available to the community to better inform them of the impact these proposed changes may have.*

It emphasised that amending this legislation will have an impact on the mental health of the community, particularly on people who identify as LGBTIQA+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people living with disabilities and young people.

The National Network of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls states that the Bill:

> *… weakens protections, entrenches discrimination, and creates barriers to justice for those who already experience systemic inequality.*

It urged our parliament to:

1. *Retain broad protections in section 20A for offensive behaviour that humiliates or intimidates, not only extreme vilification.*

2. *Remove or strictly limit religious exemptions, ensuring all educational environments are inclusive and non-discriminatory.*

The President of the Hindu Society warns that the proposed changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* will soften hate speech and create an avenue for white extremists to prosper. They also note that allowing religious schools to discriminate will be detrimental to the quality of teaching available to students and that diversity among employees creates an environment of harmony.

The founder of Vibrant Diverse Cultures Inc, an advocacy group focused on social capital for under-represented groups, describes the potential psychological harm caused by these amendments as being of great harm in the community, especially given the current state of mental health services and resources in the Northern Territory. They strongly recommend community consultation with affected groups before any legislative changes take place.

It is important we listen to all voices, and that was the point of holding the Community Scrutiny Forum. Our invitation to respond welcomed all views. There was one submission from the Minister at St Peter's Anglican Church in Nightcliff who expressed support for new section 35B and said:

> *… being a Christian is a way of life, not an attitude to the workplace.*

He said that religious educational institutions should be able to apply their values to the private lives of employees not only in the workplace. I note that this was the only submission that expressed support for any aspect of these proposed amendments.

One long-term Territorian, a member of several protected classes, said in their submission:

> *Discrimination is an ongoing reality in our community, and legal protections make a real difference to safety and belonging.*

They stressed that the NT's world-leading anti-vilification provisions must not be weakened, religious exemptions must not be reinstated and reforms must be based on evidence, human rights standards and genuine community consultation rather than political expediency.

An Aboriginal constituent in my electorate deeply affected by intergenerational trauma said to me, 'Especially with this government's policies my children are seriously scared. This makes me very worried for my family.'

Another constituent subjected to racist slurs in childhood fears that the proposed replacement of offensive behaviour with 'incite hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule of' will exclude many experiences of real harm. They said that the words 'offend, humiliate or intimidate' should be retained as these cover racist slurs and religious vilification and allow a wider interpretation of the Act.

A member of a minority religion stated that discrimination because of religion, faith, nationality, race or ability can be cruel and result in severe consequences. They urged the parliament to uphold principles of respect and fairness and to do all it can to prevent hate and hostility.

A queer Christian Territorian said that the Australian Christian Lobby represents fundamentalists, not the majority of parishioners. They fear that these amendments will allow religious schools the privilege of discriminating against another group based on attributes which do not affect the person's ability to undertake a job. They said that it might have made a difference during difficult times in their own life if there were some queer Christian role models, and who better than teachers for kids to look up to.

Another constituent said that not many people in the Northern Territory would want to live in a society that legitimises one person or group being able to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another. The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992* should bring people together to co-exist harmoniously, focusing on respect, tolerance and understanding of different cultures and religions.

A petition was provided to me today which I will formally table on Tuesday. This petition was signed by almost 1,400 people in less than 24 hours this week. The petition says:

> *We implore the Finocchiaro government to abandon their imminent plan to amend the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act. The CLP's plan will allow for increased hate speech and religious discrimination in our communities. This targets First Nations people, women, people of colour, Sistergirl, Brotherboy, LGBTIQAP+ people, all marginalised people, our education system and all people living in the NT.*
>
> *No community consent has been provided for this to occur, and we reject the government's intentions in the strongest possible terms.*
>
> *Why is this important?*
>
> *On Thursday 16th October 2025 the Northern Territory Government under Lia Finocchiaro is planning to change the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act, rolling back recently won protections for vulnerable community members.*
>
> *The vilification provision in the current NT Anti-Discrimination Act has been called 'one of the strongest pieces of vilification law that is currently in place' and 'highly visionary' by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.*

The Finocchiaro government intends to:

Amend Section 20A of the Act to provide a 'higher threshold' for what is considered vilification, allowing for increased levels of hate speech against marginalised communities in the Northern Territory. This is occurring in a political climate where racist rhetoric and anti-Sistergirl Brotherboy LGBTQIA sentiment are high.

Add Section 35B, allowing religious organisations to discriminate against employees 'on the ground of religious belief' or 'to avoid offending religious sensibilities'. This has grave implications for Sistergirl Brotherboy LGBTQIA+ teachers working in religious schools, and creates unsafe school environments for Sistergirl Brotherboy LGBTQIA+ students and families. Students and teachers deserve a safe environment in which to thrive and learn, free from discrimination.

This is one of many sustained attacks on community safety by the CLP government. We cannot allow this erosion of our hard-won protections.

As I said, that has been signed by nearly 1,400 people.

The consequences of this Bill are tangible. The vulnerable will face legalised discrimination in employment. People who experience vilification, harassment or hate-speech will find it harder to seek justice. Teachers and other staff in faith-based schools could face restrictions on their identity and speech and even their private lives. Public confidence in the law and government will erode.

By moving to this incitement-only model, the government is pretending that there is a trade-off where none exists. In reality weakening protections does not create more freedom; it creates more fear and insecurity for those already vulnerable. It tells Territorians, especially people of minority faith, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ people, that their dignity, safety and equality matters less than the comfort of those who wish to discriminate.

This is where courageous leadership is required. Anti-discrimination laws are, by their nature, counter-majoritarian. They exist precisely because vulnerable minorities need protection from the majority of prejudice and powerful interests. They tell the majority that you cannot treat people unfairly just because you outnumber them. They tell powerful interests that you cannot abuse your power just because you have it.

Maintaining and strengthening these protections requires courage precisely because this can be unpopular. It requires the government to say that even if this costs us votes and powerful groups oppose it, we will protect those who cannot protect themselves. This is what leadership looks like.

This Bill does the opposite. It weakens protections where they are needed most. It responds to powerful lobbying, rather than protecting vulnerable Territorians. It chooses political expediency over principle.

This is not an either/or. Protecting people from harm is not the enemy of free expression. The purpose of law is to ensure that freedom is responsible, safe and inclusive.

The current Northern Territory anti-discrimination law already strikes a careful and considered balance. It allows free expression while protecting individuals and communities from serious harm. The harm-based model does not prevent people from speaking their minds; it prevents people from offending, humiliating or intimidating others based on attributes like race, religion, sexuality or gender.

I urge every member of this Assembly to stand for fairness and equality and to do our jobs as leaders and protect the most vulnerable in our community. Reject this Bill and make sure that we can build the Northern Territory as a place where all people can live, work and participate without fear of discrimination. We are here to represent all Territorians, not just the majority or the powerful. This is about rights, dignity and the Territory we want to be.

I oppose this Bill.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I speak in strong condemnation of these changes. It took years of hard work for the Northern Territory to get anti-discrimination laws that were up to scratch with the rest of Australia, and now the CLP wants to take that away.

The Northern Territory's anti-discrimination laws are some of the best in the country. When they were introduced they were described as visionary. They are in line with the community's expectations and the

relevant Commonwealth legislation. The NT Anti-Discrimination Commissioner—whose job it is to provide independent advice on discrimination—said that the Anti-Discrimination Commission did not recommend these changes. I quote the commissioner:

> *Our recommendations were, one, to retain the current version of section 20A and section 20B and, two, not to revive or re-enact section 37A.*

The CLP government is charging ahead with its plan to weaken hate-speech protections and reopen the door to discrimination in religious schools. The CLP says that these changes are required to protect freedom of speech and religion, but all these changes achieve is to give legitimacy to certain types of discrimination.

Over the past year we repeatedly heard that the CLP will put the rights of victims over the rights of offenders, but in this instance it is putting the rights for some in our community to engage in discrimination above the rights of others to be safe from discrimination. Under these changes we will see more division and more hate targeted at First Nations Territorians, queer Territorians, culturally and linguistically diverse Territorians, Territorians with a disability and many others. I stand in solidarity with our diverse communities in opposing this Bill.

With the new section 35B the CLP will allow religious institutions to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief or activity when employing people and determining how employees conduct themselves at those institutions. In 2022 the CLP heavily criticised the Labor Party for removing the religious exemption before the federal parliament had completed its review into religious educational institutions and anti-discrimination laws. The now Chief Minister said at the time that if she were in power she would consider what the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) has advised the federal government to make sure the balance is right so that there is true equity under the law.

The ALRC has released its findings and the Finocchiaro government is not taking these recommendations into consideration despite the commitment given by the now Chief Minister in 2022. By the looks of the Bill, the NT Government must not have read the report. Therefore, I will summarise the key points of the ALRC report.

First it was recommended that the federal legislation be revised to explicitly forbid religious educational institutions from discriminating on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status or pregnancy against teachers, all other workers, students and their parents. No such provision is in the CLP's Bill.

In plain language, this means—despite the misinformation you will hear from those opposite—these changes will allow religious educational institutions to discriminate against people based on their sexuality, gender, marital status or pregnancy status. The CLP is okay with that.

We have heard in the Chamber many examples to try to get it through to the government. For example, a queer teacher could be fired or denied promotion simply for mentioning she has a wife at a staff meeting and a cleaner who is divorced could lose their job because their marital status is deemed to offend religious sensitivities.

Second, the ALRC report found that religious institutions should be able to preference persons of their faith in hiring in order to build and maintain a community of faith. However, the ALRC was explicit in saying that these institutions cannot use this as an excuse to discriminate. The ALRC says that the preferencing of people of the same religion must be in good faith, proportionate and compliant with the Commonwealth *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*.

This is not consistent with the laws that the CLP is attempting to pass. Instead, this government will expressly allow discrimination when employing people simply where the discrimination is on the grounds of religious belief or activity and in good faith to avoid offending the religious sensibilities of a reasonable person of a particular religion. That is a bit of a mouthful, so let me explain in more detail.

This is not merely about giving preference to people of the same faith when hiring, which is what we keep hearing from those opposite; no-one is trying to stop that. This goes beyond that; these changes permit religious institutions to discriminate against people who may offend the religious sensitivities of a reasonable person of that particular religion. This leaves the door open for a school not to hire a staff member who is part of the LGBTQIA+ community on the basis that their sexual orientation might offend people of that religion.

The hypocrisy becomes crystal clear as the CLP want the freedom to crack homophobic jokes and use slurs without anyone being allowed to take offence, but under this same Bill it is saying that religious institutions can refuse to employ a gay person, not because they are unqualified or cannot do the job but simply because their existence as a gay person might offend someone's religious sensibilities. Let us get this straight: you cannot be offended by hate speech in public, but you can be so offended by a gay person's existence that they cannot work at your school. The double standard is staggering. It is a classic case of the CLP members making one set of rules for themselves and their mates and another set of rules for everyone else.

The CLP's proposed section 35B clearly does not address the recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission, despite the CLP repeatedly raising the review during debate on the new legislation in 2022. New section 35B introduced by the CLP is far too broad and will open the door to direct discrimination against members of our community, particularly those in the LGBTQIA+ community who work in religious institutions. This will apply at all levels of these organisations, from gardeners, cleaners and grounds people to teachers and educators.

I believe the point has been made about remote schools, many of which are religious institutions, where we struggle to get teachers. Good luck if you allow them not to hire any more queer people …

A member: Our sister girls.

K McNAMARA: Sister girls, brother boys and teachers who are dedicated to their craft but somehow their existence offends religious sensibilities—we should not be allowing that in law.

In budget Estimates earlier this year the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner revealed that the commission had not received a single complaint from any religious school indicating that they had been negatively impacted—requiring the introduction of section 35B—not one. The sector is not asking for it and the Anti-Discrimination Commission did not recommend it, so you have to ask: what the hell is motivating the CLP to take this backward step? Seriously, the law as it stands has not impinged on any religious institution's right to hire who they want to. That argument is a furphy; it does not exist.

This demonstrates, as I have said before, that this is a hateful government, one that takes pleasure in punching down minorities. I repeat: there was not a single complaint about this law, as it stands, hindering religious institutions—not one. They can already do that. This is simply the CLP taking orders from extremist groups like the Australian Christian Lobby.

This is a government void of true direction or vision; it would rather engage in puerile culture wars than govern in the community's best interests. Just like Donald Trump, Pauline Hanson, Peter Dutton and Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, the CLP government is picking on marginalised groups in order to distract the population from the real issues in our community that it is doing nothing about.

The watering down of our anti-discrimination laws is another stunt, just like the transphobic comments stunt from the Chief Minister earlier this week to distract the public from the real issues facing the Northern Territory like housing, healthcare, climate change, justice and community safety and closing the gap. NT Government members could have put their heads together and come up with visionary plans to deal with actual issues, but instead they are wasting this parliament's time using the sittings to weaken our nation-leading anti-discrimination laws.

The CLP will also weaken the hate-speech laws in the *Anti-Discrimination Act*. The Attorney-General said that weakening section 20A is required to:

> *… remove unclear, vague terms introduced by Labor, such as 'offend' and 'insult' and replace them with [a] clearer standard that focuses on real harm …*

However, section 20A is not unclear, vague or inconsistent as it is modelled on Commonwealth legislation and there are clear parameters for the interpretation of the wording based on existing case law in the Federal Court.

I will explain what this change means in everyday language. Currently the law says that it is unlawful to do something in public that will offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate someone based on who they are—their race, disability, sexuality, gender and so on. The CLP wants to raise the bar so high that the conduct is unlawful only if it incites hatred, serious harm, contempt or severe ridicule. It means that a lot of harmful behaviour that currently is not okay will suddenly be okay again.

Here is what that looks like in real life. Under the current law if someone repeatedly calls out slurs to a person with an intellectual disability or mocks someone using a wheelchair, that is unlawful because it humiliates and insults. Under the CLP's changes unless that conduct is so severe that it incites others to hatred or severe ridicule, it might not be covered anymore. This means that people with disabilities will have less protection from everyday harassment and mockery that makes their lives harder. Shame on you.

Sections 20A and 20B of the *Anti-Discrimination Act*, as introduced by NT Labor in 2022, are modelled on sections 18C and 18D of the Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act*. There is substantial case precedent dealing with the interpretation and application of sections 18C and 18D of the *Racial Discrimination Act*. The courts have consistently interpreted sections 18C and 18D as maintaining a balance between freedom of speech and freedom from racial vilification. The ALRC made no recommendations to change these laws following its review last year.

The Attorney-General said that the current wording in section 20A allows people to take legal action just because they found something offensive and drag you through a complaints process—or as we heard at budget Estimates, if they are offended by a glass of water. However, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner made it clear that this is not the case because an objective legal test is applied to determine whether conduct can be considered offensive.

Further, although the commission received 46 complaints under the vilification provision since it came into effect in 2023, only three have been accepted. It does not sound like loads of people are being dragged through an unnecessary complaints process to me, but we know the Attorney-General does not like letting the truth get in the way of a good story.

Let us be clear that no-one is getting into trouble for casual jokes between mates. The bar for what constitutes vilification under the current law is quite high. It has to be a public act, not a private conversation. Those opposite need to stop misleading the public about that. It has to be something that would reasonably be considered offensive by an ordinary person, not just someone who is overly sensitive, and it has to be because someone has a protected attribute. Two friends making jokes at a park—not covered. Mates having banter at the pub—not covered, although I have to say that if your friends are casually making homophobic and racist jokes, maybe you should get new friends or look in the mirror. This law is about serious public harassment and abuse, the kind that makes people feel unsafe in their own community.

The CLP has done nothing but fearmonger in relation to hate-speech laws, and it has tried to make out that everyday Territorians are being punished under them. To try to oppose the introduction of these laws in 2022, CLP members made out that the Territory way of life would walk out the door and that no-one could make any more jokes in the pub. At the time those changes were debated, Mr Maley said:

> *Under these changes, telling a joke in the pub could see you hauled up before the anti-discrimination commission because the joke could offend someone …*

The Member for Katherine said at the time:

> *The bill changes the definition of discrimination to anything that causes offence. This will be a boon for lawyers and lobby groups as offence-taking launches a slew of legal cases.*

The now Chief Minister said at the time:

> *We are talking about jokes at the pub and iconic activities that happen in the Northern Territory, like the croc races at Berry Springs Tavern. Some of those crocs have interesting names that our grandmothers probably would not be happy to say, but people take it, generally speaking, in good humour. Now if someone does not, it could become a problem. It could be an action before the Anti-Discrimination Commission.*

Those melodramatic wailings have proved entirely false. Three cases got through. The passage of time has demonstrated that these ludicrous predictions painted by the CLP have not happened under the current law. No-one is being thrown before the Anti-Discrimination Commission for naming a croc at Berry Springs Tavern. Chats among mates at the pubs have not changed. There has been no great benefit to lobby groups and lawyers, when the only recourse from these laws is a conciliatory process before the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.

The 2022 changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* have not had the effect the CLP painted, which is evidenced by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, so there is no valid reason to walk them back now. The CLP has

attempted to repaint its reasons for weakening these hate-speech laws under the guise of them being unclear or vague, but it is clear that this reasoning is simply untrue.

If we repeal section 20A the NT will be the only jurisdiction in Australia where our residents are not protected from vilification. Vilification laws are essential because they are preventive; they help prevent more serious discrimination and violence down the track.

At this point I will bring in some of the comments we heard from the Chief Minister in recent days about trans women being 'equipped as men' and that they do not belong in women's prisons. Do you know who in our community is statistically the most likely to suffer physical and sexual violence? Trans people. Do you know who trans women are most in danger of? Cisgender men—men who were born as men who live as men.

Putting trans women in men's prisons is unbelievably dangerous and inappropriate, and it is hypocritical of the Chief Minister and those on the other side to pretend that they have this stance for women's safety in prison. This Chief Minister and government are locking up women at unprecedented rates in overcrowded, unhygienic prisons, transferring women 1,500 kilometres away from their families so that they cannot see their children anymore. How dare you pretend to give a shit about women in prison! You are simply using this as a sick opportunity to punch down on trans people.

The Chief Minister has confected this culture war in order to distract Territorians from the real threat to women in Territory prisons, which is overcrowding, underinvestment, the lack of alternatives to imprisonment and systemic racism in our so-called justice system.

The CLP's changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* will have a real and detrimental impact on the safety and wellbeing of people in our community. I have spoken with a trans man living in Darwin who can feel the anti-trans rhetoric in the last month—as this debate has been going on—rising in our community. The stripping back of vilification laws will make him and other trans people more vulnerable in public places. I have spoken with a queer teacher who finally felt that they had the ability to be their full self at work without fear of losing their job, but that now changes.

If CLP members want to change anything in the *Anti-Discrimination Act* I suggest that they stand by their word and incorporate the ALRC's recommendation into the religious exemption laws.

If I had seen any evidence that members of the Country Liberal Party had a shred of compassion, human decency or common sense, I would be appealing to that. I would be imploring them to find that within themselves and not make these changes. I would ask the CLP members, and every member in here, to stand by vulnerable people in our community and keep the current vilification laws, which are fair, balanced and provide reasonable protections to people in public spaces. However, every bit of evidence I have seen over the past 12 months, every word uttered by them in this Chamber, every social media post and everything said on radio has demonstrated to me that once again this is an ignorant, hateful government that is not acting, and never will act, in the best interests of our community.

It is a sad day for the Territory that this act is taking place.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, the government has brought forward amendments to the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992* with two key changes.

First, it is amending section 20A which was introduced by Labor's 2023 reforms. It prohibited acts of offensive conduct in public that were reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person because of their race, sexuality, gender, disability, religion and other protected attributes. These protections meant Territorians had real recourse if they were publicly degraded for simply being who they are.

The CLP is stripping these protections. It wants to remove 'offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate' and replace it with a model that requires proof that conduct incites hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule. This is what CLP members call a higher threshold. Let us be clear: it will simply make it easier for people to discriminate against others. It narrows the law so much that people who are subjected to acts of vilification—the kind that wound deeply but may not rise to outright incitement of hate—will have no recourse against this kind of behaviour. It limits Territorians' access to justice.

In doing so, the CLP has taken the Northern Territory out of step with the Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act.* Section 18C of that Act still prohibits offensive and insulting behaviour on racial grounds. Every other jurisdiction is moving forward on stronger protections, but the Territory is being dragged backwards.

Second, the government is inserting new section 35B. This will allow faith-based schools to refuse to employ someone because they do not share the same religion. It provides religious schools the freedom to require certain conduct from staff in line with particular religious doctrines. That could apply to teachers as well as administration staff, gardeners, cleaners—anyone employed by the school.

This will affect one of my communities, Wurrumiyanga. Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic Primary School is the only school on Bathurst Island. If people do not fall in line with their children regarding faith—not all of us are religious—what happens to those children? That is the big concern I have for my people with this amendment.

Religious schools have every right to uphold their faith, but let us think about what this means in the real world. In many small communities across the Territory in the remote areas where there are only farms and cattle stations the only school available is hundreds of kilometres from the next nearest school. The options are limited. If you are a qualified teacher or simply a local person looking for work and you do not share that faith, what happens? Do you need to go to an urban centre? A lot of Indigenous teachers and teacher aides work at schools. That is not fairness or inclusivity; it is discrimination written into law.

These changes may look like a technical legal tweak, but they are a fundamental shift in the values underpinning our laws. They are a shameful move away from protections for some of our most vulnerable community members.

When Labor modernised the *Anti-Discrimination Act* in 2023 we did so after extensive consultation with communities, legal experts, health organisations, people living with disability, multicultural and faith groups and LGBTQIA+ Territorians. The reforms were about recognising discrimination takes many forms and that words can wound.

As the then Attorney-General said at the time:

> *These changes are important for those who have suffered inequities based on race, culture, gender, disabilities, and a range of other factors such as sexuality and age.*
>
> *Discrimination law is an evolving area and it is important that the Northern Territory keeps up to date with modern values and expectations. These new laws will help to close the divide on inequality for current and future generations.*

That was the vision, and that was leadership.

Less than two years later the CLP wants to tear it down. Those opposite say that they are restoring freedom, but when asked they cannot name a single freedom that Territorians have lost under the current law—not one. CLP members are protecting hate speech. They are choosing to stand with keyboard warriors who want to insult and denigrate, rather than stand with Territorians who deserve dignity.

There is a rise in anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racial abuse, homophobia, transphobia and the scapegoating of people with disability and minority groups. An example was a few weeks ago when Senator Price targeted a multicultural group. I am disappointed in the Multicultural Affairs minister, who should be defending his constituents but put up a photo with the senator and defends her.

This Bill also fits the troubling pattern by the CLP government. Over and again when experts raise concerns—whether they are paediatricians, the Police Association, Aboriginal legal services or community leaders—the government's instinct is to attack them, dismiss them and say, 'If you do not like it, leave', to Aboriginal people. Us mob are from here.

We saw it when paediatricians dared to raise concerns about the youth justice changes. The Chief Minister's response was to lash out and try to silence them. We saw it yesterday when the Chief Minister told the Opposition Leader, 'You are wrong and I am right, and that is just the way it is'; that is a song. We are seeing it again today with these amendments brought forward without genuine consultation or listening to those most affected.

This government seems to believe it knows better than the people living the reality every day. We should be celebrating our differences and learning from each other. It reveals a government with no answers, solution or respect for Territorian voices.

The Labor opposition is clear that we will vote against this Bill. We will not support a 1960s model Bill. We support freedom of religion, people's rights to express their faith and live fully. We also support the right of

every Territorian to be treated equally, whether they are a teacher, nurse, cleaner, gardener, gay, straight or transgender, a person with a disability, Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

We all need to be in the same classroom to learn and tolerate each other and not separate each other through religion. These are kids we are talking about. We are narrowing their scope and acceptance of other people. That is where it is born and where we will create hate.

We support public debate. Territorians can and should have different opinions, but no-one should be publicly insulted, humiliated or degraded because of who they are. That is not debate; that is hate, and Labor will not support the laws that encourage it.

We support a strong, independent Anti-Discrimination Commission that can help Territorians navigate the system and ensure fairness.

This parliament faces a choice. Do we want the Northern Territory to be a place that embraces diversity, protects the vulnerable and says clearly, 'You are welcome here, whoever you are', or do we want to send the opposite message? That is open season for discrimination; give them an inch, and they will take a mile. If you are different you are on your own. The government will stand by while you are vilified so long as someone claims they are exercising freedom of speech.

I know what side Territory Labor is on. We are on the side of Territorians and diversity, and we listen to them whether they vote for us or not. We will stand up for their rights to live with dignity and freedom and to be free from discrimination, fear and hate.

This Bill is not about protecting freedoms; it is about protecting prejudice and opening the door to more hate speech, division and fewer safeguards for vulnerable people who need it the most. At a time when our communities are asking for leadership on safety, jobs, housing, health and maternity services, this is not what Territorians want or deserve.

The opposition will not support this Bill; we will stand with every Territorian. No-one should be left behind or held back because of who they are. That is the future Labor will fight for. The vision we offer is of a Territory that is strong, inclusive, fair and forward looking. We reject this regressive, divisive legislation and call on the government to stop playing politics with people's rights and start listening to Territorians.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, in the Territory we proudly celebrate our diversity and inclusiveness. These are incredibly precious qualities that should be protected at all costs. We believe every Territorian deserve to live free from discrimination, harassment and persecution.

It is un-Territorian to criticise or vilify someone because of their colour, race, gender, sexuality, age or disability. This is not who we are or who we want to be. We would be living in a fantasy land if we did not think that some Territorians are subjected to these behaviours because of who they are or a particular attribute.

It is important that we as a parliament and elected representatives of the Northern Territory ensure that we uphold and protect what our community values most about the Territory. This Bill does the opposite; it strips protections for some of the most vulnerable people in our community. It sends a message to those who seek to vilify fellow Territorians that it is okay to do so, and to do so publicly and openly in a time when hate speech across the country is on the rise.

Recently we saw racism on the rise when CLP Senator for the Northern Territory Jacinta Price stomped on the NT Indian community with her misguided, misinformed and rubbish comments about migration. This is at a time when people are marching through our cities, towns and big centres protesting the thousands of Territorians who have come here from other countries to make Australia their home. It is unbelievable that this is happening across our community in this day and age, but unfortunately it is.

These attitudes of division and hate are being enabled by the CLP government, and it is unbelievable. The most recent example being this week when the Chief Minister decided to use trans women as a political football to distract from questions about her own and her team's integrity. It is the dirtiest trick in the book, but our Chief Minister went there because that is who she is—lacking leadership, divisive, immature and nasty to anyone who dares to speak out about making the Territory better. The Chief Minister's attitude is, 'My way or the highway. Listen or shut up.' That is not what people expect from a leader.

Through these amendments the CLP government is making it easier to insult, humiliate and intimidate Territorians or groups of Territorians because they are a different race, are gay or have a disability or because

of their gender. That is the signal the government is sending to our community. It is utterly unacceptable. It panders to a small minority in our community who seek to peddle hate then dress it up as freedom of speech.

The freedom argument is appalling. It is nonsense. The current legislation enables freedom of speech. It is there in black and white in the legislation; it always has been. Meanwhile, the CLP cannot name a single right or freedom that has been curtailed as a result of the amendments made by the former Labor government, which were brought in to protect Territorians from discrimination and vilification.

The Attorney-General has been questioned time and again about providing an example of why this legislation needs to be changed, but she still cannot provide an example. The CLP is making these amendments because it wants to shift shame and create culture wars. The government is about enabling and empowering a small minority of people to incite hatred and ridicule or vilify other Territorians or groups of Territorians just for being who they are. It is a disgrace.

It is a regressive step and deeply offensive to the Territorians who have come together to make this place better and stronger. Every other jurisdiction has strong protections in place against this sort of behaviour, but in the Northern Territory we are seeing the CLP try to walk the Territory backwards to the Stone Age, like the mentor of the CLP. The CLP government has contempt for nearly every stakeholder group across the Northern Territory; anyone who dares to raise criticism or concern is shot down in flames and called nasty names, like a nasty school bully in the playground.

It makes you think: whose right is it to insult, intimidate and vilify, and why is the government thinking these rights are above fellow Territorians' rights to protection from discrimination?

Regardless, many individuals and groups continue to bravely speak out against the retrograde actions of the shallow, small-minded and visionless CLP government, even though they know there are potential consequences in doing so under its proposed regime.

I will give voice to a number of those brave Territorians. First of all, the person tasked with administering and interpreting this Act, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, had this to say:

> *The Commission is disappointed, but not surprised, that the Government has chosen to roll back protections that took decades to build. These amendments do not restore balance, they strip away rights and undermine the very purpose of anti-discrimination law—equality of opportunity.*
>
> *The Act is beneficial legislation. It exists to protect the marginalised, uphold fairness and set the standard for equality. These changes instead preference particular groups and misinform them about how anti-discrimination law actually works, embedding division and legitimising discrimination.*
>
> *…*
>
> *I acknowledge that the Government have compromised on this provision and rather than repealing the section altogether they have made the threshold much higher. However, these changes are not about protecting free speech, or reducing the Commission's workload, they are about creating carve-outs that could enable hate speech. Weakening vilification laws at a time of rising antisemitism, Islamophobia and racial hate sends the wrong message about whose safety the law values.*

Equality Australia Legal Director Heather Corkhill said:

> *We know from experiences in other states that the incitement-based legal test is completely ineffective against even some of the worst kinds of hate speech.*
>
> *At a time where hate is increasing around the country, including the mobilisation of far-right groups like neo-Nazis, we should be strengthening protections and not weakening them.*
>
> *It's a profound relief that under this legislation religious schools cannot discriminate on the grounds of sexuality or gender identity, only on the basis of a person's religious belief or activity.*
>
> *However, imposing a single view of religious doctrines on all staff, even cleaners or receptionists who have no role in religious teaching, opens the door to discrimination against LGBTQ+ people and silences those who support them in our school communities.*

Ella Waters, the Assistant Secretary of the Australian Services Union (ASU) South Australian and Northern Territory Branch, a union that represents members of the transport, energy and IT industries and the community services sector, office workers and many more in our community, said:

> *Territory workers deserve strong protections, but the CLP's legislation takes us backwards, weakening vital safeguards and leaving workers exposed to hate speech and discrimination.*
>
> *Instead of building on reforms that made the Territory a leader in fairness, these changes risk undoing hard-won progress and would leave workers more vulnerable in their workplaces.*
>
> *Our current laws reflect years of effort to create safer and more respectful workplaces and communities. We will continue to stand with our members to protect fairness and respect, and to ensure Territorians are protected from hate speech and discrimination.*

Sally Sievers, CEO of Northern Territory Council of Social Service, said:

> *The previous Act was the result of decades of work by everyday Territorians. The process to get to these proposed changes has been opaque, confusing and not genuine consultation.*
>
> *The existing model of vilification sets a very high bar and has not been used frivolously. There's no evidence to indicate the need for a new model, nor that the proposed 'incite hatred' model will be effective in addressing the vilification experienced by people in our community.*
>
> *These changes to the Anti-Discrimination Act will leave Territorians less safe. We need to protect what we've built together.*

This is merely a handful of the individuals and organisations that have spoken out against the proposed retrograde laws that the CLP government is championing. There are many more in our community who reached out to us in the opposition, spoke to us about their concerns and asked us when this legislation comes about to fight hard against it. They do not support these changes because their likely impact on some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our community will be big and the message it sends about the kind of community the Territory is will be degrading.

There are many members in the CLP government who are, I suspect, deeply uncomfortable about these changes, and so they should be. It is a shame that they are not brave enough to voice their own views and opinions, as we have seen other elected members, officials and community members do.

The CLP also intends to pass a number of amendments making it legal for religious schools to deny someone a job because they do not share the same religious belief or activity. Although our Territory Labor opposition team believes that our religious schools should have the ability to uphold, teach and enshrine their religious beliefs and values, we are concerned that discriminating against a potential employee, even cleaners and gardeners, in a school on religious grounds is an unnecessary step. Given that provisions in the current legislation balance religious freedom and equality, why would the CLP mess with this important law?

We heard practical reasons with real examples from the Member for Arafura about what this could mean for very remote schools which may have only one option. How will this protect Territorians in those workplaces? The CLP government cannot answer, refuses to answer or will not answer that question.

Since the former Labor government wound back religious discrimination exemptions, there has not been an instance when this has posed an issue for any Territory religious school. Think about that for a moment. That is one of the government's key arguments for changing the legislation, but there is not a single instance of communicating this—the heart of the exemptions—as an issue.

Our Territory Labor team believes that these amendments will indeed set the community back, open the floodgates to hate speech and signal that it is acceptable to discriminate against and vilify fellow Territorians based on their personal attributes. That is one of the key reasons this is so personal for many Territorians. Those attributes—things we hold dear to us as our identity, that we are fiercely protective of, who we identify as and what makes us part of the communities that we gravitate towards, being those communities that support and accept us—are protected in the current legislation. Making the threshold higher will mean it is much more difficult for people to make complaints through the commission, be fully heard and see natural justice.

When someone is vilified because of their race, religion, gender, sexuality or other personal attributes it is most hurtful because their identity is crushed. Their identity becomes something that is seen in a bad light. That is truly what becomes the most hurtful part of discrimination in a community that values diversity in all those personal attributes and the connection of the community fabric that makes us the beautiful and unique Territory that we all know and love.

Why water down those protections? That is not an answer we have heard clearly from the CLP government. We have not heard examples or been given the numbers on why this is an issue. Therefore, we conclude that the CLP wants a community divided, not united. It wants our community members fighting each other so that it can hide from the limelight, not do its job and not keep Territorians protected by this legislation because it changed the rules and the goalposts, so it does not have care in the same way as it should do now.

This has been a huge journey in previous years of this parliament, and it continues to be a saga because the CLP government chooses to play politics with people's rights in the Territory rather than focus on the vision it promised Territorians over a year ago that it would deliver, develop and work on. It is a deflection of true leadership and of the government's responsibility to protect the human rights and personal attributes of fellow Territorians. Should this Bill pass it will be a stain on the Northern Territory's legislative history.

This is why the Territory Labor opposition will not be voting for this amendment Bill. We will vote against these changes. I encourage anyone on the government side who does not support this big change to reduce Territorians' protection rights to consider their position and put their names against the changes and why they have been made.

Will CLP members be able to go to the communities in their electorate and explain to their family, friends and former colleagues why this legislation was so important to water down protections for their fellow Territorians? Will they be able to look Territorians in the eye and explain the purpose of these changes to such progressive and high-level legislation that other jurisdictions have looked to duplicate it? Can they say why they are winding back those protections in the Territory? With hand on heart can they say that they honestly believe and back what the Attorney-General is doing in the Territory? I doubt that the answer is yes.

When CLP members say, 'We love our multicultural community, our First Nations people and how unique the Northern Territory is, but we do not believe in protecting all those attributes that make you who you are, how great you are and how connected you are to your community', that is one of the biggest shame jobs for the Territory. How bizarre and to the contrary is that type of mentality?

We heard it from the Chief Minister earlier this week when she said, 'Yes, I am pro trans but, by the way, our policy has changed'. No-one can find a change in the policy. Not even the Corrections minister can back his Chief Minister and show us a document that says it has provided changes.

CLP members like saying things, but they do not like doing the hard work. When experts and community advocates question the government, they are shot down. When they raise concerns, they are ignored and the door is shut. They do not get a hearing with the government.

To the contrary when someone really annoys the government they are personally attacked, not because of their expertise or the key points they raised about government policies, programs and funding—or what the government has been good at, which is cutting funding—but in a mean-girl sense. I say that because I have mostly heard it from the Chief Minister, the Member for Katherine and the Attorney-General. That tends to be the default. In this place, we have a bit of fun with interjections and a bit of banter, but at the end of the day I hope that everyone continues to be respectful.

We have seen out in the open—in the public, in the media and in response to questions from the community and media outlets—this horrible shutting down, deflection and disregard for fellow Territorians, thinking that they know better than experts or someone else's personal experience of discrimination. CLP members think that the government is the be-all and end-all; it is rubbish. There is no humility in the way the government is doing business. There is no respect for fellow Territorians, although they purport to represent all Territorians, which is not true.

CLP members have taken the years of carefully considered work on the *Anti-Discrimination Act* and basically spat on it. They have disrespected and disregarded all that work purely because of their leader's mean-girl attitude. They have ripped up what was done—the years of consultation, amendments and changes that got us to the current legislation—all because they think that they are better than everyone else. What would we know? Those opposite think that we are just other members of parliament who do not know anything.

This derogatory mean-girl mentality has continued through the government, and it makes me feel like the next three years—if the CLP continues with its mean-girl leader—will show Territorians the lack of regard that the CLP truly has for the Northern Territory. Those opposite say that they love the Territory and wear their little badges every day; it is their uniform they have, and that is fine. They have to wear their bowling outfits in the community with their faces on the back in case anyone forgets what they look like.

Their disregard for Territorians in saying that they will listen and implement—actually, that is probably not true; they have never said that they will implement anything they listen to. All they say is, 'We will be out and about', and, apparently, 'If you do not like what we say, leave. If you do not like what we do, leave.' Now they are saying, 'All these people are coming back to the Territory because the CLP is the saviour of the Northern Territory, but if you do not like us just leave; we do not care about you.' That mentality is so disrespectful.

I thank the advocates and many community members who have spoken to our Labor team and met with us when we held roundtables to understand people's questions and concerns in order to provide a response to the legislation. I thank them from the bottom of my heart because they gave up their valuable time to share their thoughts about this important Territory legislation.

It would not have been easy, particularly for non-government organisations, because their time is precious. They have limited human resources and time in the day to do all the amazing things they do to service the Northern Territory. They had to spend their time, skills and efforts on raising concerns about a move that the government is making for no apparent reason. It is phenomenal.

I thank the advocates, community groups, experts, the people I quoted and people who have advocated in their own way against the CLP's Bill. We appreciate your time, energy, effort and skills to provide full insight into the debate.

It has been interesting to listen to members' contributions to this debate so far. They are respecting that people have different views, which is always a positive thing.

When the government of the day thinks that its views are more important than the views of other Territorians, we start to get into a dangerous area. We see the government continuing to pick and choose the voices, ideas and concerns raised, closing the door off to everyone else. It shows a dangerous and slippery slope of governing.

It will probably fall on deaf ears, but I remind the CLP that when you become the Northern Territory Government, you are the government for the whole of the Northern Territory, including people who may not have elected you—put you as number one. You have to govern for the whole of the Northern Territory, not just pick and choose the people or groups that you represent in here. The Northern Territory Government's duty is to represent all Territorians, across a range of views, at multiple times with multiple responsibilities.

We are seeing the government post-box things; the government members have tunnel vision, and are not being flexible or agile in representing Territorians and doing more than one thing at a time when it comes to important issues like the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill.

Our team will not support this Bill. The government continues to fail to provide examples of why the Act should be changed. The Attorney-General tried to pluck hopeless examples out of thin air during Estimates. That was four months ago, and she still cannot come up with one example of why the Act should be amended. I would caution Territorians in thinking that this is just a blip, because what we have seen so far in the last 13 months of the CLP government is a continued pattern of bad behaviour in lawmaking.

The Attorney-General could ignore everything else I said, but I want her to answer this question: why did the Attorney-General seek to make the changes that are in the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill, and how will this better protect Territorians from discrimination? Please can we have an answer? You have failed for over four months to provide examples and reasons for this change. If you can, come up with something other than a water glass example or a backyard barbecue example, which we know does not come into the legislative framework. Those examples have tried to desperately be made in past.

I would love the answer to that question because Territorians ask us. When we ask the government it continues to bury its head in the sand and ignore that important part of being open, transparent and accountable for its decisions and actions. If the Attorney-General is doing her job properly, she will be able to provide us with the answer and it can be on the *Hansard* record forever. We may not agree with it, but we will be able to understand.

We have no idea why the government is going down this track, opening the gates to further hate speech and discrimination in the Northern Territory.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I pick up on some of the Opposition Leader's comments. First of all, I was pretty sure I heard—what a disgrace she was—her referring to the Chief Minister as a Nazi. Talk about offensive! It is extremely offensive that she uses that language in here under her privilege or whatever she wants to do. The fact is we are 17 members of a team who are not dictated to; we all have our own expressions and provide our own input, and she comes out with that rubbish.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 31; offensive. The Member for Katherine has misquoted me in saying that I called the Chief Minister a Nazi. I did not say that at all, and I want her to withdraw because that is an imputation. I have never said that about the Chief Minister. The Member for Katherine should not make up things on the record. She should be accountable for her words and withdraw that imputation because I never said that. She should not be lying about me.

Madam SPEAKER: We had an incident earlier this afternoon when someone thought someone said something and, in that situation, under the Deputy Speaker's instruction, the member was asked to withdraw. We will check *Hansard* if you want and refer to it later.

Mrs HERSEY: If that was not said on *Hansard*—I am not sure what she was referring to then—when *Hansard* comes back and she has not said that, I will withdraw.

Madam SPEAKER: I ask you to withdraw now, Member for Katherine, because otherwise it can escalate.

Mrs HERSEY: I did think it was unusual, Opposition Leader, so if you did not say that, I withdraw.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Stop the interjections, please. Member for Katherine, I advise you to withdraw.

Mrs HERSEY: I withdraw.

Madam SPEAKER: We will ask for a rush on what the Opposition Leader said, and if in fact she said what you think she said, we can revisit it later this evening. Please continue with your speech.

Mrs HERSEY: Let us not let the truth get in the way …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I wanted to ensure the Member for Katherine withdrew.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, she withdrew, Opposition Leader.

Ms UIBO: She is smiling, so I just wanted to make sure she withdrew.

Madam SPEAKER: I heard the Member for Katherine withdraw. The Member for Katherine can continue her speech. The matter will be resolved when we get the rush from Hansard and we can check what you actually said and revisit it if in fact what the Member for Katherine thought you said was true. It has been withdrawn. End of matter—please continue.

Mrs HERSEY: At the end of the day, many things the Opposition Leader spoke of in her contribution that were like, 'Let us not let the truth get in the way of a good story'. I think sometimes those opposite have short memories.

The amendments that Labor forced through this House in 2022 were nothing short of blatant government overreach. They represented a fundamental shift away from fairness and balance towards a society where ordinary Territorians could be silenced and judged for expressing their views. In 2022 our CLP opposition opposed these changes, and we stand firmly opposed to them today.

With this Bill we are delivering another election commitment. This was a commitment we took to the election over a year ago, so we did consult widely. We also took it to an election where people knew what they were voting for, and there is a reason why we are here and the opposition is sitting on the other side.

This is delivering another election commitment to restore fairness and restore the rights of Territorians to freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Madam SPEAKER: Please pause, Member for Katherine. The members who are talking at the back of the Chamber, I can hear you. You can go outside or talk a bit more softly in respect to the Member for Katherine.

Mrs HERSEY: These amendments modernise the *Anti-Discrimination Act* and bring it back into alignment with what Territorians expect—a legal framework that protects against real discrimination and harm but does not overreach into thought policing or subjective feelings.

Importantly, this Bill also removes the unnecessary requirement that every complaint must first be assessed by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner before being referred to NTCAT. That bottleneck created confusion, inconsistency and needless delay. By streamlining the process we ensure that the tribunal, a body set up to hear such matters, is the forum where disputes can be resolved fairly and transparently.

The CLP government continues to support the core objects of the Act and the many attributes that are rightly protected from discrimination in section 19, including race, language, sexual orientation, age, relationship status, religious belief and disability. That commitment is unwavering.

In 2022 Labor went further by inserting section 20A, which made it unlawful to engage in conduct reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate. Let us think about that. Offend, insult or humiliate are subjective terms, and what offends me, Madam Speaker, may not offend you or someone else, as we have seen in parliament. What one person considers insulting may be to another nothing more than a joke or a fair criticism, yet Labor handed unelected bureaucrats the sweeping power to decide what was reasonably likely to cause someone to feel insulted or humiliated. This was not balance or fairness; it was government overreach at its worst.

This Bill fixes that. We are replacing those vague open-ended terms with a clearer and more robust legal threshold that targets serious harm. Our changes will ensure the law protects Territorians against genuine intimidation and conduct that make someone fearful or unsafe. It will not allow the weaponisation of feelings to shut down debate or drag someone before a tribunal over a harmless remark. Freedom of speech matters; it matters in our schools, workplaces and homes and for Territorians of every age, background and belief. We promised Territorians before the election that we would restore that freedom and we are keeping that promise.

In changing the Act in 2022 Labor removed section 37A an exemption given to religious schools which gave them the right to employ staff who share their faith. By doing so Labor stripped away the ability of religious schools to uphold their own teachings, values and ethos. That decision disrespected people of faith, ignored the wishes of parents and undermined the foundation of what make religious schools distinctive.

Our Bill restores that exemption. Through section 35B we are returning to religious schools the certainty they need to employ people who are aligned with their beliefs without constant fear of legal action.

I point out that we are helping the Member for Daly and his constituents in this area, as Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic College is the only school in Wadeye.

The Attorney-General deserves recognition for her extensive consultation in preparing this Bill. She engaged a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including religious schools, the Christian Lobby, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, LGBT organisations, health sector representatives, legal experts and community groups. Every voice has been heard and every perspective considered.

This is a matter of common sense. A religious school must be able to hire teachers and staff who reflect the values of its community, whether it is the International Islamic College in Darwin or one of the many Christian schools across the Territory such as the college in Wadeye, St Joseph's school in my electorate or Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. These protections apply equally to all faiths. Parents and families, regardless of their background, deserve the right to choose the kind of education their children receive, along with religious freedom—a fundamental human right that must be safeguarded.

I will be clear that these changes do not and will not give schools the right to discriminate on the basis of sexuality or race. They ensure that schools can build communities of staff and students who share a common set of values, ethos and beliefs. In fact, many of the religious schools consulted told us directly that they have no interest in discriminating against people because of their sexuality or gender. What they want and what this Bill restores is simply the right to employ staff who can genuinely uphold their faith-based teaching.

Section 35B also makes it a requirement that schools set out their expectations in a written policy available to all employees and applicants. This ensure that everyone—teachers, parents and prospective staff alike—knows exactly where the school stands and what role faith plays within it.

Labor's decision to strip these protections left schools exposed. It left them under constant threat of litigation for simply trying to employ someone whose values match theirs. That is neither fair nor sustainable, and is being corrected today.

The amendments in section 35B apply only to religious schools, not to religious institutions generally or government schools. When Labor removed these exemptions it did not just undermine schools; it discriminated against parents' and families' rights to choose. Parents and carers who wanted their children to be educated in line with their religious beliefs were stripped of that choice. Religious schools exist precisely because families want an education grounded in shared values. That requires teachers and staff who are committed to the same vision and mission.

When Labor made these changes, Mark Spencer from Christian Schools Australia said:

> *Christian schools in the Northern Territory have been 'thrown to the lions' by proposed changes to the* Anti-Discrimination Act *…*
>
> *…*
>
> *… people of all faiths and none in the Northern Territory should be very concerned by the Government's lack of respect for diversity of belief in a multicultural, multifaith society.*

Put simply, Labor disrespected people of faith and their right to choose.

By contrast, our changes restore protections without taking away rights from anyone else. They do not harm the LGBTQ+ community, weaken existing protections against harassment or vilification or privilege one faith over another. These changes restore freedom of choice, fairness and common sense. That is why these reforms have been endorsed by Vanessa Cheng, CEO of the Australian Association of Christian Schools, who applauded our government for restoring fundamental freedoms.

The Northern Territory is a harmonious, multicultural and multifaith society. Territorians respect one another, welcome difference and live side by side with people of every background, tradition and belief. We do not need overreaching laws that police people's words and create division where there is none. Territorians do not need the thought police or the government telling them what jokes they can make or what opinions they can hold.

I do not think the Labor opposition members understand that. They clearly have not learned their lesson from last year's election. They said that they would honour and respect what Territorians voted for. Leader of the Opposition, you can start now because you have wasted a year already.

This Bill restores balance, freedom and respect for Territorians' right to live, speak and believe without unnecessary government intrusion. On this side of the House we believe in freedom of speech, freedom of religion and the right of everyday Territorians to make decisions for themselves, not more government creep.

The right of parents to send their children to a school where faith is lived and taught is a freedom that sits at the core of a democratic, tolerant, pluralistic society. That is a freedom worth defending, and this Bill defends it.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT
Opposition Leader's Comments

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, we have checked with Hansard on the concern raised by the Opposition Leader that she had been misheard. She felt that the Member for Katherine's insinuation of what she said was disorderly.

Hansard confirmed the Leader of the Opposition did not say the word 'Nazi', so that was misheard. It has been withdrawn, and we can continue on. These things happen. I thought you said something different from what you said too. It was misheard by more than one of us in the Chamber, but we will continue.

Mr CHARLS (People, Sport and Culture): Madam Speaker, I support this Bill. I preface my remarks by observing that generally speaking the commentary on this Bill in the lead-up to this debate has been measured and thoughtful. I say that it has been 'reasonably measured' because, as always, the conversation has at times be countered by the extremes of argument.

This Bill should not have come as a surprise to Territorians. The public campaigning of the CLP in the lead-up to the last election made it abundantly clear that change was needed, yet across the nation we risk becoming caught in the grips of extremes. On one side there are those who claim that these changes will somehow bring society itself to its knees; on the other there are some who argue that the Bill does not go far enough. Governments, however, have a responsibility to find the balance, get on with the job and chart a course that reflects fairness and reason.

In considering this Bill I acknowledge the many groups and individuals who have provided feedback. I will reflect on the relevance of these reforms to the portfolios and communities I represent.

It is clear from the data published in the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission's recent annual reports that inquiries and complaints have not shifted markedly over time, with disability, sex and race consistently among the most common bases of complaint. In fact, of 46 vilification complaints since mid-2023, only three were accepted by the commission. The current law sets such a low bar that the commission is rejecting more than 90% of the complaints under this provision.

It is important to note that the government's proposed changes in the three key areas of this Bill are not expected to alter the data significantly. This is not merely my opinion. To quote directly from the Anti-Discrimination Commission's fact sheet on this Bill, in reference to the vilification provisions under section 20A:

> *Even with the change, the NT still has more progressive vilification laws than much of Australia because it doesn't limit the attributes it applies to.*

It is important to break down the key elements of this Bill. The Finocchiaro CLP government is delivering its election commitment to restore balance to the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992*, protecting Territorians from genuine harm while safeguarding freedom of speech, religion and belief.

Territory Labor's 2022 amendments went too far. They blurred the line between unlawful discrimination and ordinary good-faith conversation. Our reforms correct that overreach and reaffirm the Territory's enduring values of fairness, free expression and the right to disagree respectfully.

As one of the most diverse communities in Australia, the Northern Territory deserves laws that protect against real harm while upholding the rights and freedoms of all Territorians, regardless of background, belief or identity.

Specifically, this Bill provides for a number of key reforms. It replaces terms such as offend, insult and humiliate with a clearer high legal threshold focused on serious harm; makes it unlawful to incite hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule based on personal attributes such as race, religion, gender identity or sexuality; restores the right of religious schools to employ staff who share their values, under transparent written policy; and streamlines the complaints process to reduce duplication and enable faster referral to the tribunal.

The Attorney-General has already outlined the detail of section 20A of the Act and the intent for it to adopt an incitement model consistent with the approach in most Australian jurisdictions, rather than Labor's harm model.

Importantly, the new section 35B reintroduces an exemption for religious educational institutions, allowing them to make employment decisions consistent with their doctrine and beliefs. This exemption allows the school to give preference to staff who share the same religion and permits the establishment of conduct expectations aligned with the faith of that institution. Importantly, this exemption applies only when a written policy clearly sets out the relevant doctrine.

Further, amendments to Part 6 Division 4 will remove the requirement for the commissioner to evaluate every complaint when conciliation has failed. Complaints will instead be referred more efficiently to the tribunal, supported by the commissioner's statement of reasons and relevant materials. In theory, this should be welcomed by the commission, which should realise efficiency improvements in its complaints handling

process. In addition to the Anti-Discrimination Commission, these reforms will also benefit religious educational institutions and their staff, people of faith and individuals concerned about overreach into opinion or expression.

It is important to reflect on the consultation process. We are all aware that the consultation on this Bill was led by the Attorney-General's office, but I remind members that as early as November 2022 the CLP publicly opposed Labor's amendments, describing them as freedom destroying and out of step with Territory values.

We did not remove the vilification provision entirely. We listened to feedback, refined the approach and introduced a consistent national standard that targets genuine harm. In this respect there exists a diversity of religious views; not all opinions are the same. Faith communities do not hold uniform opinions. Through extensive consultation we heard all perspectives.

There have been criticisms levelled at this government that can be debunked quickly. The final provisions represent a balanced middle ground that reflects the values of Territory faith-based organisations and schools. Let us not forget that it was the CLP that took freedom of religion to the election. Faith-based schools were previously forced to employ people whose beliefs did not align with theirs. That was not equality; it was overreach. We are restoring balance, as we promised Territorians we would. This is an election commitment achieved.

This Bill allows the Anti-Discrimination Commission to remain restorative in nature. We can maintain that approach while strengthening its focus on serious harm. Ultimately, these reforms are about addressing serious harm. That is the standard Territorians expect, and it is the standard the Bill delivers.

I will reflect briefly on the commentary made in this Chamber in recent days and reaffirm some key principles of this government.

The Restoring the Territory Lifestyle strategy sets a clear direction to champion the Territory's identity as a vibrant, inclusive and respectful place to live, work and raise a family. This government is committed to ensuring that the Northern Territory is a safe community that provides genuine equality of opportunity for all. We believe that every Territorian should be treated equally, regardless of race, religion or gender. Our approach is entirely consistent with the broader objectives of the Gender Equality Action Plan that all Territorians are safe, respected and free from violence.

We will continue to monitor national policy and expert advice to ensure the Territory's practices remain inclusive, balanced and strong. The reviews of the disability action plan and the Multicultural Policy for the Northern Territory are already underway to ensure our policies remain responsive, contemporary and community driven.

I pick up on comments made in this Chamber about the comments that Senator Price made against people from an Indian background. I spoke in this Chamber a few months ago about my experience during the election campaign from a senior Labor member at the early voting centre near Casuarina in Wagaman. Along with my friends, who are Australians of Indian descent, I was standing and doing the roadside waving. One person who was wearing a Labor T-shirt said to us, 'Don't forget who brought you here'. This is the attitude that I clearly refuse to take on. When Senator Price made her statement she made it clear what she said. I do not want to provide any further commentary about that, but she said that she supports targeted migration. This was a reference in the context of what happened at the previous federal election.

When it comes to the CLP government's view on migration, the Chief Minister and Minister Cahill made it clear on multiple occasions that we are asking the federal government to increase the cap on the numbers so that we can have more skilled migrants come to the Territory to address the shortage of skilled workers.

I make it clear that Senator Price, the Senator for the Northern Territory, is also a member of the Country Liberal Party, so I support her. I will call her an older sister. When she stands by a decision with her values and conviction it is my responsibility I believe to support her, and I did and I will do in the future. After that occasion I have met her three times in the last couple of months. It is all in the public—the Member for Arafura referred to seeing a photograph—and I put it on my Facebook. This is information I am providing.

I always say to the members of the opposition that rather than tracking us down through Facebook posts, come and engage with the community when we are out and about because we do not see you out there. We are attending all these different events, engaging with the multicultural community, religious groups and schools and we are not seeing many opposition members out there. I may see one member from the opposition once a month or so, and that is it. If you try to engage more with the people in the Northern

Territory you may get feedback that is consistent with the feedback we get from the community, which is, 'Please go ahead with the job. We want the Territory to be on a better track.'

This Bill delivers what we said we would do. It demonstrates action, certainty and balance, protecting freedoms while upholding fairness for all Territorians.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank all members who made contributions. I understand there is a lot of passion in a debate like this. I remember that from 2022 when we were debating the amendments Labor brought forward.

At the end of the day this Bill is in direct alignment with our election commitments.

It amends the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992* to achieve three key objectives:

- to ensure freedom of speech is protected, especially for individuals and religious communities, without allowing or condoning hate speech

- to restore an exemption for religious schools, recognising their right to employ staff who share their beliefs and uphold the religious character of their schools

- to remove the requirement for the commissioner to evaluate complaints when dispute resolution has not been successful.

This Bill does not remove protections under the *Anti-Discrimination Act*; instead, it retains as a safeguard for communities protections from hate speech and discrimination. What the Member for Sanderson said about all communities not being the same was compelling, because that is the truth. We are not all the same. Being out in the community over the last 12 months we heard from people that they wanted to be sure they still had those protections against vilification, which is why we kept them.

The first important amendment is to section 20A, which deals with vilification. This Bill removes the words 'offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate' from what counts as unlawful conduct and replaces them with 'incite hatred towards, serious contempt for or severe ridicule of' a person or group based on a protected attribute.

This means that the law will now focus on incitement rather than just harm. This is not about giving anyone permission to be cruel or demeaning; it is about making sure that our laws do not capture everyday disagreements or public debate, especially in areas like religion, culture and social policy. Our change moves to an incitement model which focuses on prevention, stopping conduct that could lead to hatred or serious contempt before it escalates.

This amendment responds to Territorians' concerns that the model brought in by Labor in 2022 limited freedom of speech. It is argued that the incitement-based protection is better understood by the community. Our provision makes clear that freedom of speech is limited only when conduct, such as hate speech, is capable of inciting hatred, serious contempt for or severe ridicule of a person or a group with a protected attribute.

Our changes to section 20A bring the Northern Territory in line with most other Australian jurisdictions, including the ACT, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, which all use an incitement model for their anti-discrimination laws.

I also highlight that section 19—which lists all the different attributes for discrimination—remains the same as what Labor introduced in 2022. It has not been touched.

The second key reform is the introduction of section 35B, which reinstates an exemption for religious schools regarding employment. Madam Speaker, you will recall that in 2022 the Labor government removed the previous religious protections under section 37A. In doing so, it took a position that challenged the freedom of religion for faith-based schools and communities.

The religious exemption recognises religion as a protected attribute and understands that the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion can sometimes intersect with other fundamental rights, like the right to non-discrimination and equality. Where these rights intersect a balance must be struck to preserve both as much as possible. That is exactly what this exemption aims to do, and it is what we promised Territorians at the election. You may remember the rally that was held outside Parliament House the week that Labor

pushed through those laws. A lot of religious groups, parents and families—Territorians—came together to say that they were not happy with the removal of this exemption.

Religious schools play an important role in our education system in the Northern Territory and across Australia. They provide families with choice and offer education aligned with their faith and values.

This amendment allows religious schools to prefer hiring people of the same religion and to make employment decisions where a potential employee's belief or conduct conflicts with the doctrines or beliefs of the school's faith.

The Member for Arafura asked questions about some of the schools in his community. He was concerned that teachers could not be employed in his communities with these changes. I clarify for the record that schools can still employ whoever they want, even with this change. In many communities and places across the Northern Territory schools do, in fact, employ everybody and whoever they want. This does not change that. It does not say that you cannot employ someone unless they are of that religion; it just says that there is an exemption. That is for them to follow.

The Member for Arafura also brought up a question about the fears of how it might impact the students in the community. Nothing has been talked about students in regard to this change, so students can still go to whichever school their families enrol them in.

New section 35B lets schools set conduct expectations for current employees relating to upholding the religious ethos of the institution. To be clear, this exemption is not a blanket licence to discriminate. It is designed to allow religious schools to maintain their identity and character in line with the expectations of their school community and religious bodies.

For a religious school to rely on this exemption it must act on the grounds of religious belief or activity in good faith to avoid offending the religious sensitivities of a reasonable person of that faith and have these policies clearly set out in writing available to current and future staff.

New section 35B co-exists with the other exemptions available under the Act such as in section 35. These can be relied on together, as they are not mutually exclusive and can operate concurrently.

These are reasonable and clear requirements that strike a fair balance between religious freedom and the right to non-discrimination and equality. Maintaining this balance between fundamental rights is crucial and makes for good law.

Some religious groups asked us to go further; they wanted to broaden the exemption beyond what we promised. For example, there were requests to extend conduct expectations into the private lives of staff and apply the exemption to student enrolment. However, extending the exemption into private lives and allowing discrimination in student enrolment would not have been the approach we wanted in restoring religious freedoms, and it was beyond what was promised at the election. On the other hand, some non-religious community groups strongly opposed restoring the exemption at all, but religious schools have the right to preserve their faith-based teaching. In balancing these differing views we have taken a middle-ground approach, respecting the rights of faith-based schools while limiting impacts on other rights.

Importantly, religious protections are consistent with similar exemptions in other Australian jurisdictions and recognise the unique place faith-based schools hold in our society.

This Bill represents a careful and considered approach to balancing competing rights and responsibilities. More importantly, it was an election commitment. We recognise that our laws must respect freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom from discrimination while also acknowledging the legitimate role that religious communities play in public life.

I thank everyone who contributed. When I think about this Bill and talk about it in this House, it is for the parents and families of Territorians. They have faith leaders and other people who might represent them in community, but at the end of the day they want the choice to send their kids to a school of a faith group in line with the faith they may have at home. I have put this forward to make sure those parents have that choice to send their children to a school but also retain vilification provisions in the Act. We promised we would repeal it, but when were out in the community we realised there was still a strong desire to have vilification protections in the law. We retained that and have changed it from the harm model to the incitement model. I am grateful to everyone who participated today and those who shared their feedback with me and other members of parliament.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail

Clause 1, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 2:

Mr PAECH: Please confirm when this legislation is expected to commence.

Ms BOOTHBY: The Bill is separated into two commencement phases. Firstly, all but Part 3 will commence on the day after the day on which the Administrator assents to the Act. Secondly, Part 3 of the Bill will commence on the day to be fixed by the Administrator by gazette notice, but it will commence on 17 May 2027 if it has not commenced prior.

Part 3 sets out the amendments to the Act that relate to the commissioner's requirement to provide an evaluation of a complaint prior to referring the matter to the tribunal. The delayed commencement of Part 3 is to allow both the Anti-Discrimination Commission and the tribunal sufficient time to prepare for the change in process.

Mr PAECH: If Part 3 is deferred and that period expires, would it then commence on 27 July 2026?

Ms BOOTHBY: Only if it goes through to that date and it has not been commenced.

Mr PAECH: When will you be seeking audience with the Administrator?

Ms BOOTHBY: That will go through the usual process if the Bill is passed. It will be as soon as it is signed off by him and a meeting is set.

Mr PAECH: Is there a process in place for communicating the changes upon commencement to the general public?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes. A fact sheet and Q&A information pack shall be published and letters sent to relevant stakeholders to advise of amendments. The Anti-Discrimination Commission also published a fact sheet of amendments; I cannot tell you the date, but it was a little while ago.

Mr PAECH: Upon the gazette notice and assent, will those documents be released or have they been released prior to the commencement?

Ms BOOTHBY: The fact sheet and Q&A information pack will be published after it has commenced.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 4:

Mr PAECH: What does this amendment mean in practice?

Ms BOOTHBY: It basically changes the model from a harm model to an incitement model.

J DAVIS: Your government says that it wants to make this Act clearer and more in line with community expectations. Can you define 'incite'?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will get the legal definition. 'Incite' means to encourage, stir up or provoke.

J DAVIS: For the purposes of community clarity, can you explain how that will work in practice?

Ms BOOTHBY: The threshold of incite, in the context of the amendments to section 20A, is consistent with the interpretation in other jurisdictions, being that it covers a wide variety of conduct. However, it is not enough to simply express hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule of a person or a group because of an attribute.

To incite means to be capable of rousing, stimulating, urging or spurring on, stirring up or animating the viewer or listener and may cover conduct involving commands, requests, proposals, actions or encouragement. The test of inciting hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule of a person or group with a protected attribute is an objective test, meaning the conduct must be capable of inciting the emotions in a hypothetical ordinary viewer or listener. The conduct need not actually incite a viewer or listener.

The intention behind the incitement-based protections against vilification is to prevent and stop the spread of harmful conduct before it escalates.

J DAVIS: If an elderly Jewish woman—for example, my mum—gets on a bus and is sworn at by a Neo-Nazi who is also on that bus, will this behaviour be covered by this clause?

Ms BOOTHBY: I cannot explain any hypotheticals to you in that case, but I have gone through the incitement model for you.

J DAVIS: I understand that we can ask hypotheticals in consideration in detail.

Ms BOOTHBY: You are asking for an example to be rectified by me, but obviously if there was a complaint it would go through the normal channels, and the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner would assess that. I do not want to pre-empt what an assessment would be.

J DAVIS: To clarify, as the Attorney-General you cannot comment on whether that would be affected by this new law?

Ms BOOTHBY: I just went through the threshold—the incitement description. I can go through that again if you want, but that is how it is applied in this law.

Mr PAECH: How many complaints have come before the Anti-Discrimination Commission in relation to section 20A since 2022?

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 155; that is not relevant to the clause. We are talking about something that happened in the past.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! How about the member lets her answer it for herself?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will let the minister decide whether it is relevant.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is 46.

Mr PAECH: Thank you, that was not hard at all.

Your government claims in response that this is for concerns that the prohibition based on offensive behaviour overtly limits the freedom of speech. Can you step us through how the current prohibition overtly limits freedom of speech?

Ms BOOTHBY: Simply put, Member for Gwoja, because it says that people cannot say certain things, like causing offence, which curtails freedom of speech and because it is a lower threshold than incitement it curtails freedom of speech.

Mr PAECH: You said that there had been 46 complaints to the commission. How many of those were progressed and how many were upheld?

Ms BOOTHBY: I do not know the exact number because some of them are ongoing investigations.

Mr PAECH: Do you have the number of how many were progressed and how many have been upheld?

Ms BOOTHBY: Not specifically. The Anti-Discrimination Commissioner has those cases ongoing so that would be a question for him.

Mr PAECH: Would you have at hand the nature of those complaints?

Ms BOOTHBY: No, that is not something he provided to me for this exercise. You would probably have to ask him.

Mr PAECH: What concerns raised through your consultation—as you suggest you have done—will this amendment to section 20A address?

Ms BOOTHBY: This was an election commitment. When you put forward your laws in 2022 the community said those laws went too far and it was an overreach by government. At the time we said that we would repeal the vilification laws, but during consultation over the years following the changes in 2022 we altered the model from the harm model to the incitement model so that we could keep vilification in the Act.

Mr PAECH: It is not an evidence-based model; it is driven by ideology. Who benefits from amending this section of the legislation that is not already protected by the law?

Ms BOOTHBY: I refute the allegation that it was ideology.

Mr PAECH: Would you like to provide the data?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is in line with many other jurisdictions.

Mr PAECH: Can you table the data that has informed your position? The Deputy Chief Minister will jump up because he does not want her to answer.

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 155; this is not relevant to the clause.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind people to please keep it relevant to the clause, but I will initially let the minister decide whether they think it is relevant to the clause. If you do not believe it is relevant to the clause, minister, just say so. I will leave it at that.

Mr PAECH: I want to be clear. I think that the Attorney-General is answering the questions, and she is more than capable of saying when she does not want to answer something.

I want to understand who is benefiting from the changes you are putting forward who is not already protected by the current *Anti-Discrimination Act*?

Ms BOOTHBY: The same people benefit from these changes as they may have under the other model, but this is a different model. The other one was a harm model; this is an incitement model, and it is a clearer definition in layman's terms that are converted into legal terms for the ordinary person to understand.

Mr PAECH: This amendment proposes that the conduct constituting vilification is better understood by the community than prohibition based on offensive behaviour. Can you outline whether any consultations surrounding this claim took place with stakeholders?

Ms BOOTHBY: The CLP membership, in opposition and in government, spoke to many people, consulting widely about the changes. This is the model we came up with after the community said that it would like to retain the vilification measures in the Act.

Mr PAECH: Are you suggesting that the vilification provision is a position of the CLP, not necessarily based on any quantitative or qualitive data driven by community consultation?

Ms BOOTHBY: I said that this amendment is an incitement model—it was a harm model—and we landed on that after consulting with the community to ensure we retained vilification. It is the same model that a lot of other states in Australia have, so that is the model we have chosen for the amendment.

Mr PAECH: That is a CLP Cabinet decision—resolved by the CLP Cabinet—not based on any quantitative or qualitative data from community consultation other than your election campaign?

Ms BOOTHBY: I just said that we consulted widely and deeply. There have been a lot of conversations about this clause.

Mr PAECH: Was that just verbal consultations?

Ms BOOTHBY: There has also been a lot of correspondence. I think I have answered the question.

Mr PAECH: What community stakeholders and relevant experts, such as the Anti-Discrimination Commission, the rainbow community and multicultural groups, have been genuinely consulted on this change?

Ms BOOTHBY: I met with many groups. I met with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner many times. I will name them all, if you wish, for the record: Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council; Scarlet Alliance – Australian Sex Workers Association; Sex Worker Outreach Program; Sex Worker Reference Group; Health Equity Matters; National Association of People with HIV; Australian Association of Christian Schools; Australian Christian Lobby; Bishop Charles of the Catholic Diocese of Darwin; Zion Church; Glory City Church; Father Chris from St Savvas of Kalymnos Greek Orthodox Parish; NT Christian Schools; Northern Territory Council of Social Service; and Northern Territory Jewish Community Association. My office also met with Equality Australia, but I was not there that day.

Mr PAECH: Did those groups see the Bill before it was introduced?

Ms BOOTHBY: I have been meeting with these groups—sometimes over multiple meetings or sometimes once—or they have written to me, and I have written back to them. The Bill was circulated to the other departments and the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner in draft form, and then we introduced it to the House.

Mr PAECH: Did any particular stakeholder groups have access to the Bill as a draft before it came to parliament?

Ms BOOTHBY: The stakeholders that had access to the draft were the Anti-Discrimination Commission and other agencies within government. Once it was introduced it did not sit for only 28 days; it sat for two months. There has been plenty of feedback to my office on the Bill.

J DAVIS: The key change to this clause is the incitement model, which you have talked about. Can you confirm for my constituents—this is an ongoing question that people ask me—whether this means that discrimination from one person to another can no longer be prosecuted unless it inspires a third person to also act in a discriminatory way?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is not correct. Our amendment, like the previous model, requires that the act take place in a public place. Like the previous model, our incitement model protects a group of people and one person. In addition the incitement provisions can and should protect against one-on-one vilification because such direct conduct can effectively rouse or spur on hatred or serious contempt for the targeted individual and their community. Even a single racist slur or hateful comment can reinforce systemic discrimination, cause severe emotional harm and contribute to an environment of hostility.

Mr PAECH: Why has the CLP government opted for the incitement model?

Ms BOOTHBY: I feel like I have already answered that question. Do you want me to say it again?

Mr PAECH: No, if you feel you have answered it that is fine.

How will Territorians who are subjected to racial slurs be protected under this clause now?

Ms BOOTHBY: I just read that out for the Member for Johnston. Does that answer your question?

Mr PAECH: At the moment it goes through to the commission. Are you saying that process will still take place?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is correct.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5:

Mr PAECH: The government claims the amendments restore fairness and balance to protections from discrimination so as not to interfere with freedom of religion. What imbalance between religious freedom and equality will this amendment address? Can you give us the specifics?

Ms BOOTHBY: The way in which it balances it out is that religion is also a protected attribute, so by putting back the exemption it balances out that right.

Mr PAECH: You claim that these amendments are about fairness and freedom. Can you outline how they enhance fairness and freedom for members of the rainbow community?

Ms BOOTHBY: This Act change will not apply to existing employees of religious schools, so there is no effect for current employees. For future employees a school can choose to employ whoever it wishes, of course, but the school will have a written policy that is made available to existing and future staff. The written policy must set out the elements of the religious doctrine relied on when giving preference to employing a person or in establishing the conduct requirements of its employees.

Mr PAECH: I am trying to understand in practice how this amendment will work in terms of religious schools' hiring practices moving forward from commencement. Can you step me through that process?

Ms BOOTHBY: The school will have its own process, and it will probably differ from school to school. This legislation allows a religious school to rely on this exemption to give preference to employing persons of the same religion or in establishing conduct requirements whilst at the workplace. These acts must, on the ground of religious belief or activity, be done in good faith to avoid offending religious sensitivities of a reasonable person of that religion and be set out in a written policy that is made available to existing and future staff. The written policy must set out the elements of the religious doctrine relied on when giving preference to employing a person or in establishing the conduct requirements of the school's employees.

Mr PAECH: What are you referring to when you talk about religious sensitivities?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is a standard test that is used in determining those religious sensitivities.

Mr PAECH: A person who is faith based—Christian, Lutheran or Catholic—but is in a same-sex relationship, is that considered a sensitivity? They are of the religion but there are religious sensitivities around that conduct.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is not up to us as legislators to interpret that. It would depend.

Mr PAECH: Is the application or interpretation of that in the Act left broad?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is left up to the religion, as it would depend.

Mr PAECH: I am talking about if school X is a religious school and produces a written document that says, 'A religious person can work here, but if they are in a same-sex relationship that is a sensitivity, and we will not employ them'.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is not for the government to dictate or limit what constitutes religious belief or activity or how religious belief and activity is expressed. The Australian Constitution at section 116 expressly states that legislation is not to established that prohibits the free exercise of any religion. New section 35B strikes a balance between intersecting rights by preserving the substance of both the freedom of religion and the freedom to equality and non-discrimination to the highest degree possible.

Mr PAECH: The Education minister said that this legislation was about schools, so I seek your clarification of what an educational institution is. The Education minister may have slipped up and got it incorrect, because my understanding is that it is much broader than just a primary school.

Ms BOOTHBY: The definition of 'educational institution' under the Act is not amended by the Bill. It is a question to be considered on a case-by-case basis for a religious organisation which provides educational services as well as other services as to whether it can rely on section 35B. A religious organisation would need to demonstrate that a part of its organisation is an educational authority or educational institution as defined in the Act. There is a potential argument that the exemption applies in that siloed educational portion of the organisation, but ultimately it is unchanged in this Act.

Mr PAECH: I am confirming it was an incorrect assessment. The definition of 'educational institution' says:

(a) a childcare centre, school, college, university or other institution at which any form of training or instruction is provided;

(b) a place at which training or instruction is provided by an employer;

(c) a place that provides educational programs to people in custody;

(d) any other place that provides an education and care service.

Is that correct?

Ms BOOTHBY: Like I said, the definition of 'educational institution' under the Act is not amended by this Bill.

Mr PAECH: The Education minister got that wrong.

If CatholicCare or Lutheran Care started to turn into an RTO and deliver training, would they for all intents and purposes be captured by 'educational institution'?

Ms BOOTHBY: Section 35B applies only to religious educational institutions, meaning religious schools that apply religious doctrine in the operation of the school; it does not apply to non-religious schools. It also does not apply to other religious organisations that do not operate an educational institution as defined by the Act. In addition for organisations that operate to provide other services such as accommodation or programs, the areas of activities where discrimination is prohibited continue to apply. This includes accommodation, the provision of goods, services and facilities and the administration of government programs.

Mr PAECH: Have any matters come before the commission as a result of the 2022 anti-discrimination amendments when it comes to the religious exemptions?

Ms BOOTHBY: There was no ground because the protection did not exist. It was removed by you.

Mr PAECH: There have been no religious exemptions. Have there been no complaints about not having it?

Ms BOOTHBY: We had several complaints from several religious schools about this for the last three years.

Mr PAECH: Yes, but not before the commission.

Ms BOOTHBY: That is because the commission could not look at it because it was not in the Act.

Mr PAECH: What I am saying is they have other provisions. There have been no matters before the commission in relation to the religious exemptions.

Ms BOOTHBY: Not that I am aware of.

Mr PAECH: On the basis that the government is inserting section 35B, which is based on the previous repealed section 37A of the Act, how does this amendment strengthen the *Anti-Discrimination Act*?

Ms BOOTHBY: The Bill aligns with the objects of the Act to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle of the right to equality of opportunity of persons regardless of an attribute; to prevent and eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation to the greatest extent possible; and to promote the identification and elimination of systemic discrimination. The Bill focuses on balancing intersecting fundamental rights and in doing so enhances the objects of the Act.

Mr PAECH: What arrangements are in place to monitor and address unintended concerns which may arise from this amendment?

Ms BOOTHBY: There are no formal review provisions in the Bill, but it is subject to the Attorney-General's Department receiving feedback from key stakeholders and relevant agencies, including the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.

Mr PAECH: What are the oversight arrangements for written policies of educational authorities in relation to section 35B?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is a matter for the religious institution.

Mr PAECH: There is no oversight from the commission or anywhere to make sure that they are not just introduced as a way of discriminating against someone's employment at the time?

Ms BOOTHBY: What the religious institutions can do is set out clearly in the Act.

Mr PAECH: What safeguards will be in place to ensure that employers do not overstep or attempt to police employees' personal lives outside of the workplace?

Ms BOOTHBY: It applies only in the workplace, not in their private lives.

Mr PAECH: What mechanisms are in place to ensure that is protected and does not happen outside the workplace?

Ms BOOTHBY: Standard workplace protections.

J DAVIS: I have clarification questions on this clause that people have raised with me. I was unable to answer them when I looked at the Act. For example, a woman who is a teacher asked, 'My daughter has recently come out as gay. If homosexuality is outlawed by school policy on its religious doctrine, would my job now be at risk based on my daughter's sexuality?'

Ms BOOTHBY: If she is an existing employee, no.

J DAVIS: She is applying for the job in the future, not currently, so it is going forward.

Ms BOOTHBY: The school would have its own set of contractual arrangements or employment recruitment methods that would apply the Act, so it would be up to the school.

J DAVIS: If the school had a policy against homosexuality, could that include the family of someone it was employing?

Ms BOOTHBY: This exemption applies only to religion, not other attributes. The exemption applies in the context of employment and allows preferencing only when hiring employees and the establishment of conduct requirements for employees when done on the basis of religious belief or activity. The exemption cannot be relied upon outside of the category of work or on any basis other than religious belief or activity. This is narrower than the exemption that was in place prior to the 2022 amendments to the Act. The now repealed section 37A exemption also allowed discrimination by religious educational institutions on the basis of sexuality when done in good faith and in accordance with the doctrine of a particular religion. Section 35B does not reintroduce the replaced exemption to allow discrimination on the basis of sexuality.

J DAVIS: Just to answer the person who asked me that question, would her future employment not be at risk because her daughter is gay?

Ms BOOTHBY: Do you want me to go through it again?

J DAVIS: I just want a yes or no to that.

Ms BOOTHBY: Sometimes law is not yes or no. I have already answered it.

Mr PAECH: Can you explain how religious educational institutions will demonstrate that they are acting in good faith?

Ms BOOTHBY: If a complaint came up that would be assessed.

Mr PAECH: Would that be assessed by the commission?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is correct.

Mr PAECH: Obviously this goes to the heart of a number of good remote schools. Is there a requirement for these changes to be communicated in First Nations languages at the commencement of the amendment?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is not in the Act as such, but we would have a communication strategy and plan around it.

Mr PAECH: We are all in here talking about administrative and legislative changes, but not many people in remote areas understand what that means, so I appreciate your leniency on that one.

That goes to the section inserted by this clause. What arrangements were made or are being made to look at the implementation of these amendments?

Ms BOOTHBY: The Anti-Discrimination Commissioner would roll out the implementation.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clauses 6 to 14, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Schedule 1, by leave, agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the Bill be agreed to.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 16	Noes 7
Ms Boothby	Mr Brown
Mr Burgoyne	J Davis
Ms Cahill	Mr Guyula
Mrs Carlson	K McNamara
Mr Charls	Mr Paech
Mr Edgington	Ms Uibo
Mrs Finocchiaro	Mr Young
Mrs Hersey	
Mr Howe	
Mr Kerle	
Mr Mackay	
Mr Maley	
Mr O'Gallagher	
Mr Patel	
Mr Yan	
Mrs Zio	

Bill agreed to.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 16	Noes 7
Ms Boothby	Mr Brown
Mr Burgoyne	J Davis
Ms Cahill	Mr Guyula
Mrs Carlson	K McNamara
Mr Charls	Mr Paech
Mr Edgington	Ms Uibo
Mrs Finocchiaro	Mr Young
Mrs Hersey	
Mr Howe	
Mr Kerle	
Mr Mackay	
Mr Maley	
Mr O'Gallagher	
Mr Patel	
Mr Yan	
Mrs Zio	

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

RESPONSE TO PETITION
Petition No 11 – Securing Screen Territory Funding

The CLERK: Honourable members, the following response from the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality to Petition Number 11 praying for the protection and strengthening of the film industry has been received and forwarded to the member for distribution to the petitioners.

Dear Mr Keith

As required by Standing Order 123, I am responding to Petition No. 11 'Support for Screen Territory' (the Petition), regarding funding and the future of the Northern Territory screen industry. The Petition was read in the Legislative Assembly on 20 May 2025 and presented by the Member for Johnston.

The Petition raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of the screen industry and seeks greater certainty of funding and support for Screen Territory.

The Government values the vital role of the screen sector in creating jobs, strengthening tourism and showcasing the Territory to the world. Screen Territory was first established under our Government, and we remain proud to support it as one of the most dynamic and successful creative industries in the Northern Territory.

In the 2025–26 Budget, the Government committed $3.61 million in ongoing funding to Screen Territory, giving the industry the certainty it needs to continue growing. Every $1 invested through Screen Territory delivers at least $4 back into the Territory economy.

The results are clear. Recent productions such as Kangaroo, Territory and Top End Bub have generated more than $14 million in direct local spend, employed hundreds of Territorians and engaged hundreds of local businesses. Kangaroo, produced by Alice Springs-based Brindle Films, has since been recognised nationally with the company named the Chief Minister's Exporter of the Year—a strong endorsement of the Territory's growing creative capability.

The Government remains committed to supporting Territory creatives through a strong pipeline of productions, skills development, and partnerships with national and international producers. Screen Territory will continue to deliver funding programs, industry development and major events like the NT Screen Summit and supporting the Darwin International Film Festival.

The Government is backing Territory stories and talent because this industry delivers real results—economically, culturally and creatively.

I thank the petitioners for their advocacy and continued support for Screen Territory and the Northern Territory's screen industry, and the Member for Johnston for bringing this petition to the attention of the Legislative Assembly.

Yours sincerely

MARIE-CLARE BOOTHBY
14 OCT 2025

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Maternity Services in the Northern Territory

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Member for Daly as follows:

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

The state of maternity services in the Northern Territory.

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

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, it is a matter of public importance that we discuss the state of the Territory's maternity services and the Health minister's failure to be open and accountable with Territorians about what he is doing about it.

Putting it frankly, expectant Territory mothers are scared and uncertain about the future of maternity services in the Northern Territory. Since Healthscope announced in February this year that private maternity services were being pulled, those expectant Territory mothers ask themselves: where will I have my baby? To this day expectant Territory mothers and their families are asking: will I be able to have my baby in a safe, orderly and relaxed environment?

The current crisis in maternity care is not on our amazing healthcare professionals. They are working incredibly hard in difficult circumstances to deliver the best care they possibly can to Territory mothers and babies. It sits squarely with this Health minister who, 12 months on, has failed to address the incredibly critical issue surrounding continuity of care and creating certainty for expectant Territory mothers.

Let us look at the Health minister's timeline of inaction. In September last year he was told that the private maternity ward was closing. He did not do anything. When Healthscope announced the closure publicly in February this year, he admitted he had known about it for months but still did not do anything. He finally wrote to the federal minister seeking assistance in May; it took the Health minister eight months to write to the federal minister on this issue. We are now 12 months on and it turns out that he still has not provided the federal government with any details to back his funding request. He just asked for a bucket of money and expected it to be handed over, no questions asked.

This is in stark contrast to Tasmania, which found itself in a similar position when Healthscope closed private maternity services there. It sought help from the federal government straightaway, provided details to back its ask and got that funding. It understood how important the issue was for local mums and bubs.

Territory families and expectant mums are still waiting for our Health minister to demonstrate this level of concern for what they are experiencing. In true CLP form, rather than doing his job, the Health minister pointed the finger at the federal government. It is getting to be a tired tactic in this House. I know the Northern Territory mothers and families who are expecting kids are getting tired of the Health minister blaming everyone but himself.

This should be at the top of his agenda. The Health minister should be flying to Canberra and meeting with Mark Butler to raise these serous concerns, or at the very least picking up the phone and calling the federal Health minister to express how concerning this issue is for our Territory mothers.

Territory women, their families and Health staff are still coming forward with horror stories on how this inaction is impacting them. There has been a chorus of voices about this issue. Territorians are desperate for the government to act, but the Health minister continues to keep his ears closed. Some women are flying interstate to have their babies because they are not sure they will get continuity of care in the Northern Territory.

One mum told the story of having to labour in a tearoom because there was no other place for her to go. When she wrote to the Health minister about it, do you know what she got? She got the press release dot points from the minister. He did not even have the courtesy to respond in a sensitive way and acknowledge what she had just gone through. He showed no care for her; he just sent the dot points from his press release—'There you go, this is what I think about you. There is our media release. Bad luck.'

Earlier this month more than 100 mothers, fathers, family members and healthcare professionals gathered at a local cafe to run an Our Birth, Our Voice forum to discuss how this crisis could be resolved. That is right; the people most impacted by this crisis are trying to find solutions because the Health minister cannot or will not do his job. These women, families and health workers are a comprehensive cross-section of the community, and I applaud the work they are doing across the Northern Territory.

I will put on the record the things that they want, to get maternity services back on track in the Top End. Families want sufficient continuity of care to help build trust and spot issues more quickly to improve outcomes. Health workers want the government to address workforce shortages, uncertain contracts and the casualisation of the workforce that is causing skilled midwives to leave the Territory. Families want a better approach for families who suffer the loss of a child, more staff bereavement training and a consumer group set up to consult with NT Health because they feel that there is a lack of transparency and community consultation regarding changes within services.

I also understand that the Our Birth, Our Voice forum's bundle of recommended strategies to this government will reflect the Woman-centred Care: Strategic Directions for Australian Maternity Services, which it is asking the NT Government to implement.

I ask the Minister for Health to respond to these sensitive solutions. What is he doing about it, particularly ensuring women and their babies have continuity of care? Expectant Territory mothers know that this issue is not going away. I hope the minister will take the appropriate amount of time to explain and provide an adequate response, because this is about Territory mothers. This is not about politics; this should be above politics, and it should not be about blaming anyone else.

I heard the Treasurer mumble under his breath, 'Of course it is about politics'. What a disgraceful thing to say. The Treasurer is mumbling that under his breath when expectant mothers in the Northern Territory do not even have access to maternity services. That is a disgraceful thing to come out of the Treasurer's mouth when he has control over the budget. He could have implemented this in his last budget to ensure the maternity services stayed in the Northern Territory, but he is mumbling under his breath. He is now laughing to the minister because he does not care about Territory mothers. It is a disgrace. He continues to yell out when I have just given an example of a mother giving birth in a tearoom. Do you think that is good enough, Treasurer? He is quiet now because he has been called out for his poor behaviour.

This is above politics. We should not be blaming anyone else. You are in government, and you could have resolved this issue. It took eight months for you to write to the federal minister.

Earlier this week the Health minister was up in arms about lacking support, but his lines are not passing the pub test, especially not for expectant Territory mothers who want action and not just words. The Health minister is currently at the table with the federal Health minister.

Mr Edgington: You said he was not before.

Mr YOUNG: You are at the table because you go to the co-ord meetings with the federal Health minister. Why have you not been asking questions?

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Stop the interjections. Order! Direct your comments through me, thank you.

Mr YOUNG: The Member for Solomon provided Territorians last Tuesday on ABC Radio Darwin with an update stating, 'We are currently waiting for additional information from the Northern Territory Government on the proposal'. The ball is in the Northern Territory Government's court to provide that additional information to justify its request.

The way the Health minister acted earlier this week shows that maternity services are not even on his radar, and it is a shame on him. Territory women want real traction on this issue. I, for one, want to ensure they get it because they are tired of this issue being a political football.

Mr Mackay: Write to your ministers; write to Luke.

Mr YOUNG: The Territory Labor opposition team and I will continue to raise this issue in parliament, because we do not want expectant Territory mothers and their families without certainty or continuity of care.

I pick up on the interjection from the Member for Goyder. I am not sure he is aware, but the Member for Solomon is not a minister. I do not know why you are calling out, 'Why don't you write to the minister Luke Gosling?'

Members interjecting.

Mr YOUNG: You are getting it wrong.

The reality is that the Member for Goyder is part of the CLP government …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; I know it is late in the night, but everyone is guilty of it now. We are talking about maternity services and vulnerable women. Everyone has the opportunity to talk in the two hours. Just picking up on the interjections, it is not what expectant mums want to hear.

Madam SPEAKER: I concur. The member will be heard in silence, with no interjections.

Mr YOUNG: I agree with your comments, Member for Gwoja.

Member for Goyder, if you are concerned about this, I look forward to your contribution to this debate. We have a couple of hours to talk on this, so I would love to hear you speak on this important issue, because it is above politics.

I hope that all members from the CLP government speak on this issue, because it is important. The CLP members are in government and have control of the budget; they have control of the money. They have the power to oversee this and bring back maternity services for those mothers.

The opposition will hold the Health minister accountable, as is our job. We want to ensure he is listening to Territory women and families and especially our wonderful health staff. We can all agree that when you are having a baby or visiting a friend who has just had a baby, it should be one of the most beautiful, positive experiences you can have.

Under this Health minister there are other major shortcomings in overall health service delivery, and it all links with the maternity services. Earlier this year Territorians heard that the Territory public hospital system was to receive a 30% increase in funding from the federal Labor government, amounting to $560m for the 2025–26 budget—the largest of any jurisdiction in the country—to help reduce emergency department wait times and cut surgical backlogs. This was an excellent deal for Territorians, because funding for our hospitals is desperately needed. We welcome this funding. It is great to know that a federal Labor government understands that Territorians, regardless of where they live, deserve excellent healthcare.

Healthcare should be delivered in a safe, culturally appropriate, accessible and timely manner, with the proper health infrastructure as needed, because it benefits everyone in the community. We know that the Northern Territory faces unique challenges. The high supply chain cost and the distances patients and medical staff must travel to access and provide care make healthcare delivery challenging. The Northern Territory is also home to some of the most ill patients in this country, with Aboriginal Territorians battling high rates of chronic diseases and representing a high proportion of hospital patients.

With this investment from the Commonwealth Government into the Northern Territory public hospital system comes responsibility on the part of the CLP government and the Minister for Health to show Territorians they are putting this money to good use and demonstrate that this increase in funding, even the smallest amount, can translate into safer and more timely care for expectant mothers in our maternity services and better outcomes for our health staff and Territorians.

The health system is a true pillar of the government, but for us on this side of the House it barely registers in the pillars of government as heard in the Deputy Chief Minister's comments in previous sittings. If you do not get behind the three pillars of government, and only those three, you can leave the Territory. There is no mention of health as a key staple of government.

For over a year the Minister for Health has either lacked competence or been naive about the delivery of the Territory's healthcare system. The pressure on our hospital system and our outstanding healthcare staff is immense. The Minister for Health says that he knows this, but overall what is he doing about it?

We are hearing stories from Territorians, health staff and stakeholders outside of these parliamentary walls. Territorians are seeing friends and families waiting countless hours in the emergency department or for an ambulance to attend to them. They are hearing nurses and doctors, along with their unions, speaking out because of exhaustion and overall demoralisation.

There is an attempt by this government to cover up when our hospitals are at crisis point by refusing to declare code yellows, only relenting when the pressure is so overwhelming that unions and health staff take collective action.

I hope the minister takes this seriously and can speak to the federal Health minister about maternity services. The Liberal government in Tasmania took action by speaking to the federal minister to ensure its maternity services stayed open by building a relationship with the Health minister and putting out a plan of the exact spending. I hope that the CLP minister Steve Edgington can do the same.

Mr EDGINGTON (Health): Madam Speaker, let us clarify Tasmania 'keeping health and maternity services open'. There are two private hospitals in Tasmania and one in the Territory; one closed in Tasmania, and our only one closed in Darwin. The Member for Daly has no idea what he is talking about and should not be jumping up and making up stories to compare apples with oranges.

It is important in this context to talk about the state of maternity services in the whole of the Northern Territory, not just the situation in Darwin. As a remote member I know that these issues do not end at the Berrimah Line. Across the Territory there is a wide range of maternity services. There are about 2,000 births per year at RDH. I think the Member for Daly indicated that there were no maternity services; he did not clarify where, but he said

that there were no maternity services. I think he was clutching at straws and did not really know what he was talking about.

Let me assure you that there are 2,000 births at Royal Darwin Hospital every year. More than 600 babies are born in Alice Springs Hospital. Birthing services in the NT are primarily available at Royal Darwin Hospital, Gove Hospital, Katherine Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital. We should also note that as the only tertiary-level hospital for thousands of kilometres, Royal Darwin Hospital is the escalation point for the Territory and beyond. It provides vital last-resort supports and services for the whole of the NT and the broader region. This includes when Darwin Private Hospital had complex and traumatic births and emergency support and escalated levels of care were required for private patients in the private system.

It is important that we recognise that people outside of Darwin might not have alternatives to the use of our public maternity services, nor might they have readily and easily accessible services nearby. Our team at NT Health—our doctors, nurses, midwives and other service providers—do an outstanding and amazing job and have done so for many years, servicing the needs of all NT residents and those who use our services.

In remote areas parents receive pregnancy care at their local clinic until 37 weeks' pregnant. Once mum and baby are well—after birth at one of those hospitals and remote families return home—they continue to be cared for by the community nurse and midwife at their local clinic. RDH also offers postnatal home visiting services when a midwife will visit parents and babies at home to provide breastfeeding support and postnatal care.

Our maternity teams at the four birthing hospitals and midwifery services who help mums in pregnancy and in home births, and our remote midwives and nurses, deserve every bit of praise and recognition.

As we all appreciate, Healthscope's decision to close Darwin Private Hospital's private maternity and birthing service in June 2025—five months ago—caused disruption and had a significant impact on the affected pregnant women and their families. It has been not only disappointing but also immensely frustrating to the Territory residents who pay private health insurance premiums and may struggle to access services. It has been particularly frustrating and annoying to me as the Health minister.

Leading into this time and since the closure, the government has been involved in a number of measures to address the issues and ensure that a level-of-private-service option remained available in Darwin. The government remains committed and continues to work through these issues. We want all Territory families to have choice for the birth of their babies. It seems the members of the NT Labor Party are the only people who do not understand that the removal of private maternity services by Healthscope was a decision of Healthscope.

On 28 February this year Minister Butler acknowledged on ABC radio:

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

That was from the federal minister.

At an operational level NT Health has been working extremely hard to ensure the transition to Royal Darwin Hospital has been managed to the highest level of care. Our government stepped in when Healthscope stepped out. We made every concerted effort to provide a safe birthing experience for all mothers. Although these options do not replicate the model at Darwin Private Hospital, they provide a comprehensive, safe and supportive maternity experience for private patients. I also note that just like when the private hospital was operating, our NT Health-provided private maternity supports will not suit every mother and baby or may not be available for those with complex and difficult clinical needs. Not every family with a newborn will be in circumstances that allow them to access these packages.

I am heartened to know that all affected pregnant women and their families who have chosen to use the public maternity services and the supplementary private packages have been safely supported and cared for. As of 8 October 2025 I am advised that 53 families had used the private maternity services packages; 21 families used the hotel retreat package and 32 families have used the 'return home sooner' package. All 61 of the privately insured mothers affected by Healthscope's decision to close its maternity services have now given birth.

It is reassuring that many families have expressed appreciation for NT Health staff, praising the midwives, lactation consultant and support teams for going above and beyond to provide care and positive experience, with a few patients describing their experience at Royal Darwin Hospital as very positive, particularly the midwifery and domiciliary support throughout.

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

To that end the CLP government believes it is vital that, as part of the resolution of the Healthscope sale process, privately run and managed maternity services to meet the needs of Territorians with private health insurance must be restored at Darwin Private Hospital under whatever new ownership is established. We remain engaged directly with the receivers, the current operators and the federal government, and will continue to engage with all interested parties. We think it is important that the federal government has a role to play here and we remain open to positive and collaborative discussions with it on the importance of private hospital services and private maternity services in Darwin.

Speaking about the Commonwealth, I have also been in regular contact with the federal Health minister to continue constructive discussions regarding Commonwealth support for the Northern Territory. I recently spoke to him at a Health ministers' meeting in Perth. We are in discussions with the Commonwealth on funding, but we will always make sure that public maternity services are there for Territorians who need them.

In addition to my contact and discussion with Minister Butler, despite the uninformed sniping from people like the federal Member for Solomon, our health officials remain engaged with the Commonwealth regarding the Northern Territory's request for additional funding support for our public maternity services.

Member for Daly, unlike other states we simply do not have an alternative private health service in Darwin available for the federal government to fund. Our circumstances are not the same as Hobart or the central coast of New South Wales where a ready alternative is available, so stop comparing apples with oranges.

We are working closely with the Commonwealth on the Healthscope sale to make sure Territorians keep real choice between public and private healthcare.

There is no way we can have a discussion about health services in the NT without calling out the current funding levels that the Northern Territory receives from the Commonwealth to support our health system. The Northern Territory receives the lowest level of funding under the Commonwealth contribution rates—only 31.9% from the federal government, well below the national average of 37.5%. In fact, National Cabinet agreed in December 2023 to a commitment by the Commonwealth to increase its share under the NHRA to 45% over the 10 years to 2035, with an increase to 42.5% before 2030.

Current NT Health modelling indicates that under the current Commonwealth funding offer the NT would hit only 32.8% Commonwealth contribution rate funding by 2031 and that all Australian jurisdictions would remain below the 42.5% target. I understand the Northern Territory has been historically underfunded for many years, going back as far as self-government I would suggest. NT Health indicates that we would currently fall approximately $200m per annum short of our fair share of funding.

I acknowledge that the NT received an additional $51m under the one-year health funding agreement, which was supposedly to assist the NT and address the historical funding shortfalls—and I say 'supposedly'. If we were funded to at least the national average of Commonwealth contribution, we would receive an amount that would go a long way to addressing our structural shortfalls, and that is before we even start to talk about the expenditure that the Northern Territory Government makes on health and medical services that are primarily the responsibility of the federal government. These are things that the Commonwealth is responsible for directly but where NT Health spends Territory dollars because the necessary services and facilities are not provided by Canberra.

Aeromedical services in the Top End cost our health system $51m per annum. I have spoken about aged-care patients; 60 to 80 every day of the week are in the hospital system, costing us $40m per annum. Remote healthcare clinics cost the Territory $95m and that should be paid for by the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth contribution funding shortfall combined with the NT's spend on meeting Commonwealth healthcare responsibilities amounts to a total shortfall of Commonwealth health funding to the NT in the order

of $386m per annum. I will say that once more: we are short $386m per annum that we should be receiving from the Commonwealth Government.

The federal government has had our fully costed detailed plan for the $35m maternity facility upgrade funding request for some time. The Member for Solomon's commentary on this is, frankly, uninformed and nonsense. If the Member for Solomon put as much time into supporting the families of Darwin and Palmerston as he did talking about German grocery chains, our residents may well have some level of Commonwealth support for our maternity facilities by now.

A couple of angry Facebook posts while mashing the keyboard simply will not get this resolved. Collaborative engagement with the federal minister, as I am doing, will go much further than political pointscoring ever will. We acted swiftly to fill a void left by Healthscope. We stepped in as Healthscope stepped out.

The Aldi advocate should use his role as the northern Australia envoy to actually achieve something for the Northern Territory. Perhaps he could finally reveal where and when his promised aged-care beds for Darwin and Palmerston will be delivered. He crows about the increased hospital funding from the federal government, but he fails to tell Territorians the truth about the federal underfunding that I spoke about. Have you ever heard him say that the Northern Territory is underfunded by $386m per year? Why is the Member for Solomon not talking about that? Where is the Member for Lingiari? Where is the Senator for the Northern Territory Malarndirri McCarthy? There is $386m per year in underfunding. What a disgrace!

Mr Young: Where is Jacinta Price?

Mr EDGINGTON: You can laugh, Member for Daly. You might think it is funny that we are underfunded by so much, but do not come in here whingeing and complaining about maternity services. I have not heard you open your mouth once about the $386m shortfall. It is high time you got on the wagon and started advocating for more money for the Northern Territory, rather than sitting there whingeing, complaining and blaming others for the system we have in the Northern Territory. How about doing something?

A one-off extra payment still leaves us short funded. It is not a solution to the legacy underfunding issue. He will need to do a lot better than that.

In my budget speech to the parliament and in past questions from the opposition, I highlighted the dire straits of the Northern Territory health budget and the mess that Territory Labor left us, when it came to the funding of health services. On coming to office we found that Health budget spending had exceeded the allocation of funds by about $300m for at least two years, a time when the now Leader of the Opposition was the Health minister.

In our budget we acted in this year of action from the CLP to provide additional base funding as part of the Health budget. We included another $100m per annum, not just a one-off, because we know that more needs to be done to improve health in the Northern Territory.

Labor had eight years to upgrade maternity services. In 2,900 days it failed to take action to improve maternity services. I am not sure how many days Labor's part-time ministers actually worked.

Natasha Fyles was the Health minister from 2016 to 2023 before she resigned. Even with a Chief Minister in the Health portfolio it seems Labor had no plans to make any sort of additional investment in or upgrade of NT maternity services. The now Opposition Leader was the Health minister after that, from Christmas 2023 until August 2024 when Territorians unceremoniously voted Labor out. We heard crickets on improving maternity services when she was minister.

Of course, with Labor you need to look at what it does when in government rather than what it says. Labor members often make grandiose statements and issue wonderful sounding press releases, but never give Territorians the things they tell us they will do.

Labor was big on talk, when it bothered to talk about maternity services at all. Labor failed on its promise when opening Palmerston Regional Hospital that babies could one day be delivered there. In an ABC article from 27 September 2017, Natasha Fyles said:

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

The ABC said:

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

What happened to the plan by Natasha Fyles? Did the now Opposition Leader take that on? It would seem not.

In another ABC story, this time from 3 June 2021, former Chief Minister Fyles said that the Labor government:

> *… is looking at returning birthing facilities to remote and regional locations, and hopes to do so within the next decade.*

The story stated:

> *Ms Fyles said investing in birthing on country services was a 'priority' …*

Again, nothing I have seen since we came to government has shown any progress on this. Labor was all about platitudes and unfilled promises, not priorities.

We remain frustrated by Healthscope's decision to end provision of maternity services early this year. The CLP government has acted to fill a void left by Healthscope, which announced in February it would close its maternity services in Darwin.

The Commonwealth is currently leading work with the receivers of Healthscope regarding the continued operations of the private hospitals, including Darwin Private Hospital. I recently met with the receivers of the private hospitals, McGrathNicol, as well as the CEO of Healthscope and Minister Butler, across various forums. The Northern Territory has made clear that the restoration of private maternity services is an essential element of what we want at the private hospital under any new ownership.

We will continue to work with the relevant parties to look to restore these services, if it is at all possible. We want parents in the Northern Territory to have options available that meet the needs of those with private health insurance.

We are also working to address the facilities offered in our public hospitals to ensure they remain fit for purpose and receive the attention they deserve.

If there is one thing to take away, I suggest that Labor gets on board and starts advocating for the $386m shortfall we face in the Northern Territory. Stop sitting back, whingeing and complaining. Get on board and start advocating for the federal Labor government to give more money for the Northern Territory.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, one thing I have not heard about in this debate is the good people of Central Australia—the southern region of the Northern Territory that continually is overlooked. People in Central Australia have babies too, believe it or not. It might be hard to have a baby in Tennant Creek. You might not be able to have a baby in poor old Tennant Creek because poor old Tennant Creek gets forgotten.

Let us be clear that we are talking about maternity services that are delivered across the Northern Territory in some way, shape or form. The good people of Alice Springs—my lot—do not have a private hospital. There were attempts at a private wing or a section of the public hospital being a private hospital. Central Australia has an amazing health network and maternity service, and our mums, dads and caregivers have access to that service.

We have not had the privilege of having a private hospital in Central Australia. Many Central Australians have to deal with the difficult question of whether to get private health insurance because we do not have a private hospital.

I always say that public is best. I am the product of a public healthcare system, my brothers and sisters were, and I am assuming many people in this Chamber had their children in a public hospital. I will always back the public system first; through and true, it is the best service that we have.

Let us be clear that when we talk about this issue it is a big wide Territory with other services out there. In the context of anywhere, women in remote communities do not have access to the private system and they have limited access to the public system to have a baby on country. There is a range of options that we could be talking about and looking at. I encourage us to reach beyond talking about the need for a private hospital

in Darwin. Yes, it is important and, yes, it is part of the healthcare network and, yes, it is probably necessary, but a bigger part of the Territory needs ongoing investment in maternity services.

I have relatives in Darwin who were pregnant and had to make a decision. They had private health insurance and said, 'I will not go to a hotel because I am not here to have a holiday; I am here to have a baby.' They went to South Australia to give birth to my little cousin.

That is the landscape we are in now. I will not say that it is anyone's fault. We have an issue, and we all need to work on fixing it. There are investments across the healthcare system regarding maternity services. Whether it is providing services in Alice Springs or ensuring that families can stay in Tennant Creek to have a baby, it is important and this is necessary work that needs to happen. I am sure the Education minister gave birth to her children in Katherine …

Mrs Hersey: We have an amazing hospital.

Mr PAECH: It is an amazing hospital.

We need get behind our public system by investing in and backing it.

The Member for Araluen always talks about the need to build a new hospital in Alice Springs—I am waiting for a 'Hear, hear!' This is important and we need to have these conversations.

We talked about Tasmania, which worked with the Commonwealth Government to get an investment. I am hearing tonight that we all want these investments to happen across the Northern Territory so that families can be close to services.

I talked to some of the new parents who had babies in the hybrid model. They said that there was an element of anxiety if there were complications in the pregnancy that required significant medical attention. My view is that having a baby in a hotel is not an appropriate position. To anyone who thinks it is a good idea for a woman to give birth to a baby in a hotel, you are stupid, because the relevant services are not there. There is no relevant support and there is no guarantee that there will be the most advanced and up-to-date medical treatment and attention.

We need to make sure that we are investing in our hospital network so that women can give birth within the appropriate surrounds.

There is an element of some uncertainty. The government said that it asked the Commonwealth for $35m so that it could ensure an additional 250 births could be catered for, then in the next breath the Health minister said that the government has catered for an additional 250 births to take place within that financial year. There is a discrepancy that people are curious about. Is the $35m to cater for an additional 250 births within that financial year or is that a cost that is required? These are questions that need responses.

The Member for Drysdale, a good friend of mine even though he is on the other side, talks about the need to have courage. We need to work together to have the courage to overcome the challenges that come with delivering maternity services in the Northern Territory.

I emphasise the point that outside of Darwin, not many people have the luxury of private health facilities. The only time they get to access private facilities is if they have private health insurance with extras. We need to be investing in our public health system so that we have amazing facilities. One day we might need to build new facilities, and Alice Springs should be first, not Darwin, when the time is right; there are some people who are happy to hear that statement.

We need to back our public healthcare system so that we can guarantee every Territorian, regardless of where they live, can have a baby in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs or on country. We need to be working to reach that aspiration. My grandmothers and mothers were born in creeks in the bush; those days have changed, but we need to ensure we can provide the appropriate supports in our regional and remote communities so that people do not have to make the long commute into town.

If a remote woman wants to have a baby in a hospital, which is her right, she often has to travel long distances. I am talking about some of my communities, such as Kintore and Docker River, which are several hundred kilometres from the nearest hospital. It is a long journey for someone who is expecting, and they are often not alone; on average about seven people come along when someone goes into hospital, which puts pressure on our social networks, public housing and community infrastructure.

If we could get to a point where we can invest in maternity services for women and families to give birth on country, that would be amazing, as would being able to return the full rights of women to give birth in Tennant Creek. Doing the work to get the public and private systems fully functioning in Darwin so that women can give birth in either system would be amazing, and investment in Katherine's healthcare services is integral. In regard to this issue we are not just talking about infrastructure; we are talking about families and staff.

Midwives, doctors and all our clinicians do an amazing job, and we need to recognise and value them and look at the challenges in attracting and retaining them. My understanding is the private system had significant challenges in retaining staff, as has our public system. That poses the question: what do we need to do so that we are attracting and retaining staff? Do we need to move away from a traditional roster system? We are hearing that our agency nursing system is exploding. Most people are transitioning to that because they can pick and choose their hours. Some come in intensively and do three weeks of midwifery, nursing or practising and not have to work again for another few months. It raises the question about equity for nursing staff who want to be part of the public system and work with the Department of Health, but rostering is an issue. We need to revisit our roster systems in public healthcare so that we can transition people away from agency nursing and bring them back into the public service and into regional and remote locations.

The Alice Springs Hospital is a position I can speak from; I was born in that hospital, as were my family members. Every day that I visit constituents after they have given birth at that hospital I see amazing staff who love what they do, families being supported and great infrastructure, but I hear from the practitioners, 'Hey, this infrastructure needs some work'. Madam Speaker, you will appreciate this. Some of the nurses I have spoken to said that you can renovate something only so much until it becomes putting lipstick on a pig or glitter on a turd. You have to, at some point, have an infrastructure plan that will deliver significant refurbishment and reform and new areas. The hospital is getting old and will require an upgrade at some point. We should be having conversations about what that will look like on the timeline of the infrastructure master plan.

Alice Springs has an amazing midwifery team that visits people who do home births. The team does a great job. We have so much support there and we need to look at how we work around the agency nursing and transition people back into the public system. That is where we can drive the most change and see that investment.

I am hopeful. The Member for Barkly spoke tonight. This is an issue for all the Territory's federal representatives. It is not often that I give all four credit, but this is an issue that is on the radar of all four of our federal members.

It goes beyond talking about the private system. I love the public system and will back it every day. We need to have a bigger conversation about what maternity services look like in the future for remote communities, regional centres, towns and our capital city. This is an important issue. We need to acknowledge that important work goes on in that system.

We hear stories about people giving birth. I know of a woman giving birth a couple of weeks ago in the reception area of a community-based organisation because she could not get to a health centre in time. In remote communities when women go through labour unexpectedly we have to rely on our air retrieval services. I acknowledge them, particularly CareFlight and the Flying Doctor, which often have to fly into those communities and work under duress and pressure, particularly having families on the plane midair when women are going through contractions. It is a difficult space.

Tonight is a moment for us to all reflect on and honour everyone in the healthcare space who does their job, regardless of who is in government. They turn up each day. I value them and make sure we pay tribute to them. Of course, I support them in their quest for fair pay and conditions. They are worth their weight in gold. I congratulate and thank everyone who has spoken, particularly the Member for Daly, the shadow Health minister, for this opportunity for all of us to recognise the amazing contributions that people are making and the work that needs to be done across the Northern Territory.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, that was leadership, bipartisanship, good energy and what an MPI should be all about from the Member for Gwoja. We call him the shadow Opposition Leader, but he is the Member for Gwoja and I look forward to working opposite him one day.

Territorians are sick and tired of hearing—they heard it multiple times in Question Time this week and now in this MPI—the Member for Daly and the Labor opposition talking down the hardworking nurses, obstetricians, midwives and doctors who work every day to keep mums and bubs safe …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Mr MACKAY: Make up a point of order, mate. You cannot handle the truth.

Madam SPEAKER: Take your seat, Member for Goyder.

Mr YOUNG: Standing Order 31; I find it quite disorderly that the Member for Goyder has made a personal reflection on me, and what he was suggesting is untrue. I ask him to retract that. I did not say that I do not support health workers. He is misleading the parliament. Under Standing Order 31 it is disorderly because he has made a personal reflection on me which is not true.

A member: You reflected on the Health minister a lot.

A member: You cannot just make up stuff, even though you are in government.

Mr YOUNG: You cannot make up stuff.

Madam SPEAKER: All of you, stop talking. In the scheme of things, I think that is a pretty light call for disorderly. I started this week off on Tuesday morning by saying that there should not be any personal imputations, so I take that on board. There were some personal imputations there, but I think, generally, the Member for Goyder was attacking your debate. I am not sure that it was overly personal, but if you have taken it personally, I suggest that the Member for Goyder apologise, and move on and put it to bed.

Mr MACKAY: I withdraw.

Mr Young: Thank you; I will accept.

Mr MACKAY: What Territorians are sick and tired of hearing is instead of looking at the issues and attacking the actual problems—we spoke yesterday about the great man Terry Baldwin who said there are no problems, only challenges and solutions—those opposite keep trying to bring up the problems instead of working together and taking the leadership of the Member for Gwoja, who just said that he will work with his federal colleagues, and I welcome that.

Our hospitals are delivering—quite literally, we are talking about maternity services. Our nurses and midwives in the public health service, the CLP government and our Minister for Health are delivering. But what do we get from those opposite? Negative doom and gloom.

The Member for Daly gets up and says that this is above politics; he said it three or four times. If it above politics then stop playing politics. Pick up the phone, call the Member for Solomon, the Member for Lingiari and Senator McCarthy and say, 'Get on with the job of funding the NT health system properly'.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Stop the interjections, please.

Mr MACKAY: He says that it is not about sides but spends half his speech personally attacking our great Health minister, the Member for Barkly. You cannot call for unity in one breath then throw mud in the next. That is not leadership; that is hypocrisy.

The federal Labor government is underfunding the NT health system to the tune of more than $350m a year. Madam Speaker, earlier this week you raised the important matter of investing in Alice Springs Hospital, and I back your calls for that. I understand it is important to have that hospital.

I believe Alice Springs Hospital delivers in the neighbourhood of 600 to 800 babies a year. In Royal Darwin Hospital more than 2,150 babies are born every year. That is nearly 3,000 Territorians added every year. That is not collapse; that is capacity. That is not failure; that is strength. Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital are doing the heavy lifting.

Unfortunately, the private system is not working. Healthscope's closure of the private maternity ward was not unique. In the past eight years 12 private hospitals across Australia have stopped delivering babies. They stopped in Cairns, Bunbury and Hobart at the same time as us. Why? It is because the number of private births has dropped, costs have skyrocketed, insurance has become unaffordable and there are workforce shortages everywhere.

We went from having 1,000 births per year in Darwin Private Hospital to about 260 births per year. That is not sustainable. I see that as less of a reflection of the private system not being adequate and more as our NT public health service being good enough. It is good enough for 90% of births in the Territory. I back those people who do a great job at the hospital every day instead of talking them down as though the only option is for a private birth.

When Healthscope stepped out, we stepped up. We did not sit around and whinge and complain; we acted. We worked with NT Health, private insurers, doctors and midwives, and we delivered practical solutions. We created the Mercure maternity retreat, a private-style recovery package for new mums.

Although I have been praising the Member for Gwoja, I clarify for the record that no births were taking place in the hotel. Mothers were giving birth in the public hospital and then being taken for an after-care package at the hotel; that is, hotel stays, midwife visits, 24/7 phone support and everything they need to rest and recover. We created the 'return home sooner' package, which includes support at home, meals, cleaning and care for mother and baby.

By October, 53 Territory families had already used these new packages, and they said thank you. They said that the care was outstanding, the staff were professional and the midwives were incredible. The difference between the CLP government and the Labor opposition is that when the private sector bailed, we built a better model.

I thank all the midwives, nurses, obstetricians, doctors and everyone else involved in delivering babies and working in the health system. These people are the backbone of this transition. They have worked double shifts seven days a week, visiting homes, caring for mothers and supporting families. While Labor has been playing politics, they have been doing the work. It would have been great for the Member for Daly to reflect on that work. They deserve our gratitude, not the garbage coming from those opposite. I commend our frontline heroes and thank them. Labor criticises their output and talks them down. The Member for Daly might not think they are doing a great job, but I do.

Let us talk about why private hospitals are struggling federally and the federal Labor cost-of-living crisis.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 31; disorderly words. I never said that I did not think our healthcare workers are doing a good job. He has personally reflected on me. I did not say that in my speech. I ask you to consider asking him to withdraw that. I did not once say that. I value our health workers, as all our members in this Chamber do.

Do not try to bring that in here for politics. I ask you to withdraw.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, you have made your point; please sit down.

It is far easier for you to withdraw, Member for Goyder.

Mr MACKAY: I will withdraw. There is a saying about people who like to dish it out and they cannot take it—in general, I am not referring to any member of this Chamber—and that is a glass jaw. I can take it.

Let us talk about the cost-of-living crisis under the federal Labor government. Families cannot afford private health cover anymore. Premiums are up, the excess is up and the out-of-pocket costs are through the roof. Under federal Labor people are paying more and getting less, so they are dropping private insurance and that is driving private hospital closures. It is not NT Health that caused this, or the Minister for Health; it is Labor's economic mismanagement. Therefore, when the Member for Daly points his finger at us, he is pointing the wrong way; he should be pointing at Canberra.

Our public system is not broken; it is strong and getting stronger. We expanded the midwifery group practice and strengthened the home birth services. We are reviewing maternity models to keep them modern, safe and sustainable. In Alice, Katherine, Gove and for the bush, our hospitals and clinics keep delivering. We do not walk away from rural and remote families; we walk beside them.

Before Labor members gets back on their high horse, let us remind them of their record. The Member for Gwoja raised the point that you cannot give birth in Tennant Creek Hospital. I know he was not in this Chamber when it did that, but the Labor Party closed the public maternity ward in Tennant Creek in 2006. Twenty years ago, a Labor government decided it was not worth having a hospital in Tennant Creek where women could give birth, so mothers in Tennant Creek and the Barkly have to make the trip to Alice Springs

Hospital. That is Labor's legacy in regional maternity care—closure, neglect and excuses. Now Labor members have the gall to lecture us.

Members interjecting.

Ms Uibo: Shame job.

Mr MACKAY: I note the Leader of the Opposition's interjection. It is a shame job what the Labor Party did to the Territory 20 years ago; I concur.

Madam SPEAKER: Stop the interjections, please.

Mr MACKAY: Maternity services in the Northern Territory are strong because our people are strong, our workforce is strong and our government backs them every day. We did not walk away when Healthscope left; we stepped up. We did not talk down our hospitals; we backed them. We did not attack our midwives, doctors and obstetricians and say that they are not doing enough in the NT health system; we praised them.

While Labor talks about being above politics, the Member for Daly keeps dragging it into the gutter with personal attacks, political spin and endless negativity. If he really believes it is above politics, he should get on the phone to his federal Labor colleagues and demand the funding our Territory health system deserves and needs.

Until then, we will keep doing what we have always done—getting on with the job and backing our hospitals, our staff, Territorians and Territory families. When Healthscope stepped out, the CLP government stepped up. That is the difference between us and them.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, no matter how intense it gets in this Chamber, it will never match the ferocity I witnessed when my wife delivered our two beautiful children into this world.

For any man who has had the absolute honour—I mean that; it is one of the most beautiful things to ever watch—to watch a woman bring a child into the world, it will change you forever. I promise you that. When my first daughter was born—in a room full of people because a few things went wrong—dad was the only one crying, and quite a lot actually because it was such an amazing moment. The midwife was patting me on the back. The core of what I want to get at is that watching someone you love bring your child into the world is the most magical moment. I do not think I have ever felt love like it.

To all the mothers, regardless of the situation that we find ourselves in, I wish you all the best in your pregnancies. To all the dads, get around it and get amongst it. I helped deliver both my girls and it is well worth it.

Before I move on, I will touch on the Member for Gwoja's visuals. They will stay with me, which is probably good, whenever the Alice Springs Hospital situation comes up.

We are in the same boat. What I mean by that is members of our government are wishing to grow their families. I wish to grow my family, and I want to be able to give my wife the choice to go public or private. We literally are in this with you. We are Territorians as well and we want every mother in the NT to have choice.

I am going to an event soon which is a community forum for mothers on this issue. I have been invited by some Defence mothers who know my link with Defence. Obviously, there is a Defence impact as well. Mothers with the ADF will get that private option, which is great. It is quite an attraction and something you want in your posting. I look forward to going to that forum.

I have a few questions about when we found about Healthscope. I genuinely wonder whether the former government knew about this towards the end of its term. I put that question out there. I do not know the answer, but it is a worthy question.

How did we get into this situation? Over the eight years of the previous government the number of births at the private hospital went from about 700 a year to 200-and-something. That is a massive decrease in the private utility of that service. A few things would drive that. Economy would have a large part to do with it—the soaring cost to young families. It was an immense cost in the Northern Territory. At a time when we have a plummeting birthrate and we want to encourage families and make it as easy as possible for people to grow their families, we saw that big decrease. That does not surprise me, as our economy went down the

drain. It is no surprise to anyone. Over the last eight years we had a stalled economy. We were going backwards. You see it across different sectors, and that plays a large part of it.

When we came into government we saw that a holistic approach was needed. In looking at what we need to fix in the Northern Territory we saw it as a symptom. The Northern Territory was ill and symptoms were popping up everywhere. The closure of the maternity suite is another symptom of that sick Northern Territory.

That is why our government is here and why the Chief Minister as the Police minister is cracking down with law and order to make the Territory safer so that we can attract more doctors and families feel safe to come here, which will further grow the economy.

It is why the Minister for Mining and Energy is working on increasing our revenue and growing mines and making them easier to start. Our Minister for Major Events is trying to get more major events here to bring more tourists which will bring in workers and grow the economy.

Our Asian Relations minister travelled all over Southeast Asia to reconnect with countries we have not had connections with since the 1990s because Labor threw that away. We are going back to our closest neighbours to increase trade to boost this economy so that we can bring back choice.

The Education minister ensures there are pathways so that Territorians can go into the health field knowing the nuances, intricacies and culture so that we can fill those positions ourselves.

The Treasurer has been left a horrendous problem and is trying to balance that. He wants the deficit brought down so that he can have a budget book that can properly fund our public institutions to deliver maternity services.

We have seen huge reforms from the minister for Lands and Planning to cut red tape and ensure we can get this economy moving. The Minister for People, Sports and Culture ensures that people of the Northern Territory have access to sporting fields to stay healthy and enjoy life.

What I am getting at is that we have a holistic approach to this problem. This will all help the Health minister to ensure that Territorian women have choice.

Healthscope is a private company. It is important that the Opposition Leader clarifies the Labor Party's stance. The Member for Daly said, 'Healthscope has gone under. The Treasurer controls the money, so what will he do?' The people of the Territory and I need to know whether NT Labor has a policy that taxpayers' money should be going to national or multinational health companies to bail them out. This is an important question because it is a significant policy point. I want the Opposition Leader to clarify Labor's position regarding taxpayer money and private companies. There was a strong insinuation by the Member for Daly and it needs to be clarified.

Mr Young: You are in government.

Mr HOWE: We are in government, Member for Daly. The role of the government is to ensure that our public system is working well. As I highlighted, every minister is doing their part to grow the economy and make a healthier Northern Territory so that there is demand for the choice.

I do not believe on principle that public funds should be used to bail out large companies. We do not do it for small and medium businesses. At the crux of it is that important question, and the Member for Daly purposely avoided raising that because he would rather stir up division and use women who are waiting in uncertainty than come out and say whether he supports a Healthscope bailout or wants investment in the public maternity services that this government is entrusted with.

Moving on, federally there is the shocking figure of a $386m shortfall. The Member for Daly also spoke of how great the Commonwealth funding is for us. I trust the Member for Daly's integrity, which means the Member for Solomon might not have been fully honest with the Member for Daly. We are the most underfunded jurisdiction in the country; with the national average coming between 36% and 37%, the NT is at the bottom with 31.8%. Where is the $386m? Now that the Member for Daly knows this, will he contact the Member for Solomon this goose season and ask him whether we will get that money? That is an important question. I would be keen to hear whether the Opposition Leader will support a call from all Territorians for us to get a fully funded health system and not be at the bottom of the pile.

I appreciate the Member for Gwoja's discussions regarding the bush, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and all the communities and the amount of work that goes into maternity services there and that the vast majority of the NT does not have a private option. I, too, give my thanks to all the staff.

To all the mothers who are concerned and to all who are planning to become mothers over the next few years, know that our government and the Health minister, Steve Edgington, will do everything within our power to ensure there is a private maternity option in the Northern Territory. We will pull every lever we can to ensure that option is available to you. We want choice. This Assembly is responsible for delivering an excellent public maternity system, and I will back that the whole way and do everything within my power to make sure you have the choice between a public and private system. That is what we want for Territorians, and it is what we want for Territory mothers.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, many people have shared stories with me and come to me with issues to do with maternity care, so I will share some of them tonight. I acknowledge and thank the incredible people who work in our health system—midwives, nurses, doctors and support staff—who show up every day and given their all, often in incredibly tough circumstances.

I have been lucky enough to have two babies in the Territory—one at Royal Darwin Hospital and one at home through the community midwifery program. I also had a partner who the midwife was taking more care of than me because he was—you know, big things happening. I still remember the names and faces of the midwives who looked after me. I will never forget their care, calm and kindness, and many others carry these same memories, because when maternity care is done right it stays with you for life.

We have heard a lot inside and outside the Chamber about the closure of the private maternity ward and, in my mind, its alarming replacement with a hotel. However, what we have not discussed much is the state of birthing services in RDH and the conditions people are forced to give birth in. The situation we have …

Mr Edgington: Stop making it up—no idea!

J DAVIS: I beg your pardon, minister.

Madam SPEAKER: No interjections.

Mr Edgington: Nobody is having babies in hotels.

J DAVIS: No, but I repeat that the private maternity ward has been replaced with a hotel—not to have babies, but that is what happens for women after they come out of the hospital, if they choose it.

The situation that we have arrived in is caused by underfunding and chronic understaffing. Chronic understaffing is stopping the homebirth team from operating outside nine to five hours, stopping the full use of the birthing suite at RDH and stopping life-saving continuity of care—sometimes, women were telling me, with tragic circumstances.

RDH does not have to run understaffed. The government could fund the hospital appropriately tomorrow. The question is not about money; it is about priorities. If we have enough money to supersize our prisons to the tune of half a billion dollars, we have enough money to fund healthcare properly. If we have enough money to subsidise the NT fossil fuel industry, we have enough money to fund healthcare properly.

The Chief Minister today proudly said that she thinks the government should stay out of people's lives and be there in the background providing security so that if you need to call the police or an ambulance they will come and help you and if you need to go to hospital you will be looked after and you will be safe. According to many of my constituents that is not happening.

Underfunding of maternity care is symptomatic of underfunding of all healthcare in the Northern Territory. We cannot have a healthy society if we do not have healthy people. Healthcare is a foundational right in our society. If the government cannot look after us when we need to go to the hospital because it has starved the hospitals of funding, we need to think hard about the priorities it is choosing for us.

I will take the time to amplify the voices of a group of people who have been coming together to share their birth stories and are calling on the government to make critical changes to birthing services in Darwin and the broader Northern Territory. I thank one of my constituents for bringing this group to my attention and sharing its work with me.

This group shared the following on 7 October in a media release:

'According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, babies in the Northern Territory are dying at a rate more than twice the national neonatal loss average. At the same time mothers at Royal Darwin Hospital are facing conditions that no woman in a capital city should expect—labouring in hospital corridors, recovering from caesarean surgery without air conditioning, receiving ultrasounds on waiting room lounges, sharing bathrooms, while in labour, soiled with previous patients' blood or waiting days for essential care because of staff shortages.

'They are losing babies because of a broken system that fails to provide continuity of care and describe not receiving basic dignity after loss. Grieving mothers whose babies have died are being placed to recover on postnatal wards alongside mothers with live newborns. Others describe devastating delays in diagnosis, limited bereavement services and follow-up due to fragmented care.

'We are tired of excuses. In 2025 giving birth in the Northern Territory has become a lottery—safe and supported if you are lucky, but too often traumatic and sometimes tragic.

'On Saturday 4 October around 100 women and men, including parents, birthing people, midwives, doctors and healthcare advocates, gathered in Darwin for a closed community forum to speak openly about their experiences of maternity care across public, private and homebirth settings. The stories shared were raw and confronting, exposing failures across every stage of maternity care from early pregnancy to labour to postnatal support.'

Some of these stories are distressing, but I am reading them out from the group's media release. One person shared:

'My baby died shortly after birth. I was placed in a postnatal ward surrounded by the cries of healthy babies. There are limited bereavement services.'

Another shared:

'I have had eight pregnancies and two children. With my history of loss I tried to access the midwifery group practice at 11 to 12 weeks for early support, but I was told I was not eligible. The early pregnancy clinic does not start until around 18 weeks—far too late for someone like me. I lost that pregnancy at 14 weeks. Women like me fall through the cracks before care even starts.'

Another shared:

'I went to hospital four times with decreased fetal movement and was dismissed each time. At 37 weeks my baby was stillborn. In my next pregnancy I was given proper continuity of care and monitoring, and my baby survived. Continuity is not a luxury; it is life or death.'

Another person shared:

'I had my baby six weeks ago. It was an unplanned C-section. When I got to the room there was no air conditioning or fan. They gave me a couple of wet towels to put on my neck and told me to point the air purifier at my face for a bit of relief. I stayed one night.'

Another said:

'She was born at Royal Darwin Hospital. They said that she was healthy, and we were sent home. Weeks later I was told the wait to see a paediatrician was one year. By the time we got a diagnosis of Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 1 it was too late.'

A forum attendee shared this:

'We used to offer choice—private obstetrics, homebirth, midwifery group practice, a functioning birth centre—now every option is being stripped away.'

The release from this forum went on to say:

'Healthcare workers backed their stories with clinical evidence. Workforce shortages, insecure contracts and casualisation are driving skilled midwives and obstetricians out of the system. Meanwhile critical

infrastructure is underused, including the birth centre and Palmerston hospital's maternity unit, both of which could relieve pressure immediately if properly activated.

'Political inaction has consequences. Despite repeated warnings Minister for Health Steve Edgington has taken no meaningful action, relying instead on the line that he has requested federal funding. Meanwhile services continue to deteriorate, and families pay the price.

'Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro must now intervene. This crisis is happening on her watch, and the Territory's women, families and healthcare workers expect leadership, not silence.'

This is what Territory families are asking for. Their four key asks reflect the 2019 Woman-centred Care: Strategic Directions for Australian Maternity Services. These are:

1. choice in birth—women should be able to choose a setting that is safest and right for them—midwifery-led care, homebirth or private pathways

2. continuity of care—women deserve trusted caregivers before, during and after birth; this model reduces interventions, improves outcomes and saves lives

3. staffing and support—midwives and clinicians need secure full-time roles and proper investment in incentives to stay in the Territory; without this safe care is impossible

4. community voices in decision-making—women, families and clinicians must have a formal seat at the decision-making table to ensure services meet real needs.

This group of incredibly brave people sharing these personal stories and calling for change has sent invitations to all members of this Assembly to attend the next Birth Stories forum on 1 November at 12 pm at 66 Smith Street. As the forum organisers say:

'These stories are not statistics; they are lived experiences of loss, trauma and resilience. It is time for our leaders to listen in person and act. For far too long, the NT Government, the Department of Health and RDH's executive team have failed to act. Palmerston Regional Hospital sits underutilised, families are left to endure unsafe conditions, and babies are dying at double the national rate.

'We are tired of excuses. In 2025 giving birth in the Northern Territory has become a lottery—safe and supported if you are lucky, but too often traumatic and sometimes tragic. Chief Minister Finocchiaro must show leadership where her Health minister has failed. The Territory's maternity crisis is a test of her government's commitment to women, families and the future of the Northern Territory. Enough talk; the time for action is now.'

I shared this media release from the forum so that everyone in this Chamber can hear it. I support the this group's call on the government to uphold the four recommendations of Woman-centred Care: Strategic Directions for Australian Maternity Services.

I close with the words of one of the forum attendees, a senior clinician who said that yesterday's problem becomes today's emergency because no-one is responsible end to end. That costs lives.

The time for excuses, federal blame-shifting and bureaucratic inaction is over. Territory families are not asking for the impossible; they are asking for what the Chief Minister promised—that when they go to hospital they will be looked after and they will be safe. They are saying now that is not true. Every day the government delays is another day that people are put at risk. I support their call for the Health minister, Chief Minister and all MLAs to attend the Birth Stories forum in November, listen to these families, look them in the eye and then come back to this Chamber and tell us why half a billion dollars for prisons is a priority but ensuring safe births and proper maternity care is not.

Mr CHARLS (People, Sport and Culture): Madam Speaker, the state of maternity services in the Northern Territory is a deeply important issue that affects women, families and the health workforce across our community. The birth of a child should be a moment of joy and hope, not a source of anxiety and uncertainty.

The recent decision by Healthscope to close private maternity services in Darwin has understandably caused concern among families and health professionals. For many years that private facility provided valued care and choice for Territorians. Its closure represents the loss of not only a service but also an option. I know many families are feeling that personally.

It is important to understand why this happened. Healthscope, which operates Darwin's private hospital, has been open about the reasons. Over the past decade private birth numbers have steadily declined from about 700 in 2013 to fewer than 300 in 2024. That reduction in birth numbers made it increasingly difficult to keep the service financially viable. There were also local workforce shortages, particularly in experienced paediatricians and senior midwives, which made safe and consistent staffing more difficult. Added to this were rising operational and compliance costs, from locum expenses to insurance and indemnity requirements. Taken together, these pressures led to the commercial judgement to close the service. Although we may understand the reasons, that does not make it any easier for the families affected or for the staff who have dedicated years of their careers to supporting Territory mothers and babies.

I take this moment to acknowledge and thank the midwives, nurses, doctors and support teams at Royal Darwin Hospital who have stepped up in recent months to meet the increased demand. The transition has not been simple, but the dedication of the team at RDH has been outstanding. I have worked at Royal Darwin Hospital, and I know the calibre of people who serve there. They are compassionate, professional and deeply committed to their patients.

As someone who has spent much of my professional life in health, I also know the emotional load that comes with this kind of work. I was trained as both a registered nurse and a registered midwife in India. Although I am registered in Australia as a registered nurse, my heart has never left the practice of midwifery. It is one of the most challenging yet rewarding areas of healthcare; it is about bringing new life into the world, care, reassurance and trust.

As a parent I have experienced this too. My child was born in Darwin Private Hospital and many of my friends, neighbours and constituents had their children at Royal Darwin Hospital. The stories I hear from them are filled with gratitude for the skill, compassion and dedication of the staff. They speak of not only excellent clinical care but also human kindness.

We all recognise that there are real challenges in the health sector—workforce shortages, the high cost of recruitment and the strain on services with a growing population. These challenges are not unique to the Northern Territory; they are being felt across Australia and, indeed, across the world.

However, what matters most is that this government is taking action. The Minister for Health and the Royal Darwin Hospital leadership team are working closely to ensure that the transition following Healthscope's decision does not compromise the safety or quality of care for mothers and babies. Our government is committed to supporting the staff, strengthening public maternity services and looking at long-term solutions. That includes exploring ways to rebuild private maternity care in Darwin.

Territorians deserve choice. We know that private and public systems can complement each other. A balanced model provides flexibility for families and helps to relieve pressure on the public system. We must continue to create an environment where private providers can operate sustainably and be supported by strong workforce pipelines, training programs and local recruitment initiatives.

This is a time for collaboration, not blame. The opposition has raised this matter, and that is fair, but we must all recognise that finger-pointing will not solve the issue. Supporting mothers and babies requires teamwork across government, the health sector and the community. This government's focus is on solutions—listening, acting and strengthening the system.

To our nurses, midwives and doctors, thank you. You have shouldered an enormous task with professionalism and grace.

To the families impacted by these changes, we hear you. We understand that this is not an easy time, and we are working to ensure you continue to receive safe, high-quality care.

As a nurse, a trained midwife, a father and a member of this Assembly, I believe that every Territory mother deserves the best start for her baby, every midwife deserves support and every family deserves care they can trust. This government is standing with our health workers and our families to ensure that new life in the Territory continues to begin with safety, dignity and hope. I commend the government's ongoing work, and I thank all those who continue to serve in this vital area of care.

I take on a couple of points discussed in this Chamber earlier. There was a discussion about casualisation of the workforce. I worked with the NT public service in NT Health for nearly 10 years, being in a senior leadership role in the last three to four years of my career. All I can say is that there were nearly 30% full-time vacant positions in the psychiatric area I used to oversee, which was similar in other areas as well. I do not

know where the information is coming from that the government is trying to casualise the workforce. That is not the reason we cannot attract trained or skilled clinicians and staff members to the Northern Territory.

I know it is easy to say that we need more staff numbers—clinicians and skilled support staff—but the government needs to provide the environment to increase the population as well. That is why this government has the three key pillars of reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring lifestyle. Many say that we are repeating that, but there is a reason why we have these three key pillars.

Once we reduce crime it will improve how people feel about the Territory. They will feel safe. The people who are here will not leave the Territory because of the crime issue. Once we deliver on rebuilding the economy, on which the Chief Minister and the Treasurer are working hard, and the economy is flourishing and moving forward, the teenagers and uni students who are here will not leave the Territory; we will retain them. We clearly see the issues with the hospital delivery numbers dropping over the last 10 years, from 2013 to 2024. One of those issues is affordability. For an ordinary individual, even if two members of the family are working, it is hard to afford. There are various factors. The last pillar is restoring lifestyle.

The government has the three key pillars, which we are all working on, because we are sure that with these three pillars we can address the population issue and have a flourishing economy and a good lifestyle which will attract and retain the skilled workforce we need. That will not be an issue for the health system in the future.

At this point in time the government will support the Minister for Health because he is doing a great job advocating for us in Canberra. As we have discussed in the Chamber, we need all levels of government to work together. We need the strong voice of our federal representatives in Canberra. It is always good to blame each other in politics, but for matters like health we need to make sure there is a bipartisan approach. We stand behind Minister Edgington and NT Health.

I once again thank all the hardworking clinicians on the front line who make sure they are providing that service for Territorians where it is needed.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak about a crisis that is unfolding in our maternity services. It is a crisis that affects every family in the Northern Territory, but one that often falls heavily on the shoulders of First Nations women and their families.

In June there was a newspaper article which shared the story of a local woman in Darwin and her experience giving birth at Darwin hospital. Her experience should, I hope, push this government to action. She arrived at RDH in active labour. I think this story has been shared here tonight. She spent three hours labouring in a brightly lit, crowded waiting room with no privacy. When an obstetrician arrived there was nowhere to take her. Two delivery rooms sat empty waiting for cleaners and the downstairs birthing suite—purpose-built for exactly these situations; it is a beautiful birthing suite—stood unstaffed that day and could not be used. This woman received her ultrasound whilst having contractions lying on a couch in the waiting room.

In the news article, this woman said:

> *Everything that was communicated was 'We can cope with the additional numbers', and they clearly couldn't …*
>
> *It's not a public versus private thing. No woman should be labouring for three hours in a waiting room.*

She is right. This is not about public versus private; this is about a health system that has been starved of resources while women and babies pay the price.

I make it clear that I am in no way criticising any healthcare workers at either of the hospitals. The midwives, nurses, obstetricians and support staff do heroic work—as many people here have said—every day under sometimes impossible constraints. The problem is not the dedication of our healthcare workers; it is that we are asking them to do an impossible job without giving them the resources, staffing and infrastructure needed to provide the standard of care that they want to give and that women deserve.

For the record I have birthed at RDH, and the private hospital before it closed, and I have only wonderful things to say about the staff and service at both those places.

I make the point that in some of the debate we have heard tonight and when criticising a minister or problems in the sector that they oversee, we get this hysterical response sometimes from the other side about how we

are attacking public servants. It is getting quite ridiculous, and it is a bad-faith argument. The Member for Goyder was practically beating his chest about how much he backs the public servants and everyone else does not. It is ridiculous. I am talking specifically because I back public servants; I want them to be safe in their jobs and to have all the resources they need. You can critique a system and the failings it has without it being an attack on the workers. I wish you would stop saying this bad-faith argument about everyone who tries to critique something. No-one is trying to bash the public servants. We know the hard job they do. Many of us have partners who are public servants, nurses, doctors, ambo workers, police and all those kinds of things. I wanted to make that clear.

The closure of the Darwin Private Hospital maternity services this year has understandably caused concern. As we spoke about, it was the only private maternity service in Darwin and many women valued having that choice. I respect that as someone who has had that choice, and I understand the disappointment these families are feeling.

I also think that this moment invites us to consider broader questions about the maternity care landscape. These are things I think the Member for Drysdale touched on. The fertility rate is hitting record lows. We are having fewer babies, but at the same time we are in the midst of a significant cost-of-living crisis. It is not really a choice when people do not have the money to afford private care.

In this context perhaps we should be asking what it would look like if we invested in making our public maternity services so excellent, well resourced and responsive that the question of private versus public becomes less about access to quality of care and more genuinely about personal preference. What if Royal Darwin Hospital had enough midwives, delivery rooms and staff so that no woman ever laboured in a waiting room again?

Once again I am not here to criticise families who choose private care or suggest that choice should not exist, as I have had to be in that position. However, the private hospital closure opens up a conversation about whether we have been underinvesting in our public system and whether stronger public services might serve the vast majority of Territory families better regardless of where they choose to give birth.

While we debate the finer points of private hospital closures, First Nations women across the Territory face a maternity care crisis of an entirely different magnitude. The statistics mentioned by the Member for Johnston are stark and shameful. First Nations mothers die at 3.7 times the rate of non-Indigenous Australian women. Perinatal deaths are twice as high. Aboriginal women in the Northern Territory experience pre-term birth at more than double the rate of non-Indigenous women—16% compared with 7%. These are not just statistics; these are incredible mothers and precious babies, and they are families torn apart by preventable deaths and complications.

At the heart of this crisis is the systemic denial of culturally safe community-based maternity care. For 60,000 years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have birthed their babies on traditional lands supported by family, cultural and community, and that changed with colonisation. Today the majority of First Nations women in the NT are forced to evacuate from their remote communities at around 37 weeks of pregnancy to wait alone in regional centres or Darwin separated from family and cultural support networks, sometimes alone even from their partners.

Birthing on country is not just a romantic notion; it is an evidence-based solution backed by decades of research and recommended in national policies since 2012. Birthing on country is described as community based and governed, allows for incorporation of traditional practice, involves a connection with land and country and incorporates a holistic definition of health. We have the evidence. There have been groundbreaking qualitative studies published this year involving First Nations women from remote communities, and they found the crucial role family and community play in the wellbeing of pregnant and birthing women and that healthcare providers can build trust through continuity of care, cultural competency and genuine partnerships with communities.

We know that continuity of care programs for First Nations women result in greater acceptability of care, greater satisfaction, improvements in antenatal attendance, better monitoring and management of risk factors, lower rates of pre-term birth, higher infant birth weight and lower perinatal morbidity and mortality. However, we continue to force women from their communities—away from their families, cultures and continuous midwifery care—and wonder why the outcomes remain so poor.

On a personal level it breaks my heart that women have to give birth hundreds, or sometimes thousands, of kilometres from their families, their country and often their partners. In Kalkarindji recently I had wonderful experiences talking to women. I got to visit birthing trees and meet some of the women who were birthed

under those trees. I heard how devastating it can be for heavily pregnant women, especially first-time mothers, to leave their partners to birth in the city. I desperately want this to change. If we want any advancements in the outcomes for First Nations babies and a reduction in pre-term illnesses, we have to get people birthing back on country.

There is a group of Yolngu women in Galiwinku who are leading the charge. They are establishing a remote birthing-on-country maternity service. They are calling for evidence-based Western medical maternity care integrated with cultural care and practices delivered by skilled cultural caretakers—local women—for pregnant women.

The Australian Government has committed funding—$45m over four years—under the Healthy Mums, Healthy Bubs initiative and $22.5m for a birthing-on-country centre of excellence, but this is a fraction of what is needed. Unfortunately, the NT Government is nowhere to be seen.

That brings me to the government's priorities. Nowhere in the budget announcements made earlier in the year did I see specific funding for maternity service improvements. Nowhere was there funding for birthing-on-country services or a commitment to expanding programs such as strong women worker programs or midwifery continuity-of-care models.

Obviously, these issues did not appear in the last 12 months, and I acknowledge that. Decades of health underfunding by both major parties at all levels has resulted in this situation, so people in here need to stop throwing stones in glass houses. However, the CLP is now in charge and its response so far has been to prioritise punishment over prevention, incarceration over health and tough-on-crime rhetoric over the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies. We are spending nearly half a billion dollars on Corrections while women labour in waiting rooms and Aboriginal women and mothers die at nearly four times the rate of other Australians. Our priorities are fundamentally wrong.

These are some of the things we need, which many groups across the Territory are calling for:

- properly staff Royal Darwin Hospital maternity services so that every birthing suite and delivery room can be used
- increase midwife-to-patient ratios to safe levels
- expand the midwifery group practice (MGP), which I was lucky enough to be a part of in my second pregnancy and birth; those women are incredible
- ensure that no woman ever labours in a waiting room again
- fund the establishment of birthing-on-country services across remote NT and expand existing programs like the strong women worker positions
- provide funding for training programs so that First Nations women can be supported by cultural caretakers during pregnancy and birth
- reform the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme to allow all women—not just first-time mothers—to have an escort when they must evacuate for birth.

We are at a crossroads. We can continue down the path we are on—underfunding our public maternity services and ignoring the desperate pleas of First Nations women for birthing-on-country services—and accept that the maternal and infant death rates for First Nations people will remain shamefully high, or we can choose a different path. We can properly fund a public health system so that every woman, regardless of income, receives excellent care. We can listen to Aboriginal women and support them to give birth on country surrounded by family, culture and community. We can make the Northern Territory a leader in maternal and infant health instead of being in the crisis that it is.

The woman I mentioned earlier who laboured in the waiting room said that she intends to write to all the powers-that-be and hopes it will mean that it will not happen to anyone else. We are the powers-that-be. We have the power to change this. The question is: does this government have the will to do so?

Our mothers, babies and Aboriginal women who have endured centuries of dispossession and discrimination deserve so much better than the system we are offering now. It is time to do better and act. It is time to put the health of mothers and babies ahead of political pointscoring and budget cuts.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, important contributions have been made on this important topic brought to the House by the Member for Daly, the shadow minister for Health. I thank him for this opportunity to speak on maternity services in the Northern Territory.

We heard from the minister about the government's perspective and what it is doing or not doing. I know that this will remain an important topic for Territorians, particularly mums, the health providers and service providers who support mums and families and the families who are getting ready to have a little one, are planning to have a little one or have lost a little one. The gravity of decision-making for the government is huge, recognising the tit for tat we have been having for most of this discussion about who is responsible for it. As the Labor opposition we firmly want this topic to be top of mind. We do not want it disregarded, disrespected or deflected.

We heard the government's plans, and the Health minister outlined what the government has done. We urge the government to do more to work on those plans and to listen to the forum. The Member for Johnston outlined the details of the next forum, which will be held in Darwin. It is a grassroots forum, led by Territorians, particularly Territory mums and health workers, who want a spotlight shone on maternity services in the NT, particularly in the Top End.

I do not need to repeat any of the history. In earnest, I want the CLP government to work collaboratively and collectively with the federal Labor government. There is a lot of political bashing back and forth about whose responsibility it is, but I will not repeat those political statements because, as the Member for Daly reminded us, we want to try to rise above politics. Many people are frustrated with the CLP NT Government and the federal Labor government in regard to this issue which is why the shadow Health minister brought it to light and wants it to stay in the light. We do not want it to go by the wayside. It is important.

People have spoken about their experiences; it affects everybody. I give a big shout-out to the Katherine maternity ward. The Member for Katherine has spoken about how great that maternity service is, and I can attest to it in my personal experience and in the short time I was the minister. I can also attest in my professional experience to the work that happens across the Northern Territory to support mums to give birth.

It is an exciting part of any person's life. It can also be scary and anxious. From personal experience I know that it does not always ends in a happy story either, and we acknowledge that. The Member for Johnston read out sad but important stories. Not all mums get to hold their babies after they are born. The pressure around this topic and issue needs to be given that respect, and it needs to continue to be a matter of importance.

Some hospitals in the Territory are more regional or remote than others, and it is important to have that understanding. The Member for Goyder gave us a good history lesson of the Tennant Creek maternity service and a good political bashing for our party on why that service is no longer there. In my short time as the Health minister last year I thought, 'Great, let us get maternity services back into Tennant Creek'. I visited the hospital and learned from the amazing staff. Interestingly enough, there are no locum doctors at Tennant Creek Hospital. That is a phenomenal success …

Mr Edgington: They do so.

Mrs Hersey: Yes, they do.

Ms UIBO: No locum doctors. The doctors have locum staff …

Mrs Hersey: There is an Aboriginal woman.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Let the Leader of the Opposition speak.

Ms Boothby: She said 'locum'.

Ms UIBO: Locum—'nasty' versus 'Nazi', 'locum' versus 'local'. I am talking about locums. Tennant Creek Hospital is the only hospital in the Northern Territory that does not rely on locum fly-in fly-out, drive-in drive-out specialists …

A member: Inside voice.

Ms UIBO: No, you do not get to tell me how to speak when I am speaking on an issue like this …

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, please direct your comments through the Chair.

Ms UIBO: Tennant Creek, proudly, does not rely on an external doctor to deliver health services. It has a fantastic …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Nightcliff, stop interjecting, please. The Leader of the Opposition will be heard in silence.

Ms UIBO: I would like that. The Member for Fannie Bay thinks that because somebody is a man they cannot advocate for maternity services. She was rude and derogatory when the Member for Gwoja was speaking, but, no, we let her go; we let her be rude and show her colours—because you do not come from a particular group you cannot advocate for equality or for better services because of who you are, what you look like, what gender you are or what sexuality you are. That is her prerogative; that is for her to deal with. I do not expect to be interrupted when I am talking about something that is important for Territorians and that I have seen works well in our hospital system.

Maternity services need to continue to work well for mums, babies, families, people who choose to come to the Territory and people who think they would like to come to the Territory. In order to have those services we need to ensure that the Territory and federal governments of the day—no matter who they are—work together. We do not want this issue to drop off the table just because somebody said, 'Yes, we wrote to the Health minister eight months into our tenure. It is the federal government's problem when it comes to health services in the Northern Territory.'

Of course we need more funding. When the government changed I told the Member for Barkly that we delivered education and remote housing deals for the Northern Territory and that the next big thing the Territory needs is a health deal. Regardless of politics, health in the Northern Territory needs to be funded properly.

As a matter of public importance, we need maternity services delivery and funding to be front and centre. I agree with the Member for Daly that maternity services should not drop off the table.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, it may not get as much publicity as ball sports, but members should be assured there is a solid chess following in the Northern Territory.

On 4 and 5 October at Darwin High School, the Northern Territory Chess Championships were held—try saying that 10 times. The two-day event featured Australian Chess Federation-rated rapid and ultra-fast blitz tournaments, making this the first-ever tournament of this level in the Northern Territory. The event brought together about 30 avid chess players from around the Territory.

Our government was proud to support the championships with a $1,000 community support grant towards the cost of food and beverages. The purpose of that program is to support organisations just like this …

Members interjecting.

Mr MACKAY: A point of order, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 20; I would like to hear this adjournment speech in silence out of respect for the people we are talking about.

Madam ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: I want to hear as well. Members can be silent, thank you very much.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Tournament winners of the blitz round were first place, Ricardo Atanacio; second place, Brodie Driscoll-Court; and third place, Rajeev Thayil. Tournament winners for the rapid round were first place, Ricardo Atanacio; second place, Kevin Jimmy; and third place, Brodie Driscoll-Court.

It is also a vision that, by 2030, 1% of the Northern Territory population would be engaged with organised chess. This is a wonderful goal. After all, as Blaise Pascal said, 'Chess is the gymnasium of the mind'. Who would argue with a genius 17th century mathematician?

Congratulations to NT Chess Association President Rajeev Thayil, the committee and volunteers on their successful championship. Best wishes for the future.

The 2025 NRL NT senior grand finals held at Territory Rugby League Stadium in Darwin showcased some of the finest rugby league talent we have. Saturday 6 September was a day packed with thrilling matches when players not only excelled on the field but also embodied the core values of sportsmanship and respect.

In the men's premiership grand final Darwin Brothers secured a 24–18 victory over the Litchfield Bears. The women's final saw Darwin Brothers secure a dominant 60–4 win against the Litchfield Bears. The Gatley Shield was won by Darwin Brothers, with a hard-fought 18–16 victory over the Palmerston Raiders. The under-18 premiership was won by the Palmerston Raiders who defeated the Litchfield Bears 26–12.

Mr Kerle: Hear, hear!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This match not only highlighted the exceptional skill and determination of the players but also underscored the strong community spirit that defines rugby league in the Northern Territory.

On Saturday 27 September the Football NT finals brought excitement to the Darwin Football Stadium in Marrara. The women's premier league match saw underdogs Casuarina FC narrowly defeat Hellenic Athletic Club 1–nil, with Hellenic scoring an early own goal.

The men's premier league saw Azzurri United FC claim victory over Darwin Olympic Sporting Club in the NorZone grand final with a final score of 3–1. Congratulations to the underdog Azzurri United FC and head coach Dimi Galanopoulos on a truly historic season. In his inaugural season with the club, Dimi's relentless determination and strategic leadership have been central to the team's success. His tireless commitment has elevated not only the squad but also the entire club's culture.

Congratulations to both teams on their outstanding achievements. It is a moment to be cherished by all the players, the club and supporters alike.

Congratulations to the Darwin Cricket Club, winners of the 2025 Cricket NT Carlton Mid Premier Grade A competition. Jacob Dickman's brilliant unbeaten 128 on day one and William Pilkington's match winning 5/37 on day two secured a memorable victory over Southern Districts Cricket Club who were bowled out for 206. Well done to Darwin Cricket Club, the 2025 two-day champions.

Congratulations also to Southern Districts Cricket Club for winning the 2025 Darwin & Districts Cricket Competition women's division 1 championship over the Waratah Warriors Cricket Club. The Waratahs batted first and made 104. Their leading run scorers were Monet Hunter with 27 off 41; Lily-May Lyndon with 23 off 33; and Melissa Campbell with 20 off 19. Leading wicket takers for Southern Districts were Andrea Ellis who bowled two for 16 and Kelly Armstrong with two for 23. Southern Districts needing 105 to win made it comfortably, with 11 overs to spare. Rachel Andrew hitting 55 off 28 and Hannah Armstrong 37 off 25 steered the team to an easy win.

The 2025 AFL Masters National Carnival provided sporting thrills for fans. The competition ran from 28 September to 4 October showcasing veteran talent and community spirit. NTFL greats like Iggy Vallejo and Cameron Ilett thrilled fans with their skill and passion. Our very own Member for Fannie Bay, Laurie Zio, was amongst the action as well. It was a joy for the Territory to host this event and see seasoned players return to the field where age is no barrier to excellence. The carnival celebrated the enduring love for the game and highlighted the Territory's rich football heritage.

A massive congratulations to the men's 40 team who played a fantastic final game and were crowned champions of Australia. The women's 35 and men's 45 teams made it to the finals and finished runners-up in their divisions with two wins, one lost scoreline—a scoreline also matched by the men's 60 side. The women's 40 team finished fourth; the men's 45, 55 and 60 teams finished third; the men's 65 team finished fourth; and the men's 35 team finished runner-up.

Special congratulations also go to All-Australian recipients Alex Hall, Jonathan Peris and Cameron Ilett who took out the carnival best and fairest awards in their division. What an incredible week enjoyed by many interstate visitors and locals alike.

Hockey in the Northern Territory continues to scoop attention, and rightfully so. Hockey NT has done a marvellous job in promoting the sport here, interstate and overseas. Its Festival of Hockey has become a destination event, bringing teams and supporters.

The 2025 Territory Premier League hockey grand finals were held on 30 August at the MWT Hockey Centre. East Darwin won the men's Territory Premier League with a 4–nil victory over Nightcliff Tigers, while the East

Darwin women defeated the Nightcliff Tigers 5–3. Congratulations to all the teams on another strong season of competition.

On 5 September the Darwin Netball Association division 1 grand final was close, with PINTs Greenants ultimately victorious over PINTs 41–39. In the men's grand final Nightcliff Tigers defeated PINTs 70–40.

Katherine Netball Association held its grand finals on 8 September, with the Camellettes winning a close contest over the Advance Panthers in the ladies A-grade competition with a final score of 27–24. The same night the Palmerston Netball Association saw an all-Mash showdown in the division 1 seniors grand final with Mash Lutana against Mash Karraks, with Lutana taking the win 35–20.

The Alice Springs Netball Association division 1 grand final was held on 20 September. Federal Club Eastside won the day against Rovers Complete Construction 43–35.

I make special mention of the departure of Netball NT Executive Officer Penny Shearer, who embarks on a new chapter as Chief Executive Officer of Netball Tasmania. Penny has been a cornerstone of Netball NT since 2017, dedicating countless hours to nurturing talent, mentoring coaches and fostering grassroots netball across the Territory. Her leadership was instrumental in re-establishing the Territory Storm and creating clear pathways for aspiring athletes, including the formation of the NT Academy team. Penny has gone above and beyond for netball in the Territory, and will be greatly missed. We wish her all the very best in Tasmania.

I congratulate the Darwin Basketball Association Wheelchair Salties on cementing their legacy as the best wheelchair basketball team in the nation. Just a few weeks ago the Darwin Basketball Association Salties wheelchair team created history by claiming the National Wheelchair Basketball League title for the third consecutive year. In a dominant grand final they overcame their long-time rivals, the Wollongong Roller Hawks, to complete a season in which the team lost only one game.

Playing the national final interstate our Salties brushed aside the pride of New South Wales in the grand final qualifier, defeating the New South Wales Roller Hawks 83–64, and then doubled down in the grand final, crushing the New South Wales Hawks by 31 points. Led by our Olympian and co-captain Tom O'Neill-Thorne, their victory was not only the product of individual brilliance but also the strength and depth of the entire squad. Their outstanding achievement also highlights the Northern Territory's growing contribution to national sport.

Just as importantly, the Darwin Basketball Association Wheelchair Salties are inspiring the next generation of wheelchair athletes. Local pioneers such as Olympian Tom O'Neill-Thorne and Clarence McCarthy-Grogan, along with fellow Territorians Mellissa Dunn and young national junior Weston Tedcastle, carry with them the pride of the Territory and are demonstrating that there is a clear pathway for athletes who want to pursue the sport.

The Darwin Basketball Association Wheelchair Salties are more than champions on the court; they embody resilience, teamwork and community pride. Their back-to-back national titles are a testament to their dedication and to the Territory's growing presence on the national sporting stage. Congratulations to the team and our Darwin Basketball Association Wheelchair Salties.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I acknowledge all the candidates who participated in the NT local government elections in August. I think local government is important. Some people call it the third level of government, but when you are on council it is actually the first level of government. You are the ones at the coalface doing all those things that residents want for their driveways, roads and streetlights—you are right there. It is important.

I thank all candidates who put up their hands, whether they were successful or not. The fact that they put up their hands is good for democracy.

There were also some councillors who retired. We thank them for their service. There are winners and losers. In some ways, they are all winners because they have all participated.

In my electorate Karama and Malak are serviced by the City of Darwin and Knuckey Lagoon is serviced by Litchfield Council, so I need to collaborate with two local government authorities. I am about to release my new newsletter. I am identifying the relevant councillors that our residents in Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon need to deal with.

I congratulate the new Lord Mayor of Darwin, Peter Styles. Well done, Peter. He lives fairly close to my electorate, in the electorate of Sanderson. We look forward to working with him. I hope that he and the new council put a strong focus on the suburbs, not just the CBD, because the suburbs are important, particularly the northern suburbs.

I congratulate the three Waters Ward councillors who were elected because they service Karama and Malak. I congratulate Councillor Sylvia Klonaris who came to council at the same time I did in 2021. Sylvia and I were big champions of the northern suburbs. We were later joined by Councillor Kim Farrar, who was also re-elected. Kim came in when former Councillor Justine Glover resigned for personal reasons nine months after we were elected.

Congratulations to the newly elected and youngest councillor, Councillor Patrik Ralph. Patrik has already been into my office talking to me. I understand that he is the president of one of the Young Labor branches—an enthusiastic young gentleman. He obviously came to get my advice on how we work together. That is important because we are all elected now. I am the MLA for the area and they are the local councillors. Put the elections aside; we are all there to serve our community.

Knuckey Lagoon has a rural feel about it. I recently went to the opening of the new playground at the Knuckey Lagoon reserve, which was launched by the Litchfield Council. I had the pleasure of meeting the new mayor, Rachael Wright, and North Ward Councillor Daisy Crawford. The North Ward looks after Knuckey Lagoon for the Litchfield Council. Congratulations to those councillors and to the Central Ward Councillors, Pauline Cass and Kevin Harlan, and South Ward Councillors, Emma Sharp and Kris Civitarese. I am sure that they will do well. We need to work together.

Going back to the City of Darwin, I acknowledge former councillor Ms Mirella Fejo, who was unsuccessful, and two of the new candidates who were not elected, but I know they serve the community well—Mr Tejinder Singh, with whom I distribute food freely with the Sikh Family Food Van, and Mr Manoli Papathomas, a chef who has been at the International College of Advanced Education. I understand that he is looking to open a new Greek restaurant in Darwin. Congratulations to them for putting up their hands.

Finally, I pay tribute to the former Mayor of Litchfield Council Doug Barden. A lot of us know Doug well. He is still around, of course. He served Litchfield well over a number of years.

Going forward I want to collaborate. We have common goals, and we all want to serve our community. How do we work together? I will be having regular meetings with those councillors. We are already getting a good cooperative arrangement where if it is a council issue I will refer my constituents to them. If it is a Northern Territory Government issue they will refer people to me. If it is a federal issue we will probably both contact the relevant federal representative. I think that is a good way of doing things.

Once again, congratulations to everyone involved. I wish them all the best.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I will speak about the incredible young people I met doing the Y's Youth Parliament program when I acted as Speaker for their debates, as I know many others in here did.

I chaired their adjournment debate on the Wednesday, and truly I was blown away. They each spoke on their own chosen topics. They were articulate, passionate, considered and moving, and it made me wish I could have watched all the debates; I was so impressed, genuinely.

I am pleased that they got to stand in this Chamber and use their voices, but because it was not a proper sitting of parliament, there was no *Hansard*. I will table the speeches from my session so that their words can live on the record forever. I seek leave to table those speeches.

Leave granted.

K McNAMARA: I encourage all members who were lucky enough to chair a sitting of the Youth Parliament to table those speeches as well, because these kids deserve it.

In my session I heard from Preet Kaur, who spoke about the struggles faced by international students—loneliness, cultural adjustments and the extreme financial burden of higher fees than other students pay.

Gilbert Tanoto expressed his passion for digital literacy and STEM, in particular the importance of encouraging more women in STEM. It was commendable to see a young man speak on this subject.

Hannah Baczynski shone a light on a vital organisation called Share the Dignity, which aims to eliminate period poverty, which is when women, girls and people who menstruate cannot afford to access period products.

Sean Hagan spoke about the critical need for proper transparency in democracy and a warning about how when transparency is missing, community distrust grows and so does the risk of extremism.

Ash Huynh, incredibly bravely and in a beautifully articulate speech that literally brought me to tears, spoke about the suicide of a schoolfriend of hers, and the pressures on some young people to put their grades above their wellbeing and mental health.

Harnoor Kaur educated us on the cultural practice of dowries, and some of the terrible consequences they can have for young women and girls, not just overseas but also in Australia.

Virginia Dias Quintas spoke passionately about the dangers of alcohol misuse and how it impacts families and young people, and called for more education and support for those struggling.

Finally, we had Nokthor Tripura, whose speech I will read out. I do not have the time to read out all of them, which is why I gave the summaries. They were all incredible in their own right, but I feel the need to read out Nokthor's speech because I do not believe we have heard this topic properly interrogated in this Chamber. To the best of my knowledge, I do not think anyone has been brave enough to broach this in here before. I would like to be proven wrong, but to the best of my knowledge I probably will not be.

I will read Nokthor's adjournment speech so that it can be recorded in *Hansard*, because his generation deserves to know that their voices matter, their questions are legitimate and their concerns about their future are not just heard but also recorded in this place. I cannot do justice to how he performed this speech. It was passionate. There was presence and flair. Sorry, Nokthor, I cannot do it justice to how your presented it.

He begins:

> *The Northern Territory is no stranger to being at the edge of history. We have seen this time and time again, that this place—our place—has been where Australia faces the rest of the world. And it is here, on our soil, that one of the biggest questions of our time as Australians will be decided: what the alliance between Australia and the United States will change.*
>
> *This is not just a policy debate in Canberra, because this is not something that can be dismissed as distant foreign affairs. This is happening right here. In Darwin's harbour. On our training ranges. Over our skies. The US Marine Rotational Force is not an abstract concept. It is thousands of soldiers living among us, year after year. Our infrastructure is built with their presence at the forefront of our minds. Our region is being changed and reshaped around this alliance. And not for the good.*
>
> *And yes, there are benefits. Investments, jobs, opportunities. Anything to boost the economy, am I right? But no one denies this. But there are also risks, risks that rarely make into the press releases that the government provides. Risks that decide our future even before Territorians even have a chance to speak. Because what happens if tensions in some place in the world that America dictates as important boil over? What happens if their next crisis sees our harbour, our bases, our people on the front line? We will be the first domino to fall.*
>
> *The United States is our closest and strongest ally, but it is also a nation wrestling with its own fractures. Its politics grows more and more unstable by the year. Its commitments change with each administration. Its military might is massive—but so are its plentiful mistakes. And every time it makes one, only its allies bear the cost.*
>
> *We cannot treat this alliance as automatic, unquestionable, beyond debate. Because it once wasn't. We cannot simply hope that decisions made in Washington will always serve the best interests of people in Alice Springs, in Nhulunbuy, in Kulgera. Because we know they won't. They never have.*
>
> *The Territory must insist. No. DEMAND to have a stronger voice in what happens here. Not just to say symbolic 'yeses' or 'no's' to projects after the fact, but to dictate the terms from the beginning. To ensure that our environment and our sanctity is protected, that our communities our safe, that our economy is more than just a garrison town economy.*

And we must broaden our horizon. The NT is closer to Jakarta than to Sydney, closer to Manila than to Melbourne. Our future is not just as a fortress for someone else's 'strategy'. We can be a bridge, a partner, a leader in the region which we call home.

Speaker, the Territory cannot be content with being a staging ground for other nations' plans. We must be authors of our own. Because if we do not speak clearly, we will be spoken for, trodden over, ignored.

We have a choice. Either we lead in defining our future, or we allow others to define it for us. And either way, we will have to live with the consequences, but it will be our own, or another's.

Thus ends his speech.

In case some need this explained, why is this brave? Because it takes courage to question our military alliances. There exists in our political discourse an unspoken rule that to question the US presence in the Territory and interrogate the terms of this alliance is somehow unpatriotic or naive. We are told it is a settled matter, beyond debate; it is not up for discussion. However, this silence is profoundly unhealthy for our democracy. When we cannot ask difficult questions about decisions that fundamentally reshape our region, infrastructure and future—when young people are discouraged from thinking critically about what is being built in their own backyard—we betray the principles we claim to defend.

Nokthor is doing what we should all be doing, which is putting hard questions to power. These are questions that deserve not rhetoric or talking points but genuine answers about risk, sovereignty and who decides our future and on whose terms. That a young person has to be brave to ask these questions should give us serious pause. In a healthy democracy these debates should be routine, robust and welcomed.

Once again, I congratulate all the students I heard; they were incredible. To complete their experience by getting their words on *Hansard* forever, I encourage everyone who was acting as Speaker for one of their debates to table their speeches.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I acknowledge the recent and deeply felt loss of Lorna Dudley, a long-term Anula resident and a much-loved member of our community. To her husband, Brian, and sons, Adam and Calvin, their partners and her grandchildren, please accept my sincerest condolences.

Lorna was the heart of her family and a quiet force in our education system, serving as business manager at both Anula Primary School and Taminmin College. She was not only highly skilled in finance and operations but also deeply committed to student outcomes. She mentored many, built strong teams and always placed people and purpose above all else.

Her advocacy for breast cancer awareness, even during her personal battle, was courageous and selfless. Lorna never let her diagnosis define her. She leaves a legacy of strength, generosity and grace. She will be remembered with great respect and affection by all who knew her.

I am extremely proud to welcome the newest members of our Sanderson electorate office team, Chiara and Molly, who join us as part of Project21, a wonderful initiative of the Down Syndrome Association of the Northern Territory. Chiara, who began with us last week, and Molly, who starts next week, bring enthusiasm, capability and a deep sense of pride in their roles. Each has a personalised set of responsibilities and arrives each day in uniform, ready to contribute.

This program empowers young people with intellectual disabilities through life skills and work-based learning. With the support of Zoe and Cass and the mentoring of our office team, both interns will gain valuable experience with the goal of future independence in employment. Our office is proud to be part of a program that genuinely helps young people to live life to the full, and we look forward to seeing Chiara and Molly thrive.

The Sanderson Early Childhood Art Project continues to delight. I provided each of our seven early childhood centres with a blank canvas, asking them to create a masterpiece for display in our electorate office. I must say that the creativity, colour and care in each piece have far exceeded expectations. This initiative is more than art on our wall; it is a celebration of our youngest citizens and the educators who nurture their development and imagination.

Our Sanderson Seniors Morning Tea held on the last Friday of each month remains a warm and well-attended tradition. On 23 September we hosted approximately 36 attendees who enjoyed a delicious spread. We were treated to live music from Paul Wyatt, with special guest Bert Wickramanayake from Bert's Coffee. The next morning tea will be held on Friday 31 October when we look forward to welcoming some bright young visitors

from Anula Primary School. These gatherings are about connection, community and respect for our senior citizens. It is an honour to host them. I thank the Chief Minister for attending the seniors morning tea in the last week of August as well.

On 1 October we celebrated International Coffee Day in partnership with Bert's Coffee by treating shoppers and fellow coffee lovers to a morning cup on us. About 30 coffee enthusiasts stopped by Northlakes Shopping Centre to enjoy a free coffee and kick start their day with a smile. Thanks to everyone who joined us and Bert's Coffee for helping spread the joy.

In recognition of the World Teachers' Day NT Awards I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the following outstanding educators from Sanderson Middle School—Kieren Lines, finalist for Leader in Education of the Year; Kirsten Meaney, finalist for Inclusion Educator of the Year; and Anthony Busch, finalist for School Based Support Person of the Year. I make special mention of Glenn Dixon, Principal of Casuarina Senior College, nominated for Principal of the Year. Your dedication to our students and schools is appreciated by the whole community. I wish you all the very best at the upcoming awards reception on 31 October, hosted by Minister Hersey.

It gives me great joy to wish a happy 97th birthday to the legendary Victor Samuel Ludwig OAM, affectionately known as Uncle Vic. Although not a Sanderson constituent by address, Uncle Vic is very much a fixture in our community, often seen dropping into the electorate office and always a guest of honour at our seniors morning teas.

Although I could not attend his official celebrations at St Mary's on the weekend as I was in Alice Springs, I had the pleasure to deliver a birthday cake to Vic who was in his usual spot at Bert's where he and his mates meet every Friday and could enjoy it over a well-earned coffee. This Friday group are well-known legends of Northern Territory sport and include members from various NTFL clubs and NT football administrators who represent probably 150-plus years of experience. Members of this Chamber and anyone who visits Northlakes would recognise such names as Peter Atkinson, Michael Barfoot, Darryl Window, Bryan Moroney and historian Matthew Stephen, just to name a few.

I will mention a few events that I recently attended. I will start with the Oceania Cup opening match between the Kookaburras and the Black Sticks. The Kookaburras won 2–nil. The Kookaburras had a clean series sweep of 3–0 against New Zealand. I congratulate proud Territorian Jeremy Hayward on his homecoming as co-captain. He played for the Kookaburras on that night.

The Territory Stingers men and women were crowned 2025 Festival of Hockey champions after strong wins against Indonesia. I congratulate Hockey NT CEO Jason Butcher and his team for coordinating the Oceania Cup and the match with Indonesia which was good and had participation from people across the greater Darwin region.

I attended the Darwin Karting Association's closed titles. I thank Colin for the tour of Hidden Valley that our government is proud to have supported. It was great to see the track in action and watch some of Darwin's finest go-kart racers. Some racers were as young as nine years old.

I attended the NRL grand final day, the Gatley Shield, at the edge of the field with NRL General Manager Tony Crowe in the dying seconds of a tight game. I congratulate Darwin Brothers for winning the title.

Darwin hosted the 2025 Australian Veteran Golfers Union National Championship for the first time since 2015. I congratulate the NT Veteran Golfers Association volunteers and officials and the sponsors for delivering such a successful event.

The Member for Fannie Bay and I attended the netball grand final between PINTs and Tracy Village Falcons. Congratulations to PINTs Netball Club which secured the premier league win and several other division titles.

Darwin welcomed the Australian Dolphins swim team as they prepared for the upcoming Para World Championships in Singapore. Our world-class facilities and tropical conditions provide the perfect training environment, and we thank the team for choosing the Territory. Thank you to Dolphins head coach, Mel Tantrum, and our star Paralympians, Brenden Hall and Alexa Leary.

I met with Sam Watson and Greg Shaw from Swimming Australia while they were in Darwin with the Para Dolphins, along with Swimming Northern Territory CEO Warren Dopson. We discussed our opportunities to continue to host Australian swimming teams into the future and the development of all-inclusive swimming

initiatives. I look forward to further discussions on how the Territory can be best placed ahead of the 2032 Olympics for teams' training sessions during winter.

I congratulate Darwin's Sonya Newman and team Australia who recently competed at the inaugural World Para Ice Hockey Women's Championship in Slovakia. She also claimed Player of the Match in her final match.

Turning to soccer, Timor-Leste faced off with the Philippines in the AFC Asian Cup qualifier at Territory Rugby League Stadium. I thank Jamie Montieth from Football NT for arranging for me to take to the field and greet the players. The Philippines team won the game, which was well supported by the Darwin community with a couple of thousand visitors to the Territory Rugby League Stadium. I attended with the Member for Wanguri and we had a good time interacting with the community and watching the wonderful match between the Philippines and Timor-Leste.

I thank Tania and the team at the Tennis Centre for inviting me to the women's One Point Slam tournament. It was a greatly enjoyable tournament with a mix of local talent and visiting pros putting on an impressive display of skill and sportsmanship. I congratulate Alicia Smith for winning the title.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak about the events of 50 years ago in the town of Balibo in Timor-Leste. I acknowledge my great friend Rob Wesley-Smith who is in the gallery and whom I will talk about in this speech.

At the time of these events, I was living in Sydney. My dad was working as a journalist as the chief of staff in Channel Nine News, which decided to send journalists to Timor. He was on the list, but decided not to go at the last minute because of family responsibilities. Instead, Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters from Channel Nine went, along with Greg Shackleton, Tony Stewart from Channel Seven and Gary Cunningham from ABC.

The journalists travelled to Balibo in East Timor to report firsthand on advancing Indonesian troops, believing that they would be safe and would not be military targets. Tragically, they were killed by Indonesian forces who claimed that the journalists were killed in crossfire, and their bodies were burned. In 2007 a Coroner's inquest found that they were deliberately killed.

I remember the phone ringing in the middle of the night and my dad's horror and shock at the news that they had been killed. He felt terrible about the fact that he was the one who had sent them there and felt in some way responsible for their deaths, and he carried that with him his whole life. I think about the small twists of history and how often we are all intertwined and that our family narrowly escaped the fate of their families.

The journalists' story and others were not publicly told for many years, although their families and others advocated tirelessly. The truth of the Indonesian invasion and reign of terror over East Timorese people was hidden and untold too. It gives us insight into the strength of the political and economic forces, not least the irrational fear of communism and greed for the oil in the Timor Sea, that meant our Australian Government silenced what happened to our own citizens, let alone the hundreds of thousands of Timorese who were killed in the subsequent 25 years.

As you might guess, in the 1970s my family were solid Whitlam Labor government supporters and it did many good things, but inaction and collusion over East Timor is a blight on that government's record. The 2009 film *Balibo* which screened tonight at the Deckchair Cinema—which we interrupted with our Chamber bells, so my apologies, although the bells were ringing for good reason; we were standing in division, voting against changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act*. Wes, I think you would not have minded.

Balibo screened tonight at the Deckchair Cinema in honour of this anniversary. It tells the story through the eyes of Roger East who was another journalist who tried to find out what happened to the five, and he was subsequently killed.

The Australian War Memorial has a specific section dedicated to Australian war correspondents killed, and it also records the Balibo Five story for posterity.

I have also had a long history and involvement with East Timor beyond being a 10-year-old girl and hearing the phone ringing in the middle of the night. In the 1980s my involvement was as a student activist. In 1991 this took a very personal turn when my friend Kamal was killed during the Santa Cruz cemetery massacre. He travelled to East Timor in solidarity with the people there. This event became a turning point in global awareness and action when, for the first time, footage of that massacre showing what the Indonesian military was doing to Timorese people was smuggled out by Max Stahl. If only the report of the five journalists had

also been able to come out in 1975, perhaps the world could have prevented the horrors that were revealed in East Timor's truth commission.

In 1995 when my partner and I first arrived in Darwin we connected with the local group Australians for a Free East Timor and participated in rallies and awareness raising. In fact, on 16 October—this day 30 years ago—I was outside this Parliament House marking the date of the killing of the five journalists to draw the attention of the Northern Territory Government of the day to the plight of the Timorese people.

A wonderful benefit of this time is that I met someone who to this day I am lucky to continue to call my friend, someone who inspires many as a great Territorian, Rob Wesley-Smith. He is in the gallery. His autobiography was published this week. It is a whacking good story. Copies are available from him if you want to get one, or I am happy to lend you my copy.

East Timor is the nearest foreign neighbour of the Northern Territory. My friend Santina from Lospalos tells of seeing light from fires burning near Darwin as a child. Our ties are strong, with so many East Timorese coming as refugees in 1975 and many others as migrants since. Our children's preschool in Millner in the early 2000s had an East Timorese teacher and many students from local families. The Canossian Sisters, a Timorese order of nuns based in Rapid Creek, do their shopping every week at the markets.

In 1999 when independence was declared finally in Timor-Leste, the streets of Darwin were filled with celebrations. Not long after, as the departing Indonesian army and militias murdered people and destroyed Dili, 2,000 UN refugees came to Darwin and were cared for by the generosity of the Northern Territory Government, community members and the Kalymnian club which gave land for the tent city. I remember my partner and our then baby son volunteered there among hundreds of locals, helping the people who had managed to get out, to help them find clothes to wear and figure out what to do next.

As a mediator, like our Madam Speaker, and peace worker I travelled to Timor-Leste between 2003 and 2007, working on a project with the NGO founded by Jose Ramos-Horta which combined traditional mediation practices with modern dispute resolution in a country with a fledgling legal system, manifold disputes and unresolved grievances and no resources. It was a privilege to learn and see how people took pride in designing the kind of community processes they wanted.

My personal connections are not the point of this adjournment speech. I seek to illustrate that, like many Territorians, I am bound—through history, shared experiences and hope for a better future—to the fate of our neighbours. The five Australian journalists killed 50 years ago knew the importance of this. Their profession, which cost them their lives, was finding out what was happening and telling Australians so that we were informed and aware regional and global citizens. We have a duty to remember them and to continue to keep our eyes and ears open to what is happening in our neighbourhood.

I believe we must cherish and continue to foster the people-to-people connections forged between our two places. This experience of solidarity with Timor-Leste and East Timorese people has left a lasting impression. It has taught me and given me so much. It reminds me that it is always important to take action, no matter how small, to speak up when injustice occurs and to work for peace.

Mrs HERSEY (Katherine): Mr Deputy Speaker, I put on the record an event I had the privilege of attending, which was the early childhood Education and Care Awards last Friday. These awards recognise the outstanding dedication and passion of our early childhood educators, leaders, professionals and services.

These educators are the heart and soul of our communities and care for our most precious small people. Quality early childhood education and care are at the core of our future. A lot has been said in this sector recently because of safety concerns. These educators provide far more than care and education; they offer love, safety and stability during the most formative years of a child's life.

I acknowledge some of the outstanding individuals honoured that night. The Outstanding Aboriginal Educator was Annika Rory from the Moriarty Foundation. When Annika acknowledged her mother in the audience during her speech there was not a dry eye in the room. Her tireless work to give children in Borroloola the best start possible is a true credit to her family, strength and sense of community.

The Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher was Tracy Bond from Humpty Doo Preschool, who has dedicated more than 30 years to early childhood education and leadership. Tracy shared a beautiful story about a tradesman who visited her home and remembered her from preschool; that is the power of genuine connection.

Outstanding Educator Marie Renee Antoinette Valerien-Lajoie from Little Mangoes Child Care Centre in Katherine—although I note she has moved to Darwin, which is a disappointment for us—was cheered on proudly by her family.

Outstanding Leader Rachael Sheppard, team leader from Kentish Community Services, is a passionate advocate for regional and remote educators.

The Outstanding Education and Care Program was the Families as First Teachers program at Mimik-ga Centre. A heartfelt speech honoured the entire team's commitment to supporting families in early education. I visited the centre earlier in the year with I think the Members for Blain and Wanguri, and I can understand why it won. The dedication and diversity of that centre is a credit to the dynamic team.

That evening was a celebration of epic proportions, and a heartfelt tribute to the extraordinary dedication, love and professionalism of our early childhood educators. They shape the foundation of our future, for which we owe them our deepest gratitude and respect.

I acknowledge the incredible work of St Anthony's International School in Dili. I had the privilege to visit it earlier in the month during my trip to Timor for the international VET conference. St Anthony's is owned and operated by Cristina Costa. Although I was unable to meet Cristina on the day of my visit, since returning home I have been fortunate to connect with her while she has been visiting the Northern Territory. Timor holds an important place in our workforce. Cristina visited the early childhood PALM workers based in Katherine at Kentish Lifelong Learning and Care during her stay.

St Anthony's school follows the Australian curriculum and maintains a close partnership with AISNT, which supports independent schools in our region. During my visit I had the privilege to meet a remarkable young student, 10-year-old Irene who is in Year 5. Her knowledge of the solar system was astonishing; it was second to none. She spoke with confidence in detail about each planet—its functions, compositions and the number of satellites orbiting it. Her understanding far exceeded what you might expect at her age. I was speechless and applauded her presentation; it was incredible. It is moments like these that remind us of the incredible potential of our young learners and the vital role education plays in nurturing their curiosity and knowledge.

Last Friday I had the pleasure of visiting SEDA College in Marrara. I met with Samuel Dyke, the principal, and Katie Leslie, the business manager. I had the chance to speak with some of the Year 11 students about their experiences at the school. The students spoke positively about the greater freedom they have, the engagement and interest, along with their opportunities to participate in more sports and the strong support they receive from their teachers.

I have a friend whose two children attended SEDA. Whenever I catch up with them their stories and opportunities are positive.

What stood out to me during my visit was the work placement program. These placements, which happen once a week, are organised by the students themselves. They are not just about preparing for a career in sports; students are gaining experience as heavy diesel mechanics, tyre fitters and early childhood workers. One student's role is part-time employment with Thrifty Car Rental. Employers have given feedback about these students' smooth transition into the workforce. Students spoke of the positive 'one teacher to one class' model, which allows teachers to mentor and support students closely. I shout out to teachers Barney and Greg whom I met at the college.

Next year SEDA is expanding to include construction courses in partnership with the Housing Industry Association. That is fantastic news for our Territory kids, offering even more opportunities in industries where jobs are plentiful.

On Monday I revisited SEDA for the information session for families which showcased the incredible opportunities available to potential students. There were heartfelt testimonials from families, with many sharing how SEDA has transformed their child's life, empowering them to take ownership of their learning journey and future careers. It is a powerful reminder of the impact that dedicated support and innovative education models have on young lives.

I put on the record some of the amazing finalists from Katherine for the World Teachers' Day Awards coming up on 31 October—Friday fortnight. They will join other teachers and support staff across the Territory for the awards that will happen in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Gove.

The finalists from Katherine are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educator of the Year—Linda Hunt from Kintore Street School
- Corporate Based Support Person of the Year—Di Scannell, who does an amazing job at the office in the Big Rivers office, and Lyndie Watson
- Early Childhood Educator of the Year—Katie Camilleri from Katherine School of the Air and Kellie Hoffman from MacFarlane Primary School from the FaFT program
- Inclusion Educator of the Year—Sara Miller from Katherine School of the Air, Stella Kim from Katherine South Primary School and Shaelee Tonkin-Reeves from Katherine High School
- Leader in Education of the Year—Anica Beckett from Kintore Street School and Nicolle Gadd from Casuarina Street Primary School
- Primary Educator of the Year—Mere Barlow and Skye Miles from Katherine South Primary School and Rodney Gregg from Casuarina Street Primary School
- Principal of the Year—Chris Errington from Katherine South Primary School.

In my opinion this is a great honour for Chris because a couple of years ago this school went through a lot of turmoil, with approximately 90 students leaving the school. It went through a troubling period of leadership. Chris came in from Robinson River with a zest for life and has given confidence to the staff and families. He has worked hard alongside them to build the school back up, and the vibe and positivity around the school is to be commended, as is Chris on his leadership. I wish him well.

The other Katherine finalists are:

- School Based Support Person of the Year—Hannah Gower from Katherine South Primary School and Sandy Moss from Kintore Street School
- Secondary Educator of the Year—Charlotte Gorman from Katherine School of the Air and Jypsie Flynn-Hoult and Steven Miles from Katherine High School.

We will deeply miss Steven Miles from Katherine High School and his wife, Skye, from Katherine South Primary School. They are heading back south next year.

Congratulations to all the nominees across the Territory. I wish them very well. I wish all the finalists well for the upcoming World Teachers' Day Awards which I will be hosting this year in Darwin.

Mr BURGOYNE (Braitling): Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to born-and-bred Territorian and long-term Alice Springs resident Terry Bell.

Terry was a well-known friendly face throughout our community who was involved in many local organisations. Terry was not only a community man but also a gifted sportsman. From umpiring in the Central Australian Football League on the weekends to running marathons around the world, Terry was one of the elites.

For 50 years Terry dedicated his time and energy to football in the Territory and many locals would remember him for his efforts behind the goals. That is one of my first memories of him. Terry was not always behind the goals, but started as a boundary umpire before moving to the field. After his knee and hip surgery he moved to goal umpire. His efforts did not go unnoticed, with Terry being awarded CAFL Umpire of the Year three years consecutively, and he received life membership of the CAFL Umpire Association. Martin, the AFLNT umpiring lead, described Terry as a 'true giant' of the game and someone everyone looked to.

More recently, Terry and I would often catch up at the Heart Foundation morning walks, with Terry a regular.

His athletics career also left legacies, with him being the winner of the inaugural Alice Springs Marathon in 1980.

Last month I was cooking pancakes on top of the MacDonnell Ranges for the King of the Mountain running race. It was good to be up there, although this year I was not competing; I was just there to feed the participants which was just as special. The YMCA announced that the award and trophy for being first across

the line in the event would be named in Terry's honour. Terry competed in marathons across the world, but his greatest athletic achievement was his seven wins in the King of the Mountain.

The reason I referred to his seven wins being his greatest athletic achievement is that his greatest achievement in life was his family. Terry was the father to three children—Justin, Darren and my electorate officer assistant Michelle. He was also grandfather to five beautiful grandchildren. Although he spent plenty of time travelling and being around sport, Terry always made time for his family.

His energy, kindness and love for Alice Springs will be deeply missed.

Vale, Terry Bell.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I recognise an outstanding member of our local community, Barbara Kitsos who is an employee at Coles Casuarina. Barbara consistently provides an exceptional level of customer service and is known for going above and beyond every day. Just last week I saw her assisting an elderly customer into the store, ensuring their safety during a busy time. She does an amazing job at the front of Coles Casuarina. Barbara always greets people with a smile, knows many of the regular shoppers by name and makes everyone feel welcome. Her kindness and care truly reflect the spirit of our Casuarina community.

I acknowledge the recipients of the Term 3 Khoda Patel All Rounder Awards, who have each shown great effort, kindness and commitment to their schools:

- Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School—Sophie Major, for her kind and friendly nature; and Nikki Ioannou, for always doing her best and being kind to everyone

- Nakara Primary School—Rupert Willson, for his eagerness to learn, positive attitude and thoughtful questions that inspire his classmates; and Zoe Alessa Reyes, for her dedication to excellence and for living the school's BEST values every day

- Dripstone Middle School—Jade Methven is a thoughtful student who shines with kindness and respect, always checking in on others and spreading positive energy; and Isabelle East is a quiet achiever who has shown strong leadership and growth, representing her school with pride at the Together for Humanity youth conference in Brisbane

- Henbury School—Rebel Milne is a proud and positive leader who demonstrates sportsmanship and inclusion through basketball; and Lucia Jacobson, who is always willing to help others and creates a friendly, supportive learning environment.

Congratulations to all these young Territorians. You make your schools, your families and our community proud.

I highlight the success of the Tournament of Minds Northern Territory Finals, held recently at Dripstone Middle School. Nakara Primary and Dripstone Middle Schools represented Casuarina with great skill and creativity. Nakara Primary won The Arts category and received a high commendation in Language Literature. Dripstone Middle School won The Arts and Social Sciences categories and was highly commended in Language Literature and STEM. The winning teams have been invited to attend the international finals in Sydney at the end of this month. I was pleased to support both schools in their fundraising efforts, donating prizes for their raffles to assist with student travel. Congratulations to all the students and staff for their hard work and achievements.

I acknowledge the commencement of the 2025 women's baseball season. The season opened on Sunday 14 September at the Tracy Village sports complex, where I had the honour of throwing the ceremonial first pitch alongside Julie Page from Taverners NT. For those who do not know, I was a baseball player from 2014 to 2019. I was a pitcher. It was a fantastic day, full of enthusiasm and support from players, families and volunteers. Women's baseball is more than just a sport; it brings people together, builds confidence and strengthens community connections.

Round 2 was the No More Round, held in partnership with the Darwin Baseball League and Taverners NT, promoting the message to stand together against domestic and family violence. Dr Charlie King AM threw the ceremonial first pitch—which I was invited to do but I was not available that day, so Dr Charlie King did that one for me. I commend everyone who linked arms and took the stand—a powerful symbol of unity and respect. I thank Dr Charlie King AM for his support for the Women's Baseball League 2025. I thank

Baseball NT, Taverners NT and all involved for using sport as a way to promote such an important message across our community.

I recognise Vicki-Leigh Lettice, an inspiring Territory businesswoman who continues to shine as a leader and entrepreneur. From starting as a crew member at McDonald's in Townsville in 1988, Vicki now operates seven McDonald's restaurants across Darwin and Katherine, including Casuarina, making her the largest McDonald's owner-operator in the Northern Territory. Her motto, 'When you are green, you are growing; when you are not, you rot', perfectly sums up her attitude toward growth and excellence. Guided by her belief that 'if it is to be, it is up to me', Vicki has built a business grounded in resilience, innovation and community. She recently spoke at the OBM Women in Business Lunch in Darwin, sharing lessons from her remarkable journey, from humble beginnings to one of the Territory's leading business figures.

My team and I continue to host monthly community cleanups in the electorate. I thank the growing number of locals joining us to keep Casuarina clean and beautiful. We have focused on the bushland along Rocklands Drive near Royal Darwin Hospital, where our first cleanup removed two carloads of rubbish. It is heartening to see how many people care deeply about our shared spaces. Dripstone Cliffs and Lee Point are looking fantastic thanks to everyone doing their bit. I give a huge thank you to my team and all community members who show pride in keeping Casuarina tidy, safe and welcoming for all. Together, we are making a difference with one act of community spirit at a time.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I have only a short contribution I was hoping to make some time ago, but we got there in the end. I wish all the best to an awesome young man who works in my office and lives in Woodroffe—Jason the legend. Jason visited parliament earlier today, but unfortunately we did not have notice that he would be attending, so we were unable to notify the Speaker. The next time Jason comes, and he lets our office know, we will let the Speaker know so he will hopefully get a shout-out. Sorry for keeping you awake, Jason the legend. I will see you in my office, no doubt.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, I give my thanks, the Chief Minister's thanks and the entire CLP government's thanks to the Northern Territory Police Force which continues to tirelessly work to help bring down the crime rate in the Northern Territory. Police are delivering on our agenda and working hard.

I thank police for their recent operation on the bus network. I want the Palmerston police and all the police who were involved in that operation to know that it made a difference. I have heard from many people about how much safer they felt at the Palmerston bus depot during that crackdown. The police presence was warmly welcomed by the community. Commissioner, know that was well received by community in Drysdale.

Commuters would like to see as many police on the bus as they can whilst we raise our police public safety officer capability. It was heartwarming too. The Member for Blain and I spoke to the security guards at the Palmerston bus depot. I was stoked that they are interested. They have put in expressions of interest to be police public safety officers. They are excited about the position because this is exactly what they have been asking for—more powers to ensure that there is a safer bus network and they can adequately deal with the crime and antisocial behaviour seen throughout our public transport system.

Our bus drivers have endured and suffered for an incredibly long time due to antisocial behaviour, and it is not just for them; the bus drivers genuinely care about their passengers. They do not want anybody on their bus being exposed to violence, antisocial behaviour and the general disgusting behaviour seen on our buses. This is a capability we want to deliver for not only passengers but also, importantly, our bus drivers in Palmerston, Darwin and elsewhere in the Territory.

I am excited about the police public safety officers. If you are interested and want to make a difference to the Northern Territory, this is a new opportunity. You can be part of restoring this Northern Territory. Go to the police recruitment Facebook page or the website and put in your expression of interest because we are looking for anyone who wants to make a difference. The great gentlemen at the bus depot are both migrant men who have come here and want to build a better Northern Territory for their families and communities. I thank them, and I look forward to seeing them in a uniform next year making sure that Palmerston is safer.

On behalf of the Chief Minister and the entire CLP government, I thank all our hardworking officers in blue. We thank you for the sacrifices you make day-in day-out, having to face some of the hardest issues that would be hard to imagine unless you were in the job. Stick at it and keep going. The people are noticing it and they are genuinely loving what NT police are bringing to the table. I sincerely thank you.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.