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CONTENTS

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT 1707
Filming by Media 1707
DISTINGUISHED VISITOR 1707
Member for Lingiari 1707
VISITORS 1707
Zuccoli Primary School 1707
APPROPRIATION (2025–2026) BILL 1707
Serial 25 1707
REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 1707
Serial 26 1707
DISTINGUISHED VISITOR 1712
Hon Jane Aagaard 1712
VISITORS 1724
Darwin High School 1724
Mick Uibo 1724
NOTICES 1724
QUESTION TIME 1725
Territory Coordinator Appointment 1725
Territory Coordinator Appointment – Supplementary Question 1726
Budget 2025–26 – Cost of Living 1727
Darwin Waterfront Corporation – Investigation 1727
Budget 2025–26 – Payroll Tax 1728
Legal Aid Commission – Appointment of Director 1729
Budget 2025–26 – Mineral Royalties 1730
Police – Support 1731
Budget 2025–26 – School Safety 1732
Royal Darwin Hospital – Code Yellows 1733
Budget 2025–26 – Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Funding 1734
Legal Aid Commission – Appointment of Director 1734
Budget 2025–26 – Gaming Taxes 1735
Budget 2025–26 – Tourism 1736
Budget 2025–26 – Disability Support 1737
Northern Suburbs Youth Hub 1737
Budget 2025–26 – Mental Health 1738
MOTION 1739
Voluntary Assisted Dying 1739
MOTION 1751
Protecting Territorians from Gambling Harms 1751
MOTION 1771
Select Committee on Pathways for Children and Young People 1771
MOTION 1775
Appointment of the Estimates Committee 1775

ADJOURNMENT.....1777

Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT
Filming by Media

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have given permission for media outlets to record the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply speech from the Chamber floor this morning.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Member for Lingiari

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I acknowledge the Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour, who is with us today. She is here to listen to the Opposition Leader's budget reply speech.

Members: Hear, hear!

VISITORS
Zuccoli Primary School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Year 5/6 students from Zuccoli Primary School accompanied by their teachers. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome to you all.

Members: Hear, hear!

APPROPRIATION (2025–2026) BILL
Serial 25
and
REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 26

Continued from 13 May 2025.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, 12 months and one day ago Lia Finocchiaro stood in this House and told Territorians that she had a roadmap for the future—a plan for the Territory. Unlike so many of the CLP government's big promises to Territorians, this budget is less of a roadmap and more of a weedy goat track. The truth is that yesterday's budget lacks a vision for the Territory's future and fails to drive it forward in a meaningful way.

The Chief Minister's big promises about reining in the budget and responsible fiscal management are up in smoke; it was more spin from the government. She and her Treasurer have delivered the most expensive budget the Territory has ever seen.

Territorians have the country's highest net debt per capita—roughly $55,000 per resident—yet somehow the government still managed to deliver more cuts than a barber shop on a busy Saturday morning. Territory debt, which was forecast to steadily decrease under the former Labor government's stewardship, will increase by an additional $1.5bn over the next three years under the CLP government. It has no plan to get the spending under control other than telling public servants to tighten their belts to the tune of $20m, then pointing the finger somewhere else. It is quite a feat to deliver the most expensive budget in Territory history while still making cut after cut.

In my first speech to parliament as the Opposition Leader I said that I would spend my time holding this government to account and that I would do it constructively, without criticising for the sake of politicising points. However, it would be remiss of me to be here today representing fellow Territorians to congratulate the CLP on its budget. It would not be truthful on my part.

Territorians want and need a government that invests in people's success and a future where every Territorian, no matter where they live, has the chance to thrive.

I acknowledge the CLP's commitment to recycling, given it has repackaged, renamed and pushed Labor initiatives out the door to claim as its own, including a number of significant national partnerships and agreements with the federal Labor Albanese government, such as the $2bn to fully fund our Territory government schools, the $4bn 10-year remote housing package and the increased funding under the

NT Remote Aboriginal Investment agreement. These are important initiatives that the former Labor government worked hard to secure. We are pleased that the CLP government is claiming them now because it shows the CLP's understanding of how important and significant these agreements are.

They are important because they are about lifting up fellow Territorians and giving our kids the best possible start to life. They are about building a better, safer and stronger community together. It is why, on our side, we are so proud to have delivered this when Labor was in government. It is hard to see where the CLP government has shown any such strategic vision or foresight in its first budget, but at least we are thankful those initiatives remain intact.

Beyond these reheated announcements, if the budget provides a vision for the Territory, it is a bleak one. Despite receiving $800m in Commonwealth funding this year and an additional $100m in Territory-generated revenue compared with our last budget, the CLP government has failed to invest in key areas. There are deep cuts to infrastructure funding, which means less funding for roads, schools, hospitals and community building. It means less work for Territory businesses and fewer jobs for Territorians.

The Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in the country, a significant contributor to crime and antisocial behaviour across all of our communities. At the same time, Territory families continue to feel the pinch of the cost-of-living pressures. Knowing this, the government has chosen to slash housing funding by more than $100m in its first budget. That is cuts to urban, remote and government employment housing and housing in homelands and town camps.

The economy-driving tourism sector has copped a funding cut that defies belief, given the many thousands of small businesses in the Territory, Territory workers and family businesses that rely on the thriving tourism and hospitality sector to earn a living.

Our natural resources lose out, with an $11m cut to measures that protect and maintain our beautiful natural resources and the Territory lifestyle we all love and enjoy. This includes scrapping Aboriginal Ranger Grants—a huge shock to us when going through the budget papers yesterday. An independent review of the grants program found that it had made a profound contribution to land management across the Northern Territory, not to mention critical jobs and community-based industries that have benefited from the previous Labor government's Aboriginal Ranger Grants initiative.

Our ranger groups on country use these capital grants for vehicles, equipment that allows access to country, critical land management activities as well as equipment for weed control, feral animal removal and fire mitigation to look after country for all to enjoy. Scrapping this important program is a massive blow to land and sea management across the Northern Territory, as are the deep cuts to water resource management, water security improvements and rangelands funding.

There are cuts of approximately $14m in the agriculture space, including biosecurity and animal welfare. It will take time to get to the bottom of these cuts, as I have only had a look at the budget yesterday, but it is fair to say that there are many Territory losers out of this first attempt of a budget by the CLP.

This government has no vision and no idea about what Territorians need and care about. A strong economy that supports everyone, including our most vulnerable Territorians and our most remote Territorians, should go hand in hand, but the first budget of the CLP government puts investment in prisons well above investment in jobs and economic growth; in social cohesion and community development; and in a better, brighter, healthier and stronger Territory for all. This budget is a missed opportunity for the Northern Territory on community safety, which was a priority for Territorians. They want to see people who do the wrong thing face the consequences, but community safety is much more than just the short-term bandaid solutions or quick fixes that put more people on a path to criminalisation and reoffending.

Community safety is about investing in our young people so that they can thrive. It is about setting people on a path to become successful and contributing members of our community. It is about crime prevention in the first place, early intervention and correctional rehabilitation. The CLP has missed the mark on addressing the root causes of crime and serious issues within our justice system that are fuelling repeat offending. Territory Labor has been clear. If you pose a risk to the community, you should not be granted bail, but by being on bail and serving a sentence this should not be a pathway to future offending. That happens only when governments fail to invest in programs that break the cycle of crime.

Strong governments make tough decisions, not just to punish but to prevent. That means investing in early intervention, rehabilitation and programs to support people to change the course of their lives. This is how we will deliver the longer-term resolutions, preventing crime and creating safer communities across the

Northern Territory. On that front, the CLP government is failing Territorians. Its refusal to invest in meaningful crime prevention will have consequences that will reach well beyond this budget cycle. If the CLP believes its decisions are not contributing to the Territory's rising crime rates, it is not just out of touch; it is delusional. It is a disappointing approach from a government that talked up strong and big in the last election to already be out of ideas nine months in. This budget is out of care and out of touch for Territorians, as evidenced by the Treasurer more interested in casting a lure than knuckling down and doing the hard work a Treasurer should do.

Every bit of evidence around the world points to the fact that a punitive-only approach is likely to create more problems for our community in the long run, putting more people into the cycle of crime. Even the acting Police Commissioner said, 'We cannot arrest our way out of this problem'. This budget is completely and utterly failing to provide investment in a social determinant to reduce crime beyond what our former Labor government already banked into the budget. Those opposite talk about addressing the root causes, but it is clear they have no idea what that means. Nine months in, we are starting to hear its members articulate some type of understanding.

Those opposite talk about addressing the root causes of crime, but we are yet to see what programs they say will make the difference. That is largely because they are all about bandaid solutions and quick fixes to look and sound good on a media release or in a press grab. There are no quick fixes; these challenges are long term, and they need long-term solutions. Addressing them requires sustained and meaningful effort, not flashy press releases. It requires strong partnership with community, the federal government, our local government and those in the community sector to support elders and everyone who has a role to play in this space.

We have seen multiple government backbenchers in the last few weeks break ranks to talk about the concerns of crime in their own electorate in recent months under their own government, but unfortunately there are no answers in this budget for them, their constituents or the crossbench and opposition when it comes to preventing crime, rehabilitating people and getting people out of the cycle of crime.

One hugely missed opportunity is the Nightcliff Police Station. This was the Chief Minister's chance to fully commit to staffing that facility after the recent horrific incident that triggered the urgent callback to parliament—and the opposition's good faith in following the government through its urgent amendments to legislation. The communities of Nightcliff, Darwin and Palmerston have called for this.

This is the Chief Minister's chance, through her Treasurer, to put this to rest and create a safer community. If that is too hard, the opposition suggests turning the Nightcliff Police Station into a community safety hub that is shared with police and service providers to create the opportunity for the Nightcliff community to access as needed. That takes leadership, bravery and courage, and this opportunity was missed.

Of the $495m committed to Corrections this year, how much will actually go towards rehabilitating prisoners so that they are less likely to commit offences when they come out of jail? There is a measly $4.2m for domestic and family violence programs, when the majority of people serving sentences in Northern Territory Corrections are there because it is related to family and domestic violence. Overall, it is 0.8% of the prisons' budget, which is less than 1% aimed at getting offenders back on a good track and a better path to changing their lives.

The CLP members like to talk a lot about the root causes—now that they hopefully know what root causes are—but they still do not provide answers to the community when it comes to acting on them. This time last year in her budget reply speech, Lia Finocchiaro said that a future CLP government would change the law to make it mandatory for domestic violence offenders to attend behaviour change programs while serving their prison sentence.

The government now has before the House the domestic violence legislation amendment draft Bill, and there is nothing in those amendments about legislating for behaviour change programs. Hopefully, this is an oversight and will be amended by the government before the debate goes ahead. If the CLP had included an amendment along those lines, I believe we would be behind it. It is simply not there, but the government still has time to make this change.

What is also missing is increased funding to tackle domestic, family and sexual violence. The 2025 budget is on par with the former Labor's government funding in the 2024 budget. We have tried to get to the bottom of the CLP's claims that it is increasing domestic violence funding by $36m. We will now finally have the answer; it is not true. The Territory Labor opposition wants to keep working with the government to support the domestic violence sector in ensuring it is properly resourced and locally driven with community solutions.

We are pleased that the government is continuing to invest in tackling domestic violence to the same level as the previous Labor government, but it is disappointing that the CLP continues to cut the sector and community out of those critical conversations about how best the money can be spent. The CLP continues to ignore the evidence and hard work which has already happened in this space. Those opposite have decided they know best. Domestic violence experts are locked out of the conversation.

We know that to tackle domestic violence the partnerships in our community should always be the priority for the best approach. This is not patronising or an everyone-in-this-House-knows-best approach; it is to listen to experts and the people who deal with the horrific impact of domestic, family and sexual violence day-in and day-out. It is to make a change for the people experiencing this horrifying and plaguing violence.

We are yet to see the government commit to the 35 coronial recommendations following the tragic domestic violence deaths of four Territory women. Those recommendations are a clear, stepped-out and precise roadmap to tackling this horrendous domestic violence scourge, yet the CLP government has largely cast them aside.

We offered to be a part of the bipartisan delegation along with the crossbench members of the Northern Territory parliament to go to Canberra and argue for more funding to address domestic violence and make sure, once and for all, that the Territory receives needs-based funding in this area. So far, the Chief Minister has been silent on this truly unique opportunity of unified Territory parliamentarians standing up for the whole of the Territory together, regardless of politics. Chief Minister, when will you use your voice so that we can stand behind and support you, and further the work of the Territory? This is the time.

When the newly elected Albanese Labor government is in—it is now—we will offer our support to you, Chief Minister. Partnerships with the sector and community are needed across all three tiers of government. It is critical when it comes to thinking about the big issues we must tackle together. Unfortunately, this budget just does not seem to get it.

When it comes to community safety, police officers are finding out the hard way that talk is cheap with the CLP. Over and again the Chief Minister promised our police her unconditional support, then turned around and put a measly 3% pay rise on the table for the EBA. The budget papers confirmed that yesterday. That is all there is for police and other public sector workers when they come to negotiate their EBAs with this CLP government.

At a time when violent crime is on the rise—the most recent police statistics support that—the Chief Minister, who is also our Police minister, has turned her back on police and shouldering much of the responsibility in regard to law and order and the CLP agenda. This is a far cry from the unconditional support the Chief Minister promised when she was in opposition.

We acknowledge that the CLP has maintained the funding injected into the budget by the former Labor government to support an additional 200 police officers, as well as upgrading the Joint Emergency Services Communications Centre. We still support that. Both of these were key recommendations of the police resource review, and it is good to see the CLP continuing with these critical community safety initiatives, as it should.

What is less clear is where the rest of the review recommendations are at. The Chief Minister said, in her budget reply speech last year when she was in opposition, that she would follow the Labor government and implement the 15 recommendations. We have not heard from her since about the other recommendations, particularly the measures to improve the police force culture and strengthen wellbeing and welfare for police officers.

The Police minister had to be shamed into agreeing to an inquiry into senior hiring practices in the force. Two months later, and one Police Commissioner down, we have not heard another word about the inquiry from the Chief Minister. We simply do not know whether NT Police, which has experienced its fair share of destabilisation under this CLP government, is getting on with those police resource review recommendations, which are needed now more than ever to deal with attrition and bolster morale across the force.

I spoke earlier about the disappointing micro-investment this government is putting into rehabilitating offenders, choosing the punitive-only approach instead. Sadly, this budget confirms that the CLP is taking the same approach to children and young people. Despite the mountain of evidence concerning the harm caused to children by incarceration, the CLP government stubbornly refuses to invest in any meaningful way in prevention, early intervention or therapeutic supports that will actually help Territory kids get back on track.

This time last year, Lia Finocchiaro said that her future government would immediately establish boot camps in Alice Springs and Darwin. She said:

This will give the courts a place to send youth offenders as part of sentencing …

We are yet to see any signs of these boot camps in either Darwin or Alice Springs. This time last year the then Opposition Leader said that her future government would make diversion programs mandatory for young offenders. We are yet to see any sign of that either.

The only diversion program that the CLP can lay claim to is the Circuit Breaker Program, which government members often reference when they are trying to deflect questions about their lack of action on domestic violence. This is a recycled Labor program rebranded, the co-responder model. It is great to see the CLP continuing it, but the community wants to see more investment and effort into preventing youth crime and diverting children from bad behaviour.

There needs to be a greater focus on skills, training and employment pathways to give kids options and opportunity; it needs to be front and centre. The CLP will, as it always does, say that it has been only eight or nine months, so we need to give it time; however, this a concern across the Northern Territory.

Since coming to government, the CLP has not uttered a word about these things. Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro promised that she would do this 12 months ago, but there has not been a single word about it. Therefore, we must presume that the CLP government has no intention of meeting any of these commitments; they just sounded good at the time. The reality is that the Chief Minister's one-note approach to governing means that beyond locking up people, adults and kids she has no answers to improving community safety and will not let her team lead in this space either.

We welcome the CLP's commitment to the agreement that Labor struck with the federal Albanese Labor government to fully fund every Northern Territory public school. That investment is in the budget papers, and we congratulate the CLP for continuing this work. It is vital to ensure that every child across the Territory has the best possible access to education, no matter where they live.

In her budget reply last year I note that the then Opposition Leader said that a CLP government would invest in expanding school-based policing and increase access to special education for children and teenagers with disabilities. My team and I would like the CLP to point out to us where those items are in the budget papers, because they do not appear to be there as a new initiative. These critical investment areas affect all our electorates, so it is disappointing that the Chief Minister has not met her promise in these areas in the first CLP budget.

Our Labor opposition supports the funding to increase the number of school counsellors in our 153 Northern Territory schools, but we want more detail about how the CLP government will achieve this and what it will look like for schools on the ground.

The Treasurer flagged for some time that he intended to cut infrastructure funding from his own department. I spoke about it earlier, but it bears further discussion as we did not expect the cuts to be as deep and far reaching as those announced yesterday. The Treasurer can talk about the cash splash and programs, and he likes to try to muddy the water on this, but the numbers in the books do not lie. He has ripped $131m from the infrastructure budget. Yesterday in this House he avoided answering in detail the questions we asked about which projects will be cut from the CLP infrastructure budget because of this decision. However, I am sure the Treasurer will have those answers ready for us in Estimates. Hopefully, the Treasurer will spend his time properly preparing for Estimates, rather than go fishing on taxpayers' time.

This budget is an incredibly short-sighted move, with significant flow-on impacts to businesses, jobs, families and all our communities. The Treasurer will not give us the specifics, but roads, schools, hospitals and community development projects will not be built or upgraded because of this decision. This is a bad move for the Territory economy and for the benefits that our community would have reaped.

Like so much of what the CLP does, this budget is all slogans with no substance. It manages to hook Territorians in with more debt while delivering significant and widespread funding cuts and offering no clear economic vision for the future.

It is a disappointing budget for Territorians, who were promised so much more from their Chief Minister and have now received so little. No wonder the Treasurer went fishing, or perhaps he was told by the Chief Minister to stay on the boat and get out of the way.

In talking about the CLP's missed opportunities, yesterday the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network (NTIBN) put out its own media release. I support some of the areas called for by the NTIBN in its media release, which states:

NTIBN calls on the NT Government to:

- *Commit to a Whole-of-Government Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy with measurable targets, led by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people.*
- *Expand and enforce Aboriginal Procurement Policy targets across all agencies, ensuring not just contract awards, but real engagement with Aboriginal businesses in delivery.*
- *Support Aboriginal participation in emerging industries, including renewable energy, digital services, construction, and bush foods, through co-designed development plans and investment partnerships.*

So far, the details are grim for the CLP's first budget, but overall we say it is underwhelming and not hitting the mark. We have far too many questions that remain unanswered in the detail from the CLP. It keeps getting snagged on the detail. As I said when I first became Opposition Leader, my team stands ready to support further funding, investment, policies and programs that support Territorians for the better. We will remain constructive but keep holding the CLP government to account regarding the promises and commitments it made in delivering for Territorians.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Hon Jane Aagaard

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I acknowledge Hon Jane Aagaard, former Speaker of the Northern Territory and former Member for Nightcliff, in the gallery.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr MALEY (Agriculture and Fisheries): Madam Speaker, before I begin I will touch on points the Opposition Leader made when she was trying to rewrite history and say that things are not rosy and that the Territory is in a bad place. It was in a bad place, but the tide has turned, and things are moving forward.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about having no plan or roadmap and failing to drive forward; I am not sure if the Leader of the Opposition has read the Budget and Regional Overview book, but clearly there is a budget repair plan on page 5 in black and white. The Opposition Leader says that there is no plan or foresight, when clearly on page 5 there is a plan for budget repair. I ask the Opposition Leader to read the documents. Obviously, she was too busy to read through the budget books because the plan is clearly there.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about it being the most expensive budget ever seen. In only the last budget, the former Labor government predicted the deficit to be $1.75bn, while under ours it is $1.3bn. In fact, it is less and not as expensive. Again, I am not sure where the opposition is getting its information from, but the budget books are clear. Our budget has less of a deficit than the previous Labor government's. Those opposite are trying to rewrite history and say that this is the most expensive budget ever seen, when clearly that is not the case.

While I am touching on that point, the previous Labor government tried to trick Territorians when it did its budget. It had a range of programs—these are some of the infrastructure programs the Treasurer had to go through—that were programmed for delivery but not funded. Labor members went to communities and people across the Territory to say, 'We promise to build this road, this community centre and this health clinic', but they put it on the list and never funded it. They would never be built; it would never happen.

The Treasurer's own words described this as a great budget. It is not tricking Territorians. We have been open, transparent and up-front with Territorians that we will make sure the Territory moves forward. We are starting in a bad place; we have a massive debt and no money because the previous Labor government spent like a drunken sailor.

There was $1.2bn in Labor's last budget for infrastructure, yet it only gave itself $315m to pay for that. The former Labor government was back to the tricks and games it played with Territorians by saying, 'We put you

onto our programs and will give you your health clinic, roads or whatever infrastructure program you can name'. That $315m is already taken up in the arts centre, the Mandorah ferry terminal and remote housing, so there is no money. It makes it even worse that the Labor government said, 'We promise to do these infrastructure programs', but the money allocated was already being spent on other programs.

As the Treasurer said, some go over and some go under. It seems to be that the Labor government liked to go over, and not many went under.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about jobs and employment. There are no jobs on the program list. There are no jobs when these community centres are listed and never delivered. The Opposition Leader talked about how the Labor government made all these jobs and the CLP will cut those jobs. Those jobs were never there because the program list was $1.2bn, and it would never be delivered.

Jobs come from actual contracts with people doing the work, not just saying, 'We will build a health clinic, a new road and that or this'. That does not create jobs; actual work does. That is what the Treasurer has done. He has listed the infrastructure program, which will get things done—create jobs and employment and move the Territory forward.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about the losers in the Territory budget. She did not name any. I say that the winners in this budget are all Territorians because we will focus on community safety. That is our number one priority; we have spent an exorbitant amount of money on police, Corrections and the courts because Labor failed to invest in public safety.

The Opposition Leader spoke about bail as well; that it is a program that needs to continue. When we were in opposition, the then Labor government conducted a bail review because there was an unfortunate death in the community. Its recommendations were nothing—none at all. In fact, if my memory serves correctly, in that week when the Labor government announced it was doing nothing after the bail review, 10,000 people signed a petition because they were devastated that the previous Labor government would not take any action on bail. The review the Labor government conducted said, 'Do not do anything', yet public safety is the number one priority.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about backbenchers breaking rank and talking about crime and safety—because that is what Territorians are talking about. They have been talking about it not just for the last nine months but many years. Our backbenchers are doing their jobs in the community, as are the ministers. I am sure that the Labor opposition and crossbenchers get the same as we do, with people coming into their offices crying out for help and support in relation to community safety. Unfortunately, the previous Labor government failed to listen and act. The consequences were that people did not feel safe in the community, crime stats went through the roof and people were being robbed, assaulted and murdered.

This government is turning the tide and making community safety the number one priority. I say to all members, including our backbenchers, please go and talk to your community about this because if it is not front and centre, nothing will get done. Our job is to listen to the community, and public safety is number one.

The Opposition Leader talked about no forward planning. Crime statistics over the last eight years have put the Territory in a horrific place not only if you are victim of crime but also the businesses and tourism, particularly in Alice Springs, where businesses were suffering because crime was out of control.

In this budget we are spending $608m on Police, $495m on Corrections and approximately $240m on upgrading the court system because, as the Treasurer has said many times, if you spend $1 on the police system, you should spend $1.50 on Corrections and the courts. That is what the Labor government failed to do.

When we came to office there was overcrowding in the prison system to the point where the previous Labor government allowed prisoners to go to watch houses. This had an effect on the ability for police officers to keep the community safe. Community safety was not a priority of the previous Labor government. We will make sure we keep the community safe.

Thank you, backbenchers; please continue to speak out and represent your community members. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about the Nightcliff Police Station and missed opportunities—talk about political interference! There you go. It is a non-functioning police station built without a watch house. When you make a promise to the community and build a police station that police do not use—that is what we talk about regarding the previous Labor government's political interference with police.

Mr Paech: How is Legal Aid and the Waterfront going for you? Political interference—your brother was a reference!

Mr O'GALLAGHER: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I cannot hear the Deputy Chief Minister because of the interjections.

Mr Paech: Because he is talking crap.

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 31; I find that offensive.

Madam SPEAKER: Withdraw that for the sake of relations in parliament.

Mr PAECH: I withdraw it and replace it with 'talking nonsense'.

Madam SPEAKER: Let us calm down and listen to each other in silence, like we have so far.

Mr MALEY: It appears to me that correcting the record and stating a few home truths is hurting the opposition members because they do not like to hear the truth. They want to do what they did for the previous eight years, which was to fluff around and talk nonsense, saying, 'It is all safe and rosy; there is nothing to see here.' The truth is there is a lot to see, and it was caused by the previous Labor government.

We have been in office for about nine months, and we are turning the tide. We are putting people in prison and making the place safer. We are investing in courts and the community. We are making the Territory a safer place. It is a big ship to turn around because the previous Labor government let water onto the ship and made it difficult to turn around.

Mr Edgington: Eight years of Labor incompetence.

Madam SPEAKER: That is enough.

Mr MALEY: Eight years of missed opportunity and political interference.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about rehabilitation, the root causes and Corrections not having programs available. I will correct the record again. We know that we face challenges in the Corrections system. We have 500 new beds; we brought online Berrimah and increased Alice Springs. We have a chronic staff shortage, and I thank and shout out to the prison officers who do a great job.

I will run through figures in relation to education and rehabilitation because I know that Labor prides itself on rehabilitation, training and breaking the cycle. Despite our increase in numbers, Corrections has delivered more educational programs between 1 July 2024 and 17 April 2025 than it did during the same time in 2024. In 2025, 671 prisoners completed these programs compared with 553 in 2024. This shows that we increased education in prison to break the cycle.

Another point to correct the record is the focus on offender rehabilitation and engagement in family violence programs. In that period there were 103 completions for us versus 95 for Labor, and the RAGE program had 41 completions versus 12 for the same time. For the record, the CLP government is not only keeping the community safe; we are attempting to rehabilitate and educate people to make them better people and to break the cycle of reoffending, because jailing is failing. The previous Labor government did not do anything; it just wanted to lock up people without any training, and the stats speak for themselves.

The Leader of the Opposition said that we are not doing anything about children and young people. I have two words for her: Circuit Breaker. That is a program designed to intervene early, and my colleague will talk in more detail to let Territorians know that the CLP is doing more than one thing at a time. We are running the ball in multiple directions and making multiple hits to make the community safe because that is our number one priority. We are investing in police, the courts, Corrections and in children and young people. It is clear the CLP has a long way to go. I am under no illusion that it is still difficult in the community for families and to operate businesses, but we have your backs.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about no sign of boot camps. Clearly, she has not been in community and has not spoken to her own colleagues, because Alice Springs Paperbark Youth Justice Precinct has been completed and will be a boot camp. Tennant Creek has had a young offender program since March, and Katherine has Back on Track. We have been planning for eight months; you cannot do much. The previous government was in power for eight years and did nothing, but we are working hard and have many

irons in the fire. Compulsory diversion is happening through our youth justice program, and we are supporting it and moving forward.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about the budget being short-sighted. The previous Labor government's budget was not short-sighted because it planned to trick Territorians in its previous budget. Labor planned and made positive steps to trick Territorians in this funding blitz where it made a program for three or four years and funded it for the first year so that it did not breach its made-up debt ceiling. Labor planned to do it and thought about it—positive steps to trick Territorians. Labor should hang its head in shame now that it has been caught out and the budget is what it is, because this Labor government failed Territorians. Shame on them.

I congratulate the Treasurer on this balanced, responsible, responsive and great budget. This is the first budget of the Lia Finocchiaro government, a budget that puts victims first and restores what Labor broke. It is a responsible budget delivered by the Treasurer to begin undoing Labor's spiralling, out-of-control $11bn debt. This is our first budget, and it is focused on law and order, with $1.34bn allocated to our justice system as a whole, not just policing.

The Northern Territory faces a serious crime problem, including aggravated robberies, assaults and drug-related offences and events such as the aggravated robbery of a 101-year-old man in Darwin, the home invasion and injuries to a mother and her baby in Alice Springs, the home invasion and serious assault of a 70-year-old man in Woodroffe and the senseless deaths of Declan Laverty and Linford Feick. These horrendous crimes underscore the urgency of the issue. These crimes are unacceptable.

The CLP was elected to act on the Territory's high crime rate, and that is what we have done. We have prioritised community safety, even if it means increasing incarceration and overcrowding our prisons. If you are committed to a detention centre by the courts, we will find you a bed. We make no apologies for this strong response because we want to keep the community safe.

When prisoner numbers exceeded the viable bed capacity, extending them to police watch houses was Labor's answer. The previous Labor government ignored the mounting pressures, neglected our frontline services and left Northern Territory residents with a crime crisis.

Within eight months—not eight years—this government's decisive action has brought online more than 500 new beds in the Corrections system; moved Corrections out of the Palmerston and Alice Springs watch houses; introduced legislation to enable private sector support for the Corrections workforce; and funded expansions to ensure our officers can focus on maintaining safe and good order in our prison facilities.

In just eight months we have delivered stronger sentencing laws, given police greater powers and reinstated mandatory sentencing for DVO breaches. This has increased prisoner numbers and put pressure on our Corrections system, but today's budget strengthens the justice system to take care of these prisoners, tackle the crime crisis and, most importantly, deliver consequences.

The Corrections budget is $495m, with substantial new funding to expand capacity, enhance programs and support community safety. There is $59m of new money for additional operational services in Darwin, Berrimah and Alice Springs. Of that $59m, $20m is for prisoner health and $4.2m is for domestic, family and sexual violence reduction programs. Territory prisoners often require extensive healthcare, which can impact on the cost of their incarceration. The remaining funds are for operational costs with more contingencies to address a rise in prisoner numbers should that be needed.

Investing in rehabilitation inside our prisons is not just smart; it reduces reoffending, lowers the long-term costs and delivers safer communities. This is in stark contrast to Labor's short-sighted neglect of the Corrections system.

Increasing budgets to Corrections may not be cost effective, especially when the resources are directed primarily to incarceration rather than community-based alternatives and rehabilitation programs. This budget has $8.5m for Community Corrections to expand electronic monitoring. Studies have shown that community-based sentences, such as probation or parole, are often more cost effective than incarceration. There is a lot more to do in this area, and we will continue to do that. Providing opportunities for offenders to gain skills and education can improve their employability and reduce the likelihood of reoffending, leading to long-term benefits for the community.

This budget also addresses funding failures, such as the $34.7m in time-limited funding. These are the funding cliffs I spoke about, with programming and funding for something for one year. Programs were in

place, but there was no funding. This is where the previous Labor government had to consciously think and positively act to trick Territorians, and it has been caught out big time by the Treasurer.

There is $20m for staffing across all divisions of Corrections. This is for custodial and support positions in the prisons to manage rising prisoner numbers. This funding provides certainty to NDIS teams, bail support accommodation and electronic monitoring.

An effective Corrections system delivers safer communities and lower reoffending rates while ensuring taxpayers are not burdened by unnecessary costs. To achieve this, money must be spent on improving and expanding our Corrections facilities and strengthening our education programs.

This budget demonstrates our unwavering commitment to community safety. By delivering significant increased funding to Corrections, we are providing the resources necessary to address challenges we inherited, enhance rehabilitation and create a safer Territory for all. As the Corrections minister, I congratulate the Treasurer and our government on making law and order the centrepiece of this budget.

As the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Mining and Energy, I stress that the only way we can afford to address Labor's $11bn debt and keep Territorians safe is by growing our own revenue. Unlike Labor, our government only announces programs and initiatives that have funding attached to them, rather than unfunded press releases.

Our government's strategy to address our dire structural deficit is simple: we cannot and will not spend our way out of this situation. We will not do what Labor did by promising the world and underdelivering. Our option is to increase our own-source revenue through private investment while ensuring public monies are spent responsibly to attract and facilitate investment in the Northern Territory.

Having the entirety of our budget sourced from Canberra is not a tenable or acceptable situation. Territory taxpayers deserve to know that their tax dollars are being spent wisely to generate more dollars and provide cost-of-living relief across the Territory, no matter where you live. Providing such cost-of-living relief is one of our top priorities. For example, our government has followed through with commitments to double the solar feed-in tariff from 9c to 18c from 1 July 2025 during peak times.

Furthermore, our government realises the impact of increasing energy costs and has shifted from a renewables-at-all-costs focus to a lowest-cost-of-energy focus to help Territorians' bottom line. For example, the community service obligation designed to keep Territorians' power prices low will increase in line with the consumer price index. However, all these things must be paid for somehow.

Every dollar of private investment that can be spent on schools, hospitals and services is a dollar of taxpayers' money saved—a dollar that the taxpayer does not have to pay. Therefore, we are laser focused on growing the productive economy of the Northern Territory and harnessing the vast potential of our natural resources. In 2024–25 taxes and royalties on minerals and gas comprised approximately 38% of our own-source revenue and 11% of the Territory's total revenue. Mining and royalties contributed more than $200m to the NT Treasury in 2025–26.

The mining sector forms the greatest sole contributor to the Territory's own-source revenue through royalties and associated revenue. It is critical to our economic recovery that the sector grows quickly. We know that gas is important—people in this Chamber have made money out of the gas industry; their family works in it—providing direct and indirect money. It is critical that we expand and support the mining and gas industry. This government supports the gas and mining industry, and we want to work towards making it easier for you to do business, invest, bring workers here and spend money in the Northern Territory.

Two of the NT's largest mines are projected to close in the next five years, being Gove and GEMCO, representing a substantial royalty reduction. It is therefore imperative to our economic future that exploration for minerals and petroleum is expedited and that new mining projects proceed to final investment decision asap.

In this NT budget the Department of Mining and Energy has received a 2025–26 operating budget of approximately $40m. Prioritised within this budget is the role of the Beetaloo Project Management Office, charged with the coordination and facilitation of development of activities in the Beetaloo. We support the Beetaloo and the gas industry, and we need to get that gas out of the ground and to market at a competitive price. We intend to do that to the best of our ability.

Unleashing the Beetaloo is the most rapid way to guarantee energy security for Territorians and an additional long-term royalty revenue stream for our Treasury. Remember that onshore gas comes to us, and offshore gas goes to the Commonwealth then indirectly comes back through Commonwealth funding.

This coming month we should see the resumption of operations at GEMCO, and the opening of Nobles Nob mine in Tennant Creek—the land of opportunity. These and other advanced projects are critical to getting the NT economy back on its feet after years of economic ruin and policy from the Labor government.

The agriculture and fishing sector is worth approximately $1.3bn to the economy and must also be prioritised. This budget includes vital spending in this space, with a focus on increased economic growth and viability of the existing and emerging primary industries.

We will continue to promote and enable economic growth in partnership with industry through research, development and capacity-building projects and activities that support new and existing agribusiness. For example, I welcome the announcement yesterday by the NT Court of Appeal to uphold the Fortune Agribusiness water licence for Singleton Station. Fortune has been clear, transparent and positive throughout the entire licensing process and subsequent court hearings. This represents the end of almost a decade of work by Fortune, with the Singleton project expected to create over 1,000 jobs and an annual economic contribution of roughly $200m.

Our government is determined to facilitate investment of such projects and ensure that the NT Government dollars are spent making our jurisdiction more attractive and competitive to business. This includes prioritising our research farms to consolidate their projects in line with industry feedback. Under this government each research farm will develop a detailed business case to better support and assist industry and the Northern Territory's economy.

Budget 2025–26 sees a commitment of $1m over two years to implement a comprehensive research program for the integration and management of the mango twig tip dieback. The Northern Territory mango industry, which contributes more than $100m annually to the economy and employs approximately 2,500 workers across multiple sites, is being threatened by this pest. The Northern Territory is responsible for more than half the nation's mango production, accounting for 52% of Australia's total mango crop in the 2024–25 season. This crisis is not just a local concern but a national one.

This commitment to support the Territory's economic development underpins market access for agricultural products by providing a research, extension and diagnostic function and managing plant pests and animal diseases …

Mr PATEL: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move that an extension of time be granted to the member.

Motion agreed to.

Mr MALEY: It is important that we can manage any outbreaks in the Northern Territory with programs such as the trailer being made for emergency biosecurity outbreaks. We are a remote area, and we need to ensure we are ready for any potential biohazards.

The 2025–26 budget has also locked in $1m to protect sustainability of the NT's aquatic resources through continued operation of the Fisheries Compliance Unit. Fishing is a vital part of the NT lifestyle and economy. Commercial and recreational fishing combine directly to support over 2,700 jobs and add approximately $290m to the economy each year. I know because I spend my money on fishing.

The Fisheries Compliance Unit conducts on-water patrols and inspections of commercial fishers, fishing tour operators and recreational fishers to deter crime and ensure sustainability of our NT world-class fishing.

Since February 2024 the Fisheries Compliance Unit has conducted 234 fisheries patrols, of which 40 were conducted jointly with Aboriginal marine rangers on country; interacted with over 2,600 individuals engaged in commercial and recreational fishing activities; inspected approximately 1,200 vessels; seized over 250 items; and detected 170 offences.

The Fisheries Compliance Unit was established by the former government with time-limited funding for just two years. What was its plan after the funding ran out? This is another example of setting up a program, getting it running and simply not funding it. We know how important our fisheries are, and we will continue to support the unit's ongoing work.

As the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Mining and Energy, it is my responsibility not just to manage but develop and grow these sectors for the betterment of all Territorians. I will do that to the best of my ability. I support the agriculture industry, fisheries, mining, energy and the gas industry. I will make sure it is well known that they have my support and that I will do whatever I can to make sure they develop the Northern Territory, spend their money here and they are safe here to invest in the Northern Territory.

I commend the Treasurer on handing down this budget, designed not only to reduce crime but also provide the foundation on which our economy can and will be rebuilt.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, this is the ninth time I have spoken on a budget, but the first time that it has been a CLP budget. I start by congratulating the CLP government for doubling the tax revenue from the gambling industry. The NT is a safe haven for gambling companies who come here because the NT Government offers low tax rates and low penalties for misconduct. I understand from Budget Paper 3 that this could provide many millions of dollars extra to the NT. This increase may not go far enough, but it is an important improvement, given the enormous profits these companies make and the amount of harm caused. I applaud this step by government.

On the surface, there is not much else in this budget for my electorate or bush electorates to celebrate, but I also note that this government does not appear to have made significant cuts, which is important.

I note that there is a possible cut to the rangers programs, and this is concerning. This program really needs to be expanded by both levels of government as we see more activity across the region, and we need to see increased resources for patrolling the region and for training rangers so they have increased powers to act.

I note this budget is also investing in the gas industry. These are big companies with big profits, and they will take their profits out of the NT. This government should not be subsidising big business in this way when our health, education and housing sectors could use these funds.

I also note the continued support for the interpreting and translation service, and this is again a service that really needs to be expanded. When we talk about education and employment in the region, this is a clear employment pathway for our kids where there is much demand. All government departments, services and big businesses, such as Telstra and the banks, should be working with interpreters in remote Aboriginal communities.

I am also concerned about how few kinship care placements there are in the NT. This is an area that needs to grow so that we can provide the best care for our kids. Purchased home-based business models continue to grow; this is not the best outcome. The model needs to shift so that funding is redirected to family and kinship carers. With more support, extended family members can help those children who need greater care and protection. The Aboriginal child placement principle must be properly supported if we want the best outcomes. I do not believe that any government has done this yet.

I am aware that there are no new works for infrastructure for the Mulka electorate in this budget. I can see a number of revoted works, and some of these revoted works have been in the budget papers for years. Will these revoted works happen during this financial year?

The $205m for the Central Arnhem Road has been announced over several years, and I hope to see significant work being completed this year. This week the Central Arnhem Highway remains closed. No-one can drive out of Gove or any of the homelands located along the north end of the Central Arnhem Highway, and no-one can drive in.

There has been more than 600 millilitres of late rain in the Mulka electorate. While Darwin has been dry, we have had days and days of rain. This has also impacted landing strips, with only a limited number of small planes able to land in many homelands to bring in food supplies, health workers and teachers.

The Makarrata boarding school provides secondary education, but it cannot run because the students cannot be brought in. Other schools are also struggling to run. Health workers are responding only to urgent health matters and cannot provide clinics.

Many homeland residents are stranded in Gove and wanting to get home, but with no way to get there. At this stage, the Chief Minister's department does not know when that road will reopen. Laynhapuy Homelands has been strong advocating for the Laynhapuy homeland residents. They have helicoptered fuel into several homelands that will last until mid-June. Prior to the government-funded helicopters, Laynhapuy had been calling for help and support to get supplies out to homelands that had been cut off for some time.

For eight years I called on the Labor government to focus on the Central Arnhem Highway upgrades from the Nhulunbuy end to Gapuwiyak as a priority so that our homeland residents have access to supplies all year round. As part of this, the Giddy River crossing must be upgraded.

On every road that comes off the Central Arnhem Highway, including the Ramingining Link Road, the yearly maintenance is often just the grader passing over. The trucks that use that road and the Central Arnhem Road, gouge out the road, and the grading that follows then creates a road that is lower than the surrounding country, creating pools in the Wet Season for the buffalo to enjoy, but these roads become more and more impossible to drive. Gravel should be brought in to maintain these roads properly, so I ask the question: is this the year that we will see significant roadworks so that our communities are not left stranded next year?

I am concerned that I cannot see mention of infrastructure upgrades for the barge landings in my electorate. For many years the Labor government had this expenditure budgeted for, but the work was never started. However, this does not mean that we do not desperately need these upgrades. Galiwinku and Ramingining rely on a weekly barge service for all supplies, as do Milingimbi and Gapuwiyak. These barge landings need significant work to allow the barges to continue to land. I hope that this government will uphold doing these works.

This brings us to cost-of-living issues. When the roads are closed the only way to leave the region is by air. Buying a flight from Gove to Darwin this Friday will cost $1,041 for a one-way flight. This is similar across our communities, ranging from $675 one way from Milingimbi to Darwin or $835 from Elcho Island to Darwin. These are the cost-of-living pressures that people in our region face. These are the flight costs all year round. For anyone needing to leave the region urgently, these are the prices we pay.

The town of Nhulunbuy has high rents, the highest council rates in the NT and, like the whole region, an extreme housing shortage and high fuel and freight costs on all supplies; that is passed on to individuals and businesses. These issues have not been addressed by any NT Government. With the closure of the mine looming, people do not feel that enough work has been done to consult all clans and communities about what we want for the region. There continues to be land ownership issues that must be resolved according to Yolngu law and traditional decision-making. For a strong future we must have all clans involved, otherwise we continue the legacy that the mine brought of disempowering Aboriginal people and taking away our decision-making rights.

Also on cost-of-living issues, roads, infrastructure and new housing are all things that are needed across our communities and homelands. Our homelands are our safest places to live; they are where our children can grow up strong and confident on their own country—like me, growing up on homeland country.

For the past past few years I have seen the children from Garthalala homeland graduate school with confidence and pride. This is what can be achieved in every homeland with strong two-way education that is overseen by elders. I hope we will one day see these graduations happening across our region.

I have been speaking with all levels of government about new housing for homelands. In these places our ancestors' spirits are strong and call on us to live a lawful life of respect for country, community and ourselves, and we live peacefully knowing we are looked after by the ancestors.

I can see in this budget that homeland funding remains the same, and it only addresses limited grants for maintenance. This amount has changed very little in the last eight years, yet the cost of supplies and fuel in remote areas has risen enormously. Homeland resource centres are left with less capacity and capability to service homelands each year. This funding amount needs to be urgently reviewed due to increasing costs across the NT. Homelands have the capacity to bring economic independence with the operation of small businesses. Across all our communities we need to focus on local jobs rather than the increasing number of FIFO workers in communities.

I will continue to call on both levels of government to look at how the $4bn housing agreement can include new housing for our homelands. I believe there is a strong commitment to make this happen from all parties. We must begin the work now on tenure, agreements, infrastructure and design. All these things must be happening now so we can begin a pathway for new housing in homelands.

The high level of GST funding from the federal government comes to the NT to address Aboriginal disadvantage. Within this budget, I would like to see where that money goes. There is very little transparency on these funds. It should not go to prisons or police; it should go towards programs that are community led, and it should be managed in partnership with Aboriginal communities. Shared decision-making is the number one priority reform in the Closing the Gap agreement. I cannot see shared decision-making or partnership in

this budget, nor are there any plans for it that I can see. This is an enormous problem. Labor had a plan for local decision-making.

In the Mulka electorate our communities were just starting to develop clan-based representative groups that could create partnerships with government in line with local decision-making. Now with a new government we are left waiting to be properly consulted, included and engaged with again.

The Attorney-General must uphold people's rights and advocate justice for everyone. Her failure to do this is concerning. I understand that it costs $3,600 per day to detain a young person in detention, which is more than $1m a year per child. If this money was invested in the community to which the child belongs, proper community-led programs could be delivered for that child and others. This would give them a chance to be rehabilitated, rather than be exposed to a criminal culture that will breed criminal activity.

There also needs to be adequate funding to address FASD, brain injuries, addiction and trauma. There must be funding that addresses the underlying issues that cause crime.

Unless this government has interest in growing jails and creating a prison industry with significant amounts of money going to private companies, I believe that we should all be working towards lowering incarceration rates in the NT. However, this budget seeks to make incarceration the thing that the NT does the most …

Mrs ZIO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move that an extension of time be granted to the member.

Motion agreed to.

Mr GUYULA: We will not be known for tourism; we will be known for jailing people. We will overtake El Salvador as the place with the highest incarceration rates in the world. We should be investing in alternatives.

I see that the funding for Community Courts remains in this budget. I am pleased that this continues to be supported by this government, but I want to see the program expanded. We have a community court in Ramingining, but I also want to see this in Gove and Galiwinku. I am certain that many other communities want to be part of Community Courts.

I see that there is $2m less for Aboriginal justice. The budget paper says this is because of the finalisation of time-limited funding for law and justice groups. I am unsure what this means.

In Ramingining a law and justice group formed a number of years ago, and this group is critical to governing the community. It has elders and leaders from across clan groups. They are representative of Yolngu law and our systems, and because of this they hold real authority within the community. They were not elected under a balanda system or hand-picked by the government; they are the real leaders. This is what we need in all our communities, so I am disappointed to see a drop in funding in this area. We are talking about a $1.5bn law and order budget and only $8m for Aboriginal justice. Given that Aboriginal people are highly over-represented in the justice system, it makes no sense that Aboriginal justice receives so little.

Over decades the NT and federal governments have neglected Aboriginal communities in the bush. From this neglect comes increased poverty levels, increased overcrowding, low levels of employment, increased crime in the bush and the movement of people into towns. Instead of investing in programs in the bush, this government has decided to spend $1.5bn on jails and public order that, for the most part, is based in urban centres.

By taking this approach and continuing to underinvest in the bush, our communities are once again left on the sidelines without the support we need to bring change. This is crippling our communities and removing our right to self-determination. It is guaranteeing that our communities become less safe instead of solving the problems. The government will be growing the problems.

When I look at the budget I ask, where is the funding for preventive community-led solutions such as *raypirri* camps and peacekeeping? Where is the funding for increased services and support in the bush? Where is the funding to tackle poverty? Where is the funding for genuine shared decision-making and self-determination in the bush? Where is the funding for things that will improve our lives and bring equality?

These are the areas which will create the most positive impact in the NT, yet I cannot see them clearly in this budget.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I will comment on the things the Opposition Leader spoke about. She spoke about the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement that the previous government signed up to. In fact, any responsible government would have negotiated the agreement because this investment will build up our future Territorians. We need schools to be properly funded to employ teachers and support staff.

She also went on to talk about school-based police. We have increased funding of $3m for the school-based police program. I do not know what she was reading or whether she missed that part of the budget, but I wanted to let her know there is money for school-based policing, and it is an important part of the education system that we look forward to expanding.

She also said that it lacked vision. She was talking about the highest net debt per capita, but after nine short months we have inherited an $11bn debt from her previous Labor government, so she needs to look in her own backyard before she talks about the highest debt per capita. It is because of the previous government's wilful spending on pet projects—we have done that to death over time.

This is our first budget as a new government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro and Treasurer Bill Yan. This budget is about restoring confidence and rebuilding the Territory. We are putting victims first and prioritising law and order. We begin the long task of rebuilding the economy and fixing Labor's mess after eight long years. It is not a flashy budget; there is not the finances for that. We inherited $11bn of debt from Labor, and we will be cleaning up its mess and delivering a responsible budget, reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our lifestyle.

Community safety is our number one priority, and this budget makes a record $1.5bn investment in police, Corrections and justice. It is the largest law and order spend by any government in Territory history.

Over the last eight years of Labor we saw a government that focused not on the victims but instead on the perpetrator. We did not see any financial support for infrastructure or resources for staffing in the Corrections space. This has led to a Corrections nightmare for the minister, and he is working through this with his Corrections master plan.

After passing the strongest bail laws in Australia the CLP government is putting its money where its mouth is. For every dollar invested in policing we are matching that investment in our Corrections and justice systems. We know that being strong on crime requires more than an increased investment in police, Corrections and justice, which is why we are funding early intervention measures that address the root causes of crime, as well as allocating funding to support victims.

Our Finocchiaro-led CLP government is investing a record $1.6bn in education and training. This includes $120m for vocational and higher education. The 2025 budget allocates $976.6m for government education.an increase of $52.5m on the prior year—and $343.3m for non-government education—an increase of $10.2m on the prior year.

Our CLP government is taking decisive action to break the cycle of crime by addressing its root causes through a broad package of early intervention, education, family support and housing initiatives in this year's budget. We are committed to investing in the future of our children, which is why we allocated $12.9m to boost school attendance through the school attendance officer program, an increase of more than $4m from last year.

Our CLP government is driving reforms to improve school attendance and hold parents accountable for ensuring their children go to school. This was an election commitment, and we are delivering it. Parents who deprive their children of an education will be referred for income management.

One thing not spoken about often is the importance of parents being responsible for their children. It is a parent's responsibility to make sure their children attend school and act in a respectful way in the school environment. I speak to people in my community, whether it be constituents or Aboriginal organisations, about this. Jawoyn Association Chair Lisa Mumbin spoke at the Kalano 50th birthday about the importance of parents being responsible in their child's education journey.

Since the introduction of school attendance officers there has been a reduction of more than 450 students on the intensive support roll compared with the same period last year. The previous government chose to hide this roll; it had a separate roll of attendance rates that it spoke about. I thank the school attendance officers who continue to work closely with families and communities to improve school attendance.

Swimming in schools continues. Again, this is an election commitment that we are delivering, with free swimming lessons for all primary school students in Years 1 to 6. Our government has committed $3m ongoing to fund these free swimming lessons, which are crucial for our Territory lifestyle. It has been great to speak to parents and schools that previously did not have swimming lessons and hear their positive feedback. Some of those children are having lessons for the first time.

Our swimming in schools program will ensure that all children learn essential swimming and water safety skills as part of their education. It is a part of the broader initiative to provide cost-of-living relief to Territory families. This had a great start, with 127 schools committing to the Swim and Survive program so far by working with the NT School of Sport Education.

Our government is committed to ensuring qualified school counsellors are based in schools—unlike the previous government—and properly resourcing them by committing $1.9m to expand qualified school counsellor positions in schools. The school counsellor program election commitment will be funded through a reprioritisation of existing staff and resources. These funds will employ school-based qualified counsellors.

We will establish a qualified workforce of school counsellors for urban and regional schools at a recommended ratio of one to 500 students, with proper professional oversight. To improve candidate eligibility and interest, the school counsellor role will have a broader essential qualification like counselling, social work or psychology, and a more focused scope of practice.

A qualified workforce of social workers will continue supporting primary, special and remote schools with evidence-based programs and critical incident responses. Our $1.9m commitment refers to the new school counselling team and will employ 14 full-time equivalent staff from July 2025 and six full-time-equivalent staff from January 2026—a total of 20 full-time equivalent staff by June 2026.

Demonstrating our government's commitment to training and higher education, the sector will receive a $10.2m increase in this budget, boosting the total investment to $28.6m to support apprenticeships and traineeships. Skilling Territorians is a critical part of rebuilding the Territory's economy.

We know that students need choice in their education journey, so we have increased the focus on school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, giving an important pathway to meaningful employment. As a previous tradie from a family of tradies, I am pleased to see that we also have free TAFE and vocational education and training courses. We provide up to $1,000 for first-year apprentices and trainees to buy workwear and equipment as part of the workwear and gear bonus. The payroll tax exemption for trainee and apprentice wages encourages employers to invest in the Territory workforce, which is critical to having more tradies.

Also, those young tradies will not receive an increase in the cost of rego for their vehicles for 12 months. They can also access a free driver's licence for the next 12 months.

As well as investing in these measures to increase school attendance, apprenticeships and traineeships, we are investing $14.2m to boost literacy and numeracy in government schools to get back to basics.

Our government is taking practical measures to keep and attract teachers to the Territory. We know that the Northern Territory has a poor reputation around the country when it comes to crime, which is a detriment to people seeking to move here, including teachers. We want teachers to move to the Territory. We have the highest-paid teachers in the nation, but they must feel safe.

This budget is a victim-first budget that is strong on crime and addresses the root causes of it. We are reversing Labor's weak-on-crime legacy and doing what we can to keep Territorians safe.

While being strong on crime, this budget invests $13.8m in keeping and attracting teachers to government schools by giving them financial certainty and moving them off short-term contracts and into permanent positions so that they have confidence to put down roots and stay in the Territory. Our commitment is to increase the permanent classroom teacher workforce to 75% by 2027. We are well on our way to achieving this. As of now, 69% of classroom teachers are permanent employees. This is an increase of 6.7% compared with the same time last year.

On top of these initiatives for education, we have the Back to School vouchers delivering cost-of-living relief for families, sport vouchers to support families, and we are expanding school-based policing. Teachers and students need to feel safe in our school environments, and their wellbeing must be prioritised.

Since coming to government, we have already delivered a raft of election commitments and significant legislative reform. We introduced Australia's strongest bail laws, passed mandatory minimum sentences for assaults on frontline workers and created new criminal offences targeting ram raids and post-and-boast offending. We expanded police powers under Declan's law to crack down on bail and knife crime. We introduced tougher public drinking offences to help restore order to our towns and streets.

This budget will deliver $608m for police services, including continued support for the remote policing plan, police aircraft, CCTV monitoring and school-based policing. There is $16m to upgrade critical infrastructure and technology at the 000 call centre; a further $2m allocated to boost emergency communications in Central Australia; and $495m for Corrections, with $126m in immediate funding and $176m ongoing to deal with rising prisoner numbers.

Since coming to government, we have added more than 500 new Corrections beds across the Territory, which the Deputy Chief Minister spoke about this morning. If you commit a violent act in the Territory, you will face consequences, because under our government victims come first. As the Minister for Corrections has said many times, if you do the crime we will find a bed for you.

This budget delivers the most significant and sustained investments in tackling domestic, family and sexual violence in Territory history with $180m over five years and $36m ongoing to drive prevention and early intervention. We are funding:

- specialist domestic, family and sexual violence courts, starting in Alice Springs and expanding to more sites, so that victims are not retraumatised by the justice system
- new culturally safe offender programs in prisons and communities to stop violence before it escalates
- men's behaviour change programs in Darwin, Wadeye, Katherine and Alice Springs, because violence is a choice, and it can be changed; we must make change
- safe houses in remote communities where support is needed most
- a specialist after-hours health response so that survivors are not left alone when they need help the most
- an expanded family safety network for those at serious risk of harm or death.

In Katherine we know only too well of incidents of domestic violence, with four women succumbing to their death in a short space of time last year. This is a scourge on society and should not be tolerated. It is not culture but is sometimes portrayed that way. Addressing the root causes, as the minister said, is the start to tackling these issues. There is a lot of work to do, but this also starts at home with parents role modelling good behaviour and students attending school.

We are supporting frontline services with $26m over five years in additional funding for the wonderful organisations that work with survivors. We are building a permanent integrated workforce support and training system so that this response is strong, skilled and sustainable.

We are also expanding the Circuit Breaker Program in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine, with $6.6m per annum ongoing funding. This program offers wraparound support to at-risk youths, young people and their families to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence and youth crime.

The Circuit Breaker team in Katherine works in the evenings from Thursday to Sunday alongside police, public housing safety officers and the Kalano patrol. They meet in the town square, which is a highly visible area, and head off on patrols after their meeting. This has been a game changer, with people working collaboratively across departments, and is having a positive impact on dealing with youths. Youths are supported, family conferences take place, and a safe space is found if that is necessary. Follow-ups with Education, Health and other agencies is part of this ongoing work, which is seeing good results in its infancy. I am sure that the minister will elaborate on the Circuit Breaker Program in her contribution.

We are embedding a co-responder model in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and remote areas, so the response is early, focused and fast because no-one should be left unprotected from violence.

I am proud to have also helped secure $1.5m for the Katherine multicultural facility, a dedicated facility to provide a safe welcoming space where multicultural groups can meet, host events and celebrate their cultural heritage with the broader community.

Katherine School of the Air and the ICPA have also been lobbying and succeeded in bringing the plight of the school to attention. The toilets are as old as the school and are insufficient when in-school week is on and visitors arrive at the school. Teachers, students and families all use the same toilet block. Much-needed funding of $500,000 for that toilet block renovation has been secured, and they are grateful.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

VISITORS
Darwin High School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Legal Studies students from Darwin High School accompanied by their teachers. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mick Uibo

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I also welcome the Opposition Leader's dad, Mr Mick Uibo, in the Speaker's Gallery.

Members: Hear, hear!

NOTICES

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall move that this Assembly:

1. affirms the critical importance of integrity, transparency and accountability in the Northern Territory Public Sector and all levels of government

2. acknowledges growing public concern about misconduct, conflicts of interest and corruption in parts of the NT Public Sector, whether actual or perceived, and the need to restore trust in government institutions

3. notes the current limitations in investigative and enforcement powers available to integrity bodies in the Northern Territory, including but not limited to, the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (ICAC) particularly in relation to whistleblower protection, transparency of outcomes and responsiveness and action on complaints

4. calls on the Northern Territory Government to:

    (a) strengthen ICAC's independence, powers and resources to ensure thorough and timely investigations

    (b) create a cross-party parliamentary integrity and oversight committee to monitor and report on ethical conduct and integrity issues across government

    (c) implement a public register of interests for senior public servants, statutory officeholders and ministerial staff which will be updated regularly and subject to independent audit

    (d) introduce a mandatory code of conduct for public sector agencies with clear standards, reporting obligations and consequences for breaches

    (e) strengthen whistleblower protections, including anonymous reporting, legal safeguards and accessible complaint pathways

    (f) commission an independent review of integrity frameworks across the Territory, including complaints handling, conflict of interest management and procurement practices

(g) revise the lobbyist regime to require a public, real-time register of lobbyists, including details on lobbyists, ministers or members involved and the matters under consideration, as well as the publication of ministerial diaries

5. commits this Assembly to leading by example by adopting stronger internal accountability measures, improving committee transparency and ensuring the community has confidence in the integrity of its elected representatives and democratic institutions.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion calling on the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly to call on the Finocchiaro CLP government to address the high cost of airfares as a priority to support the Territory's economic development and Territorians' liveability standards.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion calling on the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly to recognise the importance of investing in viable and accessible youth services across the Northern Territory.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion that the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly:

1. recognises the Northern Territory's unique biodiversity, its ecosystems, wildlife and cultural landscapes and the important role it plays in our lifestyle, heritage, economy and resilience

2. notes with concern the rising threats to biodiversity, including habitat loss, invasive species, climate change and unsustainable land use

3. highlights the current lack of comprehensive biodiversity legislation, leaving protection and management of our natural assets inadequate

4. commends the local communities, traditional owners and environmental organisations for their advocacy and stewardship

5. calls on the Northern Territory CLP government to develop and introduce robust biodiversity laws that protect native species and threaten habitats; prevent control of loss of environment; respond to invasive species; promote sustainable land and water use alongside economic development; embed Aboriginal cultural landscapes and traditional knowledge in management practices; consult transparently with traditional owners, land councils, scientists, conservation groups, pastoralists and industry; allocate sufficient funding and resources for the implementation, monitoring and enforcement; and set clear and measurable targets aligned with national and international conservation goals

6. urges the government to show leadership in safeguarding our natural heritage so future Territorians can continue to enjoy the landscapes that define our region.

QUESTION TIME

Territory Coordinator Appointment

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

The Territory Coordinator holds unprecedented powers affecting major projects, businesses and community outcomes in the Territory. Your appointment of Stuart Knowles, whose documented animal neglect charges raise grave concerns and questions about his character and judgement, has deeply disturbed Territorians and eroded public trust. Given these allegations, can you detail what vetting processes were undertaken before appointing Mr Knowles, and were you aware of these animal neglect charges before appointing him?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I am on record at a press conference saying that I was not aware about the matters that took place over a decade ago. Suffice to say they are historical in nature. They were dealt with by the regulator, and Mr Knowles has been clear in his deep regret over what took place; he has been public about it.

Moving forward is the important part for the Territory Coordinator role. While Stuart Knowles is our Territory Coordinator, he is supported by a team of people who are focused on supporting significant projects in the Northern Territory to get off the paperwork and off the ground. This is something we did not see under Labor. It is why we made big changes to regulatory frameworks across the board.

We have done a large amount of work, including appointing a Territory Coordinator and abolishing third-party merits review in the Petroleum, Planning and Water Acts. We have the Approvals Fast Track Taskforce work coming. Regulation continues to be one of the biggest—if not the biggest—inhibitors to investing in the Territory. We have had the benefit of having Dr Brendan Rynne, an economist from KPMG who spoke at the Treasurer's budget breakfast this morning—a breakfast the CLP is proud to return to. Transparency and engagement with industry and the community—Opposition Leader, you were there; I thank you for your attendance.

Dr Brendan was talking about regulation, the levers of government we can control and doing the things we can control to yield positive outcomes for the community. That is exactly the role of Territory Coordinator. We have extensive powers to support those significant projects.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The second part of the question was: can you tell the parliament what type of vetting processes were undertaken with the appointment of Mr Knowles?

Madam SPEAKER: I think the Chief Minister may have covered that, but please continue.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The role is an appointed one. Obviously, there are criteria, and applicants must meet those criteria. That process took place. It went through all the legislative processes that we passed a few weeks ago. That has all been done.

As I said, these are historical matters that were dealt with by the regulator over 10 years ago, and they have been addressed by Mr Knowles. Most importantly for the Territory moving forward is that we have the regulatory framework right. We now have the most competitive settings when it comes to this type of support for significant projects. We are now doing the remaining work to support small and medium businesses.

Territory Coordinator Appointment – Supplementary Question

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

Given the extensive powers that the Territory Coordinator position holds, what will you do in terms of holding it to account—whether it is Mr Knowles or any future Territory Coordinator—so that the Territory public will have trust and faith in the integrity and the character of such a position?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, Mr Knowles is a man of utmost integrity. He has contributed widely to the Northern Territory over many decades. He has served our country as a soldier in the Army, and he is …

Mr Paech: He just neglects animals.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I pick up on the interjection. Member for Gwoja, if you want to be a gutter politician, that is a matter for you.

Mr Paech: I am looking at one.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is extremely offensive.

We have a historical matter dealt with by the regulator. That is how these things work. If someone has done something, the regulators are there to do that accountability process. That process has entirely taken place; it took place more than 10 years ago. Mr Knowles has been open and answered all the questions, and that is the end of the matter.

Budget 2025–26 – Cost of Living

Mrs CARLSON to CHIEF MINISTER

I am often asked by the people of Wanguri how this government can help with the cost of living. Families tell me that they are continuing to struggle with the rising cost of groceries and rent in Wanguri. To feed a family these days can cost well over $500 per week at the local shops. The budget handed down this week was a responsible budget to help fix the mess Labor has left us in. Can you update the Assembly on the cost-of-living support that is available to the people living in Wanguri?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Wanguri is a tireless and passionate advocate for her community.

Member for Wanguri, I enjoy spending time with you when I can. You are right; we have both been doorknocking, and people talk about the cost of living. Our budget delivers important relief that people in your community and communities across the Northern Territory are expecting. As assistant Treasurer you have a keen focus on making sure that our budget restores confidence and rebuilds the Territory, which is making a difference in people's everyday lives. That is an important part of responsible government.

Yesterday the Treasurer released the budget. Embedded in that budget is $290m in cost-saving measures for Territorians. This is significant, and we are proud to deliver that.

Although we see CPI coming down and within the range that the RBA finds tolerable, it is still having a big impact on people no matter where they live. We know that 85,000 householders and small businesses across the Territory receive power bills, and everyone dreads that moment when it comes in the letterbox. We capped that increase at the 3% mark. That alone is about $206m and represents a real saving to everyday Territorians of approximately $425 over the course of the year. That is money they have not had to find. They have not had to make tough decisions about whether they send their kids to ballet, swimming or engage in sport because of that relief we provide through the community service obligation.

There is also $14.4m in the pensioner and carer concession scheme for our amazing seniors, pensioners and carers who do an incredible job. We need to look after them and, importantly, keep them in the Territory. I have been out to the seniors in the Member for Wanguri's electorate, and they are an amazing bunch.

We have $400,000 for subsidised water and sewerage for religious and charitable organisations that are the lifeblood of our community, providing services.

There is our amazing $9.8m HomeGrown Territory Grant scheme, which we extended yesterday, getting more people into home ownership, which is exciting as people cannot afford to save for a deposit. That $50,000 grant goes a long way to support people with their deposit to bed themselves into home ownership and then they will stay here for the long haul.

There are lots of other wonderful bits, including free swimming lessons for primary school-age students, free meningococcal B vaccines, early childhood subsidies, sports vouchers, Back to School vouchers, free drivers' licences and 12-month freeze on car registration fees. There is a lot in this budget for everyday Territorians. We are easing the cost-of-living pressures for them so that they can love living in the Territory.

Darwin Waterfront Corporation – Investigation

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for TOURISM and HOSPITALITY

Following serious revelations about the misuse of taxpayers' money at the Darwin Waterfront Corporation, you had a clear choice: order an independent investigation or do nothing. You chose to do nothing. Instead, you relied on a briefing prepared by the very agency under scrutiny—the Darwin Waterfront Corporation. You then publicly claimed that you assumed everything was fine based on that briefing alone. How can Territorians have any confidence in your judgement when you dismiss serious allegations, not with evidence but with blind faith?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this is a good opportunity to publicly explain why I have not called for an independent inquiry into these recent online allegations about the Waterfront, because I take all allegations concerning

government agencies seriously. I take it seriously when there is substance, and I will not hesitate to initiate any appropriate investigations if it is needed. Not all online claims have substance, which is why I went to the CEO of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the CEO of the Darwin Waterfront, who consulted with that board. Based on this process I am satisfied that those allegations do not warrant any further investigation.

While I will not repeat the claims, I will say that the portfolio responsibilities, where the claims were that the Waterfront has always reported to the Chief Minister, are incorrect. It has reported to Tourism and the Infrastructure minister before, and it is back under Tourism and Hospitality now—as it was after we were sworn in as new ministers of this government. The Administrative Arrangements Order that commenced on 28 November placed the Waterfront under the Tourism portfolio to align with priorities.

A simple online search of this legislation will tell you that this establishes the *Darwin Waterfront Corporation Act 2006,* which makes it clear that the CEO of the corporation is a Darwin Waterfront board member. For anyone following online, it is in sections 6 and 9. This is also clearly stated in annual reports published on the DWC website. There are, therefore, no serious questions about governance, as has been claimed.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. What is this evidence that you are assuming based on?

Ms BOOTHBY: Madam Speaker, I am going through a lot of detail with this …

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you can continue. There is time for you to address that.

Mr Paech: I did not know you could assume a fact.

Ms BOOTHBY: I am answering the question. If you let me finish, maybe you could listen to what it is.

The allegations about board appointments and the reason I had to find a new Chair was because the last one—Richard Fejo, appointed by Labor—resigned. I found a new Chair.

Ms Uibo: It was because he did not like your government and how terrible it was locking up 10-year-olds.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Ms BOOTHBY: Mr Patrick Bellot has extensive experience in property development; his passion for the Territory makes him the ideal Chair, which is why I chose him. We want the Darwin Waterfront to be the iconic tourism destination that it is, not only for tourism but for Territorians. This is the ultimate bipartisan precinct. It was introduced by Labor millions of years ago, and every government has supported it. Why can you not understand that?

Budget 2025–26 – Payroll Tax

Mrs ZIO to TREASURER

Before the CLP government formed, the Northern Territory's payroll tax system was unfit for purpose. With hundreds of small businesses in the Fannie Bay electorate, I heard all about it during the campaign. It weighed down small businesses, charities and not-for-profits, wasting time and money which should have been put towards doing what they do best. This CLP government took action as soon as we got into government making our payroll tax the most competitive in the country. However, the Northern Territory continues to be the only jurisdiction in Australia that still requires charities and not-for-profits to pay payroll tax for activities deemed as commercial or competitive. How does the CLP Finocchiaro government's first budget take action to support our community sector through continued economic reform?

Ms Uibo: Other than taking away their leave entitlements with portable long service.

Madam SPEAKER: Quiet, please.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I pick up on the interjection by the Leader of the Opposition before I even stood to give my answer. She may not like the answer. The Member for Fannie Bay is right; the CLP entered government residing over an outdated payroll tax system and years of Labor inaction on the issues that matter.

Our community services were buckling under the pressure of operating under Labor, with our government and budget left to pick up the pieces. The Territory has the highest aged-care occupancy in the country, yet we have the lowest number of beds per capita. Our aged-care shortages are so bad that we are taking up limited hospital beds trying to care for Territorians who should be getting proper long-term care from aged-care providers.

You would think the former Labor government would have done everything in its power to support charities and aged-care providers to fix this problem, but the Labor government did nothing to create the economic environment where service providers could provide services without being weighed down by the administrative burden and cost of paying payroll tax. No other jurisdiction in Australia requires these organisations—our childcare centres, aged-care homes and crisis housing providers—to pay payroll tax.

What incentive do they have to come to the Territory and help us pick up the pieces of Labor's eight years of community inaction when coming here will cost them money? Territorians in our communities deserve better. They deserve the services other Australians expect and get at a bare minimum, and the community sector deserves a government that backs it and helps it to do what it does more easily and cheaply.

That is why in the CLP Finocchiaro government's first budget, which I handed down yesterday, we are addressing these issues by taking the payroll tax reforms we have already introduced to benefit small business further, so it benefits charities and not-for-profits as well. We are doing this by ditching the commercial and competitive test that charities and not-for-profits were subject to when seeking payroll tax exemptions.

We are cutting red tape, which encourages investment in aged care, disability support and childcare. The CLP's changes will free up resources, time and money so charities and not-for-profits can focus on what they do best, which is serving our community. Under Budget 2025–26, organisations that service the community self-sufficiently will finally have a reason to come to the Territory, offer services to Territorians and stay here. This is just another way that Budget 2025–26 continues to take action, provides certainty and supports our community sector so it can do what it does best.

Legal Aid Commission – Appointment of Director

Mr PAECH to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Last week you announced the appointment of Ms Catherine Voumard as Director of the Legal Aid Commission Northern Territory, despite an independent selection panel finding her unsuitable for the role. Legal Aid staff and senior management have described this decision as offensive, unfair and a move that undermines the confidence and integrity of public appointments under your government. It has triggered the resignation of three board members, including the Chair of the Legal Aid Commission.

Territorians expect integrity and transparency when it comes to senior public sector positions. How can you justify your direct appointment of an individual to such a crucial role when an independent expert panel found them unsuitable? How can Territorians trust you, the highest law officer in the Northern Territory, to act with transparency and integrity after this blatant political captain's pick?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to answer questions about the Legal Aid system. It feels like a bit of a mudslinging match with the Labor opposition. Those opposite do not have anything to talk about to do with the budget, so they throw mud at us, which is an interesting strategy.

Let me talk to you about Legal Aid. First, it was in disarray over the last eight years. It has been calling for reform and funding for years under Labor. It is part of a broken justice system, which Labor broke because it let a crime crisis get out of control. Labor did not invest in the justice system, courts and Corrections or into Legal Aid. It was hopscotched all over the place.

I have made a deliberate change-management decision to change the leadership of Legal Aid, because it needs reform. We have given Legal Aid certainty of funding, an extra $5.5m ongoing, year after year, which gives it certainty. Legal Aid can now make changes within its organisation, which it needs to, because what was happening under the crime crisis was not working; that was clear. Legal Aid told us that every second of the day.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The direct question is: why did you undermine the independent decision made by an independent committee about the appointment?

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you have plenty of time to answer that.

Ms BOOTHBY: I am answering that question, but the Member for Gwoja is not listening.

Ms Voumard, who will be the new Legal Aid director as of next month, was a direct appointment by me under the *Legal Aid Act 1990*. As I said, she is a deliberate change-management appointment. She brings diverse experience across the legal sector in the Northern Territory and South Australia. She has worked for a number of organisations. She worked in the Local Court, the Supreme Court, circuit courts, remote communities, prosecutions and defence. She has worked for Legal Aid and NAAJA. She was a barrister at Len King Chambers, and guess what? She also worked for Maleys, which is excellent because Maleys is a good, local, large, experienced law firm in the Northern Territory. She worked there for a little while, so maybe she is worth a conversation.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: You are right, Member for Fannie Bay; this is not a good situation. It is too noisy; please tone it down.

Ms BOOTHBY: I am backing Legal Aid and the change that we are making there. If there are people in Legal Aid who are not happy with decisions …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110 …

Madam SPEAKER: No speeches, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: It is not a speech. Standing Order 110; relevance. Why did you ignore the independent panel's assessment?

Madam SPEAKER: I think the minister has that bit.

Ms BOOTHBY: Do I have to say it again? I have deliberately chosen to appoint, under the *Legal Aid Act 1990*—do you want me to find those sections for you, Member for Gwoja?

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: You asked the question; you have to listen to the answer.

Mr Paech: She is not answering it.

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you have the call.

Ms BOOTHBY: As I said, I am backing Legal Aid. We need Legal Aid because we need justice for victims. Victims were left by Labor over the last eight years. We will not leave them and hang them out to dry. We will invest in our legal services.

Budget 2025–26 – Mineral Royalties

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for MINING and ENERGY

Yesterday we heard the delivery of the Northern Territory Budget 2025–26. At present the Territory's own-source revenue accounts for less than 30% of the NT's budget. In 2024–25 taxes and royalty revenue comprised approximately 38% of our own-source revenue and 11% of total revenue. Mineral royalties contributed more than $200m to the NT Treasury in 2024–25. However, by comparison Western Australia is estimated to receive almost $12bn in mineral royalty revenue in 2024–25, comprising almost 20% of its total revenue.

Can you outline to the Assembly—hopefully in silence—our government's action to grow our own-source revenue throughout the resource sector?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Goyder is a numbers man, and we all know how well he can add. He knows that mining royalties pay for education, police and the Health department. That is where that money comes from, so it is important that we grow it.

Over the last eight years the failed Labor government did not back that industry, which is why we have an $11bn debt. We need to grow our own-source revenue because it is a significant benefit to the Northern Territory.

We expect a substantial increase in mineral royalties and the associated revenue from that because several projects are coming online this year. These include the recommencement of operations at GEMCO; the opening of the Nobles Nob mine in Tennant Creek, the land of opportunity; the opening of the Frances Creek iron ore mine near Pine Creek; and the Verdant Minerals Ammaroo phosphate mine in Central Australia. These mines are across the Northern Territory.

We get not only mineral royalties but also jobs. There are jobs for Territorians and money being invested in local areas like the land of opportunity.

In 2023–24 the mining sector formed the largest contributor to the NT state product at 28.5%. As per the budget outlook in 2025–26, revenue and taxes from royalties are expected to yield almost $1.1bn. Of this, 32% or $346m are petroleum and mineral royalties alone. Like I said at the outset, that pays for education, health, police and our wages. That is why it is so important.

As minister for Mining, I am committed to increasing the size, scope and benefits of our mining industry for all Territorians. Without a thriving mineral exploration industry and new mines coming online, we cannot fund services or keep energy prices affordable for Territorians. GEMCO and the new Nobles Nob goldmine in Tennant Creek are set to commence operations in the coming weeks. That represents two additional royalty streams for Territorians, with more in the pipeline.

Our government is fast-tracking approvals to get these generational mining projects finally up and the investment decision made as quickly as possible. We saw record expenditure of $370m on gas exploration in the NT last year, which is a testament to our resource potential.

Police – Support

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

In opposition you said that you would implement the recommendations from the police resource review. With police shouldering much of the responsibility of your law and order agenda, these reforms are needed now more than ever to deal with attrition and bolster morale across the police force, especially with your capped 3% pay offer on the table, which has outraged the Northern Territory Police Association.

Can you advise the Assembly on the status of these recommendations, particularly measures to better support the wellbeing and welfare of our hardworking police?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader is right that policing and community safety is our number one priority as a government because it is the number one priority of Territorians. We have not only backed that with the strongest bail laws in the country and much greater powers for police in the last nine months—which we urgently did as soon as we came to government—but we also delivered on that commitment through our budget yesterday with a record police budget of $608m, which is $47m bigger than the previous Labor government had, plus spending on police infrastructure, which sits within the Infrastructure department. We are supporting police with the dollars they need to have the resources they need. The police college is full of police, and we look forward to continuing to work with them.

The police review is just work in the background that continues. I do not have a specific update on each recommendation, and I am happy to talk to the NTPA about it; it has not raised that with me. All that work is being done within the agency as a blueprint forward. There are many components that are well advanced. The previous government did not accept all of them, and neither did we at that time in opposition. It remains a blueprint—for lack of a better word—on certain types of reform and ways forward, just like everything else.

We continue to work closely with police to ensure they have what they need when they need it. A good example of that is the Nightcliff Police Station. The Opposition Leader had a bit of a sledge in her speech today, which I find comical because Labor built the Nightcliff Police Station when it should not have. Labor wasted $12m on a building that is not operational or capable for police. Labor did not fund police to house them in that building, and now it is trying to ask me to politically meddle in operational decisions of police, which I will not do. I will not do that because I am not a Police Commissioner or an officer. The best people to decide how they can deploy police to the community in response to 000 calls is the police.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question was specifically about an update on the recommendations. If the Chief Minister does not have that, would she take it on notice and report back to the parliament?

Madam SPEAKER: The Chief Minister has the call.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, I can report back, but I have 22 seconds to confirm that the CLP government will not meddle in the operational decisions of our police because it is too important to muck around with like Labor used to. If Labor members had not stuck their noses in, in the first place, we would have $12m we could probably put into the pay deal instead of a giant building sitting in Nightcliff with an insulting sign on the side of it.

Budget 2025–26 – School Safety

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

I am proud to be part of a government that has made community safety its number one priority. This is what the residents of Blain want investments in most. I am pleased that Budget 2025–26 delivers widespread action across the board to improve community safety and reduce crime, including in our schools. As a father of three young boys who currently attend our schools, I know that other parents in Blain want their children to be safe in school. Can you explain how the 2025 education budget will help improve safety in our schools?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Blain is right; every child should feel safe in our school environments.

In recent months we have seen unacceptable behaviours in our schools. I know firsthand the impact this had on my local community in Katherine. We saw that play out at the start of the year.

The CLP recognises that education has a critical role in building a safe and strong Territory. As part of our plan to address the root causes of crime, we are investing $12.9m in school attendance officers to get more kids to school and away from a life of crime.

We also need to ensure that when kids go to school, they can learn uninterrupted and in a safe and secure environment and that youths who may require extra support receive it from a qualified professional. That is why this year's budget will see an extra $1.8m a year ongoing to expand qualified counsellor positions in schools, as well as $3.5m to continue the school-based policing program, which is in addition to the passing of Declan's law which gives police greater power to detect and stop knife crime on school grounds.

Employing qualified counsellors in our schools was an election commitment which we are delivering. The additional $1.86m will allow 14 full-time school counsellors to be employed, with a plan to expand this to 20 by June next year. This new program will establish a qualified workforce of school counsellors with proper professional oversight to provide vital support to children in our schools.

We will also further expand the essential qualifications required to include counselling, social work and psychology to ensure we have, as I said, a highly qualified workforce supporting our schools with evidence-based programs and critical incident responses.

I emphasise 'qualified' because that is what you get from the CLP government in stark contrast to the Labor Party which, at the eleventh hour before the election last year, announced unqualified wellbeing officers to be rolled out in schools.

Our children need access to appropriately qualified and highly trained professionals to deal with the complex issues our children face. That is what the CLP's new expanded school counsellor program will deliver.

We know there is still a long way to go to reduce unacceptable behaviour in our schools, but the tide is turning. In Term 1 this year, compared with last year, there were 17 fewer assaults on school staff and four fewer school lockdowns. The numbers are still too high. It is not acceptable behaviour, and we are taking it seriously.

Our new school counsellor program is real action that will deliver real, positive outcomes across the Territory for Territory kids.

Royal Darwin Hospital – Code Yellows

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for HEALTH

Code yellows are an important part of managing peak demand in hospitals. They also ensure the community knows when patient demand is high. The AMA NT President, Dr Rob Parker, said on radio today that there has been a directive not to call code yellows at Royal Darwin Hospital. Was it you or the Chief Minister who ordered the Department of Health to stop calling code yellows? Did you interfere with this operational matter to avoid public scrutiny of your government's management of the health system?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, that is a great question because we know we have the best staff in Darwin and across the Northern Territory. Being at the Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards the other night highlighted to me the professionalism, commitment and the quality of staff we have.

You should be ashamed of yourself to be slagging off at our staff in the Northern Territory health system. When we talk about code yellows—here you are criticising the NT Health staff for the way that they are doing business.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. It has nothing to do with the question, which was: where did the directive come for hiding the code yellows?

Madam SPEAKER: Take your seat. He has only just begun; I think he has time to be highly relevant.

Mr EDGINGTON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Obviously, it hit a nerve over there, because when it comes to code yellows, Labor does not want to hear about them because in 2024 I do not know how many there were. I hear numbers being quoted behind me; it was 16 or 18 code yellows under the Labor government.

This seemed to be happening on a regular basis; I suspect it was probably during the Leader of the Opposition's term as the Minister for Health, but we saw an increase in code yellows across the board.

When it comes to what is happening at the hospital now, we have worked with the staff, and we have a new CEO in place overseeing NT Health. Many times we have seen an increase in demand in Darwin at the emergency ward, and we are seeing better coordination, collaboration, staff working together …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question was very clear: was it the Minister for Health or the Chief Minister who gave the directive to hide the code yellows?

Mr EDGINGTON: I think she is still upset about the code yellows under her watch. There has been no direction given. What I started to say was that we have the staff and management working together to deal with the pressures that are constantly felt in the emergency area of the hospital. Most of those were brought about because of the lack of investment by the Labor government for aged-care patients still taking up beds in the emergency ward. No directions have been given.

Ms Uibo: Are you calling the AMA a liar?

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me make this clear: no directions have been given to anybody in the health system to stop code yellows. We have better coordination and management. That is what Labor failed to deliver for the last eight years.

Budget 2025–26 – Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Funding

Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic, family and sexual violence has no place in the Territory. As previously stated, over the last eight years of Labor government the Territory has seen an 82% increase in domestic violence, tearing families and communities apart. Can you update the Assembly on the permanent ongoing baseline funding outlined in the budget and how this funding will address the root causes of domestic, family and sexual family violence and keep Territorians safe?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Fong Lim works very hard in his electorate to address concerns about DV and the egregious impact it has on our community. I very much appreciate his support in addressing the root causes of domestic violence.

I am pleased to update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro government's record-breaking commitment of $36m ongoing baseline funding to address the scourge of domestic, family and sexual violence in our community will make real inroads in addressing the root causes of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Critical to addressing the impact of DV in our community is recognising that this is a battle we are fighting on two fronts. The first is the crisis front, providing support to victims of domestic violence to find safety and support and deal with the perpetrators of what is, without question, the most heinous of crimes.

The second is the prevention front, working to address the root causes of domestic, family and sexual violence with the goal of ending this vicious cycle of violence against the most vulnerable members of our community.

This record funding works to do just that. It provides security to existing frontline services which, too often, have walked the tightrope of funding uncertainty, and it injects new funding into programs that will work hand in hand with existing services in a coordinated, cross-government approach as well as with the NGO sector.

A total of $9m has been allocated to ensure:

- continuity of existing programs
- programs in community settings for people committing DV
- whole-of-government policy and coordination
- primary prevention grant programs, all of which are critical to addressing the root causes of DV
- specialist witness support
- counselling for women prisoners, working to break the cycle of violence.

This equates to 21 NGO programs that were about to fall off the funding cliff as a result of the failure of those on the other side to provide continuity of funding to provide critical services.

A further $9m is being provided to expand existing programs like specialist service funding for integrated response, programs in prisons, family safety frameworks and specialist DV courts.

Most importantly, $18m has been provided to fund new programs, all of which will play a pivotal role in addressing the root causes and breaking the cycle of DV, including Circuit Breaker, co-responder models, DV resource centres and specialist health responses. Our government is committed to addressing the root causes of DV, and this funding is a clear demonstration of our willingness to do that.

Legal Aid Commission – Appointment of Director

K McNAMARA to CHIEF MINISTER

Our independent anti-corruption commission says that it is improper conduct to favour mates for senior public servant positions. You found that in such a circumstance, the position of a person who engaged in that

conduct is untenable. Why is there one rule for the Police Commissioner and another for your Attorney-General, appointing the new Legal Aid director, contradicting the hiring panel that found them unsuccessful for the role, but whose reference was your deputy's brother?

How can Territorians trust your government if all they see is nepotism and jobs for mates?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we already had a question about this, which was answered by the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General has clearly laid out that, under the legislation, she appoints the Legal Aid commissioner. Legal Aid has been suffering an incredibly tough time over many years with chronic, unsustainable underfunding. There has been a bit of a change at the top and requires an entirely fresh set of eyes. I do not think anyone could dispute that.

Yes, while people take umbrage at the minister exercising her powers under the legislation, that is what a minister is here for; otherwise, the public service would run everything, there would be no members of parliament, and we could all go home and not worry about doing anything. This is how government works; ministers must be able to make decisions. These are strategic decisions that must be made at the highest levels. We have a chronically broken justice system because Labor has not invested where it has needed to.

Legal Aid needed top-up funding every year. That does not allow it to employ lawyers long term, to have a strategic plan or work out where their place in delivering legal services is and what its remit is. On top of that, there is the clogging of the courts, when Legal Aid is not functioning. Late last year it could not even hold cases, which meant cases would be adjourned, there would be no access to justice for victims and offenders would continue to be on remand or bail for long periods.

Legal Aid is a fundamental piece of the justice puzzle.

K McNAMARA: A point of order, Madam Speaker! The question was not about the functions of Legal Aid. Why is there one rule for the Police Commissioner and another for your Attorney-General? How can Territorians trust your government if all they see is nepotism and jobs for mates?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not accept the premise of your question whatsoever. This is like comparing apples with LEGO pieces. It is nonsense and gibberish from the other side. It is easy to sit there, lay back in your offices and conjure up these ridiculous questions, but at the end of the day we have a government to run. We cannot sit around waiting for the day that we might make the Member for Nightcliff happy; that day will probably never come. We are comfortable with that, and we are moving forward. Territorians have given us an important job to do.

Ms Uibo: One rule for you; one rule for the others.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The former Attorney-General yelling across the Chamber, 'One rule for one; one rule for another', shows how bad a government those opposite were.

We have a minister exercising her legal power under the *Legal Aid Act* to do her job, and she has now been criticised for doing her job. It is a bit like when we implemented our election commitments last year and everyone asked why we were doing that. It was because we said that we would. The Attorney-General is doing her job and getting things done. That is our government.

Budget 2025–26 – Gaming Taxes

Mr HOWE to TREASURER

You were given the difficult task of handing down the Finocchiaro CLP government's first budget after inheriting deep deficits, record debt, unfunded infrastructure programs and cost blowouts—how's that for a legacy! Yesterday you introduced a CLP budget which starts the hard slog of budget repair whilst rebuilding our economy. How does the Finocchiaro CLP government's first budget rebuild our economy through revenue initiatives?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I have said it before and will say it again: eight years of Labor budgets have left the Territory in a mess, and the CLP's first budget is mopping up that mess. The CLP is repairing the budget through our

five-point fiscal strategy, which includes increasing our own-source revenue, thereby reducing our reliance on the Commonwealth for funding and giving us the ability to fund more of our services ourselves.

As part of the budget I handed down yesterday the CLP government announced that we will undertake two major gaming tax reforms. The first reform is legislating a standardised 50% tax rate for lottery ticket reselling and matching and a 50% floor for licensed internet gaming activity. These changes are expected to generate an additional $17.7m per annum for the Territory.

The second reform the CLP is making is increasing the sports bookmaker and betting exchange annual tax cap from one million revenue units to two million revenue units. These changes are expected to generate an additional $13.1m per annum for the Territory.

However, the CLP is wasting no time in standardising this as part of our first budget. This will be taking effect on 1 July this year. Standardising the internet gaming tax and sports bookmaker and betting exchange annual tax cap will increase the Territory's own-source revenue by more than $30m every year from this year. An additional $30m can do a lot for the Territory. It is almost the same amount that we have allocated to domestic, family and sexual violence programs on an ongoing basis.

Although we have changed the taxation rates on internet gaming and sports bookmakers, we still provide one of the best regulatory environments in the country. This is great to see. We want these people, at the end of the day—because they employ Territorians; some of these businesses employ up to 300 people across the board between those combined businesses. They pay payroll tax from which we also get revenue. We have made these changes in such a way that they keep the Territory competitive in this space, because we want those people staying here, and we want that business.

This revenue means that there is more money to go towards essential services and less debt the CLP has to pile on top of Labor's debt disaster. This is all thanks to the Finocchiaro CLP government's first budget.

Budget 2025–26 – Tourism

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for TOURISM and HOSPITALITY

Tourism is a major driver of the Territory economy and supports thousands of Territory jobs. The last Labor budget allocated $115m to the tourism events and screen sectors. Your Budget 2025–26 cuts their funding to $88.4m. How do you justify slashing the tourism budget by more than 23%, the events budget by 12% and the screen industry budget by 30%? How do you plan to rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle when you are dudding key sectors with a $26m cut?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Daly will remember—because he was part of the Labor government in the last eight years when tourism went backwards—that holiday tourism declined. There was a crime crisis that trashed our reputation, not only in Alice Springs but across the Territory. That continued for eight long years. To stand here and accuse us of not growing the economy and investing in tourism is hypocritical. Our government backs our tourism industry. Tourism is one of our five key pillars. It is one of the most important drivers for economics in the Northern Territory. That is why it is part of the Rebuilding the Economy strategy 2025; our Treasurer talked about that months ago and continued to talk about it as he discussed the budget for this year. We are investing $88.4m in tourism events and screen because it is a pillar. The sector has 16,000 jobs, and it contributes $3.3bn to the economy. That is why we are backing it.

A lot of the major events that are important for our tourism industry—things like the iconic Supercars, the Darwin Festival, Red CentreNATS, BASSINTHEGRASS—are CLP initiatives that we introduced many years ago. They are important drivers of the holiday visitor economy—the visitors who will come here, enjoy themselves and tell everybody else.

Madam Speaker, you will remember this. How long has the Tourism Central Australia project for the new information centre sat on Labor's budget books, year-in and year-out? Labor kept saying that it would happen but never got it off the ground.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. If tourism is so important, why did you cut $26m from the budget?

Ms BOOTHBY: If he listens to the answers he may learn something. The way Labor used to deal with the Tourism budget was to keep propping it up every year with no certainty of funding. If they were having a bad time, which they were every year under Labor, it would give them a bit of money, then they would scatter the money all over the place into international or domestic markets—whatever it might have been—and hoped and prayed that things would get better. That is not how you deal with the tourism industry. We had to fix things like the crime crisis and build the tourism base. We have to increase the baseline by $8m to provide certainty to our tourism industry so that it can do the marketing spend it needs to do.

Budget 2025–26 – Disability Support

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for DISABILITY

As you may be aware many residents in my electorate live with disability, including a large number of Indigenous residents. Territorians living with disability rely on the stability and accessibility of support services, especially as national discussions continue about the future of the NDIS. Can you update the Assembly on what the Finocchiaro CLP government is doing to provide certainty to people with disability in the Northern Territory, including any recent investments in the NDIS and other key services that support inclusion and accessibility for deaf and hard-of-hearing Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Finocchiaro CLP government is proud to be delivering certainty and stability for Territorians living with disability through a significant and ongoing investment in the Northern Territory's disability sector. As I announced yesterday, we are committing $11.5m annually to support the Territory's contribution to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This funding addresses the gap left by the cessation of the Commonwealth's DisabilityCare Australia Fund and ensures that NDIS services remain stable and accessible for the thousands of Territorians who rely on them every day.

About one in eight people in the Territory live with a disability. This investment is about more than just numbers; it is about providing choice, stability and dignity to individuals and families and strengthening the disability services workforce across the Territory.

In addition, from 2025–26 we are investing $120,000 per year to continue delivering vital face-to-face Auslan interpreting services. This service is critical, particularly in high-priority situations like hospital visits, emergency broadcasts and press conferences. It ensures that deaf and hard-of-hearing Territorians are not left behind when it matters most.

This government stands firmly with Territorians with disability. We will continue working to ensure that they are supported, included and empowered now and into the future.

I look forward to working with the new federal Minister for Disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Hon Mark Butler. I congratulated him for the new portfolio responsibilities and reinforced this government's earlier commitment to host the Disability Reform Ministerial Council meeting in Darwin this June.

Northern Suburbs Youth Hub

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for YOUTH, SENIORS and EQUALITY

You claim that you relocated a northern suburbs youth hub because of community concern, yet only two Casuarina residents objected to it. Mr Warren Ebert, CEO of Sentinel Property Group, which owns Casuarina Square, said that the relocation was purely political and you had not consulted with anyone. Is it true that your reasons for relocating the hub are political, rather than to support young people? Can you confirm if you spoke to anyone from Karama, Malak, Leanyer or Wulagi before this decision?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I once again inform this Assembly why we wanted to change the youth hub location from Casuarina. It was the concerns raised by the residents of Casuarina during the election campaign. This opposition always goes back to the survey done probably a year ago and tries to portray that as the reason we changed. It is not the reason. We wanted to change it because of the Casuarina residents who were living around the proposed location at the time.

The new proposed location is at the Leanyer water park. Yesterday during my speech on the budget I informed this Assembly that in the last two months, for five days, the program for Sanderson Middle School was running from the Leanyer water park recreation site. The reason is that Sanderson Middle School was not available. This program has already been running from the Leanyer Recreation Park occasionally, and we noted that this was a proposed site.

Unlike the previous government, when there was no consultation about the proposed site, this government will be open for consultation. That consultation will commence in June. The department will be opening the consultation to all the people living across that area.

To be honest, another thing the opposition is trying to say is that we are making a mistake. My electorate is only 200 metres from this proposed location. The Member for Karama's electorate is probably less than 100 metres. This will be in the Member for Wanguri's electorate. We are saying that this is an opportunity for the northern suburbs. Young children will have the opportunity to go to a place after school where they can engage and have a mentor. There are many disadvantaged kids in the northern suburbs who are not getting that opportunity. We want to give that opportunity for the young people to do the best in their lives.

Regarding children's behaviour in Casuarina, there are issues happening at the bus station, which the Chief Minister and Minister Yan are addressing. That is a concern we have. We do not want young people to get mixed up and absorbed in that issue as well. We want this to be in a place that is accessible. There are two bus stops within 200 metres of this proposed location, and when it comes to the consultation, every resident, young person and other stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide feedback in that process, which will start in the next few weeks.

Budget 2025–26 – Mental Health

Mr PATEL to MINISTER for MENTAL HEALTH

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Study of Health and Wellbeing 2020–2022, the Territory has the second highest rate of people suffering from a lifetime mental disorder. I notice in the NT Health budget that key investments for 2025–26 include $16.5m to operate the new mental health ward at Royal Darwin Hospital. What will this new funding provide, and how will it support members of the community?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know how much the Member for Casuarina cares for people living in his electorate.

I am delighted to inform the Assembly that funding of $16m per year will be used to provide operational costs for the new 24-bed mental health facility from 2025–26 with an additional $500,000 for the purchase of medical equipment. These funds, which were unveiled in the first Finocchiaro CLP budget delivered yesterday, will enable Royal Darwin Hospital to improve patient care and safety, alleviate bed shortages and provide improved mental health services across the Territory.

It will provide a dedicated space for patients experiencing acute mental health crises and will assist to reduce bed block, improving patient flow and health service capacity. Under Labor, funding was only injected into the construction, but nothing was set aside to operate the mental health ward and have it run efficiently. Without operational funding, NT Health could not staff or utilise these new beds, undermining previous investments and worsening existing pressures.

We cannot expect to offer support services to our most vulnerable members of our community without investing in the operation of our health and mental health services. That is the reality of what we have inherited, but I am not here just to point the finger; I am here to outline how we are fixing it.

This facility, due to be completed next year, will not only reduce the burden on the emergency department but enhance patient outcomes and safety. The new funding will provide about 56 staff for a 24/7 roster including nursing, medical, allied health, radiology and pathology professionals. It will also be used to purchase hospital beds and other equipment for the ward as well as cover ongoing costs for utilities, catering, cleaning, pharmacy, clinical consumables and security.

This investment will improve acute mental health service capacity and make sure people can be cared for in an appropriate purpose-built facility—a facility that complements broader programs aimed at harm

minimisation and improving the health and wellbeing of Territorians. It is all part of the work the CLP is doing to deliver in our year of action, certainty and security for our health staff and the Northern Territory community.

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

MOTION
Voluntary Assisted Dying

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly:

- acknowledges the important and extensive work of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Independent Expert Advisory Panel in producing the Report into Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory

- recognises the right for Territorians to end their lives with dignity and the immense suffering that is caused for them and their families when this right is taken away from them

- recognises that the Northern Territory, the first jurisdiction in the world to legalise voluntary assisted dying, is now the last in Australia to pass this law

- urges the government to implement the 22 recommendations of the Report into Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory, acknowledging that many Territorians from all political persuasions want the right to die with dignity in the Territory.

I feel great honour today to move this motion. For those of you who are watching and listening and who are hoping for change, I am here on behalf of you. This motion reflects not only the values of compassion and dignity but also the clear will of so many people across the Northern Territory.

From the moment I became the Independent Member for Johnston, community members raised the issue of voluntary assisted dying with me. In my second week in my electorate office, Maureen walked in and said to me, 'Don't bother coming back here if you don't do something about voluntary assisted dying'. That was the beginning. Since then the calls, emails and conversations have not stopped. People from my community and across the Territory from all backgrounds and beliefs have reached out. They have shared their grief and hope. Some have thanked me. Many have begged me to act faster. All have asked for the same thing: the right to die with dignity and the right to choose, when their end is near, how they will go.

I have also met with and listened to organisations, health professionals, faith leaders and many others, and I will keep listening. I thank my fellow MLAs across this Chamber who have been willing to talk with me about this issue and explore pathways forward for the Northern Territory.

This is not a theoretical debate. This is not just about politics; this is about real people, real families and real suffering. It is about Territorians who are asking us, pleading with us, to give them back a basic right—the right to die with dignity on their own terms.

During our last sittings I spoke of Gavin, Lori and Sonia, long-term Territorians each facing terminal illness. All of them said, 'I would do anything to have this as an option'. They all know that legislation may not come in time for them, yet still they spend what time they have left fighting for others to have the choice that they will not. Their courage and selflessness demand something from us. It demands that we act.

This motion honours their voices and the voices of so many others who have lived and died without this choice. It also acknowledges something sobering: the Northern Territory was once a world leader in this space and is now the last place in this country without this law. This must change.

Voluntary assisted dying is not a partisan issue. It does not belong to one ideology. It belongs to people; it is personal. I have heard from all corners, from doctors, nurses, palliative care workers, grieving families and those who are uncertain. I have heard from people like Sophie, who I talked about in our last sittings, a young woman from my electorate who wrote a thoughtful, courageous speech opposing voluntary assisted dying. Sophie, I read your words carefully, and I say again that good law must come from listening to all the voices, even those we may disagree with. Your concerns about protecting doctors and human rights and investing in palliative care are valid, and they must be part of the conversation.

The Voluntary Assisted Dying Independent Expert Advisory Panel has done the hard work of consultation, research and listening. Its final report is measured, thorough and humane. It gives us a clear, safe and

practical path forward, based on 22 detailed recommendations. This motion urges the government to implement those recommendations and to do so with urgency.

I could spend all of my time today sharing the stories that people have sent to me. I know that this is a hard and sensitive issue, but three people asked me specifically to share their stories with the people in this Chamber.

A woman from Alice Springs told me about her father who was diagnosed with a terminal neurological disease. As he lost the ability to walk, speak and eventually swallow, his only legal option was to be sedated heavily for days while his body shut down. He told her through tears that he did not want to die this way. He wanted to go while he was still himself and while he could look her in the eye and say goodbye. That choice was denied to him and his family.

The second story is from a couple in Darwin. The wife had been battling cancer for years. She was a nurse and knew exactly what her final weeks would look like. She did not want her children to see her suffering but wanted to be able to say that it is time and to go surrounded by family peacefully. Her husband said to me, 'If she had that choice, she would have had peace, but instead she died with fear and pain'.

Finally, there is Gavin, who some of you have met and I was lucky to spend a morning with recently. He has lived in the Northern Territory for more than 50 years. He told me wonderful stories of riding his bike behind the bulldozer as it cleared what is now Dick Ward Drive. Gavin has been told he will have a painful death, caused by his cancer, and he will do anything to end his life in the way he chooses in the place he loves that he has given so much to.

These are not isolated stories; they are echoed across our towns and communities. People are asking for something deeply personal and profoundly simple—the right to choose how they meet their end. This is not about devaluing life; it is about valuing quality of life and recognising that when it has come to an end, individuals should have a say in how their own journey is taken.

Every other Australian, except Territorians, has this right; every other state has legislated for voluntary assisted dying with strong safeguards, strict eligibility and compassion at the core. Those systems are working, have been reviewed and are safe. We now have the opportunity and duty to build a Territory model that is just as robust and deeply responsive to our unique context, cultures, communities and healthcare challenges.

About 85% of Territorians support this reform and have waited decades and they should not have to wait any longer. Delaying this law any further is not neutral; it is an active choice to let people without options and to force families through needless trauma. You have heard me say many times in this Chamber—and will probably have to listen to me saying it for the next three years—that I believe our job is to work together for the whole of the Northern Territory and to make good law with the best information we have. Here is a clear opportunity to do that across this Chamber and with our communities to create law that responds to the concerns, hope and experiences of the people we serve. It is a chance to lead with compassion and care and to give Territorians a right that every other Australian now has and to do it in a way that listens to and includes everyone.

On behalf of the people in the community who have given me this task, I ask the CLP government to support the implementation of the 22 recommendations of the expert advisory panel report. I call on this Chamber to recognise the human right of all Territorians to end their life with choice and dignity.

I welcome today's announcement from the Attorney-General that the CLP government will now take action on voluntary assisted dying. Initially in this Chamber the Chief Minister stated that voluntary assisted dying was not a priority for the Northern Territory, and many people contacted me in great distress about that. However, I am proud to say that in response to this motion advocating for VAD in the Northern Territory, the government has now chosen to move forward and take action that reflects the overwhelming will of the people. This decision will bring much-needed relief to those in our community who are suffering.

Today marks a significant victory for the people of the Northern Territory. It demonstrates what can be achieved when we work together in the best interests of the community. I am grateful to the government for coming to the table and collaborating on this vital matter that will make a real difference in the lives of many.

When I speak about parliament working together to create good laws for the Northern Territory, this is exactly what I mean. I am particularly encouraged to see that the government seems to have taken on board the concerns raised regarding the lack of consultation in the drafting of previous Bills brought before this

parliament. In this instance, it has outlined clear consultation requirements for the committee. This is the kind of sound, collaborative process we should all be working for.

To all the Territorians who have fought for this for so long and to those who have urged me to take action on their behalf, this is for you. For people who have contacted me worried that this will be yet another delay, I have confidence that the government is committed to taking this matter seriously and acting on it. I know that we will all be watching the work of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee closely. I look forward to seeing the outcome of its work by the end of September this year and to the restoration of this crucial right for the people of the Northern Territory.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I move the following amendment:

Omit all words after the first dot point and insert:

- notes the Attorney-General has referred the matter to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee to report back by the end of September 2025. The Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee has been provided the following terms of reference:
    - prepares a consolidated consultation paper drawing upon previous reports, inquiries, proposals and the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995 (NT)
    - consults extensively with communities across the Northern Territory, particularly in remote areas, to gather views on the possible introduction of voluntary assisted dying in the NT
    - evaluates different voluntary assisted dying models and safeguards, with a focus on those that would be appropriate for the Northern Territory context
    - identifies any specific challenges associated with delivering voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory
    - if the committee recommends adoption, provide drafting instructions for model legislation to give effect to voluntary assisted dying in the NT.
- calls on members of the Assembly to respect the deeply felt views on this issue across the community and participate in respectful debate on this important issue.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I support this important motion regarding voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory.

Twenty-nine years ago, our Territory led the world when we passed the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act. We were the first jurisdiction anywhere to recognise that individuals facing terminal illness should have the right to choose the manner and timing of their death. That pioneering legislation demonstrated our Territory's commitment to compassion, dignity and individual autonomy, yet today we find ourselves in the unenviable position of being the last Australian jurisdiction to implement voluntary assisted dying laws. Every state in Australia has now passed legislation allowing their citizens this fundamental right that continues to be denied to Territorians.

Today, in a last-minute attempt to pre-empt this motion, the Attorney-General released a media release announcing that the government would request the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee to undertake an inquiry into the voluntary assisted dying report. Although I commend the government in budging on this issue, it is a little frustrating because the consultations were already done, which is what the 2024 report is. However, I am satisfied that the proposed terms of reference for this review are thorough, and I look forward to the results.

The movement from the government on referring this to the LCAC is a win for the community. I say this to everyone in our community: this is what having a proactive, progressive crossbench can do for you. We have a Chief Minister who was bowing to the Australian Christian Lobby and refusing to listen to the overwhelming support of the community, but we listened. We met with organisations and families. We pushed, you pushed, and together we forced the government's hand. It could not deny your voices any longer. It remains to be seen what will come from this committee, but for a government that says this was not a priority, this is a huge step forward.

The extensive work of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Independent Expert Advisory Panel deserves the highest recognition. The comprehensive report, completed in July 2024, represents nine months of diligent research, community consultation and careful consideration of the complex ethical, legal and practical issues. The panel received input from more than 350 individual participants through public forums; met with about 60 organisations; received 98 written submissions; and gathered almost 1,400 survey responses. Importantly, 73% of survey respondents agreed that people should be able to choose when they die.

The panel has provided us with 22 thoughtful recommendations that offer a clear pathway forward that respects the dignity of the individual and the sanctity of life. The panel's first recommendation is that the NT should implement voluntary assisted dying legislation that is broadly consistent with VAD legislation in other Australian states and territories while addressing our unique Territory circumstances.

I have spoken with many Territorians who have watched loved ones suffer through terminal illness without the option to end their lives with dignity. During my campaign last year I doorknocked constituents who raised it as their biggest issue. One person in Coconut Grove took me into their home, and we had a long talk about his experience with incurable cancer and his wishes to access VAD. Since being elected I have spoken with many more people in my electorate for whom this issue looms large. They say, 'We just want the choice'.

I also had the privilege of meeting Sharon Cramp and her husband, Spud, earlier this year. They brought with them photos and diaries of her mother, Liz Holmes, and shared with me her story. Liz, suffering breast cancer and two hip replacements and in unbelievable daily pain, wanted the choice to die peacefully and without pain, but this was denied to her. After a long struggle and without access to voluntary assisted dying, Liz took her own life. Sharon told me about the trauma of her mother suffering and the trauma for her and her family having to witness their mother's pain and not be with her in her final moments.

Liz's story was tabled in this parliament in 2017, and her family feels let down that eight years later there has been no movement on the issue. Sharon would like me to share the last text message she received from her mum before she took her own life. Liz lived in New South Wales, and Sharon lives here in the NT, but at the time voluntary assisted dying was illegal in both places. Sharon wanted to be by her side, but Liz worried that her daughter would be charged if she was involved in any way. Liz's final text message reads:

'Shaz, thanks so much for your understanding. You know I can't do this existence anymore, having nothing to look forward to but palliative care in a nursing home. I'm not doing that to you three or me. No euthanasia in New South Wales. Was once passed in the NT—have it happen again. You of all people can do it. Animals have it. We are animals too. It is my legacy. My spirit will always be watching over you. I love you more than words can say. Mum xoxo'

I send my deepest condolences to Sharon and her family who are listening live and thank her for incredible bravery and persistence in advocating for voluntary assisted dying legislation in the NT.

These are not isolated cases. These experiences reflect a fundamental injustice facing Territorians today.

It is deeply concerning that despite widespread community support we continue to face political resistance to these necessary reforms. The resistance from the CLP until this point is evidence of it being unduly influenced by pressure from organisations like the Australian Christian Lobby, which made submissions against voluntary assisted dying legislation. While I respect the role of faith-based organisations in our community, their view should not determine health policy for all Territorians.

The ACL's lobbying efforts may align with the personal beliefs of CLP members, but they do not reflect the views of the majority of Territorians. The panel's consultation showed overwhelming support for VAD across all demographics and regions. With 73% of respondents supporting the right to choose and other polls nationwide being as high as 80% or 85%, it is clear that this legislation transcends partisan politics.

I ask my colleagues across the aisle: will you represent the wishes of your constituents or allow external lobby groups to dictate the position? Let me be clear: this is not a partisan issue. Support for voluntary assisted dying legislation cuts across political divides. The desire for dignity at the end of life is not aligned with any particular ideology. Polling consistently shows that a significant majority of Territorians, like most Australians, support this reform.

Critics may argue that palliative care should be sufficient. The panel's recommendation 7 specifically addresses this, recognising the importance of palliative care services in the NT and recommending that a person who requests VAD must be informed of all treatment options, including palliative care. Critically, it also recommends that palliative care services must be consistently and adequately resourced.

Now that we have the amendment—some of it not as relevant—it is time to restore the rights Territorians briefly held nearly three decades ago. It is time to end the situation where dying Territorians must either continue to suffer or leave their homes, communities and support networks to access rights available to other Australians.

The Northern Territory has always prided itself on its independent spirit and practical approach to difficult issues. We were leaders once in this area; we should be leaders again, not reluctant followers.

Despite the announcement of the review to be carried out by the LCAC, I still urge all members of the Assembly to support this motion and work together in a spirit of cooperation to implement these recommendations with the urgency they deserve.

This is not about politics; it is about compassion, dignity and the fundamental rights of Territorians to make their own choices at the end of their lives.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Johnston for bringing this important motion to the House.

Every individual deserves dignity, compassion and the right to make informed decisions about the support and medical care they receive as they near end of life.

Palliative care can help people with terminal or life-limiting illnesses to live free of pain and discomfort as much as possible to ensure the person and their families are receiving the support they need, whether that is physical, mental, emotional, practical or spiritual support.

These are personal decisions and will be different for every person, depending on their circumstances, beliefs, values, family considerations and many other factors. What is important in these circumstances is choice. Every Territorian should have the right to choose for themselves what end-of-life care looks like for them, should they choose to follow that. For people with terminal illness, disease or medical condition, this may include choosing the time and place of ending their life with the assistance of a medical professional.

Once upon a time, the Northern Territory was a pioneer in voluntary assisted dying. In 1995 the Northern Territory became the first jurisdiction in the world to legally give people this option through the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act. It was the proud political legacy of the then CLP Chief Minister Marshall Perron, who believed strongly in the rights of Territorians to voluntarily end their life. Mr Perron continues to this day to advocate for assisted dying rights in the Northern Territory. I acknowledge his continued advocacy and care for the Northern Territory. Mr Perron was a politician of principle who strongly believed in giving Territorians this final, crucial control over their lives.

Mr Perron showed—and continues to show—true leadership on this issue, which is much more than can be said for the current CLP government which desperately tried to avoid this issue up until today when it was forced to act and send out the rushed media release this morning ahead of the 3 pm General Business in parliament.

Not everyone in our community supports voluntary assisted dying, and their beliefs and opinions on this highly personal and sensitive matter deserve to be respected; however, it is also true that there is strong support across the Northern Territory in our communities for voluntary assisted dying.

After the federal government intervened and overturned the Northern Territory's Rights of the Terminally Ill Act in 1997, we have seen other jurisdictions consult on and introduce their own voluntary assisted dying legislation in support of terminally ill people in their jurisdictions who are ready and able to make a choice about ending their lives if they choose to do so.

In my team, the Member for Arafura has his personal story of a family friend interstate who chose to end their life peacefully, surrounded by their loved ones.

It took until 2022 for the Australian parliament to pass the Restoring Territory Rights Bill, allowing the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory the right to legislate on voluntary assisted dying once again. This Bill was largely thanks to the strong advocacy of re-elected Member for Solomon, Luke Gosling OAM. At the time, Mr Gosling had this to say about the Bill:

> *This bill does not legislate voluntary assisted dying.*

It is about democratic equality and fairness.

For too long, Australians living in the territories have been treated as second-class citizens when it comes to legislating on matters that impact their own lives.

It's well past time for that to end.

It is called the Restoring Territory Rights Bill because that is all it seeks to do—to level the democratic playing field and restore legislative rights to our territories.

The Member for Solomon's advocacy and hard work alongside his ACT counterpart, the also newly re-elected federal Member for Canberra, Alicia Payne, paved the way for the former Labor government to recommence a conversation with the Northern Territory community about voluntary assisted dying.

At the time, the former Labor government recognised this was a complex issue for many people across our community and for many different reasons. We knew there were many sensitive matters to consider before reintroducing legislation that would give Territorians their rights to that important choice.

In late 2023 the then Northern Territory Labor government established an independent expert advisory panel on VAD to have the conversation and work through this issue carefully with the community. This panel was led by Hon Vicki O'Halloran AO, CVO and Duncan McConnel SC, who undertook this extensive consultation across the Territory.

The committee heard from 350 individual participants through public forums and other meetings. They met with 60 organisations and received 98 written submissions and almost 1,400 survey responses. The committee opened discussions on what voluntary assisted dying was, who should have access to it, how people should have access it, the models of care, the role of health professionals, how it should be monitored and what safeguards should be put in place.

It was a thoughtful, well-informed and considered conversation across the breadth of the Territory between August 2023 and April 2024, engaging with many people from many walks of life. The panel also spoke with individuals and organisations in other jurisdictions across the country to understand what their voluntary assisted dying experiences were, as well as taking in the already extensive research available done on this issue when it comes to voluntary assisted dying legislation in Australia and around the world.

A report was delivered to the government in July 2024, not long before the Territory election, with 2022 comprehensive recommendations for introducing a safe and practical framework for VAD. It is disappointing that the CLP, under pressure in its reactive mode as usual, looks like it must kick the can down the road because it does not want to show or allow its members their conscience vote on the issue and has suggested consultation when this has already occurred.

The CLP government failed to consult properly regarding domestic violence, changes to the sacred sites legislation, scrapping the portable long service leave and moving the location of the northern suburbs youth hub. The list goes on.

Now the CLP decided it wants to do extensive consultation on VAD knowing well, as I do, that this work has already taken place. It is beyond pathetic that such an important issue for Northern Territorians that this would be kicked down the road by the government which says that 2025 is its year of action, certainty and security.

While timing constraints prevented legislation from being introduced before the 2024 Territory election, our Labor team committed to reviewing these recommendations thoroughly and introducing VAD legislation for a conscience vote if re-elected to government; that remains our position. It is deeply disappointing that Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro, who at one stage was to introduce her own General Business motion on voluntary assisted dying, and her CLP team have failed to show any leadership on this issue.

The ongoing advocacy and engagement from organisations such as the Council on the Ageing NT (COTA), Go Gentle Australia, Northern Territory Voluntary Euthanasia Society and many other community groups has been essential in continuing to keep this issue on the public agenda. Their voices and advocacy are crucial in the ongoing conversation because we know the government is silent on this issue.

I was deeply moved by the story of Lori Martin who wrote to me and other members of this Assembly in support of voluntary assisted dying. Ms Martin shared her story of being diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease at the age of 54 years. I will quote from Lori's story:

> *'In time I will be bedridden. Eating and talking will become more difficult if not near impossible. Current friendships will fade and I will be left, alone with nursing staff. This is my reality. I stay and linger, struggling for every breath. But I'm not near the end yet. It gets much worse.'*
>
> *…*
>
> *'This isn't about death. It's about choice. About dignity. About Hope.'*

I sincerely thank Ms Martin for having the bravery to share her story.

The Chief Minister said that legislation to reintroduce voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory is not a priority for the CLP government. This morning it has been forced to put out its rushed and reactive media release, pre-empting debate this afternoon. The CLP wants to do this so-called extensive consultation, which it has not done in the last nine months, to keep kicking the can down the road on this issue.

Governments need to govern for all people, manage a broad range of issues in the best interests of their constituents, address complex matters across the Territory and show leadership in these matters. Saying something is not a priority is an excuse not to act, for no action, certainty and security when it comes to the leadership on voluntary assisted dying in the Territory.

When a politician says that something is not a priority, we need to dig deeper and find the real reason they are not willing to provide action; that is what they promised they will do this year for Territorians. When all the hard work has been done and hard conversations have been had, it beggars belief that the CLP still is running from a complex and sensitive matter. In this case I argue that the real reason is lack of courage and leadership. There are many people across all the communities we represent with strongly held views against allowing voluntary assisted dying. That is fine; it is their prerogative, and I respect that. Some of these people are my Arnhem constituents, and some live in the electorates of my Labor colleagues. Some people hold these views on faith-based grounds, some on cultural grounds and some on both.

We are all aware of this, as is the Chief Minister. Sometimes you have to make decisions that are in the interests of or that align with the views of the majority of Territorians, whether you are personally supportive, fear pushback from the people you represent or are worried about those who support you questioning what you have done.

Sometimes you just have to do what the community wants—we saw that recently with the urgent sittings—even when it is a hard thing to do and may go against your belief and gut feeling. Not everyone in our community supports voluntary assisted dying. As we know, so far almost 80% of Territorians support it. They support the choice that Territorians should be able to make just like the rest of the country can. This is a significant number of Territorians who say that they want the choice for themselves or their loved ones when the time is right should it unfortunately occur.

That choice is not for me or anyone else in this Chamber to decide or to personally judge, but it is not possible right now; it is not even a choice for Territorians. The real inequality and injustice in this is that Territorians do not have the same rights and choice as their fellow Australians when it comes to VAD.

When it comes to ending someone's own suffering on their own terms, to be able to make a personal decision that has dignity and compassion at the heart of why they are making that decision, it is incumbent on us in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly to respect that wish and to bring back this legislation for consideration and debate, allowing Territorians a choice and, ultimately, for every member to vote on this important issue based on their own beliefs through a conscience vote. This is the right thing to do.

This is a priority for many of the Territorians we represent. The Chief Minister and her CLP government have the chance to do the right thing in allowing Territorians their choice rather than playing the safe game for political convenience. I strongly urge the Chief Minister and the CLP government to listen to the many voices of Territorians and commit to bringing this legislation before the Assembly.

I note that the Attorney-General has moved an amendment to the motion. I recognise elements of the amended motion, but I support, on behalf of the Labor opposition, the original context from the Member for Johnston. I thank the Member for Johnston for bringing this important issue to the House, because we do

not want important or complex issues to fall off the table. We do not want to put aside an issue that may challenge us—whether it is in this Chamber, in our electorates or visiting other parts of the Northern Territory—in doing our best job to represent all views of Territorians despite any personal views.

The overwhelming evidence and advocacy is about making sure that Territorians have the same right to choice as the rest of Australia. Territorians do not deserve to be second-class citizens when it comes to our own legislation. We do not deserve to be cut out of a conversation that the rest of the country has already steamed ahead with. We do not deserve to be the last jurisdiction to allow this choice when we were the first jurisdiction in the world to allow this. We should honour a legacy that puts people first. I believe, regardless of politics or personal views, having that choice is the right thing to do.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am speaking because I think I am the only person in this Chamber who has publicly stated that I do not particularly agree with voluntary assisted dying. I am not enamoured by it. I have grave concerns about it, but I accept that all Australians, apart from Territorians, now have a right to voluntary assisted dying, so it is a fait accompli that Territorians will have the right to voluntary assisted dying at some point. I accept that, and I take on board what the Opposition Leader just spoke about and that Territorians deserve a choice, but I have concerns.

I think the amendment the Attorney-General has proposed to do more grassroots consultation is probably a good idea, although the former Labor government and current CLP government could be accused of procrastinating on this issue. Most of us, if we delve deeply, know where we stand and how we will vote, but to do more consultation in a new government is a good thing.

The former Labor government's consultation process was criticised by the Australian Christian Lobby. The Member for Nightcliff has expressed her concerns about this group, but it felt that, particularly in the Alice Springs consultation on 16 November 2023, the process started on the premise that this will happen and the consultation was about how it will happen. They felt that was premature. They did not like the premise and felt that it was a bad place to start. A lot of Christian people have a problem with voluntary assisted dying, so they participated in the consultation processes in the Northern Territory wanting to state publicly why they did not support voluntary assisted dying. They came away quite disappointed when they were told, 'No, that's not our starting point. Our starting point is how, not if.'

This new consultation process the CLP has triggered should start on the premise of, 'What do you think? Is it a good or bad thing?' and not, 'It's happening. How do you want it to happen?' All Territorians need to have a voice in this, and they will through us when we finally get to vote on it in this Chamber, but we need to go back a step.

For me, living in Alice Springs—I am not sure what the Member for Gwoja intends to talk about—a lot of my constituents are Aboriginal people who have fear in regard to voluntary assisted dying. They do not necessarily like it or understand it, and it will take a lot more than a consultation process and a Bill through parliament to allay their fears. I think that is unique to the Northern Territory, and we cannot ignore the fact that 30% of our population is Aboriginal. I am not saying most of them or even all of them have these fears, but I have heard from Aboriginal constituents of mine that they do not like the idea of VAD. They do not trust it or want it.

I am not equipped in any way to represent those people's views, but I know they exist. I find it interesting that the Members for Nightcliff and Johnston, who normally speak up and empower the voices of Aboriginal people, have not mentioned that, because that is one thing I consider when thinking about VAD. How will this impact on a significant proportion of our population who are often neglected and disempowered through processes of government? Their voices must be heard; they are very important, as are all Territorians' voices.

Along the lines of what the Member for Nightcliff said, all voices are important, and there are spiritual concerns in relation to how this practice of voluntary assisted dying is implemented. How are people's spiritual beliefs and needs respected and heard throughout this process, as well as the cultural needs I just referred to?

In the Northern Territory there are so many things we do well, but there are also things we do not do well at all. One that smacks us all in the face, particularly over the last 24 hours, is ICAC. You are probably thinking, 'What does ICAC have to do with VAD?', but the way we set up ICAC was not tailored well to the needs, nature and peculiarities of the Northern Territory. We have seen a failure of ICAC because of that.

Setting up a model of providing voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory will hit similar roadblocks and problems. We are such a small jurisdiction and population, as we know, spread out over a vast geographical area. How on Earth will we educate people about VAD and provide a compassionate, sensitive

and highly professional service across the length and breadth of the Northern Territory? It will be a logistical nightmare, as is the provision of a lot of services.

Today I received a letter from someone concerned about a movement service with a nurse who services the whole of the Northern Territory beyond Darwin. The service has been cut back because there is no funding. There are health services that you can access only in particular places; they are not accessible throughout the Northern Territory. We know that.

When we debated the use of medical terminations years ago, the conversation went to how we make that accessible to all Territorians. VAD will be one of those things where we have to come up with a unique and different model of how we provide it that is equitable, sensible and affordable.

We had the budget in the last 24 hours. The provision of VAD in the Northern Territory could cost millions of dollars every year because we know, through the recommendations of the report that was produced last year, that it has to be of a high standard and bulletproof, with layers of accountability. How on Earth can we get away with not setting up a full structure costing many millions of dollars?

Going back to ICAC, my view from before we set up ICAC was that we should have outsourced a lot of it. Once again, I go back to that model. We have to do something bold and different when it comes to VAD. We need to think about an outsource model. Queensland does it. I am by no means an expert on how, but I understand it has zones with specialist teams that cover different geographical zones within Queensland that do outreach. Queensland has a vast geographical area too.

We should consider using the existing services within other jurisdictions to provide their expertise to us just over the border—whether it is WA, South Australia or Queensland. It should be an option or possibility that they come to us rather than us set up a whole system.

That is the mistake we made with ICAC; we should have outsourced the investigations. Instead of trying to set it up and struggle to find the right people to work in our ICAC services, we should have outsourced. We should look at a similar model for VAD.

We all know it is difficult to get specialists in any field to the Northern Territory. It will be difficult to set up voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory.

To begin with, the numbers could be incredibly low. I have been given this interesting book—I think everyone has received it—Go Gentle Australia's State of VAD. It is a report on voluntary assisted dying across Australia and New Zealand. The figures are interesting. Since 2019 there have been 7,208 terminally ill people who have sought access to VAD. Of those, less than half of them have died using a VAD substance. That is millions of people—I do not have a number for the population of Australia plus New Zealand. In the Northern Territory to start off with, the numbers could be incredibly small; it could be fewer than 10 a year. That is the sort of number I have heard. For the first couple of years you could be talking about five, six, 10 or 20; it is unlikely to be any more than those sorts of numbers.

If we are to go down this path, and we are—it is a fait accompli, I think; I would be surprised, if we put up our hands tonight and voted for or against VAD, that it would be voted down—we must be sensible about this. We must look creatively and sensibly at a model that will work and will work forever and be something we can be proud of. We have too many examples of things not going well, not being sustained, being hideously expensive and not necessarily delivering the high quality of service that all Territorians deserve and require.

I have issues. I have ideas. I will participate in the consultation process that the Attorney-General has put forward. It gives all Territorians another opportunity to have input. We need to tread carefully, and we must get this model right. We must make sure that it is fit for purpose for the unique environment and circumstances of the Northern Territory. We need to look circumspectly at not only the Northern Territory but also beyond. That is probably a part of the motion that is a bit lacking. Added to that, we probably need to take a look at what is happening across the world. There are different sorts of models, and some countries are well advanced. They have been practising voluntary assisted dying, euthanasia, for many years.

I will leave you with a thought, and I shared this story recently with a colleague. I was in Coles in Alice Springs just before Christmas, and this amazing elderly German woman, who I know quite well, bailed me up. She is modern, contemporary, well read and educated. She said, 'This voluntary assisted dying, Robyn', and I thought, 'Oh'—she read that I do not necessarily support it. She continued, 'In Germany we do not have voluntary assisted dying because people are very fearful of VAD, given the history of war and the Nazi mass murders which they called euthanasia. We do not have assisted suicide in Germany. There are factions that

want it and regularly lobby for it, but we do not have it because people are fearful and do not trust the Germany government to implement it safely, fairly and sensitively.'

Then she went on to say that she had worked in another European country that had VAD. She worked in an aged-care facility. She said, 'Robyn, I am not saying that it would happen routinely in the Northern Territory, but you are right to be cautious and careful because things can go wrong, and it can be misused. If it is not understood and executed properly it can divide and be a major problem.'

On that note, I leave the Assembly with my final thought that I am still concerned about this, but I will by no means be preventing Territorians from having access to the same rights as other Australians.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Mr Deputy Speaker, this has been a conversation I have had for some time with the Member for Araluen regarding the importance, sensitivities and characteristics that need to be identified and discussed. I start by putting on the record that I am a proud Territorian and a Catholic who has been baptised, communed and confirmed. I am a Catholic person who is incredibly proud of our new Pope Leo XIV, but I am proud to ensure that every Territorian gets to have a say over their future and their lives.

The motion brought forward by the Member for Johnston is important. I make it clear that what we have been asked today is not to have the vote to say yes or no to voluntary assisted dying itself but to say as a parliament, 'Let us get on with the job of bringing actual legislation to the Legislative Assembly for this Assembly to go out and talk on'.

The Attorney-General has seen the Member for Johnston rearrange the Notice Paper yesterday, as she is entitled to do, and has used this as a political opportunity to make a statement this morning about something that the Member for Johnston was already coming in here to do.

There has been extensive consultation. There was consultation in 2015 and consultation extensively by the independent committee in 2023, which was delivered by the esteemed Duncan McConnel and the Honourable Vicki O'Halloran who travelled and talked with people about some of the considerations that need to be adhered to when making a report to the government that needed to be embedded. I acknowledge that an amendment has been circulated, and that talks about referring it to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

I am not sure if it has been highlighted what they are consulting on. We are consulting on a consulted report. We are consulting on expert advice that has been provided to government. I support the position the Member for Johnston has put forward asking the government to go away and do the work on a draft, then we will have a draft exposure Bill to talk to community about what is being proposed. At the moment there is nothing. At the moment it will continue to be a question on whether or not it should happen.

We should be working to bring in a draft Bill before the parliament, allow all 25 members to talk with their communities about what they want and then have a vote in parliament. If it passes, then we can go and do the work to make sure the implementation can be done, and we can set a date in the future when it becomes active legislation. If this Assembly voted no, then we have an answer.

I also acknowledge the amazing advocacy of people in our community. I highlight one individual in particular: Judy Dent from the Northern Territory. When I first entered parliament in 2016 she was one of the first people to reach out and encourage us to push the Commonwealth Government for the return of Territory rights. She spoke about her story; the care, empathy and love of her husband; and the trauma and sadness that they felt he was exposed to.

The Territory parliament has a long history when it comes to trying to restore those Territory rights. I acknowledge a few people who are no longer members of either the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly or the Australian parliament. I acknowledge the hard work and advocacy of Kezia Purick, the former Member for Goyder, who always stood up for Territory rights. It was not whether VAD was a good or bad thing; it was about returning decision-making back to the Territory to make and shape laws for ourselves. I also acknowledge the former Country Liberal, turned Independent, Senator Dr Sam McMahon, who was also firm in the return of Territory rights.

Fast-forward to 2022 when the federal parliament considered this. I acknowledge the three out of four Territory representatives in the federal parliament who voted for the return of Territory rights: Senator Malarndirri McCarthy; Marion Scrymgour; and Luke Gosling. It would also be remiss of me not to acknowledge the former Member for Lingiari, Warren Snowdon. They have all done hardworking advocacy

to get Territory rights restored and enable us now to have this conversation and allow these decisions to be made in the Northern Territory. That is incredibly important.

I acknowledge the concerns. From the onset, we need a commitment from the government that after it has finished at the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee it does not just sit there for eternity. The way that the motion has been drafted, it does not say that it would then make a definitive decision on what will happen with voluntary assisted dying. It does not say that draft legislation would be created or that no further action is required. Basically, it lays out that it would look at recommendations, adoptions and measures. It does not give us a definitive date. It continues to leave Territorians in limbo.

We need that commitment. If we are all talking about consultation and the need to do it, we need a draft Bill based on the extensive expert advice of the panel to help shape something. Everyone in this parliament knows how it works. Use the advice, evidence, experiences and stories that have been collected to then work on providing something that we can consult with. We can bring out a draft exposure Bill to talk about with people and say, 'This is what the parliament is potentially considering. Where are changes needed? What is not good? If you do not support it, that is okay, but we need to understand.'

That is important. This is a conscience vote for members in the parliament. I have not made up my mind how I will vote. When there is a draft Bill, I will talk with my community members and hear their concerns and suggestions they may have about this. Right now, we are not getting anywhere near a position to allow those conversations to happen because we are referring something to a committee when there has already been extensive work done. We need not to hide behind committee processes. Let us draft a Bill and put that draft exposure out to the community to engage in active conversation and then we can work to that.

I have spoken with the Member for Araluen at length about this during catch-ups with a coffee. My biggest fear about VAD is that it will be politically hijacked and motivated by people who will scaremonger and provide fear, hate and division in our community. We all must work to ensure that does not happen; the conversations and dialogues need to be civil, respectful and calm. I will not judge people on their position because I acknowledge that many people talk about and have differing views and opinions on this.

When you hear stories from around the country of people using it, you hear the sadness of people who have lost someone but also of people who see their loved one's final wishes being respected and upheld. That is incredibly important.

I also highlight that I have done a fair amount of homework interstate on voluntary assisted dying. It is not a matter of rocking up to a doctor and saying, 'Hey, I want to die tomorrow'. There is a long consultative process that involves psychological and psychiatric assessments and counselling, with multiple visits to a doctor and expert medical advice on the prognosis and the level of pain and condition people are in.

During the consultation process that happened in the Northern Territory, there was a conversation about where and how it could be administered, because there is a question about telehealth. That issue remains ongoing with the Commonwealth of Australia in terms of the laws at the Commonwealth level. Where and how it could be recommended to be used has all been included in the consultation. It is important that we all should remain respectful of each other's views and opinions, faith and beliefs because they differ. That is okay.

For the purposes of seeing this move, even if it is a small step forward, I will accept and support the amendment brought forward by the government to send this to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee because that is at least a step forward.

We all need to be clear that we owe it to Territorians not to leave this in the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. We need to be clear on what the next steps are after September when a report is brought back. That should be a draft exposure Bill.

That is not saying that the government supports it or not, but the government is in power, and it will be the one that asks Parliamentary Counsel to draft a Bill. I make it clear that if that is the case, I will not go out and tell everyone that this is what the government will do. We need to be clear and say, 'The government, after this committee, has instructed a report to be done. Now a draft exposure is being done. This is a conscience vote for the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly.' If members are uncomfortable about voting or how it looks, then let us have a conversation as a parliament about how that vote would take place to make you all feel empowered about the decision that you will have to make as some point. If the government does not do it, then there will come a time when a Bill will be presented to parliament by someone else.

It is important, and I sincerely thank the Member for Johnston for bringing this forward. I thank the countless amazing advocates across the Northern Territory, including Judy Dent, the members at COTA and all the amazing people who have done strong work and advocacy. It is incredibly important. Yes, there are groups with different views and opinions, but we can get to a respectful position. I stand by the fact that we need a draft Bill so that we can go to our communities and say, 'This is what is being proposed and spoken about'.

I support the amendment brought forward by the government, but I make it clear first and foremost that I support the motion brought forward by the Member for Johnston.

To the Attorney-General—this is being referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee—I say that I am a proud blackfella; I might look white, but I am proud of my culture, language and law. Any consultation done in the Northern Territory needs a significant portion of funds allocated to interpreter services to ensure people are aware of what is being spoken about and agreed to or not agreed to. We need to empower and employ local people on the ground in communities to do that work, which is important. We must ensure that things are done in print as well.

We have done it before with the *Burial and Cremation Act*. We had interpreters and created audiovisual installations, movies and those types of things so that we could guarantee it would be done and that consultation was done respectfully and clearly.

It is also important to say that we are referring this for further consultation. It will then go on the Notice Paper for 28 days if there is a draft Bill, which will give time again for people to talk about how important this is.

I thank the Member for Johnston for the opportunity to talk about this and congratulate her on proceeding to get this to the next level.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Mr Deputy Speaker, voluntary assisted dying is not a simple issue for Yolngu people. We have our beliefs on death that do not include assisted dying. When someone elderly or with a terminal disease is dying, this is a time when we are engaged in ceremony. We are singing the songlines that provide comfort and allow the person's spirit to go home to the ancestors. It is also possible that the ancestors will bring healing and it may not be that person's time to die, so they come back to us.

This ceremony is important for the family to allow for healing of that person or, if the time is right, sending their loved one home in the right way. Beliefs in our culture mean that voluntary assisted dying could create fear and blame throughout our communities. If someone dies early, there could be blame placed on the family that this has happened. There is also fear of the health system generally. When family members have been sent to hospital for care and never returned, our communities worry about what has happened, whether they died naturally and that they have died without ceremony. These issues in our community create fear about VAD.

I acknowledge that many people in balanda communities also do not support VAD, but there are many people who support this option at the end of their life. I do not wish to say what is right or wrong for another cultural group, but I believe that any committee that looks at this issue and the development of a Bill for the Northern Territory must be careful and thoughtful about understanding the cross-cultural perspectives on this issue. VAD will not be helpful in our Yolngu communities; it will create fear and mistrust. Any Bill that is developed in the NT must be sophisticated enough to allow cultural groups to opt out. There must be clear cultural protections with no blurry lines.

It is clear from the VAD report that it was difficult to consult broadly with Aboriginal communities. The report said that there was a notable silence or hesitation from some communities and that there is a need for continuing discussion with Aboriginal communities.

It is clear that, as the last jurisdiction in Australia, the Northern Territory will move towards some kind of Bill on VAD, but the Northern Territory is a different place from the rest of Australia, and these differences must be reflected in our laws.

This is a very sacred part of Aboriginal custom. When we die our bodies become a sacred object. Our ancestors will appear when we are getting ready to die, and we know that they are taking us home. These are the important parts of preparing for death, and our traditions and customs are critical at this time.

It is important that in the discussion of VAD, the LCAC seeks advice from cultural leaders—not just an invitation for submissions, but the committee should identify Aboriginal elders who hold authority for their people and ask them about any changes to the laws. If—as the VAD panel found—there is silence coming

from Aboriginal communities and leaders on this issue, this silence may be telling you that the fear attached to VAD is so great that people do not want to engage. This should be considered and understood as part of a consultation process.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

MOTION
Protecting Territorians from Gambling Harms

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I move that the NT Legislative Assembly:

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

Today I speak on a matter that affects families across the Northern Territory: the unchecked proliferation of gambling and the devastating harm it causes our communities.

Let me be clear that gambling is not some harmless form of entertainment in the Territory. For too many of our constituents, it has become a source of financial ruin, family breakdown and mental health crisis. The numbers are staggering. Australians lose approximately $32bn annually to gambling; that is over $1,555 per adult, making us the biggest gambling losers in the world, and the Northern Territory is no exception to this troubling trend.

Why is this happening? Because pokies are designed to be addictive—pure and simple. They employ sophisticated psychological techniques to keep people playing, like flashing lights, near misses and the illusion of control. These machines are carefully engineered to draw vulnerable people into cycles of harmful behaviour.

Research from the Australian Gambling Research Centre shows that 87% of regular pokies gamblers are experiencing harm. Even more concerning, those experiencing high levels of harm typically spend longer at machines—a median of two hours per session compared with 45 minutes for those at low to no risk.

The Northern Territory has one of the highest concentrations of pokies per capita in Australia, and where are these machines located? Disproportionately in our most disadvantaged communities, extracting money from those who can least afford to lose it. Unlike Western Australia, which restricts pokies to a single casino, the Northern Territory allows these harmful machines to proliferate throughout our communities.

On Monday night I held a community event in my electorate where we screened the Australian documentary called *Ka-Ching! Pokie Nation* and held a community discussion afterwards. If you have not seen it, I highly recommend this documentary. It is a brilliant but devastating look inside the pokie machine industry and at the social impacts and the power it holds over our political system. People from the industry spoke on it, and it was horrifying to hear them say so casually that the question is how fast or how slow you want to bleed the users, how every aspect of the machines is designed to create addictions and how they deliberately target the most vulnerable. This is evident from the distribution of machines. In Australia the poorest communities have the highest number of poker machines.

As Reverend Tim Costello said in the documentary, 'It is a ruthless transfer of wealth from the poorest postcodes to the pockets of the gambling companies'. The predatory nature of this industry is enough to make you sick. At our event we had a member of Gamblers Anonymous talk to the audience. It was a generous thing to put himself out there and speak about his experiences with us. I will not use his name here, but I thank him from the bottom of my heart for his openness and generosity.

Governments all over generally point to the Community Benefit Fund as justification for the gambling industry's social licence. This argument does not stack up. According to research by the Menzies School of Health Research, the total quantifiable social cost of gambling in the Northern Territory is between $165m and $380m, and that was in 2018. That represents a cost per at-risk gambler of between $9,722. The central estimate was $190m, or $11,000 per at-risk gambler. Now we have the government's own figures confirming how inadequate the Community Benefit Fund is.

I remind you that one of the main reasons for this fund's existence is to use the profits from gambling to try to help reduce harms and mitigate the negative effects in our community. The Community Benefit Fund Annual Report 2023–24 shows that $17m was paid out in grants covering various community needs, but guess what? Most of it had nothing to do with gambling harm reduction. If fact, specific gambling amelioration grants totalled just $3.26m and gambling research grants were a mere $320,000, together representing less than 25% of the total fund expenditure. The majority went to community organisation grants that were completely unrelated to gambling harm reduction, which of course is great for community groups that are struggling for funding. These community groups are fantastic for the NT, and I agree they should receive funding from the government, but this funding does not need to come from gambling industry harms. The government could easily allocate this small amount of funding each year in its budget to ensure communities thrive.

All funding is a political choice. We have seen in the budget that this government is happy to fork out for corporate welfare to build infrastructure for gas companies but will tell us that it does not have money for community grants. This is the wicked thing about the gambling industry; it cynically uses the needs of the community for its own gain by essentially bribing us to allow it to continue. The gambling industry has done what it does best; it wants us to get addicted to its measly funding to support our local clubs.

These reports clearly demonstrate how the fund prioritises general community grants over addressing the devastating impacts of gambling addiction. When compared with the Menzies School of Health Research estimate of up to $380m in annual social costs, the amelioration spending represents less than 1% of the estimated social cost. This is a severely inadequate response and highlights how the industry's contribution through the fund fails to offset the enormous social harm it generates. The research also found that 1.4% of our population, almost 2,500 Territorians, were classified as problem gamblers in 2018, with a further 3.6% at moderate risk and 9.4% at low risk. The share of problem and risky gamblers in the NT is significantly higher than any other Australian state or Territory.

For every dollar that finds its way to community organisations through the fund, multiple dollars are lost in productivity, healthcare costs, family breakdowns, housing instability and in some tragic cases, crime and suicide. According to the Alliance for Gambling Reform, these losses translate to social harm on an industrial scale.

The Community Benefit Fund Annual Report 2023–24 reveals that licensed clubs in the Territory contributed about $5.6m in community support, representing approximately 13% of their net gaming machine revenue. Here is the kicker; that represents a decrease from the previous year, when contributions were 14% of revenue. More concerning is how uneven these contributions are across venues. While some clubs report

contributions exceeding 30% of their revenue, others contribute as little as 1% to 5%. This inconsistency demonstrates the need for stronger standardised requirements to ensure the industry adequately offsets the harm it causes.

The social and economic costs far outweigh the benefits. The Menzies research revealed that 11,335 gamblers reported they had experienced at least one form of harm as a result of their own gambling, but even more concerning is that 14,521 people reported experiencing harm from someone else's gambling. Among the affected population, the financial harms had an incident rate of nearly 40 incidents per person per year, with relationships and family harms occurring 34 times per year and emotional and psychological harm, 23 times per year.

Online betting is also exploding in our communities, with rates of regular betting rising by more than 50% among men aged 18 to 34 over the past eight years. Many of these online gambling operations are licensed in the Northern Territory, yet their contribution to our economy is minimal compared to the profits they extract.

I was happy to see an announcement in the budget yesterday of an increase to the cap on the tax paid by these online operators, which I will touch more on in a moment, but it is not enough. The current taxation arrangements for gambling companies operating in the Territory are woefully inadequate. The Racing and Wagering Bill 2024 was a feeble attempt to regulate a multibillion-dollar industry, but the previous Labor government once again folded to the gambling lobby by consulting only one harm-minimisation group compared with 28 betting companies.

While Territorians suffer, gambling corporations continue to profit handsomely from their misery without contributing their fair share to our public purse. By better regulating and taxing this industry, we can reduce harm and grow our revenue base to fund initiatives that actually improve the health and wellbeing of Territorians.

We cannot discuss gambling harm in the Northern Territory without acknowledging its devastating impact on Aboriginal communities. Independent member Yingiya Guyula has repeatedly highlighted how Aboriginal communities are disproportionately affected by harmful policies imposed without proper consultation or respect for cultural authorities.

In previous statements about wellbeing, the Member for Mulka has pointed to the harm caused when Aboriginal people are exposed to gambling venues in urban centres away from their homelands. He has described how many Aboriginal people living on remote communities and homelands can manage their finances responsibly when not exposed to the predatory environments of, 'Binge drinking areas, poker machines and gambling venues that exist in towns'.

The Menzies School of Health Research found that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations between the ages of 30 and 65, living in a single-person household and being a smoker were associated with higher rates of gambling harm. People living in Alice Springs or regional towns are significantly more likely to experience gambling harm than those in other parts of the Territory.

This speaks to the importance of strengthening, not weakening, our gambling regulations. It also highlights why Aboriginal leadership and consultation are essential in developing effective gambling policies. Once again the consultation process for gambling reforms has fallen woefully short of meaningful engagement with those most affected.

When we talk about reducing gambling harm, we are talking about addressing a significant contributor to the disadvantage and distress experienced by many Aboriginal Territorians. If we are serious about closing the gap, we cannot ignore the role that predatory gambling practices play in perpetuating cycles of poverty and harm in Aboriginal communities.

This motion puts forward practical, evidence-based measures to address these issues. First, I am calling for the introduction of precommitment systems across all venues with pokies, including casinos. These systems would require gamblers to set binding limits on their losses before they begin to play.

A 2018 Northern Territory gambling prevalence study found that 11,333 gamblers reported experiencing at least one form of harm from their gambling. Even more concerning is the 14,500 people who reported experiencing harm from someone else's gambling. Research from the Australian Gambling Research Centre strongly supports precommitment approaches, their studies showed that load-up limits or the amount that can be loaded into a poker machine at one time, are particularly effective when set at the right level. The

research found that 58% of high-risk gamblers loaded up more than $50 compared with 22% of low-risk gamblers.

This is why my motion calls for reducing a load-up limit to $100, a prudent step in the right direction. As Dr Nancy Greer from the Australian Gambling Research Centre points out, 'Given the purpose of load-up limits is to prompt a moment of reflection before someone chooses to continue gambling, making this decision after every $100 or $500 is probably too late'.

Tasmania is implementing a precommitment system that will limit losses to $100 per day, $500 per month and $5,000 per year by 2025. The Northern Territory should follow suit.

We must increase transparency on the gambling industry. The Northern Territory is one of the only jurisdictions that does not regularly publish electronic gaming machine expenditure data. The previous practice of publishing venue earnings and taxation must be reinstated. Additionally, I call for the monthly publication of venue-specific data, bringing the NT in line with other jurisdictions.

The publicly funded NT Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Survey report should be released within a month of receipt. The public has a right to know this information. The need for transparency I have emphasised is clearly demonstrated in the Community Benefit Fund reporting. Reports show the fund collects nearly $16m in revenue but provides insufficient detail in how effectively these funds address gambling harm. While the report meticulously details hundreds of community organisation grants, it lacks an evaluation of whether the $3.62m spent on amelioration services reduces harm.

This motion calls for greater transparency on venue earnings and the effectiveness of harm-reduction measures funded through the levy.

We must ensure gambling companies pay their fair share of tax. The situation is outrageous. The NT is home to Australia's online wagering industry which has an annual turnover of $50bn, yet our tax laws are designed to protect these enormous corporations and their profits. We tax gambling companies at 5% of their profits but with a low cap on the tax, which up until now was $1.41m in tax paid per company, no matter how much they make.

As we heard in the budget yesterday, this cap will be increased from one million revenue units to two million revenue units. This is a step in the right direction, and I was heartened to see it yesterday, but it is not enough. This means the cap now sits at $2.8m. This is a measly, tokenistic amount from an industry with a $50bn turnover—chump change—and Territorians deserve more.

I am pushing for a removal of this cap. The cap itself is the manifestation of the power of the gambling lobby on our two major parties. It is the government's way of saying to their donors, 'We will tax you, but do not worry; we will not do it seriously.'

To be clear about what this means, a gambling corporation came make billions in profit, but they will never pay more than $2.8m in tax to the Northern Territory. It is corporate welfare plain and simple. To put it into context, the NT Government is facing record debt levels and is reported to be heading towards $14bn. We are struggling to fund basic services for Territorians, yet we are giving massive gambling corporations a free ride. It was positive to hear the tax changes announced in yesterday's budget. It will see some revenue but is still not enough by a longshot.

The other change we saw in the budget was to standardise a minimum 50% tax rate for activities under internet gaming licences, which is only for online casino-type games. It does not apply to the online wagering companies headquartered here.

Why is this happening? It is because the gambling industry has successfully lobbied both major parties for decades. Just look at what happened to the Racing and Wagering Bill 2024. The former Labor government vowed to overhaul this sector, but despite the update in the Bill, the tax rate and the cap remained virtually unchanged. During the creation of this Bill, the government at the time consulted just one harm-reduction organisation compared with 28 gambling giants which stood to benefit from the watered-down legislation.

When the Labor government drafted the Bill there was virtually no genuine community consultation. The Greens repeatedly called for rigorous open consultation with all relevant experts and the broader public, but those calls fell on deaf ears. Instead, Labor pushed ahead with the Bill that primarily served the interests of the industry it was regulating.

The Bill was supposed to modernise our outdated gambling laws, but instead it preserved the absurdly low tax rates and caps that benefit corporations at the expense of Territorians. It was a missed opportunity of epic proportions—a chance to properly tax a $50bn industry and use that revenue to fund services for Territorians while also implementing serious harm-reduction measures.

This is a scandal hiding in plain sight; every other state in Australia has higher gambling taxes than the NT. Victoria, for example, applies a 15% tax on net wagering revenue. As of yesterday's budget we will now cap our tax at $2.8m per company no matter how much it makes. This is an unconscionable giveaway to an industry that is causing massive harm to our communities.

The Territory cannot afford to leave this revenue on the table whilst our hospitals, schools and essential services are chronically underfunded. We need to remove this cap immediately and significantly increase the tax rate to bring it in line with other jurisdictions. This would generate tens or possibly hundreds of millions of dollars in additional revenue that could be used to fund much-needed services rather than padding the profits of gambling corporations.

We must improve integrity and accountability by banning all gifts from the gambling industry to MLAs, their staff and other statutory decision-makers. The need for this ban could not be clearer after the recent outrageous revelation that the Chair of the NT Racing and Wagering Commission has been accepting gifts and hospitality from the gambling companies they are supposed to be regulating. Just weeks ago, Alastair Shields admitted to attending the Darwin Cup as a guest of bookmakers.

How on Earth can Territorians have confidence in our regulatory system when the regulators themselves are accepting perks from the industry? This is why I have included the gift-ban provision in this motion. When gambling regulators are enjoying corporate hospitality on the industry dime, it undermines the public's trust in their independence.

In the last 12 months political donations from the gambling industry have flowed to Territory politicians. The public deserves confidence that decisions about gambling regulations are made in the public interest and not influenced by corporate largesse. I know that taking on the gambling industry requires political courage; its lobbyists are well funded and persistent. Who do we serve—the powerful gambling corporations or the Territorians who elected us to protect their interests?

The Menzies research reveals deeply troubling connections between gambling harm and other social issues. For the non-Indigenous population, experiencing domestic or family violence was significantly associated with gambling harm, with those affected being seven times more likely to experience gambling-related harm than those not affected by domestic violence. The research also found that people experiencing moderate or high levels of psychological distress had a significantly higher incidence of gambling-related harm.

The gambling industry has a history of ruthlessly fighting efforts to reduce harm. Is this surprising? Of course not; its profits rely on high-risk heavy spenders. Research shows that 5% of gamblers account for 77% of gambling spending, but these gambling companies seek out and target these vulnerable individuals, designing things specifically to get them addicted and take money from people who can least afford it.

This explains why the gambling industry fights hard against reforms, but we can look to our neighbours to the west to see a real-world example of life without the stranglehold of pokies. Western Australia proves that we can have thriving communities without pokies on every corner. Its strong regulatory approach has limited pokies to a single casino, yet residents still enjoy clubs, sport and social connection, demonstrating that clubs do not need pokies revenue to thrive. That is an important point to underscore.

The impacts of those lives that have been devastated by gambling addiction ripple through our community—parents who cannot afford school uniforms because a partner gambled away the family budget, elderly Territorians who lost their retirement savings and young people whose first experience with pokies led to a destructive addiction. The Menzies research found that in the Northern Territory 2,188 adults reported that kids missed out on school or something else as a result of the impacts. The lack of data collection from children about the harms they have experienced as a result of the gambling of others means that we do not know the full scale of harm experienced by children.

We had thousands of households where people ran out of money, rent or mortgage payments an average of 14 times a year due to gambling, and 1,678 households ran out of money for food an average of 24 times a year. These are our neighbours, friends and family members. They deserve better than the status quo.

We stand at a critical crossroads. The window for sensible reform is finally open across Australia, with both the federal government and other states taking action to address gambling harm. The Northern Territory must not be left behind. The Community Benefit Fund receives nearly $16m in revenue, yet the allocation of these funds demonstrates misplaced priorities. Less than 20% was directed to gambling harm reduction and research. If we are serious about addressing the estimated $381m in social costs, we must direct more of these funds towards evidence-based harm reduction.

Most Australians support stronger regulation. Seventy-seven per cent believe that there are too many opportunities for gambling nowadays, and 59% believe that gambling should be discouraged. Our constituents are watching to see whether we will protect their interests or cave to industry pressure. We have seen the significant support for reform and protection for Territorians from gambling harms from the community group No New Pokies in Mparntwe. Their surveys revealed 98% support for no new pokies anywhere in the Red Centre. This community pressure achieved success in 2023, with a cap on pokies lowered in response to the pressure.

The research from Menzies School of Health Research makes it clear that the current situation is untenable. The $381m in social cost of gambling harm is having a devastating impact on Territory families, and they are not just statistics; they represent real Territory families dealing with financial hardships, relationship breakdowns and emotional distress. My motion represents sensible evidence-based reform that would make a real difference in reducing these harms. This motion presents an opportunity for this parliament to take meaningful action on an issue that affects thousands of Territorians. It offers practical steps that would reduce harm, increase transparency, improve public revenue and strengthen the integrity in decision-making.

As a grassroots campaign, No New Pokies in Mparntwe has shown that Territorians care deeply about this issue and are taking action in their communities. Now it is time for us, their elected representatives, to do our part. By implementing these evidence-based reforms we can reduce the devastation of gambling addiction in our community while simultaneously improving the Territory's financial position.

This is not about eliminating gambling entirely; it is about putting reasonable guardrails in place to protect our most vulnerable citizens from exploitation. I commend this motion to the Assembly and urge all members to support these commonsense reforms that will protect Territorians from gambling harm.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Nightcliff for bringing the motion to General Business day. It is important to talk about gambling and reform with a considered approach.

I acknowledge the motion put forward by the Member for Nightcliff. The opposition is supportive but will move the following amendment:

Omit all words after 'significant harm in our community' and insert:

- recognise the financial and social costs to our economy and our community from gambling and pokies
- establish a select committee on gambling harms to inquire into and report on:
    - measures introduced in other jurisdictions
    - identify social and economic impacts of gambling
    - develop a best-practice gambling harm minimisation strategy for the Northern Territory.

The committee will comprise two government, two opposition and two crossbench members.

The committee is to report by the first sitting day six months after the passing of this motion.

We put forward the motion to establish a select committee in recognition that the motion put forward by the Member for Nightcliff is important. The opposition feels it is important to have an holistic approach and comprehensive review into gambling. We understand the significant concerns regarding pokie machines and electronic gaming machines, but it is also important to acknowledge and look at harm-minimisation strategies, particularly in other online portals.

When we talk about this issue, we acknowledge that reform is required in this space.

Having been a Cabinet minister previously with the Racing, Gaming and Licensing portfolio for a short time, I acknowledge that there is always work to be done in that space to be done to contemporise legislation because the technology is constantly changing for electronic gaming machines. This is a good opportunity for a select committee to look at harm-minimisation practices. We need to look at this as a health issue because of the addictive nature of these electronic gaming machines.

When I had the portfolio, work was undertaken to lower the cap on electronic gaming machines. That was a commitment of the former Labor government. We started introducing that cap when we were elected in 2016 and throughout 2017 and 2018. Of course, during the COVID years it was put on hold as we responded to the pandemic. When I became the minister we moved to lower that cap again, acknowledging that in between an application had been made about accessing electronic gaming machines that were available in the Territory. That process was undertaken with the tribunal.

You will note in the statistics that the number of pokies or electronic gaming machines in the Northern Territory is higher than nearly any other jurisdiction per capita. This cannot be done in isolation; we need to make sure we have a response and a harm-minimisation strategy in all areas of gambling.

I have been on the record continuously—recently in the *Australian Financial Review*—saying that I believe the best way to tackle gambling in the Northern Territory is to look at having national gaming reform. We need to do something similar to what John Howard did with gun reform. We need national consistency in gambling approaches so that, regardless of which jurisdiction you are travelling in, there is the same national framework in how we respond.

We have heard from parents who need to minimise the impacts and relationship that gambling can have in young kids' lives. In everyday life when children are on their iPhone playing a game—some Members of this Assembly like a good game of Candy Crush—at each level they go up to it starts to ask them to use a credit card to pay for the next level. That is identified as the early stages of normalising a young person's relationship with gambling, which in turn can lead to problematic situations when people are exposed to that. It grows their addictive behaviour. We can see that growing in the future.

This is an important motion. Electronic gaming machines and pokie machines need to be looked at, along with other areas. There has been a conversation about measures. When we were in government and at the election that just passed, we spoke about the need to look at limits on expenditure.

Tasmania brought in $100 limits, and those establishments have moved to being cashless venues, making it difficult for people who are problem gamblers or have addictive behaviours. It is not a matter of just pushing the button on the pokie machine; it is making it more difficult for them to access it. There has been a number of conversations about transitioning to cashless gaming machines for a long time.

This committee could also look at how we respond to gambling in our communities. Many members of this Assembly know that there are good card games played around the Territory, and a good bit of chuck-in goes in there. Someone is always a big winner at those card games, but some people are also big losers. The education about gambling and the effects it has on our communities is important.

There has been a commitment of lowering the number of electronic gaming machines as they become available. There have been national conversations about 'you snooze, you lose' policies whereby if a machine is not active for a period, the government of the jurisdiction then makes moves to take the machine back because it has been dormant. We have seen that in the Territory; a number of machines have not been used for a period, but they are still held by the licensee.

It is a complex space. No-one here is claiming to have all the answers, but we can look at whether it is a select committee or whether the government wants to take time to think about how it responds to this. Gambling causes harm if it is done irresponsibly. I note that there are campaigns about gambling responsibly and taking into account the effects it can have, but we also must be mindful—as the Member for Nightcliff spoke about—where electronic gaming machines pop up.

Talking to people around the streets, sometimes it can become difficult when they say, 'We want to go out for dinner, but there is nowhere we can go without pokies'. The kids can hear 'ding ding' or 'whoop whoop', or whatever sound they make, and it draws their attention and starts to normalise that behaviour.

We should look at it as a harm-reduction and health issue—a bit like we did with the Riley review. Electronic gaming machines should not be seen from the restaurant areas of pubs, clubs, casinos or wherever there

are places that people can go with their families. They should be partitioned off, and you should not be able to see the bright lights trying to lure in people or make it attractive for children. That is incredibly important.

As the Member for Nightcliff spoke about, there is the Community Benefit Fund, which funds a number of wonderful community groups doing great work in our community. When we were in government, we used to work with and provide amelioration funding to groups and organisations like CDU and Amity to look at doing that work. It is important work, but there are only so many times you can conduct research before you are fatigued. We need to look at how we can respond.

Yes, the Northern Territory Government and previous government contemporised—heaps of work has been undertaken in the wagering and betting work, but the best way is to have a group of Assembly members look into it, as the amendment reads. We need to call for national uniform legislation when it comes to gambling, particularly in regard to the use of electronic gaming machines, online games and the addictive behaviours they might bring and gambling advertisements. A bunch of work needs to be done nationally.

I acknowledge what has been put forward. The opposition has put forward an amendment for consideration.

Ms BOOTHBY (Racing): Madam Speaker, I start by letting the opposition and crossbench know that we will not support either of the motions put forward today. I will go through my contribution to explain why.

Gambling has long been part of life in the Northern Territory. For many Territorians it is recreational, a night out, a trip to the track or a social flutter with mates. In a free society, people deserve the right to choose how they enjoy their time.

The CLP believes Territorians can make their own decisions. Government's job is not to tell people how to live; it is to make sure there is support for those who need it and to ensure that industry is playing by the rules. The Territory has one of the toughest caps on gaming machines in the country, with 1,659 in total, not all of which are operational. From pubs and clubs to casinos and online platforms, the NT has strong and modern codes of practice in place. These are not static; they are updated to reflect regulatory best practice across Australia. The CLP's approach is clear: provide support to the vulnerable without punishing everyone else.

The CLP is under no illusion that gambling can cause harm, and the Territory has one of the highest per capita gambling spends in the country. That means we have a greater responsibility to get it right. That is why there are strengthened oversights through Licensing NT's dedicated gaming unit and why both casinos have implemented facial recognition to enforce self-exclusion and their own banning procedures.

The Territory is also part of the national working group reviewing new measures like cashless gaming and precommitment systems; however, unlike the rest of Australia, the Territory has its own challenges, and that is why this government is focused on what works and not ideology.

The CLP knows that gambling revenue must benefit the community; in the Territory, it does and has done so for years. The Community Benefit Fund, supported by a 10% levy on gaming machines, is a great example of that. In 2023–24 the CBF delivered 275 minor grants worth more than $2.8m; 59 major community grants totalling $7.2m; more than $3.2m in harm-minimisation grants; 20 community event grants; two research projects; and funding for 16 ex-government vehicles to support not-for-profits. This is an abstract policy. People often forget that this is the boots-on-the-ground support for local sports clubs, volunteer groups and youth programs. It is about giving Territorians an improved lifestyle and opportunities to engage with community.

However, nothing is 'set and forget' for the CLP government. In the first year of action, a review of the CBF research grant program is underway, with a new gambling research guideline due in July 2025. This will better inform and determine what is needed for the Territory, drive meaningful outcomes and avoid replication of what is already being researched nationally.

The CLP is committed to transparency; that is why this government delivered a proper framework to regulate lobbyists for the first time. That includes a lobbying code of conduct and a public register of lobbyists, which Labor never bothered to implement.

The CLP government supports data-driven decision-making, not ideology. NT gambling data is publicly available and contributes to the Australian gambling statistics. The latest Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Survey will be published once finalised just like every previous survey. Good policy starts with evidence, not assumptions, slogans and hypocrisy.

Talking about hypocrisy, I highlight that this motion—which comes from the Greens member, the Member for Nightcliff—claims moral high ground on gambling harms, yet the single biggest political donor to the Greens is Mr Duncan Turpie, who made a personal donation of $875,000, which is the top of the list on the Greens political donations webpage. The Greens are happy to preach about gambling harm, but they have taken the most from a professional gambler to fund their federal election campaign.

Last month we found out that Duncan Turpie, a reclusive gambler and long-time Greens donor, has been bankrolling billboards and social media ads in key Brisbane seats. The *Australian* says that while the Greens pushed for strict gambling ads bans, they claim there is a big difference between a gambler and a gambling company. Is it okay for them because Mr Turpie does not seem to dabble in the pokies. That is the topic of today.

The donations were publicly disclosed but labelled as non-political despite being used for electioneering. It is just another case of the Greens saying one thing and doing another. Territorians deserve better than grandstanding from a party bankrolled by betting money. Good policy always starts with the good information, not assumptions and ideology.

We must not forget the context of what the CLP has inherited. When we came to government in August 2024 we unravelled a financial disaster tucked away within the books. Labor left us with an eye-watering $12.3bn projected debt for the Territory within three years. There were unfunded services and funding cliffs at every page we turned. There were expensive flash buildings with no money to operate them and blown-out Labor pet projects all over the Territory. Yes, every dollar counts, including from gambling contributions.

We recognise and support the wagering industry's strong contribution to the Northern Territory through local jobs, Territory-based offices, community sponsorships and funding. Their success has helped drive economic activity, and we acknowledge their ongoing commitment to operating in the Territory but recognise that success should not come at the expense of transparency or fairness. We are fixing the fundamentals, replacing Labor's ad hoc opaque tax deals with clear, sustainable and consistent arrangements.

This week the Treasurer announced reforms to increase the industry's contribution, and soon there will be legislative amendments to the *Gaming Control Act 1993*, establishing a 50% tax rate on profits from lottery ticket reselling and matching activities under internet gaming agreements. This will standardise the taxation of internet gaming in the Territory and ensure a level playing field for online operators who offer ticket reselling or matched lottery products.

We are also amending the *Racing and Wagering Act 2024* to double the annual tax cap for bookmakers and betting exchanges from one million to two million revenue units starting from 1 July 2025. The majority of Territory wagering licensees are not likely to be affected by the change to the cap. For the few likely to exceed it, the increase reflects turnover which reached a combined $41.5bn in 2023–24. These changes will deliver a fairer return for Territorians, contributing to safer streets, better health services and real economic growth.

In recent weeks there has been commentary about my role as the Minister for Racing and the engagement I have with industry stakeholders, including attendance at key events like the Darwin Cup Carnival. I want to be clear that of course ministers have a responsibility to engage with portfolio stakeholders and the community, whether it is listening to industry operators, consulting with regulators or turning up where the community is. That is how we make informed decisions; it is how we govern as ministers. That is our job and what we were elected to do. It is not a perk; it is part of the job, and it is hard work. We will continue to consult, listen and lead with integrity because responsible engagement is how good policy is made. As elected members we are all required to declare any gifts, benefits or hospitality we receive. That has been the case for a long time.

I understand that the Member for Nightcliff is seeking to highlight the harm from gambling. We want this industry to be safe, transparent and well regulated, but gambling is not unique in that respect. There are other industries—such as alcohol, water, fishing or agriculture—that all need to be run safely with good regulation to continue to operate. The government has a duty to engage with industry, whether the economy is growing, stagnating or struggling. That is how we drive reform, attract investment and protect the community.

Gambling should be a choice, enjoyed with safeguards in place, not a burden and a trap. We are taking a fair, measured and evidence-based approach to gambling, enabling responsible Territorians to have a flutter, ensuring there are industry contributions to the Territory's future, protecting vulnerable Territorians and ensuring help is available if needed. We will keep doing that without rushing into unproven reforms and taking on ideology to the detriment of existing businesses, local jobs and those who contribute to our economy and

great lifestyle. This is about keeping gambling safe, enjoyable and fair and making sure that help is there when people need it.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I support the motion to reduce gambling harm in our community, and I thank the Member for Nightcliff for bringing this to parliament.

We have heard a lot in this Chamber about a will and intention to invest in prevention programs that will make our community safer by dealing with the root causes. We have heard a lot of what I hope is not just rhetoric about a Territory where everyone can afford not only to meet their basic needs but also enjoy the so-called Territory lifestyle.

The CLP government's first budget is a timely opportunity to highlight that, for many Territorians, the cost of living causes immense financial stress. None of us want people who are already struggling with poverty to spend more than they can afford on a temporary escape from the stress of poverty that invariably worsens their financial situation.

Gambling offers dangerous and addictive false hope—a one-in-a-million-dollar-fish chance. None of us want someone to get into unmanageable debt or experience financial stress when they cannot afford to meet their basic needs, and this can happen even if the person has the best intentions and if the person has a good income. For many people struggling with gambling that is exactly what happens.

Regardless of our personal views on gambling as entertainment, the evidence is clear that for many in our community gambling is far beyond entertainment; it is addictive, just like alcohol or drugs. As with those addictions, gambling is often hidden behind a wall of stigma, shame, secrecy and deception. It is normalised and widely promoted. We see advertising for bets on everything from sports to award shows—even our own NT elections. Meanwhile, Australians lose more to gambling per capita than people in any other country.

Let us be clear that gambling companies make excessive profits off the hard-earned income of Territorians, and these profits do not come back to the Northern Territory. Gambling companies are not local businesses but large national or multinational corporations. These companies are even more predatory in their operations in the Northern Territory because we have the weakest laws in the country, enabling them to do things that they could not get away with in other states and territories. The argument that gambling contributes economically to the Territory is misleading at best. Most gambling profits are siphoned straight out of here.

The Member for Nightcliff has done the research—thank you—and provided us the data to support gambling reform. I will contribute to this debate by sharing a story because, at the end of the day, the laws we make in this Chamber are not abstract; they are laws about real people.

I suspect that many members in this Chamber have relatives, neighbours and friends affected by gambling-related harms. My family is no different. My partner's mother has kindly allowed me to share a bit of her story, and I thank her deeply for her bravery and commitment to this. Although her story took place in another jurisdiction, it illustrates a common experience for many Australians.

She and her husband ran small businesses for many years, struggled financially and were constantly in debt. When poker machines were bought to Victoria in 1992, she turned to them as a distraction from this stress in the hope that a big win would somehow bail them out.

Like many others, she borrowed to pay off debts and to continue gambling. She used credit cards, loans from friends and sold possessions. Eventually, it became unsustainable. The fallout was immense, with bankruptcy; the breakdown of a 29-year marriage; loss of friends, employment, housing and community support; and serious health issues. In her own words:

'Gambling, for me, is an addiction. How I acted during the 14 years I was gambling was not like me. I became fixated on poker machines, treating people differently than ever before, lying to feed my habit. From being a people pleaser to an addict did not take long. Almost nothing and nobody mattered; I just wanted to get my next fix.

'My husband left me, and this was yet another reason for me to visit the pokies. I started borrowing money from the organisation I worked for, telling myself I would repay it until realisation set in. I did not even know how much I had borrowed, and I was on a downward spiral with no end in sight.

'I decided to commit suicide. I was hurting and did not have any other ideas. My eldest son and his partner were visiting and said, "Let's meet for lunch."'

That partner was me, and when we got there we knew something was wrong. She had wrapped up her last few heirlooms, her mother's wedding rings, and gave them to us as a present. We asked her what was going on. She said, 'I need you to look after these for me'. She then broke down and told us about her gambling.

We talked it through, and she contacted her boss, then the police. She was charged and began a long journey to rehabilitation. For her the turning point came in 2006 when her middle child became pregnant and offered a place in their home on the condition that she stop gambling. She has been free from gambling ever since for 18 years.

Good on her. My partner's mum is an amazing woman. She has spent her whole life caring for others. She is known to so many people as mum, and she nearly lost all of that through the addition and harm done by gambling.

In typical fashion, since 2018 she has been part of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation's Lived Experience Advisory Group. She has participated in education programs, media campaigns, community outreach and policy development, bravely telling her story. Her work continues as part of her city's Gambling Harm Prevention Taskforce. She continues to work towards gambling harm prevention. She said, 'There are many stories like mine, and I am one of the lucky ones, but gamblers in Australia spend more than anyone in the world per capita'.

We heard here about children playing on devices even before primary school age, and the rewards are designed to lead them towards betting.

I tell this story to remind us that we are talking about real people. I am so grateful that my partner's mother could escape from the incredible harm that gambling did to her and to those around her. I greatly respect her strength in being 18 years free of gambling. I thank her again for being willing to let me share some of her story and for the work she now does to advise and contribute to programs to reduce gambling harm.

I do not want anyone else to have to go through what she went through and what her family went through if there are things we can do in this Chamber to reduce that harm. The measures in the Member for Nightcliff's motion are moderate in comparison to what some evidence suggests.

This motion asks us, as community leaders in this Chamber, to acknowledge the harm of gambling and the economic, human and social costs. Supporting this motion, I also support the amendments put forward by the Member for Gwoja. It will send a strong signal of encouragement to those experiencing gambling-related harm and let them know we see them, they are not alone, and we are willing to do something to address this.

I welcome the tax changes in the budget as a first step towards addressing gambling harm, although I notice this reform comes with a cap on the tax the companies pay, letting the big players get away with paying the same tax as the smaller players, but it is a start. Let us continue this commitment by implementing the rest of this motion.

I advocate in and out of this Chamber for us to work together, do politics differently, set aside adversarial approaches and work together for what will be best for our whole community. I commend and support this motion to the Assembly and again urge everyone to support it.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff)(in reply): Madam Speaker, first I thank the Independent Member for Johnston for supporting my motion in full. In regard to the amendment put forward by Labor, I understand that I am at the mercy of this Chamber, and I can and will continue to put things forward that aim high to the highest standards possible, because Territorians deserve it. But if my motions get watered down by the two major parties, it is up to them to explain their actions to the community, so I am happy to support Labor's amendment, although the CLP has confirmed it will not support that.

I am utterly disappointed and disgusted, but not surprised, by the government's rejection of my motion. I reached out to …

Mr Maley: No-one cares.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; the Member for Nelson made the interjection saying, 'No-one cares'. I think that is offensive to the Member for Nightcliff.

Madam SPEAKER: It is not kind, but I do not think it is on the offensive scale. We will let that go through to the keeper. It is not pleasant, but it is not on the offensive scale.

K McNAMARA: It shows the contempt with which the member who said that holds for people who are struggling with gambling addition, the community, all the evidence and the experts …

Mr Maley: No, just you.

Madam SPEAKER: Stop the interjections.

K McNAMARA: Yes, Deputy Chief Minister.

I reached out to every member of the government to meet with me to discuss this motion and how we can work together to reduce the terrible impacts of gambling in our community. No-one took up the offer to meet with me and work together.

The hypocrisy we just heard from the Attorney-General is breathtaking and, frankly, hilarious. Firstly, the Attorney-General and Minister for Racing claimed this afternoon that she trusts Territorians to make wise decisions when it comes to gambling and does not want to impede on the rights of responsible gamblers. This is quite simply a ridiculous approach to a public health issue. For example, we do not say that we do not want to impede the rights of safe drivers by punishing them and forcing them to wear a seatbelt. We legislate changes to ensure that all people are safe on our roads.

I also want to correct the record regarding the remarks made by the Minister for Racing about the donations to the Greens. The government so desperately want to take the moral high ground but cannot because it is funded by gambling and alcohol companies, oil and gas companies and property developers.

Ms Boothby: So are you.

K McNAMARA: No, we are not. I am correcting the record. Listen up, and you can hear it.

Members interjecting.

K McNAMARA: If you would stop interrupting and listen, you would hear the corrections to the record.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; interruption and interjections. The government is being disrespectful to the Member for Nightcliff.

Madam SPEAKER: We will have silence from now on so the Member for Nightcliff can finish her comments.

K McNAMARA: The Queensland Greens, not the NT Greens, received some donations from a professional gambler, but he is not associated with the gambling industry. He is a professional poker player and does not engage in the pokies. If you cannot understand the difference between a gambler and a gambling company, lord help us all. They are trying to confuse …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, come on.

K McNAMARA: Yes, he is a poker player.

A member: Go on; defend this one.

K McNAMARA: Yes, I am defending it. It is hilarious that a party funded by all the things that cause harm in our community—they bank on your party, and I appreciate that you are trying so hard, but this person is someone who had a truly lucky break, I guess, and this person chooses to donate to causes that he deems worthy, such as supporting a grassroots political party which fights for the rights of everyday people over big business.

Members interjecting.

K McNAMARA: He is not a gambling company. The fact these people cannot get it into their heads shows they are not listening.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please. Member for Nightcliff, talk to me.

K McNAMARA: If you could turn that down—it is embarrassing, and I am embarrassed for them.

The CLP campaigned on reducing crime and protecting Territorians, but when presented with evidence-based measures that would protect people from another type of harm, it has chosen to protect gambling industry profits instead. The hypocrisy is breathtaking. This government talks endlessly about being tough on crime while refusing to address one of the key drivers of financial hardship, family breakdown and, yes, criminal behaviour in our communities.

I will be crystal clear about what happened today. The government has just voted against measures that would protect vulnerable Territorians from predatory gambling practices; provide greater transparency in an industry raking in billions; redirect funds from harmful practices to help people; and strengthen the integrity and decision-making on gambling. For what—to keep the gambling industry happy and protect the political donations flowing in? The Community Benefit Fund collected nearly $16m in levies last year, yet a pathetic 25% went to gambling harm reduction and research. We have heard in this Chamber that the social cost is estimated to be up to $381m annually. This government has just said it is perfectly fine with that equation.

I have many stories of the rippling effects the predatory gambling industry has on our community—marriages destroyed; children going hungry; and young people developing terrible addictions, setting them up for failure in adulthood …

Mr Maley: Because they played a professional gambler and lost.

K McNAMARA: When I share these stories with this government, I hear back empty talking points about gambling being part of the Territory and freedom of choice …

Mr Edgington: It is part of the Greens.

K McNAMARA: I will tell you about freedom …

Mr Maley: Freedom!

K McNAMARA: These pokies are specifically designed to be addictive. They are programmed to make you lose, and their carefully engineered psychological tricks are not about freedom; they are about trapping vulnerable people into cycles of addiction.

Western Australia has proven we can have thriving communities without pokies on every corner. Its strong regulatory approach has limited pokies to a single casino. Somehow, magically, its club, sport and social connections continue to thrive.

Mr Maley: The Member for Drysdale knows about freedom.

K McNAMARA: Meanwhile, the Northern Territory has one of the highest concentrations of pokies per capita, disproportionately located in our most disadvantaged communities.

I put on the record the continuous laughter and interjections from that side that show Territorians how much our government cares about their suffering, which is not at all.

We heard, as I said in my speech, about the thousands of Territory households where people run out of money for rent or mortgages in a cost-of-living crisis, on average, 14 times a year due to gambling. In over 1,500 households, people run out of money for food, on average, 24 times a year. Over 2,000 adults reported that their kids missed out on something—those are only the ones that are reported—as a result of gambling. This government thinks this is perfectly acceptable.

It is not too late to change course. It is a bit late today, I am guessing, if the government will vote against it. Its members cannot find their spines or the moral fortitude to do something. It is not too late because the government could still implement these sensible, evidence-based reforms: the precommitment systems; the transparency measures; and the proper taxation of gambling companies. All of these could be introduced tomorrow if the political will existed.

The government has shown today that it does not have that will and that corporate interests trump the welfare of everyday Territorians. It would rather let gambling corporations continue to extract wealth from our most vulnerable communities than stand up and say, 'Enough is enough'.

Its members now have to look their constituents in the eyes and try to explain why they blatantly chose to protect gambling companies over the wellbeing of their constituents.

I assure my community and all Territorians that the NT Greens will not accept corporate donations from the gambling industry, such as the ones the major parties accept. I can assure you that I will always work in the best interests of everyday people. I will continue to advocate for these reforms because I know they will make a real difference to the lives of Territorians. I urge members of the government to reflect deeply on their decision and ask themselves who they are really serving—the powerful gambling corporations or the Territorians who elected them to protect their interests?

Amendment not agreed to.

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

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 3	Noes 21
J Davis	Ms Boothby
Mr Guyula	Mr Brown
K McNamara	Mr Burgoyne
	Ms Cahill
	Mrs Carlson
	Mr Charls
	Mr Edgington
	Mrs Finocchiaro
	Mrs Hersey
	Mr Howe
	Mr Kerle
	Mr Mackay
	Mr Maley
	Mr O'Gallagher
	Mr Paech
	Mr Patel
	Dr Rahman
	Ms Uibo
	Mr Yan
	Mr Young
	Mrs Zio

Motion not agreed to.

MOTION
Select Committee on the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I move that:

1. a select committee to be known as the Select Committee on the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum (IEPS) be established to inquire into and report on the Auditor-General's November 2018 Report to the Legislative Assembly at pages 31 to 66 in respect of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, including but not limited to consideration of:

   (a) the full extent of overpayments to all IEPS contractors

   (b) options for repayment by contractors of all unrecovered overpayments

   (c) in cases of prima facie evidence of fraud, the merits of legal proceedings based on advice from relevant government agencies

2. the committee comprise government, opposition and Independent members

3. the committee has the power to report to the Assembly from time to time

4. the committee present its final report to the Assembly on or before 31 October 2025.

I rise to address an important issue regarding the integrity of our government spending, accountability and justice for the people of the Northern Territory. As a parliament we must take seriously allegations of fraud and misuse of funds, especially against the backdrop of our incredibly high levels of debt and a growing lack of trust in our public institutions.

For those unfamiliar, the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum (IEPS) program was introduced in 2014 by the CLP government to encourage construction companies to hire Aboriginal workers. However, in 2017 the program was shut down by the Labor government after allegations of widespread fraud. This included allegations that some companies who signed up to the scheme inflated invoices and submitted falsified records of Indigenous employment.

The allegations are that these companies claimed money from the sum by saying they were hiring Indigenous Territorians when they were not, and by doing so they undermined the purpose of the program. The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics conducted an internal investigation under former Chief Executive, Andrew Kirkman, which took five years to complete.

During this time Auditor-General Julie Crisp found the amount potentially rort through the IEPS program could be more than $100m, which would make it the largest known fraud committed in the Northern Territory. The Auditor-General raised concern about the slow pace of the investigation and warned that the recovery of the funds would depend on its timely conclusion.

She highlighted the serious flaws in the program design, including a lack of fraud controls, poor recordkeeping and inadequate oversight. Despite 18 companies being referred to the NT Police in 2017, only three were charged, even though up to 146 contractors were suspected of fraudulently obtaining funds. Two small-time company directors and one employee were convicted, while larger companies that received millions in payments were never charged.

Of the approximately $60m suspected of being rort—some estimates are as high as $100m—only $900,000 has been recovered. That means only 1% to 10% of the alleged total funds defrauded have been recovered, depending on the true state of the fraud.

We have been presented a budget that gives us the highest rate of debt in the Northern Territory's history. The public sector has been asked to find $20m to cut. How can we afford to ignore an alleged $60m or more?

The government has previously said it would not investigate this fraud. I move this motion to ask the government to reconsider this decision, find out what happened and whether it has to hold these contractors accountable for their alleged defrauding of nearly $60m. Not doing so is not good enough.

Territorians deserve a full and public accounting of how much was lost, what was recovered and who will be held responsible. I have spoken on this issue since last year, and since then I have had a number of people coming to me saying, 'Please pursue this. Let me tell you what else is going on.' I said, 'Do not tell me; there are agencies to investigate this', but they are saying that this needs to be investigated and a light shone on it.

Given that there has not been a willingness to do that, I call for the establishment of a select committee to investigate the full extent of the fraud within the IEPS program. The committee will focus on the following key areas: how much money was wrongfully paid to contractors under the program; how those funds can be recovered, including repayment plans or legal action; and whether there is sufficient evidence of fraud to warrant legal action against the contractors involved, with expert advice on the strength of the case.

We do not know how big this fraud might be. The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure said that $100m was paid under the scheme between 2014 and 2017. The department could not confirm how much, if any, money was potentially defrauded in total, so we do not know the answers to those questions.

As lawmakers we have a duty to ensure that taxpayer funds are spent wisely and transparently. The IEPS program was designed to support Indigenous workers and to provide economic opportunities, but instead it has been marred by accusations of fraud, mismanagement and a lack of oversight.

Since raising this issue many people in my community and across the Northern Territory have urged me to pursue justice in relation to this. I moved this motion for those people. We owe it to them to address this

failure, find out what happened and, if funds were stolen, give them back to who they belong to—us as Territorians. This is an opportunity for us to investigate, recover what was lost and hold those responsible accountable.

I note that this government champions accountability. It champions accountability for public housing tenants and 10-year-old children; now is its chance to champion accountability for those who have defrauded taxpayers. Accountability is not optional. We cannot pick and choose whom we decide to hold accountable. In our last sittings the government passed a Bill to recover rent arrears from individual public housing tenants. If we can hold public housing tenants accountable for $30m we must hold contractors accountable for alleged defrauding of $60m or more.

We have heard about our debt, removed the debt ceiling and passed Bill after Bill, apparently with the aim of growing our economy. If this taxpayers' money, which belongs to us, has been defrauded, we cannot afford to ignore it. This is about not only accountability but also recovering what is rightfully ours and ensuring that it is used properly.

This motion is not just about investigating the past; it is about ensuring that this does not happen again. If we allow things like this fraud to go unchallenged, we send the message that fraud and mismanagement on this scale will be tolerated, not prosecuted. I urge members of this Chamber to support this motion to properly investigate the alleged fraud regarding the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum. We owe it to taxpayers, the Indigenous workers this program was meant to help and a future of people trusting our governance in the Northern Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON (Health): Mr Deputy Speaker, this side will oppose the motion put forward by the Member for Johnston. I move to omit all words after 'that' and insert:

- the Public Accounts Committee inquire into and report on the Auditor-General's November 2018 Report to the Legislative Assembly at pages 31 to 36 in respect of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, including but not limited to consideration of:
    - the full extent of overpayments to all IEPS contractors
    - options for repayment by contractors of all unrecovered overpayments
    - in cases of prima facie evidence of fraud, the merits of legal proceedings based on advice from relevant government agencies
- the committee present its final report to the Assembly on or before 31 October 2025.

We want to see accountability, and I will speak about this matter. I thank the Member for Johnston for bringing this matter forward.

I will use this time to shed light on a policy initiative that, despite some of the controversy surrounding it in later years, made a genuine difference in the Northern Territory—that is, the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum (IEPS). Too often when programs face issues in implementation, we allow the problems to overshadow the achievements, but today I want to bring us back to the positive outcomes realised from this ambitious and impactful program.

The IEPS was introduced by the Northern Territory Government in 2014. Its goal was simple but powerful: increase Aboriginal employment through government-funded construction and infrastructure projects. The purpose was to set aside a dedicated portion of project budgets specifically for employing Aboriginal workers and engaging Aboriginal businesses. In other words, it was a policy tool designed to drive inclusive employment by leveraging government spending.

In just the first two years of operation from 2014 to 2016 the program created over 1,400 Indigenous employment outcomes across 453 government contracts. That translated to employment for 994 individual Aboriginal workers. Before the IEPS the number of Indigenous individuals employed through similar public infrastructure projects was just 40. That jump in numbers is not just significant; it is transformational.

In practical terms, that is nearly 1,000 Aboriginal people who were given the chance to gain experience, earn a wage, build a resume and, perhaps most importantly, see a future for themselves in industries that had historically been difficult to access. It gave families financial security. It gave communities role models, and it gave individuals dignity and purpose.

One of the key strengths of the IEPS was how it linked economic participation to public procurement. When the government spends money, particularly on large-scale infrastructure projects, it has the power to shape markets and employment trends. IEPS recognised this and used that spending power to open doors that had previously been closed. It was not just about numbers; it was about the quality of the outcomes. Many of those employed under the IEPS were not just doing basic labouring work, although that is valuable in itself; they were learning skilled trades, getting accredited training and being introduced to workplace structures and practices that would set them up for long-term careers. In short, it was creating pathways and contributing to growth of our important blue-collar workforce.

It was not only about the individual workers; Aboriginal-owned businesses also benefited from the program. With IEPS funding many of these businesses could scale up their operations, invest in equipment and training and compete for contracts that might have previously been out of reach. This created a ripple effect with more jobs, training and economic activity in Aboriginal communities.

The program also sent an important message to the wider industry. It showed that Aboriginal employment is not just a nice-to-have; it is a must-have. By tying employment outcomes to contracts it encouraged companies to think more creatively and proactively about how they could include Aboriginal people in their workforce. It fostered partnerships between contractors and Indigenous organisations, made cultural competency training more common and embedded inclusive thinking into the procurement process.

For many companies, this was the first time they genuinely engaged with Aboriginal employment at scale, and while it might have started as a contractual obligation, in many cases it became a core part of their business model. That cultural shift and mindset change is one of the most powerful legacies of the IEPS.

It would be disingenuous not to acknowledge the problems that emerged later in the program's life. In 2017 the program was suspended amid allegations of fraud and mismanagement. Investigations revealed that while over $60m had been allocated to IEPS contracts, some of that funding may not have been used appropriately. Legal action followed, individuals were convicted and the program's reputation took a serious hit.

The provisional sum of $122m for IEPS covered possible items that could have been claimed under the scheme. This provisional sum refers to an estimated amount of money set aside for items that may have been eligible to be claimed by contractors meeting the criteria of the scheme. Some contractors chose not to claim against the IEPS. Across more than 450 contracts, the total sum determined for payment was $60.8m of the total provisional sum.

Following investigations, contracts to the value of $1.4m were further scrutinised, and $300,000 was proven by the courts to have been fraudulently claimed. As with all NTG projects, any unspent funds are written back at the completion of the contract. Given only $60.8m was achieved, the remaining $61.2m would have been written back at the completion of the contracts.

We need to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The existence of fraud does not negate the value of the program. It highlights the need for stronger oversight, better accountability mechanisms and more transparent reporting. These are administrative challenges, not philosophical ones.

The underlying intention behind the IEPS that government spending should create inclusive, economic opportunities is as sound today as it was in 2014. In fact, we have seen similar models adopted in other jurisdictions. Social procurement policies, Indigenous employment targets and inclusive hiring strategies are now common features of public policy across Australia and increasingly evident in the private sector as good practice. Many of them were inspired, in part, by what the IEPS achieved in its early years.

What can we learn from the positive side of this story? First, we learn that targeted investment works. When you direct funds with a clear purpose, like increasing Aboriginal employment, you get results. The numbers from the early IEPS years prove that.

Second, we learn that inclusion must be designed into systems; it does not just happen by accident. By embedding employment outcomes into contracts, IEPS ensured that Aboriginal employment was a priority, not an afterthought.

Third, we learn that the private sector is willing and able to rise to the challenge when given the right incentives and support. Contractors met the targets. They built relationships, trained and hired Aboriginal workers. They adjusted their practices.

Finally, we learn that trust and transparency are essential. If a program lacks proper oversight, even the best ideas can be undermined. Future initiatives must be built on a foundation of good governance.

I return to the people at the heart of this story: the nearly 1,000 Aboriginal workers who found jobs through IEPS; the Indigenous businesses that won contracts, grew their operations and contributed to their communities; and the contractors who changed their practices and discovered the value of inclusive employment. These are real outcomes, lives and impacts.

The IEPS was not perfect, but it was powerful. It showed us what is possible when we match ambition with action, back policy with purpose and believe that government spending should benefit all Australians, not just a few.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the Member for Johnston's motion to comprehensively investigate the widespread fraud surrounding the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum. If she supports the CLP's amended version, I will follow her direction on that.

This was a great scheme on paper, which was poorly implemented by the previous CLP government. Systemic fraud ensued, and it was not effectively investigated by the next Labor government. Now is the time to right this wrong and get Territorians back the money they lost. This scheme is reportedly the largest known fraud ever committed in the Northern Territory, and it is time something is done.

Two smaller contractors have been convicted so far, but this does not come close to accounting for the entirety of what taxpayers have lost. We need to put a magnifying glass to these contractors, since some of their conduct reeks of foul play.

Halikos Group was awarded about $51m in contracts eligible for the scheme's funding and is also a major donor for Labor and the CLP. In 2014 it staggeringly claimed to have 134 Indigenous workers for a single construction project, but business insiders said, 'You would be lucky if it was half of that'. I am glad to hear the government will support an amended version of this motion, but the question lingers: would it have done anything had the Member for Johnston not put this motion forward? There were many calls from the public to investigate this, but the government refused to until this moment.

Many construction companies and property developers took contracts while the scheme was active, and many of them donate to the major parties. When there is another $60m unaccounted for, the government seems to lose its ability to tout 'tough on crime'. At the least, the CLP could be consistent with its disastrous agenda.

I cannot imagine a world where the budget is front of mind while the government continues to ignore the blatant theft of taxpayer dollars. The government has announced an eye-watering debt and an additional $265m to borrow by the next financial year, so it is obvious the government could put a huge dent in what we need to borrow and claw back this rort. If not for this motion from the crossbench, would they have acted?

Territorians deserve transparency, and this is an opportunity for the government to deliver it in the wake of relentless headlines about dodgy appointments. This is a redemption moment for the government, which can make a start on delivering transparency today and accept an investigation into this fraud. This motion is a gift for the government. In a single vote it can show it is tough on crime by delivering justice to these contractors and that the government is willing to do it to give Territorians taxpayer $60m back. This is a no-brainer. I commend the Member for Johnston for putting forward this motion to force the government to do what it should have done all along.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the original motion and the amended motion with some of the actions the government is looking to support.

The original motion was to establish a select committee to investigate the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum (IEPS). For some history of this scheme, in 2014 the former Mills-Giles CLP government introduced the IEPS with the well-meaning goal of increasing job opportunities for Indigenous Territorians in the construction sector. This scheme was designed to incentivise companies by providing funding to employ Indigenous staff on projects valued over $500,000 and keep those staff on the job for the duration of the project; however, the IEPS was poorly designed and lacked oversight mechanisms, leaving it vulnerable to fraud.

After the Mills-Giles CLP government lost in 2016, the scheme was paused by Labor and investigated. An audit by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics uncovered widespread misuse of the

program. The Auditor-General found that weak controls in the design of the program left the government exposed to financial risk, with some contractors who had deliberately accessed the funds they were not entitled to.

Some $57.8m in taxpayer funds was paid out under the scheme, and it is not known how much of those funds were legitimately used or effectively rorted. The scheme was suspended for all new tenders and contracts on the 4 August 2017 under the former Labor government, and in November 2018 the Auditor-General released a second audit report reinforcing the findings of the 2017 investigation and recommending 10 key reforms to ensure a fairer and more accountable system that could not be exploited. Despite these findings, the damage had already been done. Six companies in the Territory were referred to police for investigation, and multiple cases went to court, yet little to no taxpayer funds have been recovered from those who rorted the system and were alleged to have committed fraud, including some who had been found to have committed the fraud.

There is no doubt this does not meet community expectations across the Territory. The Territory Labor opposition supports the motion regarding the select committee to again look at this program to see whether there are any avenues to recover the taxpayer funds that were misappropriated through this scheme. It is time to restore trust in government and those programs that are meant to benefit Territory businesses and employees, not serve as a slush fund for fraud without facing the full consequences of the law or the return of taxpayer funds.

The IEPS, as implemented by the former CLP government, was neither efficient, effective nor transparent. The Auditor-General's findings were damning, exposing the incompetence, laziness and lack of policy rigour in the former CLP government's approach to governance at the time. It sounds like it is coming back, unfortunately. Lia Finocchiaro, the current Chief Minister, was a part of that CLP government.

Beyond the $57.8m in wasted taxpayers' funds, the years of audits and investigations drained critical departmental resources. Those resources could have been better spent supporting genuine local businesses and creating jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorians.

We continue, unfortunately, to hear stories about black cladding in the construction sector, a practice where companies falsely claim to be Aboriginal in ownership or in terms of having workforce participation in order to win government contracts and gain an edge on competitors. This continues to be disappointing.

Under DIPL's tender guidelines, 5% of government contracts must go to Aboriginal businesses, which are defined as having at least 51% Aboriginal ownership. This is a definition that took many years for government to agree on. I acknowledge the work was led by the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network and took some time. It was the first definition to be adopted by any government in the country. Often what was referred to as joint ventures or Aboriginal ownership was a fifty-fifty split. The Northern Territory adopted the work of the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network to ensure that 51% was the definition for an Aboriginal-owned business.

As has been said, some Aboriginal businesses have continued to raise concerns about black cladding and improper claiming of Aboriginal ownership by competitors that do not meet the 51% definition of an Aboriginal-owned business. I believe that it should be a key focus of the proposed select committee. The amendment moved by the minister is to go through a process led by the Public Accounts Committee.

I will be clear that in no way is the Territory Labor opposition advocating for an end to the Aboriginal Procurement Policy that is already in place. We continue to support the definition that was adopted for Aboriginal business ownership in the Northern Territory. That was led by the NTIBN. We continue to support the growth and development of Aboriginal businesses across the Northern Territory.

Unfortunately, we are yet to hear the CLP government's plans for Aboriginal businesses—which makes me nervous—and whether it is supporting or growing. I hope that I am proved wrong and there is nothing to be nervous about in that space.

Those in the government who claim to be all about private sector growth should also confirm their ongoing support for the well-regulated Aboriginal Procurement Policy. Unfortunately, I have heard rumblings and whispers that the CLP government is planning to scrap the Aboriginal Procurement Policy. I am happy to be proved wrong on this front, but many businesspeople have reached out to me with the concern that this may occur. Please, I hope that there is someone who can prove me wrong in the government and reassure Aboriginal businesses that the many years of work and waiting to confirm the Aboriginal Procurement Policy will not be scrapped. If it evolves and improves, I am happy to support that, but not for it to be scrapped.

I guarantee if that is the case and the CLP government plans to scrap the Aboriginal Procurement Policy, we will fight it at every step in any way, shape or form that we see fit. We want to ensure that the strong and ever-growing NT Indigenous Business Network can continue to lead not only the Northern Territory but also the country in Aboriginal business procurement contracts and growing the economy.

I urge the CLP government to support the committee's formation. An amendment was moved by the government, so I assume it will support the amended motion. Time and again we have heard the calls for accountability. We all must pay respect to the taxpayer dollar and ensure there is stronger oversight. When blunders and policy mistakes of this size and scale are made, we need to ensure they can be rectified in some way. Now is the time to turn those words into action. The CLP government signalled its intention to recoup outstanding rent from public housing tenants, so I do not see that there is any reason it should not pursue this type of recuperation of taxpayer funds with that same vigour.

With respect, tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars were unfortunately and sadly lost through the IEPS. Hopefully, the amended motion will lead to that lost money being recuperated. There must be action—the CLP promised that 2025 is its year of action—so that ongoing rorting throughout the Territory, particularly black cladding in our construction industry, is stamped out once and for all.

The people of the Territory deserve better. The Territory Labor opposition fully supports the original motion, and the government's amendment, to establish a committee to ensure that this can be properly investigated through the parliament so that we can have answers and, hopefully, get back some of that money.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Johnston for this motion.

From the time the scheme was introduced in 2014 it seemed to be clear that it was not working properly. There were concerns about reporting requirements from the beginning. The government should have known that there were problems, and it should have intervened earlier.

In the NT there is nothing new about taking money that is meant to help Aboriginal people. This is similar to the effective enrolment strategy in schools. Federal money intended for remote schools was kept in Darwin. Roads and infrastructure in urban centres are always the focus of spending. The Northern Territory is given billions of dollars in GST. That is provided for Indigenous disadvantage, but there is no requirement for the NT Government to account for that spending.

There have been consistent underspends in areas that service Indigenous communities. In 2016 a body of work to analyse this spending by then NTCOSS president, Barry Hansen, showed that 68% of $3.4bn in Commonwealth Grants Commission assistance was intended to benefit Indigenous people, but the Northern Territory spent just 53% of it. According to its own Indigenous expenditure review, there are underspends in housing, roads, welfare and services to communities. That underspend can be seen by government in other areas that benefit non-Indigenous urban communities. When all the infrastructure spending in Darwin goes millions of dollars over budget, where does that money come from?

In the Mulka electorate we have seen the budget show, year after year for nine years, infrastructure works that are revoted. The money is never spent. The jobs have not been started. As I mentioned this morning, every year there is a commitment to spending that does not happen.

The corruption within the IEPS should be properly investigated. I support the motion for the parliamentary inquiry into the problems with the scheme, and I believe people must be held accountable for the corruption. If we do not start holding people accountable for this kind of spending, it will never end, and the government will enable corruption to continue.

J DAVIS (Johnston)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all members who spoke on this motion. I welcome the amendment from the Member for Barkly. My initial hope was that this scheme would be referred to PAC, and it did not seem there was a pathway to that, so I am happy that will happen. People who were raising the issue with me will be happy.

I appreciated the Member for Barkly talking about the benefits of this scheme, and people talk to me about the good things in this scheme as well. The big concern people had was regarding the ongoing lack of accountability and transparency, questions of alleged fraud and the continuing feeling that many Territorians have that there is a lack of willingness and desire to look at what has been going on and to protect vested interests. People have said to me, 'We have had enough', and I welcome a pathway forward. It makes me feel hopeful that there is a pathway forward regarding the last two motions I have brought to this House. I often feel like I am standing here saying no to everything, which is not my preferred way of being; I like to

find ways to work with people. I believe we are all here for the same reasons to make things better for the people of the Territory, and the way we do that is by listening to each other and our constituents and working well together.

I feel buoyed by the fact that—while it may not be my perfect vision in relation to the VAD motion and this motion of what I and people I am speaking on behalf of were originally hoping—we can find a way in this Chamber to work together and move things forward.

I thank the Member for Barkly and the Attorney-General regarding the earlier motion. I look forward to what happens when this is referred to the PAC. I have had the opportunity to talk to people across the Chamber, and people have different views about what there may or may not be to see. That is not the job of us in this Chamber because there will be an investigative process. I look forward to it being a robust process and being able to say to people that we have looked at what happened in a scheme which we all know, as the Member for Barkly outlined, was designed to benefit Aboriginal people—many people said they benefited from it—but instead was closed down because there were allegations of it not operating properly and of fraud, and serious concerns around it. That is not the Territory we want; we want a Territory where we are working together to support all people, where Aboriginal people have as much right to be protected in their workplace as everybody else and where we know there is clear accountable governance and procedures in place for programs.

I look forward to when that investigation happens and hope that it looks at the monies that may have been stolen, whether there is an option for recovering them and also what went wrong with that scheme and to learn from it, so if we put similar schemes in place in the future—schemes that are designed to boost our economy and give people skills and employment on country—that we do not repeat what went wrong with this scheme. Let us do things better in the future.

I do not know anything about construction or money, but I have learned a lot since I first spoke about this motion publicly. Like many things, which I am sure people in this Chamber will have experienced, if you talk about something publicly and people know how to get in touch with you, they tend to give you a lot of information. As I referred to in my opening speech, since I first gave notice of this motion sometime last year I have had many people come to me, including people from large businesses in the Territory, who have said, ‘We are grateful that this will finally be investigated’.

When there are questions about things happening properly, it casts a shadow on everyone in that industry. We have seen that in many different industries, and they have said, ‘We want this to be cleared up’. People came into my office with big piles of paper and said, ‘Here you go; look at this’, and I said, ‘Maybe you could try this way or that way’.

PAC may get a lot of information when we hold this inquiry. It may be that there is nothing to see here, and that would be great because we could let people in the Territory know that nothing was done wrong. Whatever the outcome is, it will be good to tell people that we had a look and worked it out. If something went wrong, we will fix it and make sure it will not happen again.

I am happy with the amendment proposed. It was what I originally hoped for. I am glad we could come to this point in the Chamber and that this is what we can do and there is a pathway forward for people. I do not know whether I can say that I have confidence in PAC, seeing as I am on it, but I am confident that the PAC will go through proper processes in terms of doing the investigation and working out what can happen next in relation to this matter.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

MOTION
Select Committee on Pathways for Children and Young People

J DAVIS (Johnston): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that this Assembly:

1. notes:

    (a) on 16 October 2024 the Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Corrections moved that the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2024 be read for a second time, stating one purpose of the Bill was ensuring

10 and 11-year-old children who commit offences have appropriate rehabilitation that will provide them an opportunity to turn their young lives around

(b) the vital responsibility that this government owes to all children and young people in the Territory, including a responsibility under section 4(b) of the *Youth Justice Act 2005* to ensure that young people who commit offences are dealt with in a way that acknowledges their needs and will provide them with the opportunity to develop in socially responsible ways

(c) the vital responsibility that this government owes to all Territorian children and young people, police, Corrections officers, judges and justices, including a responsibility under sections 4(c) and 81(6) of the *Youth Justice Act 2005*, to provide them with appropriate alternatives to detention and imprisonment.

2. establishes a select committee on pathways for children and young people to inquire into and report on:

(a) the alternatives to detention and imprisonment available to police, Corrections officers, judges and justices when dealing with 10 and 11-year-old offenders

(b) additional pathways needed to help police, Corrections officers, judges and justices to prevent reoffending and provide children with opportunities to make safer, more responsible choices with the support of meaningful and engaging programs.

3. The committee will comprise three government, one opposition and two crossbench members to be nominated by the relevant Whip or crossbench member to the Speaker in writing.

4. The committee is to report by the first sitting day six months after the passing of this motion.

For people who were committed to having a motion like this before the House—I note that I wrote this motion at the end of last year; clearly, I did not expect it to come up today. The government said that it intends to amend the *Youth Justice Act*. The content of this motion may be affected by that. I am regretful that I have not had the opportunity to see what those changes might be before we talk about this motion.

Nevertheless, the intention of this motion is that we find ways to work together as a parliament to make sure that we can address in a more effective way the issues facing our young people who come into contact with our criminal justice system.

Everyone in this Chamber is concerned about community safety and about our children. We have a shared responsibility to make sure we look after and care for the children in the Territory and give them alternatives so they do not end up on a pathway that none of us want. The intention of this motion is that we find ways to work together to identify what those alternatives might be that will keep all of us safe, including children and young people, into the future.

I had the opportunity with my fellow crossbench members to visit the Holtze Youth Detention Centre to see what is happening there. All the evidence shows that locking up people does not work. It harms and damages them, and the younger people come into contact with the criminal justice system the more likely they will go down a pathway of ongoing engagement with that system, and that is not what any of us want.

We know there are many alternatives and things we can do differently and more effectively. I have only had the privilege of being in the Chamber with the Member for Mulka since October last year, but this is now his ninth year, and many people have heard him speak about alternative pathways and ways to work with Yolngu children that will make a difference. He speaks about working with elders and communities to address what is causing crime or problems and moving forward to create a safe community and future and to bring these children up in a way that they can contribute to society, be strong, be healthy and be part of the world we all want.

We need to find ways to work together and accept the invitation the Member for Mulka graciously puts on the table over and again to listen to elders and work with the people who know what will work to stop this terrible tragedy in the Northern Territory.

It is heartbreaking to hear what is happening. People in this Chamber are telling stories all the time about the crime in their communities and what they are facing, talking a lot about young people. What we are doing is not working. The CLP has said it wants to do something different; that is its mandate. I agree that we need to do something different.

I have not seen any evidence. I have worked around conflict and the justice space with young people for more than four decades. I have studied it; I have two master's degrees working with justice. I know a lot about this. I have never seen any evidence anywhere that locking up children will do anything to make any of us safer, and it will not do anything to make them safer.

This motion calls on all of us to figure out will actually work. Let us do something smart that can meet what the community is calling for—what the CLP describes as its mandate—and what we all really care about, which is the future of our Territory. It is a future that is held in our children.

There is limited time, and I would be disappointed if we did not have a chance to vote on this motion tonight. I am putting that out there to the floor. This motion is about finding ways to work together to find alternatives to do what we all want. I encourage all of you to support the motion.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Johnston for bringing this to the House. I have strong views on youth crime, and it will not be a surprise to the Chamber that they counter the Member for Johnston's. I will outline why I oppose this motion and want to give it the respect it deserves. I will read a letter sent to me by Louis, a man from my electorate, and I hope you all have some insight into why the government is doing what it is.

This is the letter from a constituent titled, 'No more excuses':

'I grew up in hell. My mother chased drugs and abusive men from state to state, dragging me with her. I was locked out of the house most days, left to wander the streets while she got high or passed out. Each new partner took a turn abusing me; I had no safety, no love and no reason to believe things would ever get better.

'By the time I was 14 we were back in Victoria. I had a few mates by then, and one night I went to a party. My best friend Brenton was outside and said he would fight someone. I followed him, like any young kid would. We got to the house, he went to the door and the next thing I heard was screaming. I tried to get him out, but people pinned me down.

'When I got up, he was running toward me, bleeding out. He said nothing and just collapsed at my feet. I held him a while as he died—a 14-year-old kid holding his best mate's body while he bled out.

'After that, my mum left me. Just gone—no goodbye or care. I was on my own. I stole anything I could just to survive. I got arrested and did time in Parkville. Here is what changed me: sitting in that cell, I could hear the fucking zoo—families laughing, kids having fun and life going on out there while I sat locked away. It hit me that this isn't living; this is wasting.

'When I got out, I had no support, money or experience. No-one cared. I convinced my mum to move to Perth with me. I started working shitty little jobs—sales stuff, anything. I taught myself how to be a human being, how to show up and how to survive without hurting people.

'Now I am 32, a qualified mechanic, and I have three daughters who I love more than anything. I am not perfect, but I am present. I have broken the cycle.

'When I see crime happening now, especially in places like the NT, I don't want to hear excuses. Don't tell me these kids are just troubled. Don't tell me they have had a hard life; so did I, but I didn't bash old ladies, break into homes or stab strangers for fun, and I sure as hell did not think I could get away with it.

'That is the problem right now. They think they can get away with it because most of the time they do. There are no real consequences and no accountability, and the rest of us normal people just trying to live have to suffer for it.

'Enough is enough. I am not a community figure; I am not looking for praise or pity. I am just a bloke who lived it, and I am telling you that you can be tough on crime and still care about people. Right now, all I see is a system failing both. You want to make a difference? Start with the truth. There is no excuse for hurting innocent people, and there is no excuse for doing nothing while it keeps getting worse. Do something.'

I find that an incredible and moving letter. I know Louis well. He said that he is not a community man, but he is. He is present at the school. He has three amazing, beautiful daughters who are a credit to him and his partner.

I read out that story because at its core what changed the projection of Louis' life was a term of imprisonment as a child. It can be hard to hear, because when we hear the word 'child' it conjures up in our minds pictures of innocent children playing in parks. That is nice and would be the ideal world, but unfortunately it is not the truth.

Prior to my Army career I was a youth worker for the worst of the worst. I worked with boys who had committed serious violent crime. I can assure you when you hear the word 'child' and in your mind you think of an innocent kid playing in the park—when we talk about custody for children, there are crimes being committed and a victim behind it, like a rape victim because, yes, a child can rape. I know this because I have worked with them. A child can stab or hit with an axe, and I know because I have worked with them. I have lived this experience.

Justice is not vengeance, and our government does not set out to seek vengeance. The idea of custody is to create a moral framework for society. The evidence showed, with years of trying the soft approach, that it did not work. I worked in that, and we had program after program; there were huge amounts of funding for programs.

The best outcomes I ever saw was following a stint in juvie with the young boys I worked with. I also saw them at the happiest they had ever been because they were achieving for the first time in their life. My role as a youth worker was a residential live-in role. I lived with these boys. When they are on the street, I can assure you that there is little self-pride. Visiting them in juvie when they are attending school, playing in a sports team and showing me their artwork and the things they have achieved for the first time and are getting praised is an incredible thing to be a part of. They are also learning that what they did was wrong, which is a key part of the CLP's measures in reducing the age.

I understand the image that people conjure up—'How could we do this to 10 and 11-year-olds?' These are not the 10 and 11-year-olds playing at the swings; that is the point. There are victims behind these crimes.

There are the nature and nurture sides of this. I worked with boys who had a good nature to them, and they were brought up in horrible environments which turned them to crime, violent crime or doing acts that they would not have done had they had the upbringing that most of us had. The boys I have the most hope for are the ones in custody. That change in environment is where I had hope for them. I did not have the same hope for them staying in the programs that we were doing; I had to leave it. The Assembly knows I left that job because I fundamentally believed that we were doing more harm when a boy came to us.

On the nature front, we must accept that for some people there can be an evil streak. They are not just on the streets; they can wear a suit just like this. Some people are inclined that way, and we must protect the wider society. Whilst I hold hopes for most people who commit violent crime, we must face the fact that not everybody can be rehabilitated, especially by the later years. Unfortunately, the ages of 10 and 11, for some people, is too late. That is why we are focusing on trying to get kids back to primary school.

Some people might find these comments I have made confronting or might think there is something to make of it, but it is facing reality. We must face reality and protect our community from those who will continue to harm. I do not believe true care is permissiveness. That is why for the most severe offences there must be an aspect of custody.

I also believe the failure to act when young people start becoming wayward will ensure we create predators tomorrow. I will not create predators for the future which my daughters will have to face.

Something we should all agree with is how we turn those predators into protectors and the role that they should take in society. I am talking from a male perspective; it is my background. This affects young women as well, and the same rules apply for them. How do we turn the predators of today into protectors of tomorrow? We must start by making sure there are no more victims by removing them from society to protect the community now. That is non-negotiable for me.

I understand that can be hard for some people to swallow. I have a wife, children and ageing parents. I will not allow people who are willing to commit violent and sexually violent offences to be free in our community.

We must teach that there is a consequence. There is an educational process in the act of custody and in learning that they have done something wrong and therefore society will respond accordingly. We do this in our own homes with our children and in school systems. If my children are misbehaving, they get a timeout. Schools can use detentions or suspensions. I do not know why it is when we get to the state level, these ideas break down. The state should be implementing things in accordance with human nature. In a good

family home we will discipline with love. I fundamentally believe discipline is a form of love. I do not discipline random children in Coles; I discipline my children because I love them and want them to grow up and be successful members of society. We do it in our home, and the same things should be reflected in the policy of the state.

I have said before that the state is a blunt instrument for any of these social issues; however, the hard reality is that for some of these children there has been no discipline or love in the home. When I spoke of this earlier, the Member for Gwoja laughed at me for saying families commit crimes together. The violent axe incidents I just spoke of occurred with a boy I worked with who was given the axe by his father and uncle as they committed a robbery. This boy grew up in an environment where his father and uncle handed him an axe to rob a service station. That is the reality some children face.

We are left with this difficult question of what to do. They had the hardest way into the world, and unfortunately—this is just the fact of it—for that child there needs to be more suffering for them to achieve their full potential in our society, because it is through that they can learn to be the protector. They can learn that what they have been taught is wrong.

At the core of this topic, as it ties into the domestic and family violence we see throughout the Northern Territory, is the role of masculinity in our society. This and men's health is something I care deeply about. I fundamentally believe that masculinity, along with femininity, are virtuous things. Those two words only mean good, and they reflect all the good things that come in the way of nurturing, role modelling and protecting the innocent.

We need to teach men what masculinity is and what it means to be a man. Committing acts of violence against the innocent is not masculine; it is not the action of a man. I do not believe in what is called toxic masculinity; I reject that in its entirety. I feel for the boys growing up in an age when they hear words like that. Where are their role models? I say to them, embrace your masculinity. Learn what your strength is for. It is for protection, and it is to do no harm.

We have had great progress in what our young girls can achieve in this country. As a proud girl dad, I am glad I bring my girls into a world where they have so many opportunities. They can look to my workplace at the Chief Minister, Leader of the Opposition and Speaker of the Assembly to see how limitless the options are in the Northern Territory.

An unintended consequence of the great progress we have made for women has been to forget our young men. We need to come back to showing our boys and men their role in society. As a former soldier I reject that there is no place, ever, for violence. That might seem controversial, but I would say to a young man that there is, and it is in the protection of the innocent. I would say to a man that when you see domestic violence occurring, that is your time to step up to the plate. When your country needs you in a time of war, that is when you step up to the plate.

It is teaching the value of discipline in how they use their mind and body. Greater education and role modelling for young men could do a lot of good in how they enter society and the type of men who exist, especially for the age when my daughters become women. I would like there to as many good men as we can possibly make.

MOTION
Appointment of the Estimates Committee

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly resolves that:

1. There be appointed an Estimates Committee of the Legislative Assembly (known as the committee) for the purpose of examining and reporting on the:

   (i) estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill (the Appropriation Bill) and related budget documents

   (ii) Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, Serial 26

   (iii) activities, performance, practices and financial management of the Power and Water Corporation, Jacana Energy and Territory Generation with reference to those corporations' Statements of Corporate Intent 2025–26.

2. The membership of the committee will be three government members, one opposition member and one crossbench member to be nominated in writing to the Speaker by the relevant Whip or crossbench member. Nominations to the Speaker should occur no later than Monday 19 May 2025.

3. The committee may hold hearings on the following days:

   Tuesday 10 June 2025
   Wednesday 11 June 2025
   Thursday 12 June 2025
   Monday 16 June 2025
   Tuesday 17 June 2025
   Wednesday 18 June 2025
   Thursday 19 June 2025.

4. The total time for the hearings of the committee may not exceed 60 hours.

5. The maximum time of the appearance of the Chief Minister and the Treasurer shall not exceed eight hours. For each other minister and the Speaker the maximum time of their appearance shall not exceed seven hours.

6. The committee will publish a schedule of the days and times of hearings and the times allotted for hearings from ministers, the Speaker and board Chairs by Friday 23 May 2025. The committee may only amend the published schedule with the consent of the Leader of Government Business.

7. The committee shall examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill by portfolios in accordance with an agenda published by the committee and the proposed expenditure shall be considered on an output-by-output basis for each portfolio unit.

8. All questions should conform to Standing Order 109, and answers will be concise and directly relevant to the question asked.

9. Answers to questions taken on notice during the hearings, or additional information about an answer given by or on behalf of a minister, the Speaker or board Chair, are to be written and given to the Estimates Committee Secretariat by 14 July 2025. Answers or additional information so received are authorised for publication.

10. The Clerk of the Legislative Assembly is authorised to publish a transcript of the committee proceedings, whether or not it has been edited, as soon as practicable.

11. Evidence taken in public by the committee and documents presented to the committee are deemed to be authorised for publication by the committee, unless the committee orders otherwise.

12. At a hearing of the committee the Chair may, after a warning, order any member of the Assembly whose conduct, in the opinion of the Chair, continues to be disorderly or disruptive, to immediately withdraw from the committee for a period of one hour.

13. Following its second reading, the Bill stands referred to the committee for report by 19 June 2025 after which consideration in detail will take place followed by the third reading.

14. The Assembly's Routine of Business for Thursday 19 June 2025 is:

    (i) 2.30 pm—prayers and acknowledgement of country

    (ii) report from Estimates Committee and consideration of the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 and the Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

15. When the committee's report on the Appropriation Bill is presented, the Assembly shall immediately consider the question that the expenditure proposed in the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill stand as printed and the report of the Estimates Committee be noted.

16. The following time limits shall apply to the debate on this question:

    - ministers, Leader of the Opposition and shadow ministers, 20 minutes

- any other member, 10 minutes

- the maximum period for consideration shall be five hours.

17. When the question on the expenditure proposed in the Appropriation Bill is agreed to, the following question is proposed and put immediately: that the remainder of the Bill and the Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill stand as printed.

18. When the Bills have been agreed to by the Assembly, their third reading may be taken into consideration immediately.

19. This resolution shall have effect, notwithstanding anything contained in standing and sessional orders.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Ms BOOTHBY (Brennan): Madam Speaker, I attended an event on Saturday night with my CLP colleagues the Member for Blain, Matthew Kerle, and the Member for Drysdale, Clinton Howe. It was at the Islamic Society of Palmerston hall and mosque in Moulden. It was a great event to celebrate the Eid Reunion. The society's members are always such a welcoming community for us local members of parliament, and I thank them for having us. They always allow us the option to talk about what it is like to be there in their community. All of us spoke about that, including Mayor Athina Pascoe-Bell, who was also with us.

I shout out to the ISP committee and some of its members who continue to be welcoming when we go along to the mosque at Palmerston. On Saturday night there was a record of about 300 people there. It was a fabulous event. Thank you to the Islamic Society of Palmerston President Muhammad Mujahid; Secretary Iqbal Faruque, who does a wonderful job as emcee and usually keeps all of us in line; Shaheryar Zafar, the imam; and Tarique Memon, committee member.

The Islamic Council of the Northern Territory is always there with the group. Council member Chowdhury Sadaruddin gave a fantastic speech, reminding us that the positive influence we can have on others starts with ourselves. We all sat there nodding and smiling about that. Some of the stories he shared about himself, his family and his community resonated with us.

There are two seniors I shout out to, Khalid Khan and Jillur Rahman. They are always welcoming, and we appreciate the time they spend with their community members and the time they allow us to spend with them.

The UMNT had representatives there, including its president, Mohammed Raziuddin, and vice president, Kamran Azeem.

A highlight for me at that Eid Reunion event was that we gave out little gifts that they had organised for the children. We got to say 'Eid Mubarak' to each child, and they said it back to us. It was so special. There were children of all ages; some of them were just babes in arms, and others were almost as tall as us. It was great to do that.

A highlight raised by each speaker at the event, including the committee members, was that they are building a new mosque at the Palmerston site. It is the second mosque in Darwin; the first is on Vanderlin Drive in Wanguri. This second mosque of Palmerston has taken a long time from the planning and architecture drawings and working with government and different agencies to get approvals to now where it is starting to look like a building with all the bricks there. There is a huge temple area, and it is starting to take shape but is not finished yet because the society still needs more money.

The federal government was represented at the event by the re-elected Member for Solomon. When he made his speech, he reminded the committee that he had made a commitment to the Islamic Society of Palmerston that the federal government would invest $1.8m towards finishing the mosque in Palmerston, which will be a multi-use site with a prayer room, kitchen and other facilities.

The CLP looks forward to that $1.8m being delivered for not only the Islamic Society of Palmerston and its mosque but also the greater community so they can grow and hold more events which we will attend. We

will work together with the federal government and the Member for Solomon to ensure the investment will go to the mosque. It is a good thing for Palmerston and the community which people have been striving towards for a long time. We had a quiz about the dates in which the process started. It was so long ago I cannot even remember; I think it was 2015.

It was a wonderful night. I thank the Islamic Society of Palmerston's committee for having us along.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, soon we will gather to celebrate National Reconciliation Week. It is a time to reflect on our shared history and commitment to a brighter and united Australia for all. It is a moment of challenge and opportunity and a call to action for each of us to continue to work to bridge the gap in understanding, respect and equity.

Reconciliation is about not only acknowledgement but also partnership and walking side by side to create a future where the truths of our past are recognised and the possibilities of our future are shared. Australia has a unique opportunity to lead the world in truth-telling and healing. With a re-elected federal Labor government, we have an opportunity to be visionary and continue important work to invest energy and resources into creating pathways of truth-telling and healing. These are not abstract ideas; they are necessities if we are to build a nation where every individual, their culture and story is valued.

Imagine for a moment an institution at the heart of our country—a knowledge nest that tells powerful, often painful but deeply important stories of Australia's First Nations people, like the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, which stands as a global example of the transformative nature and power of truth. Such a facility could be an educational and cultural hub, teaching us about the past and how to build a bold and inclusive future. There is no better place for this institution than Alice Springs, which is a vibrant town sitting at the crossroads of songlines and storylines. It is the beating heart of Australia where stories converge and where we should invest in creating a facility that embodies reconciliation, inviting all Australians and overseas visitors to listen, learn and grow together. Reconciliation is not just a destination; it is a journey that requires courage, investment and a willingness to face uncomfortable truths so we can heal and build something truly extraordinary.

When Reconciliation Week comes, let us not only reflect; let us also act and commit to partnerships, investments and conversations that will ensure we can bridge the gap and build a strong, enduring and inclusive Australia for all of us.

As people say, we are all Australian, and no-one is taking away our history. We are asking, though, that we embrace our entire history—the good, bad and upsetting. It is a part of our healing. Together we can build a nation that not only acknowledges its past but also celebrates its shared future.

Reconciliation Week is at the end of May. It is an important time and perhaps a time when the Alice Springs members of this parliament all come together and look at reconciliation regarding the investment in the Central Australia Aboriginal art gallery (ATSIAGA). Perhaps it is a time when we listen to the conversations in the community and use Reconciliation Week to listen to what the community wants.

As a former minister overseeing that project, I know it is a deeply powerful opportunity to tell important stories through art. I know that with a change of government and change of location and size, there has been a change of emotion towards that. Given those circumstances, I support the opportunity for us to come together and reconcile the truth of that project and to move forward together to a place where we can tell those important stories. We can look at education opportunities and educational tourism, and we can support that.

I acknowledge the hard work and advocacy of Marion Scrymgour, the re-elected federal Member for Lingiari, who has been instrumental in securing a significant investment in Alice Springs to build a national place of significance.

Maybe we need to come together now and look at what that national place of significance is in Central Australia. Is it an art gallery built on top of a car park? No. It is an opportunity now to pivot and build something empowering and important that not only acknowledges the truth and the stories; it could be a knowledge nest and a place to really celebrate that will not be divided. It is an opportunity we all have as we approach National Reconciliation Week to look at how we can do things differently.

I acknowledge that it was a controversial project, but we hear loud and clear from the community that a downsized project will not even allow us to have national visiting exhibitions showcased in that facility.

I support the Member for Lingiari in her calls to reconsider where the project is located. Given the changes of this government, that project should be reconsidered. We should all come together and have that important conversation, and we should be looking at building a national centre of reconciliation and truth-telling in the heart of our nation. If that needs to be south of the Gap, then it needs to be south of the Gap. I support that, given the experiences I have been through and the conversations I have had before and after the change of government.

No-one wants a national Aboriginal art gallery celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people built on a car park adjacent to a seniors club, across the road from a pub and at the end of a car park in front of a sports oval. That does not honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is not built in a naturally beautiful surrounding location or gardens as it was initially proposed in the original project. Therefore, we must reconsider this project. We must look at providing something more important. We have heard from people in Alice Springs that what is now being proposed by the government looks like a sports shed. That is not a place to honour First Nations people. We need to use this opportunity to build something amazing.

There is $80m on the table from the Commonwealth Government to build something important. Alice Springs needs an economic narrative. We need something that will bring hundreds and thousands of tourists every year to hear important stories and to share in the beautiful place we call home. We must use this as an important opportunity to do that. It will not be easy and will require many conversations, but it is time.

Mrs HERSEY (Katherine): Madam Speaker, I put on the record my first opening of a centre on 10 April, which was the Trades Training Centre at the Charles Darwin University Casuarina campus TAFE. It was a fantastic event and a pleasure to attend to officially open the new Trades Training Centre. As an ex-tradie I could not have thought of a more apt person to do that.

I have spoken many times in the House about trades training. It is not about learning how to hold a hammer or wire up a switchboard; it is about rebuilding the Territory, strengthening our workforce and making sure we have the skilled hands we need now and into the future. The NT is built on the back of hardworking tradies, and we need more of them.

The new Trades Training Centre is a game changer for CDU TAFE. It will boost training capacity, expand existing facilities and equip students with the tools—literal and figurative—to become the next generation of skilled, agile and capable workers. I learned what an industrial sandpit was. I presumed it was not for the tradies to play in at little lunch or big lunch. I learned something new that day.

With construction being a massive part of the NT economy, we know firsthand how painful a shortage of skilled workers can be. Local businesses are crying out for trained professionals, and the new Trades Training Centre will help fill that gap.

There was a recent announcement of 170 free TAFE places in the housing construction sector. There has never been a better time to roll up your sleeves and get into trades training. Congratulations to the vice-chancellor, the TAFE CEO and staff for their work on this project. It also ties nicely into the announcement of the extension of the $30,000 and $50,000 housing grants along with the payroll tax relief for business, free TAFE places for students and a renewed focus on VET training. There are many reasons to get into a trade.

As the Minister for Education and Training I cannot think of a better way for students to have a meaningful pathway into employment, as tradies will never be without work. It does not matter where they go in the world, but in Australia tradies will always get a job in whatever field they aspire to be in.

As a family of tradies—my husband, children and I are all tradies—I can guarantee whenever I choose to give up this job I can always fall back on my trade, as any tradie would. There is never a shortage of work. It was a pleasure to open my first building. Given that it was the CDU Trades Training Centre, I was honoured to do that.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I will speak in adjournment because I did not get to close my VAD motion.

Madam SPEAKER: I am so sorry about that; that was my mistake.

J DAVIS: I take the opportunity to do that now.

I thank all members who spoke on the motion, people who outlined the long history of voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory, people who outlined the work done, people who expressed support and people who shared their concerns, like the Members for Araluen and Mulka.

On behalf of the people outside this Chamber who have been fighting so long and hard for this, I am disappointed the CLP chose to remove any commitment to recognising Territorians' rights to voluntary assisted dying from the motion.

The government's amended motion removed the statement that this parliament:

- recognises the right for Territorians to end their lives with dignity and the immense suffering that is caused for them and their families when this right is taken away from them

- recognises that the Northern Territory, the first jurisdiction in the world to legalise voluntary assisted dying, is now the last in Australia to pass this law

- urges the government to implement the 22 recommendations of the Report into Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory, acknowledging that many Territorians from all political persuasions want the right to die with dignity in the Northern Territory.

I know this is important to many people who have contacted and spoken to me over the past months, and I want to let them know that I will continue to work for voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory. I know this is what the majority of our community wants, and any member who listens to their constituents would know this too.

Member for Araluen, I agree that we need to listen to a wide range of people, and I have done that, including those who are remote, faith based, First Nations people and people from across the spectrum. It has always been important to me that we need to listen to everyone and that there is wisdom in what everyone says. If we are to move forward as a community, we need to bring people in, not shut them out.

Member for Mulka, thank you for sharing your knowledge and wisdom and for outlining what we need to understand, who we need to listen to and how we need to listen when making law. I agree that we must be thoughtful and careful when we approach this issue.

I know there are many complexities surrounding this law. I have constituents who are concerned about VAD, and I spent time listening to their concerns. It is important to listen to all voices in our community; there is wisdom in the know. We can learn from that and find ways to develop laws that respect the issues people are raising. We need to make sure any law we develop in the Northern Territory is appropriate for our specific circumstances and complexities, including culture, remoteness and challenges to our health system.

I believe good lawmaking is finding proper ways to listen to everyone. Although this is not my ideal motion, I welcome more consultation if that is what can bring us together and make good, strong laws. I am sure the LCAC has listened to the Member for Mulka and other members about the ways we need to do that.

My commitment is to get this done the best way we can in a way that brings everyone with us. Territorians have waited long enough. I have confidence that when the LCAC does its work over the next few months of listening, it will bring back clear and strong drafting instructions to get this legislation ready to vote on, which will address the concerns raised here and in the community, making sure we have the right law for us in the Northern Territory and that we can move on with what people desperately want.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.