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CONTENTS

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT 1337
Public Accounts Committee – Inquiry into Acacia Digital Patient Record System 1337
REORDER OF BUSINESS 1337
Condolence Motion – Hon Grant Tambling AM 1337
VISITORS 1337
Manunda Terrace Primary School and 1337
Michael Long Learning and Leadership Education Program 1337
PETROLEUM, PLANNING AND WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 1337
Serial 11 1337
VISITORS 1345
Manunda Terrace Primary School 1345
NOTICES 1355
ABSENCE OF MINISTER CAHILL 1355
QUESTION TIME 1355
Crime Statistics 1355
Police Recruitment and Retention 1356
Domestic Violence Prevention 1357
Domestic Violence Prevention – Supplementary Question 1357
Federal Government – 2025 Budget 1358
Men's Behaviour Change Programs 1359
Budget 2025–26 1360
Rehabilitation and Behaviour Change Programs 1360
Onshore Gas Industry 1361
Gas Industry – Revenue 1362
Corrections – Update 1363
Incarceration Rate 1363
Humpty Dumpty Foundation 1364
Domestic Violence Service Funding 1365
Driver Primary School 1366
Casuarina Youth Hub 1367
Water Supply – Leanyer 1367
PETROLEUM, PLANNING AND WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 1368
Serial 11 1368
RESPONSE TO PETITION 1387
Petition No 1 – Suspension of Transitioning Treatments for Children in the Northern Territory 1387
MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE 1387
Investment in Healthcare 1387
CONDOLENCE MOTION 1395
Honourable Grant Tambling AM 1395
MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE 1402
Investment in Healthcare 1402
ADJOURNMENT 1414

Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT
Public Accounts Committee – Inquiry into Acacia Digital Patient Record System

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee advising that on 13 February 2025 the committee received a referral from the Treasurer to conduct an inquiry into the Acacia digital patient record system.

REORDER OF BUSINESS
Condolence Motion – Hon Grant Tambling AM

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 80 government business will be interrupted at 6 pm today for a condolence motion for Hon Grant Tambling AM and will resume at the point it was interrupted at the conclusion of the motion.

VISITORS
Manunda Terrace Primary School and
Michael Long Learning and Leadership Education Program

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Year 5/6 students from Manunda Terrace Primary School accompanied by their teachers, as well as young people from Galiwinku with the Michael Long Learning and Leadership Education Program accompanied by their leaders.

On behalf of honourable members I welcome you this morning and hope you enjoy yourselves.

Members: Hear, hear!

PETROLEUM, PLANNING AND WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 11

Continued from 12 February 2025.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, the Territory Labor opposition stands firmly against this Bill. We will not support legislation that is sprung on Territorians without warning, consultation and genuine engagement. This government has shown an alarming aversion to transparency, doing everything in its power to avoid accountability. By systematically excluding Territorians from important decisions the government has made it clear that the voices of the people do not matter in its pursuit of unchecked development.

We want the Territory to grow and prosper, but growth must align with the values and expectations of Territorians. It must balance economic progress with environmental, social and cultural safeguards. Development should never come at the expense of these critical protections. Instead, this Bill seeks to remove fundamental checks and balances, stripping away accountability mechanisms to ensure responsible and sustainable development.

The most concerning aspect of this Bill is the removal of third-party merits reviews. Merits reviews are not an impediment to progress; they are a cornerstone of good governance. They allow decisions to be independently reviewed to ensure they are robust, transparent and in the best interest of all Territorians. They provide a vital avenue for community members, traditional owners, industry groups, environmental organisations and others to challenge decisions that may have far-reaching consequences.

Without these safeguards we risk opening the door to unchecked and potentially harmful developments. This is not about environmental activists, as the government would have you believe. Removing merits reviews shuts down our pastoralists, local governments, traditional owners and industry bodies, or anyone who may be directly or indirectly affected by these decisions.

We have seen the dangers of removing oversight before. Under the former Giles CLP government massive water licences were handed out without proper scrutiny, benefiting a select few at the expense of our collective future. This Bill takes us back to those dark days, eroding decades of progress.

The facts speak for themselves. In 10 years only three merits review decisions have been made under the *Planning Act*. Since third-party merits reviews were introduced under the *Petroleum Act* in 2022 there have been no review requests. This is not about delays or frivolous claims; it is about silencing opposition and avoiding accountability.

The removal of merits reviews is part of a broader agenda by the CLP government to dismantle environmental protections and community safeguards. We have seen funding cuts to environmental and planning community groups, weakening the voices advocating for sustainable development, with the watering down of greenhouse gas regulations, including scrapping policies for large emitters and rushed approval for water allocations without proper consultation with advisory committees or stakeholders.

This government has repeatedly prioritised short-term development at the expense of long-term sustainability. Our environment is not a limitless resource; it is the foundation of our culture, livelihoods and identity. When we fail to protect it we fail future generations.

Merits reviews are more than a procedural mechanism; they are a democratic right. They empower communities to hold decision-makers accountable, highlight unintended consequences and ensure that development aligns with the values and needs of Territorians. Removing these rights signals that we have a government which does not trust its processes, people or its future. It sends a message that our environment, culture and communities are all expendable in the race for unchecked development.

That is not how good policy is made. Legislation like this should involve robust community consultation, input from stakeholders and transparent debates. Instead this government has chosen secrecy, exclusion and unilateral decision-making. This Bill does not reflect the values of Territorians or the principles of fairness, accountability or sustainability that we should all uphold.

We deserve a government that listens to its people, respects the importance of oversight and places at the heart of its decision-making the principles of wellbeing for our environment and community. This Bill is a step backwards. It undermines the integrity of our system, erodes public trust and puts our shared future at risk.

It is becoming increasingly clear that Territorians' voices are being cut out of the public debate and that their views do not matter to the CLP government, particularly when it comes to the development-at-all-costs approach. We all want the Territory to grow and prosper, but development should meet the expectations of Territorians by taking into account environmental, social and cultural aspects and putting appropriate safeguards in place. Instead we have a government that is desperately trying to stifle public commentary and alternative viewpoints in order to ram through development. It is a sign of government members who do not care about the views of the people who put their faith in them and took their word when they promised to be open and accountable. This Bill is an erosion of the protections in the system designed to ensure development is done in a responsible, sustainable and transparent way.

Removing the rights of a third party to request a merits review on a major development, whether it is to do with petroleum, industry, water resources or planning decisions, is a retrograde step that will remove a layer of accountability in our system. It is part of systematic dismantling by the CLP government. Ultimately, this will lead to poorer social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes because it takes away the ability for Territorians to ask for a decision on a new development to be independently scrutinised to ensure that it is the right decision for the Territory. It denies people the right to challenge assumptions, suggest improvements, highlight unintended consequences and feel as though they have buy-in—all the things that enhance decision-making and ensure decisions are being made in the best interests of Territorians.

It is clear that the CLP wants to pull down the shutters on development decisions and does not want anyone to be able to see, let alone be involved in the decisions. It is important to highlight that we are seeing this government go down the same path its former government did; it learnt the tricks from the previous Adam Giles government.

The first anyone knew of this legislation was a press release from the minister on 10 February, a bit over a month ago. He said, 'Rallying against activists', and used deliberately divisive language to justify his government's decision to ram through these amendments without a scrap of community consultation or stakeholder engagement. It joins a growing list of measures brought in by this government aimed at sidestepping accountability. CLP members do not want to be subjected to scrutiny as a government; they are now applying that to the longstanding merits review process. In making these changes they are deliberately looking to shift attention from the fact they have no economic vision for the Territory. They are happy to step in and take credit for projects that got off the ground under the previous government; beyond that they have no ideas or vision for the Territory beyond motherhood statements.

What is proposed will lead to poorer social and economic outcomes for the Territory because it removes another layer of scrutiny when it comes to development. Third-party merits reviews have been a feature of Territory legislation for decades. In the *Planning Act* third-party rights to merits review have been in existence in planning decisions since 2004; in the *Water Act* they have existed in the legislation that first commenced in 1992; and in the *Petroleum Act*, the former Labor government amended the legislation in 2022 to include third-party merits review rights as per recommendation 14.24 of the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory.

The *Petroleum Act* was subsequently amended to identify how and when third parties could seek merits review and listed the key decisions which could be challenged, including releasing specified blocks of land for exploration, decisions to grant a petroleum exploration permit and the approval of all environmental management plans.

Those opposite would have us believe that they need to get rid of the merits review because NTCAT is swamped with vexatious or frivolous review requests that are holding up development throughout the Territory. The facts tell a different story. In the past 10 years there have been three merits review decisions by NTCAT under the *Planning Act*. Since the *Petroleum Act* was amended to allow for third-party merits reviews there have been precisely zero review requests to NTCAT.

This tells us that it is not about green groups holding up important development, as the CLP would have you believe. It is just one of the many ways the CLP is seeking to shut down any opportunity for Territorians to have their voices heard on any matter. Territorians should be alarmed at what the CLP is doing.

A merits review process allows for someone other than the applicant or a decision-maker to ask for a review of a decision. It is a way for the community to test the rigour of a decision without going through a lengthy and costly court process.

For example, a farmer, pastoralist or tourism operator can ask for a review of a decision to grant a water licence to a large agricultural proposal that might be accessing the same water source. We all saw what happened under the former CLP government with Adam Giles—the now Chief Minister was a close friend—when they handed out massive water licences to their mates.

Removing merits reviews from the system opens it further to inappropriate, unchallenged decision-making about our precious resources.

Thanks to this retrograde legislation being put forward by the Environment minister, here is who will be denied the opportunity to challenge a decision through NTCAT:

- Territorians directly or indirectly affected by the decision
- members of an organised environmental community or industry group
- Aboriginal land councils
- registered native title prescribed body corporates or registered claimants under the *Native Title Act*
- local government bodies
- Territorians who have a valid objection during any assessment or approval process.

Those opposite will tell us that this is all about shutting down and silencing environmental advocates; it is not. It shuts down and silences everyone, including industry bodies, traditional owners, pastoralists and community members affected by water licences or planning decisions where they live. It is a wholesale and deliberate move to silence opposing views.

Territorians genuinely care about the way development occurs in this beautiful place we call home. They want to know what is planned and to be able to have a say. This is our culture. We want robust discussions about a development project. It is the best way to keep each other honest and ultimately get better decisions for everyone.

This legislation falls well outside community expectations. The CLP has not attempted to make a show of public accountability with this Bill. It has not been out for any consultation, and the CLP members refused to send it to a scrutiny committee. They made it clear that they are not interested in what the community has to

say about this Bill. Ironically, this removes the rights of industry bodies, pastoralists, traditional owners and local government from having a say about project approvals.

As I said, this Bill is part of a broader and systematic erosion of critical checks and balances in the way projects are assessed, approved and monitored. The CLP members are not interested in the evidence. For example, they initially tried to avoid community consultation on the Territory Coordinator Bill, despite it challenging the way developments are assessed and approved in the Territory. After being embarrassed into a sham community consultation process, the government then refused to release the 559 submissions provided by Territorians in relation to that Bill. We can guess why the CLP kept the submissions secret.

The government agreed to send the Bill to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee with a ridiculously tight timeframe of a few weeks. The majority of submissions opposed the Bill entirely or in part. In response the CLP made a few minor changes, but ignored and discounted the genuine concerns of the community.

From that scrutiny process we learnt that the Territory Coordinator Bill will not address the concerns of industry or project proponents regarding assessments and approvals. Their concerns about specific bureaucratic hold-ups can and should be dealt with by identifying what holds them up and how they can be fixed.

This wholesale overreach will do nothing but erode the integrity of the Northern Territory legislative framework. The CLP will ram through its legislation because it has made such a fuss about it.

The government has removed the requirement that environmental management plans for petroleum activities be referred to the Environment Protection Authority. Our oversighting environmental body will not see environmental management plans for projects unless it calls them in. At the time of this decision the Chair of the NTEPA, Dr Paul Vogel, said that he was confident the environmental regulator and regulatory framework for onshore petroleum in the Northern Territory was sufficiently robust to ensure sustainable development of that industry. When he agreed that EMPs did not need to go before the EPA did the doctor know about the CLP's plans to water down the code of practice for the petroleum industry?

Those opposite have quietly scrapped a number of important safety protections in the code of practice for the petroleum industry, including removing the requirements for fracking companies to report hazardous leaks to landowners, keep records of the chemicals they hold onsite and keep safety risks to the public and workers as low as reasonably practicable. Effectively, the industry will no longer have to consider the safety of workers or the community when it goes about its business.

This is not intended as a slur on the industry, which takes its safety obligations seriously, but a criticism of the CLP government. The Deputy Chief Minister was called out for secretly making these changes and trying to gaslight Territorians by saying that the government was strengthening protections. What nonsense! This government is intent on systematically dismantling environmental, cultural, social, community and worker protections in its quest for unfettered unsustainable development.

There are more examples, such as:

- pulling funding from those environmental and community planning groups and unions
- ramming through the Mataranka and Western Davenport Water Allocation Plans without consulting advisory group committee members, stakeholders and local communities
- watering down regulations for greenhouse gas emissions by scrapping the Territory's large emitters and gas emissions policies.

I could go on. Be in no doubt that what this CLP government is doing is un-Territorian. It flies in the face of community expectations. Billions of dollars' worth of projects got underway under the former government. It did so within a legislative and regulatory regime that ensured important Territory values and protections were upheld. More can be done to streamline regulation, and I am sure this parliament is here for that.

What we have seen and continue to see is a government willing to cut corners at the cost of the Territory. Ramming through an ideologically based agenda that will make Territorians worse off and put our environment, culture, community and resources at risk is not the best thing to do. We will not be supporting this retrograde legislation.

Time and again we have heard from the community groups. The CLP would have you believe that development is being held up by environmental activists; that is not the case. We heard about the number of matters that have gone before the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal. This is an important protection that should not be eroded. It goes to the heart of the decisions made by an independent person to review those decisions.

There is a significant difference between a judicial review and a merits review. Merits reviews are not a new thing in the Northern Territory. The *Water Act* had merits reviews since its inception in 1992. The *Petroleum Act* was amended in 2020, in line with the independent Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory by Justice Pepper.

These are important mechanisms that should not be removed or eroded. The Territory Labor opposition stands firm in its opposition to the Bill. We do not support this legislation. It is disappointing that it has come in without warning, consultation or genuine engagement with Territorians.

Members of the government talk about the need for courage. It is clear that the Environment minister has no courage and is more like a coward.

Members interjecting.

Mr PAECH: They are laughing at their own Environment minister. He is more like a coward because he hides behind scrutiny. He will have to live with himself in the future when his children ask questions about why the Territory's ecosystems are not looked after and have not been protected. He will have to look them in the eye and tell them that he did not support merits reviews or the ability for independent reviews into decisions made by government—that he changed the Mataranka and Western Davenport Water Allocation Plans. He revoked plans done in consultation with and for community and scrapped them seven days before Christmas.

He will have to look them in the eye and say, 'I watered down the rights of Aboriginal Territorians by changing the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*. I removed the Northern Territory's Large Emitters Policy. I was a member of the CLP government that had a hopeless Deputy Chief Minister who did not care about the environment and took great pride in eroding the Territory's environmental measures.'

This government's legacy will be the erosion of the Territory's environmental protections to make a quick buck. CLP members will have to live with that legacy for generations to come.

In the last decade significant progress was made in the Northern Territory's environmental regulations and protections. You do not have to agree with them all. I do not agree with them; I think they could have been harder and stronger.

In a few short months under this government there has been the erosion of decades of work by community organisations, Territorian researchers, hardworking scientists and people in departments to strengthen protections so that future generations can share in the landscape of the Northern Territory. That has gone in a matter of a few short months. The Environment minister, the Member for Braitling, has to live every day with that legacy. When there are natural disasters in Alice Springs he has to live with knowing that he helped defund environmental organisations.

As time goes on the Territory's pastoral industry will understand the bad decisions that this CLP government has made. When pastoralists have people rocking up uninvited on their property to do work under the Territory Coordinator and they are not happy about it, they will realise how bad the Territory Coordinator legislation is.

I will remind people in remote communities that although Steve Edgington, the minister for Housing and for Aboriginal Affairs, talks about empowering Aboriginal people, he is a part of the government that is watering down Aboriginal sacred sites legislation.

Let us not be fooled: that is part of a bigger plan of watering down protections in the Northern Territory to allow un-vetted, unchecked and unsustainable projects to happen in order to make a few dollars so that the Territory looks better and this government can say that it is doing a good economic job when it is not. This CLP government will cost the Territory more because of its bad decisions that lead to environmental issues and damage to country by these large-scale projects, which will need to be fixed.

The minister for Environment spoke yesterday about strengthening laws. I hope he will meet with AAPA before he brings in any legislation to rewrite the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act* which is doing

what it should have done—strengthening penalties for people who do the wrong thing, increasing fines and improving processes, not making it easier to do the bad thing then get a slap on the wrist and a small fine and be told, 'Don't do it again', when you have destroyed a place of deep cultural and spiritual significance.

This government is allowing land clearing at an horrendous rate, having done a backroom deal, with a slap on the wrist for clearing country—hundreds of hectares of land. It was going through the court because the people did the wrong thing. Now this government says, 'We know you did the wrong thing, but we will not take you to court; we will give you a little slap on the wrist or a little fine.' This was done in the back room so that we do not know what is happening. It is failing to be transparent.

That is the attitude of this government: 'She'll be right, mate'. It is cowboy country over there. The Environment minister is doing this retrograde reform wearing his ten-gallon hat—he has probably never ridden a horse in his life—making these decisions and costing the Territory thousands in years to come when we have to clean up the mess because he has damaged country.

When we talk about country we need to be clear what we are talking about. We are not just talking about country as a physical place; we are talking about country as a living, breathing being. For Aboriginal Territorians country is almost considered a family member, as it has feelings and emotions, it heals, it helps people and it sustains life.

Having merits reviews is important because when decisions are being made that impact country, people should have the right to challenge those decisions and have an independent body review those decisions to ensure they are the best for the Territory. That is why we need to continue to support the merits review. We need a government that is not allergic to public scrutiny. However, this government is allergic to it and will try everything in its power not to have to answer.

I feel like a clairvoyant this morning because its members will say, 'You never had a scrutiny committee; you could have sent it there.' I am being honest.

Mr Maley: You cut it.

Mr PAECH: I must be psychic because I predicted it, and it has just happened. Deputy Chief Minister, come over later and I will give you a psychic reading. I can tell your future because it will not be good; you will not be remembered well.

The government brought in this scrutiny committee which I am on. Probably the only thing I will ever say of this government in a positive light is that I support this measure; it is good. Do not do as others have done; do something positive, learn from the mistakes of all previous governments in the Northern Territory, whether they were Labor or Liberal.

Members interjecting.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; interruption. I cannot hear the Member for Gwoja, even though he is making some great points.

Madam SPEAKER: We will have some silence now; thank you.

Mr PAECH: We should be learning from the mistakes of all previous Northern Territory governments, whether Labor or Liberal and, if it benefits Territorians, do things differently.

We have the scrutiny committee—an important mechanism—but the government is picking and choosing what it sends for scrutiny to make it look like it is sending things there to be open, transparent and accountable.

It sent the Defamation Bill to the committee. It is uniform national legislation happening all across the country. Most of the Bill was developed under the previous government. However, it refused to send this Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill—about the merits review—which will have a huge impact on the Northern Territory. It refused scrutiny for one of the biggest Bills that the community would have expected to have a say on. This government said, 'We are not prepared for that level of community backlash; we are not prepared to have to go to those and listen.' We know this government ignored the voices of its own backbench when it put forward recommendations. It controls the scrutiny committee; there are three members of the CLP on it, me as the Labor member and an Independent member.

Mr Mackay: Are you joining us? Make it four.

Mr PAECH: The Member for Goyder is interjecting because he is upset about being exposed as a voiceless man in the CLP government. The government ignored the recommendations he put up. I accept that the good Member for Wanguri was unable to be at those hearings in person; she used teleconferencing due to medical reasons. The Member for Goyder led the charge and would get the government to accept all these recommendations—well, good boy was ignored; the government did not accept all those recommendations, only a few to make it look as though it listened to him and the committee. That is what you get under this government.

Territorians, have a close look at this parliament because you will see that this government is deliberately sending small matters to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee and not sending the big wholesale reforms. The only reason the Territory Coordinator Bill was sent to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee is that the government had to look as though it was attempting to listen to Territorians. The government did not listen; when Territorians gave their testimony its own backbench made recommendations based on listening, then this government ignored its backbench and hardworking Territorians—gone, ignored.

We are talking about important legislation: the Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill. We are asking simple questions: why was this not sent to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee? It is about the merits review process that has been in the *Water Act* since 1992; the *Planning Act* since 2002; and the petroleum merits review process, which has been in the Act since 2022. The government had an opportunity to send this to the scrutiny committee, but it did not, as it did not send legislation to the committee last week so that people could have the opportunity to have their say.

The CLP is picking and choosing what it is held accountable for and what is scrutinised. That is not good government. That is not how good policy is made.

This legislation does not reflect the values of the Territory. I look forward to members' contributions because the Member for Goyder is going around working on his team to have their say and ensure Territorians think they are not being ignored. This legislation does nothing to give certainty or a guarantee to Territorians that this government values or considers the importance of the environment or the necessary environmental protections. It does nothing; it waters it down, as this government has repeatedly watered down important environmental protections in the Northern Territory since being elected.

We could talk about jobs, jobs, jobs, but there are no jobs on a dead planet or in a Territory that we cannot live in. The government can be short-sighted and say, 'We are all about development, development, development; money, money, money; and jobs, jobs, jobs', but if you ignore the Territory's environment you will have none of that. You will turn the Territory into a barren wasteland.

We need to protect the Territory. We are one of Australia's only jurisdictions that has an amazing ecological and biodiverse corridor. We have sustainable, unique ecosystems. We should be valuing and protecting them for future generations because if we do not there will be nothing to celebrate.

I acknowledge all the Territory's environmental organisations, researchers, scientists and the people who provided the evidence, data and statistics. They are Territorians who are genuinely worried about our environment, whether they are in our towns or remote communities. I thank them for speaking up. It may seem dark now, but we need to continue the hard work of standing up and talking about the need to protect the environment, support environmental organisations, provide alternatives, continue to develop, put forward good ideas for people to consider and have important movements so that we have an alternative view to support the Territory's environment and growth in an economic and environmentally sustainable way.

They should not be seen in isolation; they should not be mutually exclusive. We can have economic development in the Northern Territory that does not come at the cost of the environment. We can have strong environmental regulations to protect the environment that still allow development and economic growth. It is important to grow the Territory's economy; no-one disputes that. We also need a safe environment so that we can all live here. The projections are that if we continue to go at this rate none of us will be able to live in the Territory. We should be doing more to protect the environment and have more investment in renewables to strengthen our response to climate change.

Instead, this government is stepping back. It is taking an insular look and ignoring the calls of thousands of Territorians who want change for the environment and who want more to happen in the Northern Territory's environment space.

Mrs Zio interjecting.

Mr PAECH: The Member for Fannie Bay is interjecting. Clearly, she does not remember that many people in her electorate will be judging her at the next election on her performance with the Northern Territory's environment.

This is important. We should all be proud of protecting the environment. We should not be, like the CLP members, standing up at rallies and conference dinners rejoicing in the fact that they have wound back environmental protections in the Northern Territory and that they defunded environmental organisations. They may think they are big and tough now, but future generations will see them as cowardly, draconian and short-sighted because the Territory's environment will be damaged due to their failures.

We will not be supporting this legislation.

Mr MALEY (Agriculture and Fisheries): Madam Speaker, I make my contribution to this legislation, which I say from the beginning I strongly support.

That was a great contribution from the would-be Leader of the Opposition, who is trying to disable himself over there. There seems to be a fracture in that side of the House. We see where the cracks are; they are not on this side. There is a canyon on the other side, and it will be interesting to see what happens over the next few months in regard to who the real leader is.

The Member for Gwoja spoke about us being allergic to public scrutiny. He admitted that his previous government made a mistake and scrapped the scrutiny committee. He is trying to rewrite history saying how high and mighty Labor is, but in reality it scrapped the scrutiny committee. Labor withdrew the committee—cut it out—because Labor did not want to face scrutiny. When the member talks about being allergic to scrutiny it is clear who it is, and that is probably why Labor backed down before. Unlike the other side we are up for public scrutiny, and we installed the scrutiny committee to scrutinise legislation. That is what it is for.

The Member for Gwoja said that no big bits of legislation are going through. Fortunately, the Territory Coordinator Bill went through the whole process. Clearly, he has his facts wrong. He spoke about the Environment minister—thank god he will turn the Territory around.

The Member for Gwoja spoke about decisions made over the last decade which put us as the worst-performing economy for the last five years. He spoke about jobs. Clearly that has not worked because those on the other side had eight years of opportunity, yet the Territory went backwards. Crime has gone through the roof; our economy has gone backwards, and people are leaving the Territory in droves because of crime and no jobs. We are here to clean up that mess, which is what the Environment minister is doing. This is what we are doing to make the Territory a better place to live in because it is worth fighting for.

I was born here, as were lots of people in this Chamber. I want to see the Territory it used to be before the Labor government members got their mitts on the control levers and wrecked the economy. They took everything they possibly could out of the economy and left it on life support. Thank god Territorians in August last year turned it around and gave the Territory a fighting chance, because under the previous government it did not have a fighting chance.

The Member for Gwoja said that we sprung this on the community. We followed due process. We followed the process that has been followed in this Chamber for decades. We did what was meant to be done, unlike the previous government which cut corners left, right and centre and put our economy in a world of hurt.

The facts speak for themselves. One fact we cannot forget is that debt went from about $1.8bn to $11bn in eight years because this Labor government failed to read the tea leaves and get the economy moving forward. The Member for Gwoja spoke about this great environment and what we have in the Territory. He is correct; we have a great place, and we need to ensure that it is available for Territorians. There is no point in having a great environment if you cannot afford to live here, send your kids to school or buy food. We need to get the balance right; that is what the Member for Braitling is doing.

The Member for Gwoja went on a lot about an erosion of merits reviews. He mentioned quickly that there is a judicial review, but he mentioned it only once. He knows that is still available. If you have a problem and are aggrieved by a decision you go to the courts; you go through the judicial review. It is there so that if you are aggrieved, a decision has upset you or you think something is wrong you can take it to the court like any other civil matter. If you have a dispute with someone, such as a contract or commercial dispute, you take it to the court; if you break the law you go to the court. He talked about an erosion, but the judicial review is available to anyone who needs it. I am not sure whether he mentioned it quickly on purpose so that he was not misleading parliament. The judicial review is ready to go.

He spoke about not going down the path of previous governments. The previous government created uncertainty, destroyed the economy and delayed projects. Certainty in private enterprise is crucial. Why would people invest in the Territory when it is uncertain? They do not know what will happen or whether they will get approval and then be dragged through a merits review. A merits review is an opportunity to review the decision. That decision is made by the minister based on all sorts of evidence. That decision should be final. 'Approved' should mean approved.

The Member for Gwoja also spoke about environmental plans. He mentioned that they can be called in. He said, 'They will be taken away. No-one will review it.' He is right. If the EPA wants to call in a plan, it can. The EPA manages that; it is there to do its job. The EPA can call in plans any time it sees fit. On this side we are giving industry certainty.

As the minister for Agriculture and for Mining and Energy, I have seen projects and decisions across those three portfolios that are subject to third-party merits review. In the Territory a final decision should be a final decision. Once all appropriate assessments and approval processes have been completed, 'approval' should mean approval.

This is critical in providing industry with the regulatory certainty it needs to invest to in our jurisdiction. Unfortunately, the minerals do not stop at the border; they spread across Australia. Investors from Australia and overseas want certainty. We need to give investors the certainty to invest in the Northern Territory.

What happens when they invest in the Territory? We get jobs, population and services; that is what we need. We need own-source revenue. Remember, mining and onshore gas give us that. We do not have to rely on the federal government—unlike the Labor government which seemed to spend like drunken sailors and put us in $11bn worth of debt. It overspent $1bn a year.

VISITORS
Manunda Terrace Primary School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Year 5/6 students from Manunda Terrace Primary School accompanied by their teachers. On behalf of honourable members, welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr MALEY: A billion dollars just rolls off the tongue, but it is a thousand million dollars. That is a lot of zeros. That is how much the previous government overspent every year for eight years, and perhaps a bit more if we did the maths.

It goes back to certainty. We need to rebuild the economy, make the Territory a safe place to live and make sure that our lifestyle is ready to go.

Talking about certainty, that was one of the critical factors when we had the multibillion-dollar INPEX investment in the Territory. We need to give industry the certainty to invest.

Given that Territorians have an $11bn debt because of the previous Labor government, we are sorely in need of large-scale private investment to rebuild our economy. The budget is blown. We cannot afford to just keep spending like the drunken sailors. We need private enterprise to have confidence to invest in the Territory. We need that private investment.

We will not allow millions of dollars in revenue to be jeopardised by minority groups, anti-investment people and environmental activists. We need to make sure that money is invested in the Territory. It is easy to be a single-issue interest group when you never really have to concern yourself with how the services and amenities of Territorians, such as hospitals, schools and the police are funded. The mining and gas industries fund hospitals, the education system and police officers; these things do not fund themselves.

The government does not make money; it spends money. We need to make sure that we get more money in than we throw out. That is what the previous Labor government failed to do. It put us in $11bn worth of debt. We must get that confidence because we want to be able to fund the health system, education and police. We need to keep the community safe and healthy.

Without the benefits of agriculture, mining and gas projects that the third-party merits review has been weaponised to stop, we would not be able to provide these critical services and amenities to Territorians, because it is about funding. Being completely reliant on the Commonwealth for the Territory's annual budget is not an acceptable situation if we wish to maintain our lifestyle. Therefore, we must remove the threat to economic development presented by lawfare that is designed to delay, discourage and devalue investment. We need private investment in the Territory; that is a fact.

Presenting the Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct as nothing more than a toxic gas hub is a clear example of the dishonest tactics used by activist groups and who they employ. At present third-party merits reviews of decisions under the *Petroleum Act,* the *Planning Act* and the *Water Act* can be appealed to NTCAT. Third-party interests only need to pay an administrative fee of less than $500 to lodge an appeal. These appeals cost the government and industry proponents thousands of dollars to defend and delay project development for months, representing untold costs and opportunities to Territorians.

When you delay a project for months or years, people in that region do not reap the benefits. They do not get the jobs or services. These actions tarnish the reputation of the Territory as a premier place to do business. We need investment. We do not want things like third-party merits reviews driving away the dollars we need to kickstart our failing economy. That is what the Labor government did, which put us last five years in a row.

Ironically, most of the decisions subject to third-party merits review have not been for the gas and mining projects that attract the attention of these environmental groups. Instead, they have been for large-scale agricultural and horticultural projects, such as that proposed at Singleton Station, which are designed to provide fresh produce to local and interstate markets. We are talking about food producers and the businesses that produce food to feed Territorians and Australians.

Apparently there is no primary industry acceptable to these interest groups. They just want to stop it all. Since 2020 there have been 18 third-party merits reviews of decisions made by the independent Controller of Water Resources under the *Water Act 1992*. Most of these decisions have been upheld, demonstrating the lack of merit associated with the appeals and showing them for the delay tactic they are.

Rather than rein in these groups Labor allowed them to try to sandbag major projects across the Territory, including the Larrimah Agricultural Precinct and Arafura Resources Nolans project. We need investment and certainty. These groups wish to provide Territorians with unique jobs which sustain the Territory's unique lifestyle. There is no point having a great lifestyle if you cannot afford to live it.

For example, the Singleton Station development is estimated to be worth $110m to the economy and provide over a thousand seasonal jobs. The Member for Gwoja spoke about jobs, jobs, jobs. There you go; a thousand seasonal jobs and $110m for our economy. That is true investment and true growth which, unfortunately, over the last 18 years—because of the Labor government—the Territory has failed to benefit from and take advantage of.

The Nolans mining project has an estimated capital expenditure of $1.7bn—that is a lot of zeros—and will provide millions in royalties to the Territory and about a thousand jobs between construction and operation. That means jobs, investment, regional growth, strengthening the economy and certainty.

The Jervois copper project water extraction licence decision which was subject to third-party merits review has a capital expenditure of roughly $300m and will provide millions of dollars in royalties and hundreds of jobs. The licence decision was upheld after delaying the project for months, following the normal pattern of such matters.

The Beetaloo Sub-basin has been a primary target of third-party merits review activism—activists in the Territory are not welcome. The Beetaloo, as per hydraulic fracturing in the Pepper inquiry, which environmental groups love to cite, has an estimated 6,000 jobs and $17bn in revenue over the next 20 years. Imagine what that would mean to Territorian households and businesses; families could rely on the gas and mining industry to pay their wages, mortgage and education, buy food and look after their families.

Members of this Chamber have made money out of the gas industry. The gas and mining industries provide Territorians with jobs, whether they are a member of parliament, hairdresser, mechanic, farmer or a ringer. Many frontline staff could be employed in our hospitals, emergency, law and order, environmental services, police and education. Our education system could be much better with this money providing jobs.

The development of the Beetaloo would benefit the lives of regional and remote Territorians living in Katherine and the Daly Waters region. The steps our government is taking to remove third-party merits reviews will help unlock the generational investment which will benefit the lives of our children and provide a bright and enjoyable future for all Territorians.

As the Minister for Mining and Energy, and Agriculture and Fisheries, I support the repeal of the third-party merits review.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, if only alarmism could fix our woes we would all be in paradise by now. It would be a socialist and bureaucratic paradise but, for some people, that is what they are looking for.

In Drysdale we have felt the reality of what that so-called paradise looks like; it looks like poverty. That is the harsh reality of the bureaucratic process that has existed in the Northern Territory for so long, and it has been delivered throughout my electorate. We aim to change that.

When asked the question about courage—the Environment minister has made tough decisions for the betterment of the people of the Northern Territory. They may not be in agreeance with certain groups, but that is not what the Environment minister is here for. He is here to represent the people of the Northern Territory who placed our government, and him, in that position. I thank the minister for every step he has taken in his reform agenda and for putting Territorians and the majority view first. The people in my electorate want the economy to get moving and to have jobs and certainty. That is what this minister is delivering.

If 10 people were in a room and one was screaming, it would not make them right. That is the core of what we are doing today. We are giving the power back to the people of Drysdale so that we can get the economy moving; they want jobs and to earn money, and I want to make that a reality. I want my people's wealth to grow. They should not be ashamed of that. I will push that reform agenda all the way.

The people of Drysdale want cheaper energy bills, development and for their kids to have jobs in the Northern Territory and not to have to go interstate. This is at the heart of what we are trying to achieve.

The reality is that the third-party merits review has been abused, weaponised and drifted far from its original intent. Yes, it was originally created as an accountability measure, but certain groups identified that it could be used for a tool to push their ideological agenda. This government will step in and make changes. The activists who have hijacked this process do not bear the costs of the loss of jobs and the income to tradesmen who no longer have a site to work on. For the small businesses like subcontractors and builders, this is a flow-on effect of the process being hijacked.

Our government will stop that today because that is what the people want, such as the people in my electorate. Fuller said the law must be coherent, consistent and provide certainty. That final word 'certainty' is what the law must provide. That is what we promised the people of the Northern Territory. We promised action, certainty and security this year.

This speaks to the heart of the certainty aspect, so that once businesses have approval they can continue with development. That means certainty for the investors and for everyone who is part of a development. Hundreds of businesses quote in any given tender process. Businesses go through a huge amount of unpaid work during that process to try to get the job, including the whole supply chain for materials, the separate trades and the manufacturing.

An activist who weaponises a process like the merits review throws the whole logistics train off, and leaves all those businesses with uncertainty. They do not know whether they will get the job or when they will be paid. That is what we will stop.

When people follow the rules, comply with planning frameworks and still face unpredictable delays, the system has become unjust. That flows on to a real human cost, which is not being spoken of by those opposite. I will speak to it now. The human cost behind every project delay is a family at home waiting, a tradesman waiting, a community left waiting and a Territory economy waiting. At the same time our country faces a severe housing and cost-of-living crisis. Why would those in power in this House, who are meant to represent the people, want to block any legislative change that can help fix housing and cost of living?

That is why I support this Bill. I will do anything within my power to alleviate pressures on the people of the Northern Territory.

Burke stated that society is a contract between generations. What are we leaving behind for the next generation? It seems that those opposite look at that through one prism. I sincerely want to give my children and the children in my electorate real futures in the Northern Territory. I want them to stay here, study here and see that they can have a long, enjoyable and wealth-creating career in the Northern Territory. I will support any legislation that can make that a reality.

I want to improve youth employment, housing and business confidence. All those things are collateral damage from legal activism masquerading as justice.

The economic consequences are that investors simply avoid uncertainty. At a time when we need to gain investment and business confidence we must make the Northern Territory look as promising as it possibly can be. When projects are shelved building goes quiet and apprentices miss out; the entire supply chain is affected.

We are an interconnected society and economy. One hold-up by a merits review put through on an ideological agenda has implications for many in the community I represent. We must not let the loudest minority override the needs of the majority. I say 'needs' because when people cannot afford their weekly shop, that is not a 'want' or a 'nice-to-have'. Many Territorians this week will struggle to afford groceries and pay rent. Although we may disagree on matters like this, the government is trying everything in its power to alleviate those costs, and that is why I support this Bill. If it makes an impact on the ability of the people in my electorate to pay for their Coles shop or their rent or to buy their own home, I will support it.

There is a principle at stake, which is certainty. We have seen this principle erode over time with prior governments pushing away responsibility. Why not own the decisions you make? As a government we are proud to say that when we make a decision it will rest on our shoulders. It will rest on the minister's shoulders, and that is what we want. When you get the tick of approval from the NT Government you know you have a decision and you can go forward with it.

The law must not create anxiety for individuals, businesses and investors. Our laws should invoke only confidence and should at all costs avoid creating anxiety in the marketplace or in any other aspect of our lives. If you follow the rules and receive approval you should be able to build. I believe that is fair and lawful; it will create confidence in our system.

Territorians do not want wasteful layers of bureaucracy. Territorians have put the CLP in this Chamber to reduce the bureaucracy they see everywhere. It is time that this parliament starts making decisions and being accountable for them, which is exactly what the Finocchiaro government said it would do. We will do that. We will unashamedly strip bureaucracy from the Northern Territory because we are doing it for the people. That is a noble and good thing.

We have heard a lot of alarmism today on the erosion of safeguards, but consultation still remains. The process is still open. Environmental and planning regulations still remain. Genuine community voices will still be heard, but only during the right stage of the process. I commend the fact this was not sent to the scrutiny committee, because the heart of what we are changing is the stripping of bureaucracy. There are Bills that need to go to the committee of which I am a part. We saw it with the Territory Coordinator Bill. That was a good Bill for the committee to look into community issues and provide recommendations.

This Bill does not need it. As part of that committee I do not believe this Bill needs to come through because we are trying to reduce the layers of bureaucracy. I just want to see it done so that we can get to the business of getting things done in the NT.

I am increasingly concerned by the hyper-polarising of the environment. I ask those opposite to keep that in mind when we enter these debates. Especially to young people, the environment can be bipartisan; you do not have to prescribe to extreme ideology to care about the environment.

I have long supported conservation; I love biology, but I do not prescribe to the fact that I need to give up any form of conservation care by standing firm on things like economic development. They can go hand in hand, and our government will ensure there is balance. If we continue to polarise the environment we will lose large numbers of people who will see it as an extreme fringe issue, which it is not. I will not subscribe to that either.

To anyone listening, you can be for economic development and you can also care about the environment. That is what our CLP government will aim to do to get the balance right.

The previous government took any measure to avoid accountability. If the previous ministers could disseminate a decision, they would. We created an environment whereby we have death by bureaucracy, and that is not good for anyone, especially the people of the Northern Territory. We are not afraid of reducing bureaucracy to what is essential, and we will bear the brunt of those decisions.

It is time to call it what it is. When third-party merits reviews are weaponised it is not about transparency; it is purely about power. A small class of activists with no accountability and no care for the flow-on effects of the decisions they make are disrupting the system. As members of this Chamber we are held to high standards in the community, as we should be, but I will not stand for a small group who are empowered, remain faceless and destroy projects that bring economic benefit, jobs and money—essentially they make my people poorer.

This reform is about courage. At its core we are taking the courage to make the hard decisions to change. Minister Burgoyne has shown immense courage since the day he stepped into this portfolio. I thank him for his leadership and for making real changes to environmental legislation for the Northern Territory and the people of Drysdale so that we can get jobs going, get apprenticeships for our kids and have a real future.

To the people of the NT, we have your backs. We have the back of every mum and dad working today, trying to make a living. We have the back of every child looking to have a future in any industry they wish. If you want to go to TAFE and be a tradie we want you to stay in the Northern Territory. I want you to use that skill set to build your wealth. I want you to have the future you dreamed of when you were young, and I want you to pass on to your children the future that you did not have.

That is at the core of what we stand for. We will do everything in our power to ensure that people of the Northern Territory have a real future and real wealth-building capacity. It is about saying ‘no more’ to the people who stall progress and the environmental activists who stall this Territory. You have come up against a government that will no longer accept it. We are here for the people of the Northern Territory; we will listen to the majority, and we will make a government for the people.

I commend this Bill, and I thank the minister.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, the CLP government wants us to believe that merits reviews are onerous lawless acts of protests by crazy greenies. According to the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment, people are supposedly exploiting the merits review process to deliberately sabotage the Territory’s economy. Or, according to the Chief Minister, merits reviews are lawfare that is holding back the Territory’s economy.

If there is any hysteria, clearly it is coming from the other side. I am glad to stand here and offer a sensible contribution to this debate and to dispel many of the misrepresentations and outright mistruths we have heard so far.

According to the Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 fact sheet:

> *Merits reviews are intended to improve decision making by increasing transparency and accountability and in doing so, build confidence in decisions. They provide proponents and other parties with an avenue of procedural fairness for an adverse decision.*

That sounds like a reasonable and important process, does it not? In fact, transparency is supposedly something that the CLP government members are dedicated to increasing, yet here they are removing this important process of transparency and accountability and eliminating an avenue of procedural fairness.

The CLP government is trying to convince the public that just about anyone could submit a merits review through NTCAT, with the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment claiming that merits reviews are accessible for ‘those opposed to the development of the Territory’.

This is so far from the truth. In our legal system someone must have standing in order to make a merits review claim. Different pieces of legislation have different rules for who has standing, but generally someone would need to meet the threshold of having a special interest in the decision. This means they would need to demonstrate a special relationship with an environment, that their property or economic interests are affected, or that they have spiritual or cultural ties to land. In reality that is a high threshold.

The CLP said that one of the main reasons it is removing merits reviews is to prevent ‘potentially vexatious claims’. However, this demonstrates that the CLP and the people who have spoken so far fundamentally

misunderstand how a court system works. Australian courts have three overarching principles: their proceedings are quick, just and cheap. Under these principles our courts refuse to take on vexatious cases.

To recap, merits reviews are intended to improve decision-making by increasing transparency and accountability, and they are an important avenue for procedural fairness. NTCAT cannot take on merits cases unless someone has a legitimate standing through a special interest; it will throw out any vexatious cases. That is the current law.

The CLP keeps referring to the Blake Street development as a key example of why merits review should be removed, but does not provided the full picture. Whilst the merits review has been a factor in the development's delays, numerous concurrent factors have delayed it, including concerns regarding the transparency of the planning process, arbitrary decisions of various Planning ministers and the honesty and business competency of the developer. A High Court judge referred to this developer as 'a liar with messy and opaque business affairs'.

I am grateful for important judicial processes that add oversight to the actions of said 'liars with messy and opaque business affairs'. It is important to recognise that often third-party merits reviews which are not successful as a whole may be successful in part—say, the development of a water licence that is still granted. The court will often add conditions, adjust the approval or limit the scope of operation to successfully increase protection for the environment or to protect the sacred site as risk of destruction. This is a win for both parties. The project still goes ahead, but more stringent protections for our environment have been added.

This is the benefit of third-party merits reviews that add to our development process. Of course, this nuanced and honest take will not be heard from the CLP; its members are interested in only presenting an entirely distorted view of these merits reviews. It is disappointing.

This baseline understanding of merits reviews shows that they are not scary. They are an important legal tool to ensure strong transparency and accountability. These proposed changes pose a real threat of further disenfranchising First Nations communities. Should a mining or development application that will destroy a significant sacred site be approved there is limited scope for review. Judicial review is still available, but it looks at only whether the decision was legal. There would be no scope to argue that this decision, whilst legal, was not the right decision when considering the full picture. This is a terrible step backward for our democratic processes.

I will touch on the key issues with having only judicial review as a means for review. The first is that a judicial review has the potential to be incredibly costly, as the court can give unsuccessful parties a cost order. That risk alone is a big enough barrier to prevent any non-corporate group from pursuing a judicial review. Through the removal of merits reviews, the CLP government is making our legal system inaccessible to the public. That is anti-democratic. It is supposed to serve the public and ensure good governance—unlike the CLP government which is only there to serve the interests of big corporations.

The second issue with having judicial review as the only option is that the court can only look at the facts the original decision-maker had. This means that if the original decision-maker did not know about a significant environmental risk or the potential for the destruction of, for example, a sacred site, the court is not allowed to consider these factors when re-examining the decision; whereas, in a merits review the court can consider these other factors, which the original decision-maker may not have been aware of.

With third-party merits reviews repealed, there would be no means for key groups, such as traditional owners, to appeal decisions which allow a development that would threaten an endangered species or have devastating impacts on our beautiful Territory. The CLP may argue that there are plenty of other checks and balances to prevent disaster or protect the environment, but that is no longer the case because these changes are not being made in a vacuum.

The Territory Coordinator Bill passed last Tuesday; it made wide-sweeping and concerning powers. Last month the CLP cut funding to the two peak environmental groups, ALEC and ECNT. We cannot continue to pretend that we are not making decisions in this Assembly that threaten the environment and beautiful outdoor lifestyle, which so many Territorians love and that builds our economy through tourism. We need to stop being short-sighted in our decision-making. The decisions we make today will cause harm in the future.

Through the removal of third-party merits reviews, the CLP government has ignored the recommendations of the Pepper inquiry, specifically recommendation 14.24, which stated:

That prior to the granting of any further production approvals, merits review be available in relation to decisions under the Petroleum Act *and Petroleum (Environment) Regulations including, but not limited to, decisions made in relation to the granting of all EMPs.*

That, at a minimum, the following third parties have standing to seek merits review:

- *proponents (that is, gas companies) seeking a permit, approval, application, licence or permission to engage in onshore shale gas activity;*
- *persons who are directly or indirectly affected by the decision;*
- *members of an organised environmental, community or industry group;*
- *Aboriginal Land Councils;*
- *Registered Native Title Prescribed Body Corporate and registered claimants under the Native Title Act;*
- *local government bodies; and*
- *persons who have made a genuine and valid objection during any assessment or approval process.*

That an independent body, such as NTCAT, be given jurisdiction to hear merits review proceedings in relation to any onshore shale gas industry.

Yet here we are with this government slashing all of that, bar the proponents themselves. Justice Pepper held that fracking should take place in the NT only if all the recommendations are followed in full. This is another example showing that this government has thrown those recommendations out the window.

The CLP government is ignoring the court's decision and trying to make our legal systems inaccessible to the public. Why might the CLP be trying to remove merits reviews? In whose best interest is this? We do not have to do much digging to find out; it is one thing the CLP has been transparent in. The CLP made it clear that its only priority is so-called economic growth, which means profits for big business that do not trickle down to everyday people. The reality is that big businesses have the CLP in their pockets.

The Minister for Mining and Energy stated that these changes 'would provide greater certainty for key industries, including petroleum, mining and agriculture'. What about the certainty for the ongoing connection to culture and land of First Nations communities, whose sacred land is being destroyed; for Territorians, that they will still be able to live here by 2070, considering the unliveable climate predictions caused by fossil fuel expansions; or the certainty for our constituents that their government is making decisions in their best interest and with transparency after this Bill passes and decisions can no longer be reviewed?

The government recently quietly defunded the Planning Action Network in an attempt to nail the lid shut on public participation in planning. I take this moment to recognise the great work done over many decades by individuals, including Nick Kirlew and Margaret Clinch, who contributed to this essential community organisation that provides support for Territorians who want to engage in planning decisions.

The CLP's defunding of this vital group that has been operating for over 30 years was a disgraceful move that further underscores its attempts to stifle and remove government accountability and transparency. The CLP does not care about everyday people. If you are not a big business owner the CLP refuses to make decisions in your best interests. It has continued to spout its party line that merits reviews create uncertainty and act as a strong disincentive to invest in the Territory, but this is ludicrous. Allowing decisions to be reviewed independently merely acts as a measure to see that big mining or businesses in the NT follow industry standards and get the right permits, and it acts as a preventive measure to ensure sacred sites are not destroyed.

Let us remember who we were elected to represent: everyday people, not big corporations. Maintaining merits reviews demonstrates to our constituents that we have nothing to hide, we are making decisions on their merit and that we are happy to be accountable to the public. The decision to remove them is another move by the CLP to erode trust in our government; it is deeply disappointing.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, I join with my colleagues to speak with concern about the Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Those opposite would have you believe the amendments in the Bill are minor and procedural, but in reality they are far more serious and concerning. This Bill represents a significant and unacceptable watering down of transparency, accountability and the right of the community—especially traditional owners and native title holders—to have their voices heard.

The explanatory statement accompanying this Bill states clearly that it intends to remove third-party merits reviews in industry development and environmental legislation. The government claims this will provide certainty, foster confidence and reduce delays, but let me be clear that this Bill silences Territorians' voices and shuts down the legitimate concerns about developments that impact the environment, our cultural heritage and our precious water resources.

Consider for a second why these merits reviews exist. They are there to ensure natural justice, that concerns from Territorians are heard, to avoid unintended consequences and to ensure we make the right decisions. They are integral to the good social licence for mining companies. This change will remove all of that.

For those paying attention this move should not be a surprise. The new CLP government has been busy dismantling any opportunity for Territorians to challenge their decisions. It is undemocratic behaviour from a group that is still acting like it is in opposition. Those opposite even went so far as to vote against referring the legislation to the new scrutiny committee.

Third-party merits reviews were introduced deliberately following the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory, also known as the Pepper inquiry. Recommendation 14.24 of that inquiry outlined that third-party merits review should be available for decisions under the *Petroleum Act* and the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations. These recommendations were carefully considered and implemented to ensure robust accountability and community trust in decision-making. This government now seeks to overturn that accountability, dismissing it as a cause of big delays. Removing this measure will hurt the petroleum industry's social licence. What evidence has the government provided to support these claims? Absolutely none.

As my colleagues have pointed out, the NT Civil and Administrative Tribunal's own data reveals a limited number of merits review cases, which is hardly an epidemic causing project delays. Between 2020 and 2023 only 20 third-party merits reviews related to water decisions occurred, despite over 600 water licences being active. The data does not support the government's narrative. Instead of enhancing accountability this amendment deliberately excludes the stakeholders who stand to lose the most. Aboriginal land councils, native title holders, community groups and even local councils will be stripped of their right to seek merits reviews of decisions that directly impact them.

This is not streamlining regulations; it is shutting down public debate and community oversight. It is an attack on democracy, and it is deeply irresponsible. This Bill is part of a troubling pattern from the current government of removing environmental and community safeguards at every opportunity. We have seen it with the Territory Coordinator Bill, which also silenced community consultation. We have seen it in the weakening of safety standards for petroleum activities and in the rushed adoption of water allocation plans without adequate stakeholder engagement.

The pattern is unmistakable. It is development at any cost with no accountability, transparency or genuine community engagement. Territorians rightly expect sustainable and accountable development, not a free pass for industry at the expense of our cultural heritage and longstanding economic wellbeing. These amendments move the Territory backwards by undermining hard-won protections and damaging public confidence in the system that is supposed to protect us all.

Sustainable economic development must balance growth with environmental, cultural and social responsibility. It requires listening, not silencing; openness, not secrecy. These amendments fail that test. The opposition firmly believes that Territorians deserve better than what this legislation proposes. We believe Territorians must be heard, that their concerns matter and that transparency is essential for the responsible management of our shared resources.

There is nothing wrong with economic development, but it cannot be done at any cost. The protections the CLP government is removing are there for a reason. Therefore, as you might have guessed, the opposition strongly opposes it. I hope that every member of this Assembly values accountability, transparency and the voices of our community, by standing with us in rejecting it.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I am in disbelief that the CLP government continues to push aside the concerns and voices of the Territorians it claims to speak for. Decision-making is important. Territorians want their say, whether it is in support or in opposition of what is brought before the House.

I just noticed the former Member for Daly, Gary Higgins, in the gallery. I hold him in high esteem, so I wanted to acknowledge him. We miss you, Gary. We are happy to have the current Member for Daly in the Labor team, but we miss your presence in the Chamber. I want that on the record. Gary is somebody I call a true Country Liberal Party member.

It seems that the CLP government members before us, who prided themselves on listening to everyday Territorians during the election period, no longer feel the need to listen to Territorians. They are not listening to the people who voted for them and those who now raise concerns about the appalling processes of decision-making and bad practice made by the CLP in the last seven months.

In seven short months of CLP government we are seeing the introduction of new amendments that Territorians were not given a say on; they were not given the opportunity through the so-called celebrated reinvigorated scrutiny committee. We have not seen a period of consultation on this important legislation; it is becoming a habit of bad practice and bad governance for the CLP to do this time and again in every parliamentary sittings.

The CLP government keeps saying that it brought back the scrutiny committee—which we commended—but as the Member for Gwoja rightly pointed out, we have seen the CLP choose what is scrutinised. How crazy is that? We have a democratic process to allow people of the Northern Territory to have their say, but at the end of the day the CLP will pick and choose what Territorians are allowed to have a say on. That is opposite ends of the spectrum for a fair and equitable voice in decision-making by Territorians who represent—guess who? Territorians.

Picking and choosing what you are scrutinised on is ridiculous. That is not a democratic process. It is not what CLP members promised they would do. They promised Territorians that they would be open, transparent and accountable. Shoving through legislative amendments that affect Territorians and government decision-making in extreme ways is not open, democratic, transparent or accountable. I hope the CLP members are taking a hard look at themselves in the mirror to see, 'I'm actually two-faced. I've been telling Territorians one thing and doing the opposite.'

I hope that the government will use this opportunity, but it will not because—guess what? Not only does the government not listen to Territorians, it is not even listening to its own members—its own teammates. Even that is highly unusual.

We are seeing a slippery slope into the continued process of decision-making being stripped away, corroded and disregarded. It is not Territorians those opposite are ignoring; they are ignoring their Country Liberal Party members who sit on the scrutiny community and pick and choose what gets scrutinised.

We saw this last week: 'Yes, this one will go to the scrutiny committee. Hang on. This one is important to Territorians. Let us not send it to the scrutiny committee. Let us hide it away and jam it through parliament.' At the end of the day the government has the numbers; we know that. That is the democratic process. The government of the day has the majority; everybody knows that. That is taught in civics in Grade 3 and 4 here in the Territory.

If you genuinely want to improve legislation in parliament—the house of the people, I remind the CLP; it is not our house—for fellow Territorians, a good government that has promised to be open, transparent and accountable to Territorians would welcome scrutiny, consultation, feedback from Territorians, reports and the opportunity to make the best possible laws for Territorians.

We are not seeing a sliver of that. The CLP is being disingenuous with Territorians. It told fibs at the election, saying that it will do one thing but is now doing the opposite, much to the despair of Territorians. They are the biggest losers in this. This government thinks it is righteous and has a so-called mandate. Yes, we all know that the CLP won the election, but 48%—less than half of Territorians—picked the CLP as number one in whatever electorate they were voting in.

Government members say that they have a mandate, but they still have a duty to listen to Territorians and respect the 52% who did not put a number one next to a CLP name. They like forgetting about that truth. They like not telling Territorians or acknowledging that over half of Territorians did not support the CLP as their number one choice.

Mr Mackay: You won with 30%.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Ms UIBO: I have hit a chord. The Member for Goyder feels as though he has to defend the 48% of people voting for the CLP. One has to defend the bad practice of his government. I guess it is because he is the Whip and has to run around getting people to speak on this terrible process. He has to try to encourage his members to speak and then sit there in a shame job that his own team did not even listen to him. He is on one of the scrutiny committees. Even the Member for Goyder does not have a voice, but he is trying to arc up now and pretend that he does. We know he does not.

The CLP government continues to operate under this crazy assumption that it is immune to public scrutiny and can forgo any form of scrutiny that would provide accountability because it has the numbers.

Territorians have good memories. When there are rash decisions, kneejerk responses to processes of parliament and amendments the CLP government is choosing to push through with the Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill and the Territory Coordinator Bill—which has now been assented to by His Honour.

The CLP picks and chooses what it wants to tell Territorians and creates mistruths. Territorians are smarter than that; they see past the facade of a government that pretends to have been open, transparent and accountable. For the next couple of years the CLP members will have to defend why they made decisions about the amendments we see in this Bill.

I hope that after their time in this parliament they hold their heads high and say, 'We were proud to ignore Territorians and public scrutiny, and not be open, accountable or transparent like we said we would be. At the end of the day we got to push through what we wanted, and we did not care about Territorians. We wanted to be in parliament to do whatever we wanted to do.'

Economic development and progress in the Territory is welcomed by the Territory Labor opposition. Like all Territorians we expect that it will be done in a responsible and sustained manner in line with community expectations. That is the only reason we are here; I remind the CLP that we are representing the communities of the Northern Territory.

The proposed Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill will remove third-party merits review in decisions about planning, water and onshore petroleum developments. Those in the CLP government will have you believe that they are making this amendment because it will help to speed up economic growth in the Territory, cutting through unnecessary red tape and stopping environmental groups from interfering with developments. This is simply not true.

With the removal of the third-party merits review—a right that has been afforded to Territorians as part of Territory legislation for decades—pastoralists, tourism operators, industry bodies, community members, traditional owners and native title holders can no longer seek a review of a decision about a major development that may impact them, their families, communities and livelihoods.

The third-party merits review exists to assure Territorians that their government, whether it is a CLP government or a future Labor government, is open to hearing them and reviewing decisions when they believe that the government of the day has not made decisions in their best interests. Third-party merits review is a safety net that keeps the government accountable and fair, regardless of its political colours, and it is a way for Territorians to ask for a closer look at decisions without going through a lengthy court process. Surely Territorians deserve for that right to be kept intact. Unfortunately, the CLP does not care or believe Territorians deserve that right.

I am interested to hear contributions from the Members for Namatjira and Barkly as to whether they have gone to the communities and pastoral properties they represent in their geographically large electorates. Have they talked with their constituents about the CLP government removing their right to question and have the merits review process intact? Will they feel proud to go to their electorates after this parliamentary sitting and say, 'You'll be really proud. As your local members in government we've removed your right to review any processes of decision-making in these parts of the Northern Territory.' I wonder whether they will do that or stay silent and hide in the background while Territorians' rights are eroded.

The role of government is to listen to all Territorians, even if they disagree with you, and take their concerns into consideration when making legislative amendments. There should be scrutiny and processes of input, feedback and constructive ways to improve laws in the Northern Territory.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

NOTICES

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): 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 the Northern Territory's regions and their role in developing the Territory economy

- recognise and support their plans for economic growth.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled the Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, Serial 22.

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 recognise the importance of investing in the regional and remote road network across the Territory to drive economic development and improve connectivity, flood immunity, safety and access for all Territorians.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): 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 rolling out high-voltage underground power in the northern suburbs to deliver more reliable and safer electricity for residents, schools and businesses, particularly over the Wet Season

- condemn the Finocchiaro CLP government for failing to tell Territorians before the 2024 election of its plans to scrap the 10-year program to underground power to the northern suburbs.

ABSENCE OF MINISTER CAHILL

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I advise that in the absence of Minister Cahill, any questions relating to the Children and Families portfolio be directed to me, and any questions relating to Trade, Business and Asian Relations be directed to Minister Boothby.

QUESTION TIME

Crime Statistics

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

Last week you announced that crime statistics in the Territory had improved. Your crime statistics released last week show that violent offending remains high, with total assaults up by 12.3% in December 2024 and January 2025 compared with December 2023 and January 2024. You are cherrypicking data that suits your political narrative rather than giving Territorians the whole story. You are misleading Territorians regarding crime. When will crime stats improve?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I find it an interesting question from the Opposition Leader who was a minister in the government that oversaw the Territory's worst crime rates in our history. One those opposite love to talk about, domestic violence, went up by 82% under Labor.

We have unashamedly and unapologetically made law and order our number one priority. Six weeks after taking government we walked into this parliament with a raft of legislation put through on urgency to give our police better powers. We have not stopped that work since. There is legislation being introduced tomorrow; we will debate a Bill on Thursday. Every parliament has this important focus.

The crime statistics came out; they are starting to show a better picture. We are proud of that, but the work has just begun. In six months we completely turned things around. The data is starting to look good. We have been honest with Territorians that more needs to be done. We will continue to support our police and fix the watered-down laws voted in by Labor that stopped police from doing their jobs and allowed perpetrators to commit violence on others. From a law-and-order perspective Labor decimated the Territory.

We are seeing great results. In Darwin offences against the person were down by 29%, domestic violence assaults were down by 32% and alcohol-related assaults were down by 16%. Territory-wide, some good early data shows house break-ins down by 27%, total offences against the person down by 12%, DV down by 11% and alcohol-related assaults down by 17%.

The Opposition Leader talks about transparency and accountability, but she has no credibility on the topic. I said that commercial break-ins went up; I put it in my media release. We have been open and honest with the community. We know it is just the beginning because we have been in government for only six months.

If you ask the average Territorian on the street who they trust to support our police, have stronger laws and deliver law-and-order improvements across the Northern Territory they will say the CLP. Labor had its chance and failed them, laughing in people's faces. Labor oversaw the worst chapter in our history; Territorians will not forgive or forget that.

We are excited that the data is starting to show. There is much more work to do, but we are willing to do that work to protect everyday Territorians and keep them safe.

Police Recruitment and Retention

Mr KERLE to CHIEF MINISTER

Under the previous Labor government the good people in my electorate of Blain suffered rising crime numbers and antisocial behaviour issues. There has been much public discussion about police resources, or lack of them, in particular regarding retention and attrition rates. That was highlighted more so in Alice Springs over the summer months when South Australian police officers were deployed to assist.

It was pleasing to see another police graduation a couple of weeks ago. Can you update the Assembly on the current situation with police recruitment and retention?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, under eight years of Labor police left the force in droves. The Police Association said that about 98% of police survey respondents had no confidence in the Labor government to support them; that was a terrible and dark time.

We have turned that around in just six months. We will keep working because our police are important to us, as is community safety. In your electorate, Member for Blain, it is the number one priority for people. You and I talk about this a lot. You continue to raise the issue and are a strong voice on it. I commend you for your work to make sure the people who live in Blain are safe, can live their dreams and can fulfil their aspirations for the future. We are here to provide the environment for them to thrive and do what they want to do with their lives.

We already have wonderful results in regard to attrition. We have the best attrition rate since 2019, which is encouraging. The fastest way we can put more police on the street is by keeping the ones we have. We have trained them, spent time on and invested in them. They have skills and experience on the ground; we need them to feel valued, heard, supported and empowered to do their job. If they have those things they will continue to serve the community; that is exactly what we need. Attrition is a core focus for us. There are early results, but the job is not done; there is much more work to do.

I had the privilege of seeing the graduation of recruit squad 157. It was wonderful to see, and I hope they have long, terrific careers. Eleven went to Katherine, 10 to Alice Springs, five remained in Darwin and one went to Wadeye. We swore in an accelerated recruit program squad, with 21 new recruits. Nine Aboriginal community police officers are transferring to constable, which is wonderful. We have another Aboriginal community police officer squad transitioning to constable later this year.

Squad 159 started in February and will graduate in September; squad 160 will start in April. There is plenty of work happening at our college. I thank all the incredible instructors.

Member for Blain, I hear you loud and clear. It is the number one issue that people talk to me about, and I know it is the number one issue people talk to you about. When our police force is strong, the Territory is strong. Our job as a government is to back them, improve attrition rates, support police and drive down crime to make the Territory a safe place to live, work, visit and invest.

Domestic Violence Prevention

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for HEALTH on behalf of MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Given that domestic violence-related crime remains unacceptably high and continues to rise—as confirmed by the latest crime statistics—will you commit to implementing all the recommendations handed down in November last year from the coronial inquest into the domestic violence murders of four Territory women?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, after eight years of Labor domestic violence rose by over 82% across the Northern Territory. Under Labor, in my electorate alone, domestic violence rose by well over 100%. Out-of-control domestic, family and sexual violence was never reined in by the Labor government.

This week we will be debating further laws to strengthen police powers for dealing with domestic violence. I look forward to debating those.

Regarding the coronial inquiry, we are methodically working through a number of recommendations in that report, taking into account all the issues raised throughout the inquiry. These are important to me and to our government because we want to take action to reduce domestic, family and sexual violence.

Regarding the coronial inquiry's findings, we want to look at a number of things carefully. We do not want to rush into a number of recommendations, putting in actions that would not be sustainable over the longer term. We want proper plans in place to deal with domestic, family and sexual violence.

These are the issues that Labor never focused on when it was in government. There were plenty of opportunities to take action to work towards the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence. We only have to go back to 2022 when the Stronger Futures legislation expired. The Labor government—the Member for Gwoja knows this better than everybody because he sat by and did nothing when it came to the lapsing of the Stronger Futures legislation …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. Will the CLP government commit to implementing the recommendations of the coronial inquest?

Mr EDGINGTON: Talking about the Member for Gwoja, allowing the Stronger Futures legislation to lapse without putting in place—I am getting to …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: If this is about relevance, he still has time to answer.

Ms UIBO: Standing Order 110; relevance. It is about the coronial inquest recommendations.

Mr EDGINGTON: I will go back to those recommendations. Some of the recommendations have been implemented. I remind the Assembly that we will not be doing what Labor did, which was to allow alcohol legislation to expire without putting in place any legislation to ensure that women, children and families are protected.

Domestic Violence Prevention – Supplementary Question

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for HEALTH on behalf of MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

What recommendations of the coronial inquest have you agreed to, and which recommendations will you implement? You just said that you have agreed to a number of them. What are they?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we have implemented recommendations relating to Children and Families and to the police. I am happy to talk to the Member for Gwoja at some other point in time.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: The minister has finished his answer.

Federal Government – 2025 Budget

Dr RAHMAN to TREASURER

Tonight the federal government will deliver a budget in the lead-in to a federal election where there is an opportunity for the federal government to provide support for significant Territory projects that could help us to create jobs, stimulate investment and lead to improvements in the Territory economy and our enviable Territory lifestyle.

Can you outline to the Assembly what actions you have taken to engage the federal government and what outcomes you would like to see from the federal budget tonight?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I have been in discussions with my federal counterparts—as have my departments—ahead of the federal budget. We have been advocating strongly for firm commitments from the Albanese government in this year's budget. We made it clear that those opposite left the budget in an atrocious state, riddled with underfunded or completely unfunded projects.

The CLP government has already turned the ship around, but it is no secret that we need the support of the federal government to build the right momentum. We have been engaging with the Commonwealth to unlock economic opportunities, enable sustainable debt management and support regional and remote Territorians.

We already have an uptick in our GST funding, with a $248m boost for the next financial year, recognising the unique economic and social challenges we face in the Northern Territory. It is a step in the right direction, but we need to move from maintenance money to investment that will deliver economic growth and confidence, and drive private sector economic investment and population growth. I have made it clear to the federal government that we need investment to ensure our road and logistics network is fit for purpose through projects like the Stuart Highway duplication from Darwin to Katherine, the Katherine heavy vehicle alternative route and the continued commitment to the $440m regional logistics hubs.

We need to futureproof Darwin's water supply with a federal funding commitment to the pre-construction phase of the AROWS project.

Given the Territory's strategic position we want a new compact with the Commonwealth government to focus on supporting mutually beneficial Defence and energy security projects as well as sustained support for Middle Arm and the Beetaloo. The nation faces severe gas security problems, and the east coast will start to suffer in the next few years. We have the solution to this crisis in the Northern Territory. We just need the federal government to prick up its ears and listen. Gas is critical to this nation's energy security for the foreseeable future, and we are best placed in the country to supply those needs.

It took no time for the Albanese government to put together funds for Whyalla; it is time we had the same support. Our port is critical to our economy, not just now but as it develops into the future. We want a port with the financial and logistical capacity to invest on the scale needed by the export and import sectors of the Territory. There are some brave calls needed from the federal government, which is wedged between doing the right thing for this country's energy future—a future the Territory is central to—and the Greens and teals who hold the inner-city seats in Sydney and Melbourne.

Men's Behaviour Change Programs

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS on behalf of MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

More than half of the Territory's male prisoners are locked up because of domestic violence offending. How much of your government's $36m into domestic violence will be directed to the prison-based Men's Behaviour Change Programs in line with recommendations 23 to 26 in Coroner Elisabeth Armitage's report into the domestic violence deaths of four Territory women?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I like talking about Corrections because Corrections is keeping the community safe. The previous Labor government failed to keep the community safe, with crime rates going through the roof to a point where it was dangerous to go shopping.

People in Coolalinga told me that people from Casuarina drive to Howard Springs to do their shopping because it is too dangerous to shop at Casuarina. That is why Corrections is an important job. Corrections has had staffing issues because the Labor government failed to fund it correctly for many years. That led to programs being cut and industry going down, but the industry section of Corrections is starting to kick on. We are starting to rehabilitate the industry because domestically violent people need rehabilitation. They need a purpose in life. Their purpose in life is not to commit crime and domestic violence but to do things like mow people's lawns or work in industry doing something like welding.

A lot of bunks in the Berrimah correctional centre have been built through the prison industry. In order to give people programs to help them rehabilitate, give them some purpose in life and to save the taxpayers' money, we are building it in-house.

The programs we are talking about are helping rehabilitation …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question was regarding the $36m funding for domestic violence programs, such as the prison-based Men's Behaviour Change Programs.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, the minister has enough time to get to that. Relevance, minister.

Mr MALEY: If we look at history we see that Labor delivered no programs, which is why domestic violence went up by 82% under its watch.

The prison is working well; it has challenges and faces a lot of pressure. I give a big shout-out to the prison officers who are doing a great job. The prison officers are keeping us safe, and they are working 24/7. They are doing a great job under extreme pressure because the Labor government failed to recognise the pressure they are under, fund them correctly, allow prison officers to rehabilitate the domestic violence offenders …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. We have been patient with the minister's ramblings, but could he please answer the question?

Mr MALEY: Corrections has a budget of approximately $312m; within that budget there has been a small advance of approximately $6m through the midyear financial injection. That is because of the rising prison numbers due to Labor's failure to do the job.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I am appreciative of the minister's response regarding some funding, but it is about the $36m for domestic and family violence. What money has been spent?

Mr MALEY: I was talking about rehabilitation, which was funded within our budget. With the $312m we are funding services and work parties, and we are making a difference in the community. Unlike the previous Labor government we are rehabilitating these offenders.

Budget 2025–26

Mr MACKAY to TREASURER

Over the last eight years Territorians watched in horror as Labor led the Territory down budget black holes and debt disasters. Now that the CLP is in the driver's seat we are focused on spending what we have, but Labor left us with nothing but scraps. We are dealing with the fallout of funding for critical services over the long term, and we must find money where there is none to cover our operational costs. Could you update the Assembly on the budget predicament the CLP government is in as it makes the tough decisions to deliver a budget that delivers for Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, to show how bad Labor left the budget, I will ask a question. If there was a $5bn infrastructure program, how much should be put aside to fund it? Perhaps $1bn or $1.5bn. That is not a trick question, but Labor struggled to find the answer. It put aside only $330m to deliver a program that needed $1.2bn in the following financial year. Labor boasted about its record infrastructure program, but it is safe to say that it also took home the record for overspending and under-budgeting. Let us call it what it is: Labor was gaslighting our community.

The CLP government has two choices: we can borrow another few billion dollars and push out our debt even further, or we can take a breath, reprioritise and refocus on strategic and important projects that benefit all Territorians. Thanks to Labor we were left with a shortfall of $900m in cash to deliver those infrastructure projects for 2025–26. I question whether the members left over from the former Labor government ever made it past Year 3 maths. It is just not adding up.

Due to Labor's struggle with mathematics the CLP will need to stretch $330m for infrastructure, that barely covers our three largest projects. We have to spend another $50m on the art gallery across the street. Not only was Labor collecting records for its infrastructure spend, it also could not be trusted to get the basics right. Labor set a record for the most embarrassing cost blowouts.

The design work for the student boarding accommodation had a cost blowout of $1m; that is a 200% blowout before it was even built. Labor could not replace the air conditioning at Nhulunbuy Primary School without blowing out the cost. This seems to be a pattern for Labor, as the air conditioning at Royal Darwin Hospital blew out by $110,000.

Budget Cabinet is working overtime to dig us out of Labor's graveyard of fiscal failure without falling deeper into the black hole of debt. We will not deliver a budget in May that just applies a bandaid over time-limited funding for critical services and does not bother to allocate funding towards operational costs. Instead, we are fixing the legacy issues left by Labor once and for all.

The 2025–26 budget is all about getting back to basics. We are getting back to spending within our means and funding what matters.

Rehabilitation and Behaviour Change Programs

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS

Despite having more people on remand or imprisoned, domestic violence and violent crime continue to rise, according to your crime statistics released last week. Given this situation can you explain what rehabilitation and behaviour change programs are available in Territory prisons, and outline what actions you are taking to reduce reoffending?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I will take the Member for Daly through the history in relation to domestic violence. It was up by 82% under the previous Labor government. This government has been in office for about six months, and house break-ins are down by 27%; total offences against the person are down by 12%; domestic violence assaults are down by 11%; and alcohol-related assaults are down by 17%.

Our program to keep the community safe is working; if you commit a crime we will find a bed for you in a Corrections facility that was neglected and underfunded by the previous Labor government, which seemed to have the idea of just letting things go.

In the last budget the previous government wrote that it would cut Health and Corrections. The previous Labor government planned to do that even though the crime figures were going through the roof and it was unsafe to do almost anything in the Northern Territory. The consequences of having high crime rates are that people do not want to move here, bring their families here or work here. They are the consequences of allowing crime rates to go through the roof and the rate of domestic violence to go up by 82%.

We talk a lot about the offenders and the people going into prison. What about the victims? Every time there is a crime there is a victim. Every time there is a victim there is a family member. Our CLP government is putting the rights of the victim above the rights of the offender. If you do the wrong thing you will be punished. There will be a consequence for your indiscretion.

We are all about trying to make the Territory a safer place. On Thursday we will give police more powers of entry to deal with DVOs. That means if you are on a DVO whereby you …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I appreciate the minister is trying to answer the question, but it was in regard to rehabilitation and behaviour change programs in Correctional facilities and what programs they are.

Madam SPEAKER: If you could get to the point, minister.

Mr MALEY: I want to talk about what we are doing to decrease the number of victims and DVOs to start with. We are giving the police more power to enter a premises. For example, if you have a DVO whereby you can be with your partner except if you are drinking that means you cannot have a drink with your partner because the history is that when you drink you cause domestic violence. After this legislation goes through, the police will be able to go into properties and breath test those people and people on parole.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: The question was about rehab and behaviour change.

Mr MALEY: The Attorney-General is introducing more laws to deal with DV. We are trying to strengthen the law to make sure that victims feel safer and have an opportunity to go about their business.

Onshore Gas Industry

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for MINING and ENERGY

The CLP plan to rebuild our Territory economy highlights the importance of a safe and well-regulated gas industry and the role it can play to grow revenue that funds essential services. We know that petroleum investments represent a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Territorians and will secure a future for generations to come. Can you outline the current and developing benefits of our onshore gas industry to Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I love talking about gas and mining because these two industries will bring the Northern Territory out of the despair the former Labor government put us in. It will enable us to have funds to spend on the health system, education, and police to keep the community safe.

The Member for Karama is a passionate and strong supporter of the gas industry in the Northern Territory because he knows how valuable and important it is.

Petroleum exploration expenditure in the Northern Territory reached $200m in the December 2024 quarter, which was the second-highest quarterly result on record. Petroleum exploration increased 469% from the 2023 figure of $78.8m, reinforcing the Territory's position as a key destination for investment in resource development.

There are some green shoots in the community thanks to the Lia Finocchiaro government giving those shoots the fertiliser and water needed to ensure that investors come to the Territory knowing they will be looked after. Investors know that if they spend their money here there will be a return on that money. In return we will have jobs, certainty and own-source revenue.

More importantly, investment relates to real benefits for the Northern Territory, with jobs in local businesses. Local businesses are the backbone of our community; they are family businesses that have been here for

one or two generations. They will benefit from the petroleum industry. They are the contractors who might supply a bulldozer, the parts to fix that bulldozer or the fuel for it. This is about supporting local businesses.

A significant proportion of expenditure is likely to be onshore, particularly in the Beetaloo Sub-basin and Amadeus. Around the Daly and Alice Springs—in the regions—is where this money can be spent. This is about supporting the whole Northern Territory, not just a select few Territorians as the previous Labor government did.

Unlocking the Beetaloo's resources is vital for the community and the CLP. It is a high priority for me as the minister. We need to show our support for the gas and mining industries because they generate the money that pays for our health system, teachers and police. I feel like a broken record, but that is how important it is. These industries pay to keep us safe and healthy. What more do you want if you have family or friends, and you want to get a job and go to the doctor or hospital when you need to? Revenue earnt from the onshore gas and mining industries pays for that.

Gas Industry – Revenue

K McNAMARA to MINISTER for MINING and ENERGY

This is a topical question. Last week when talking about revenue from the gas industry you said:

Last year we received approximately $8m, which pays for police, education and the health system.

Eight million dollars is 0.09% of the Territory's total revenue. My maths might not be great, but with budgets of $472m for police, $2.2bn for health and $780m for education, the gas industry at $8m cannot possibly be paying for all that. Even with future fracking in the Beetaloo, under the most optimistic scenario the independent fracking inquiry's ACIL Allen modelling showed that royalties would be about $69m per year. That is still less than 1% of the NT's total revenue, and it does not touch the sides of our police and health budgets. INPEX in Darwin has never paid royalties, which means it is taking our gas for free.

Will you finally stop reading from the gas lobby's propaganda book and admit to Territorians that gas does not pay for any of our social services?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Nightcliff is a bit confused because that $8m I spoke about was from one company: Central. I was not talking about all the other companies. Beetaloo gas is not flowing into the system yet because the Labor government failed to support it for eight years; it is eight years behind schedule. If the Labor government truly thought about the best interests of the Northern Territory it would have had the gas flowing as soon as possible. What did Labor do? It got stuck on a moratorium and could not do anything.

Gas and mining industries are massive to the Northern Territory because they provide jobs and own-source revenue. The Member for Nightcliff's own family benefited from the gas and mining industry; it paid for their mortgage, car, fuel and cost of living. That is just one example. All of us have benefited from the gas and mining industry because it employs people to come to the Territory; it increases our benefits and makes our cost of living better—not to mention the gas shortages across the Northern Territory and Australia.

The gas industry is only in its baby steps; it has just started. As it progresses there will be more royalties. Right now we are speaking about supply chains, people spending money here and the jobs it makes. I reinforce that the money this puts into our economy makes us flow. The previous Labor government overspent by about $1bn per year. That means it spent more than it got. That is 1,000 lots of $1m with nothing to show for it.

The gas and mining industry has my and this government's full support because it needs to get going and produce the royalties we need to spend on our health, education and police systems. A solid onshore mining and gas industry pays the bills. What else pays the bills? Not the government; we spend money, that is for sure. We have a public service, which we pay for. That is money generated from the gas and mining industry. It might be in the Northern Territory or across Australia, but we support the gas industry. We get federal money that comes from WA's mining and gas industries. It is important to emphasise that we support the gas and mining industry and say a big thank you.

Corrections – Update

Mr PATEL to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS

Residents in my community have made it clear that community safety was their number one priority. A central plank of the CLP's election campaign was to reduce crime in the Northern Territory. That includes action to strengthen bail laws, provide better police powers and strengthen Corrections through more prison facilities. Can you update the Assembly on actions the CLP government has taken to strengthen Corrections in the NT since being elected eight months ago?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Casuarina understands how important community safety is. He understands how important it is for family members to be able to go shopping and walk down the mall without being attacked. It is important for business owners to arrive in the morning without seeing that their business has been broken into and the stock is damaged.

It is not just the inconvenience of not being able to trade that day; it is about cleaning up and the work health and safety of your staff. Imagine if you are working at a service station, doing your bit and selling fuel. Someone comes in with an edged weapon and waves it around, threatening you, stealing and then leaving. In many cases there is an assault, which happens a lot in the member's electorate. It is important to get community safety up and running.

From the first weeks in government we listened to Corrections staff and announced an infrastructure plan to rapidly increase capacity. We knew that the Labor government had failed. We commenced work immediately to futureproof our Corrections system while designing new prison infrastructure, and we finished and opened builds that had been left with delays and millions of dollars in cost blowouts by the previous government. For example, the youth justice facility at Holtze was two years late and $70m over budget and the Tennant Creek bail facility was delayed by three years.

Those opposite talk about rehabilitation; the Tennant Creek bail facility is where a young offender can be safe with wraparound services to rehabilitate them instead of just sticking them in a prison. This Labor government failed to deliver for three years. One facility was three years late, not to mention the O block in Alice Springs, which was a $12m budget and almost two years late. The biggest shame of all was the use of the operational watch houses for prisons.

The police are trying to protect and look after us, but what did the Labor government do? It failed to invest because, as the Treasurer pointed out, its program was so much more than its cash, it just stuck people into watch houses where there were no training, rehabilitation or windows, and there was barely a bed. Labor's solution to rehabilitation and training was to stick them in a watch house and forget them. Shame!

Unlike the Labor government we have a plan. We started up the industry again and passed legislation to build a more flexible, responsible workforce.

I give a big shout-out to the Corrections officers; they do a great job. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for the work they do under immense pressure with a lot of challenges forced upon them by the previous Labor government.

Incarceration Rate

J DAVIS to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS

Shamefully, the Northern Territory's incarceration rate of 1,238 per 100,000 people is the second-highest in the world, only behind El Salvador. According to the Productivity Commission we have the highest recidivism rate in the country, with six out of 10 prisoners returning to jail within two years. You say that your government is targeting the root causes of crime. When prior incarceration is a clear contributor of crime, how can you possibly justify that your government's approach of locking up more and more people is not directly fuelling higher crime rates and making our communities less safe?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, education is the key to a strong community. The Labor government failed to get kids to school. The education rate was down to 30%, I think, and even lower because we found out that Labor fudged

the figures a little by dropping off numbers so that we did not know the real truth of how many kids go to school. We know it was particularly low …

J DAVIS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 100; I know that it is early in the piece, but I did not ask about education …

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Johnston, there is plenty of time for the minister to answer the question.

Mr MALEY: I am trying to set the scene for why people go to prison. It is the root cause because the Labor government failed to educate children. The Labor government said many times that this is generational and that it would take generational change. I remind members that the Labor government was in office in the NT for about 19 of the last 22 or 23 years. That means a 19-year-old was not even born when Labor came to power. Any intergenerational change was under its watch.

Did it get better or worse? Somebody remind me. It has become significantly worse. Crime rates have gone through the roof with an 82% increase in domestic violence. Labor government failed an entire generation.

What are we doing about it? We are here to fix it and make sure there will be a consequence for crime. As I said before, if people commit a crime in the Northern Territory we will find a bed for them. We will make sure that they go to school, especially the youths.

I have been to the youth detention centres, and the biggest thing I see is that young offenders are going to school every day and services are wrapped around them to help make them better people. We want young offenders not just to go into the big house—the big jail—we want them to come out better people by going to school. Education is a key part of this rehabilitation. Education is super important because we want and need to break the cycle.

It goes back to the mining and gas industry and getting a job. When they come out with an education and cannot find a job, what happens then? They might commit a crime. If we can get people employed through the gas and mining industry—there you go. It does not have to be directly employed; it can be indirectly. They could be employed as a grease monkey for the bloke who owns the bulldozer that goes into the mine. I have done that; I have been a grease monkey on a bulldozer. I know what it is like; it is hot, dirty and dangerous.

It is about making sure we have a strong economy and making sure young offenders go to school to get a better education.

Humpty Dumpty Foundation

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for HEALTH

I understand that just yesterday you and the Chief Minister met with Mr Paul Francis OAM, founder and board Chair, as well as patron Ms Johanna Griggs, of the Humpty Dumpty Foundation. The foundation does incredible work through charitable donations that promote and benefit the Northern Territory. As Mr Paul Francis stated, we need that more than ever in the Northern Territory.

In 2024 the Great Humpty Ball was held at Mindil Beach Casino in the amazing suburb of Fannie Bay, my electorate, and raised a record-breaking $1.2m. We are hoping that this year it can break that record. The foundation provided much-needed life-saving equipment and healthcare initiatives for sick babies and children.

Can you update the Assembly on some of the great work of the Humpty Dumpty Foundation?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we know how much of a strong advocate the Member for Fannie Bay is for her electorate. The Humpty Dumpty Foundation is an amazing story. As the Member for Fannie Bay said, the Chief Minister and I met with Paul Francis and Johanna Griggs yesterday to talk about the fantastic work they are doing, raising funds to provide better health equipment in hospitals and health clinics in the Northern Territory. Their passion and enthusiasm for the work is inspirational, and the foundation's contribution to the NT is incredible.

Since 2009 the Humpty Dumpty Foundation has been a strong supporter of the NT community, donating 868 items of medical equipment worth over $9m to hospitals and clinics throughout the Northern Territory. As of November 2024 the Humpty Dumpty Foundation supported hospitals and clinics.

As the Member for Fannie Bay said, the Great Humpty Ball raised a record $1.2m in 2024. We are all looking forward to this year's ball. It may be hard to top that, but we hope to raise even more money for health services in the Northern Territory to provide children with medical equipment in hospitals and clinics across the Northern Territory.

The Humpty Dumpty Foundation's support is life changing. Some years ago, to better the survival rate of critically unwell babies, the foundation donated a world-class transport incubator valued at close to $300,000 to Royal Darwin Hospital's neonatal transport service, to facilitate the swift transport of critically unwell babies who need life-saving surgery interstate. The transport incubator saves precious hours and ensures much better outcomes for vulnerable infants. It has now saved more than 60 young Territorians' lives.

Recently equipment donations included an R Series defibrillator for the Royal Darwin Hospital's neonatal intensive care unit; five Infinity M540 monitor systems for Royal Darwin Hospital's special care nursery; and 32 HemoCue Hb 801 analysers to Alice Springs Hospital, Miwatj, Aboriginal Health, Red Lily Health, Royal Darwin Hospital and Tennant Creek Hospital to prevent and control anaemia.

The Northern Territory Government is extremely supportive of and grateful for the work of the Humpty Dumpty Foundation in the Northern Territory.

Domestic Violence Service Funding

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for HEALTH on behalf of MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The latest crime statistics reveal that domestic violence offending has risen more than 27% year on year, from 1,100 incidents in December 2023 and January 2024 to 1,399 in December 2024 and January 2025. One incident is one too many. Given this concerning escalation, can you explain the delay in additional domestic violence funding reaching our frontline services and outline which, if any, services or programs have received increased funding from the CLP government?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, there has been only one delay in funding hitting frontline services in the Northern Territory; that is Labor. Over the last eight years there were plenty of opportunities for Labor to start delivering and funding services in the Northern Territory. What have we seen instead? There was an increase in crime across the board. I do not know how many times I have spoken about the crime statistics. There has been an 82% increase in domestic, family and sexual violence incidents. I have spoken about my electorate, Katherine, Alice Springs and Palmerston where domestic, family and sexual violence increased substantially over the last eight years.

Our funding is flowing out as we speak, but for eight years under Labor all we saw was chaos and dysfunction in managing domestic, family and sexual violence. Five years ago Labor promised $450,000 for a children, family and domestic violence specialist hub in Tennant Creek, and not one shovel hit the ground.

It took Labor three to four years to put in place a position that would help coordinate service delivery for domestic, family and sexual violence in Tennant Creek alone. Year after year Labor promised to put in place a coordinator but failed to do so. That was the interest Labor showed during eight years of government in the Northern Territory.

We are facing a situation with the highest rates of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia because Labor failed to tackle this head on, taking a soft approach in dealing with domestic, family and sexual violence, house break-ins and alcohol-related assaults. Labor failed to take any action …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The minister said that the money is rolling out. We are just asking which services and programs are receiving that.

Madam SPEAKER: The minister has the call.

Mr EDGINGTON: We have extended all the domestic violence funding to our frontline services in the Northern Territory. We have committed $36m per year, every year. Compare that with what Labor did …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Mr EDGINGTON: All we saw was escalating crime under Labor. We are committing …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: The minister is being relevant. If your point of order is about relevance, Member for Daly, you can sit down. He has been answering the question.

Mr YOUNG: He said 'extended'. It was additional funding to those services. What additional funding to those services?

Mr EDGINGTON: I reiterate—$36m every year under the CLP government. That is what Labor failed to do over eight years. We have seen women killed and bashed, and serious offences were committed under the Labor government year-in and year-out …

Mr Young: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: You do not have a point of order if it is about relevance.

Mr EDGINGTON: I repeat that because it sounds like Labor does not want to hear the answers. It is $36m year-in and year-out under the CLP government to strengthen our frontline services across the board.

Driver Primary School

Mr HOWE to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

Parents at Driver Primary School have long been concerned about the state of the kiss-and-go facilities outside the school. Prior to the election this was raised with me as a major safety issue. The Labor Party was in office for eight years; during that time it did nothing to improve the situation. It failed to deliver.

Now, entering our eighth month since taking office, we are already seeing action on this issue. I was delighted to join the minister at Driver Primary School recently to announce that the CLP government will deliver upgrades to the kiss-and-go area. Could you update the Assembly on this important initiative for the people of Drysdale?

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: The Minister for Education and Training will be heard in silence too.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Drysdale is committed to the people of his electorate and always fights for them.

This upgrade was for Driver Primary School. The $1.5m upgrade to the drivers' kiss-and-go zone shows the stark contrast between a CLP government and the Labor Party, which is that you get action, certainty and security. That is what we do on this side of the Chamber. Whether it is action to improve student safety and address traffic congestion at Driver Primary School, action on crime or action for the economy, that is what people get from our side of the House; not eight years of broken promises, inaction and failure to deliver projects that are important to Territorians.

This has been a significant safety issue at Driver Primary School and was described by some parents as a disaster waiting to happen. With 450 students at the school these important upgrades will help alleviate congestion during drop-off and pick-up periods, providing enhanced safety, convenience and accessibility for families, staff, visitors to the school and nearby residents. Hector the Cat attended the school and showed correct road safety to the children.

These upgrades will benefit the road users who use this arterial route to get to Palmerston or the city or to go south along the Stuart Highway. Community consultation has begun on the concept design. The design tender is expected to be awarded soon, with construction expected to be completed by quarter one 2026.

I thank the member for his strong advocacy on this and many other issues. I look forward to working with him to continue to deliver action, certainty and security. I will update the Assembly on the progress in the future.

Casuarina Youth Hub

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for YOUTH, SENIORS and EQUALITY

You have been in government for over six months with no progress on the Casuarina youth hub, a crucial facility that will give young people in Darwin's northern suburbs a safe place with essential support services. When will you build this much-needed facility, and what is the hold-up?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, there were issues with the previous Labor government's plans. There were concerns from people living in Casuarina …

Ms Uibo: I heard that it was mostly Palmerston people putting in submissions.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, please stop interjecting.

Mr CHARLS: No doubt they are referring to a few different things, but we had an election and my colleague the Member for Casuarina—the previous Member for Casuarina was from the Labor Party and did not listen to Casuarina residents. That is the reason the current Member for Casuarina is sitting in this Chamber. He often heard from the residents that they were not interested in having a youth hub. I asked the department to further consult; once the proposal is ready it will be submitted for further consultation.

It will be in the northern suburbs, but at this stage I am unable to say where it will be. It could be in Casuarina or anywhere in the northern suburbs, but we will know more in the next few weeks to a month. Once the decision is made there will be consultation with people in the area. We will ask for their ideas as to how we incorporate it to ensure the community is safe. We do not want to bring problems from Casuarina to a youth space where young people are spending their time after school, during school breaks and weekends.

I recently visited the youth centre operated from Sanderson Middle School, which is in my electorate. The Member for Karama and his residents participate in that area as well. So far there have been no issues. After-school hours children are accessing that space during the weekends and in school holidays. We do not want it to be a place like Casuarina, near a shopping centre where we know from the statistics that high numbers of youth crime takes place. It will not be a facility of diversion for young offenders to come and trash the place; it will be a place for young people with a focus and purpose for education and a life going forward. We need to support them through this program. Anglicare is providing wonderful support for these young children through its program at Sanderson Middle School.

Water Supply – Leanyer

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Last year the residents of Leanyer were subjected to multiple unplanned water outages. As you can appreciate, a sudden interruption to water can throw our daily routines into chaos. When the water supply is cut even the simplest tasks such as cooking, cleaning and bathing become a struggle. Can you provide an update on what work you have done with Power and Water Corporation to improve the water supply in Leanyer?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, all of us can understand that a sudden water interruption is more than just inconvenience; it impacts on individuals, families and day-to-day business.

Ensuring the issue is recognised and that proactive measures are taken to prevent future interruptions is important to me and to Power and Water. Following your recent inquiry I asked Power and Water for an update on actions being taken in Leanyer.

Between 1 July 2024 and 17 March 2025 there were nine mains water breaks impacting multiple Leanyer residents, with four occurring in January this year. On 16 January 2025 emergency works replaced a full length of DN 100 asbestos cement pipe with the DN 100 PVC-M pipe to Coucal Court. The team worked throughout the night, completing six metres of piping by 2.30 the next morning. Power and Water advised that the water reticulation and service pipes are fail-and-repair assets, which means that reactive repairs or replacement happens only when they break or leak.

A mains replacement program operates throughout the Northern Territory. Suburbs are assessed and prioritised within the program based on several factors, such as the number of breaks in critical asset assessment. When multiple failures occur within a short period—three times within one year in the same section of reticulation pipe—Power and Water conducts investigations to determine the underlying cause, and replacement is considered.

Power and Water has identified key replacement works in Leanyer. Stage 1 of AC main replacement at Leanyer on Edgeview Court and Ridgehaven Circuit began on 1 March 2025, with replacement works expected to be completed by 1 May. The next stage of replacement works is planned for Parkside Crescent and Saddle Court in Leanyer in the next financial period.

Power and Water will continue to undertake assessments of the mains throughout Leanyer and will take action if replacement is necessary.

I thank all the staff at Power and Water for the incredible work they do. They get called out at all hours of the day and night to fix broken water pipes. We will continue to work directly with Power and Water to make sure water leaks are fixed.

We will not be promising $65m for underground power that simply cannot be delivered except in one street. We know that what Labor promised would cost $500m to deliver and, of course, that was unfunded.

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

PETROLEUM, PLANNING AND WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 11

Continued from earlier this day.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I continue my contribution from before lunch.

The push of this amendment to the Act is further proof that the CLP government has no interest in listening to those who have concerns or raised ideas about the Bill. The CLP government continues to ignore the voices of Territorians regarding these important matters.

Last week with the passing of the Territory Coordinator Bill, amendments put forward by our opposition and the crossbench were not even looked at. The government has not feigned any interest to make Bills and legislation stronger when it comes to being constructive. That is the reason the debate on the Territory Coordinator Bill continued late on Tuesday night into the early hours of Wednesday morning. It was the effort of the Labor opposition and the crossbench raising concerns of Territorians, organisations, stakeholders, industry leaders, business leaders and community members to try to ensure that if the Bill went forward and passed—which it did—it was in its best form. We do not believe that it was, which is the reason the opposition did not support the Bill. We worked to provide opportunities to be constructive, and again the CLP government chose to ignore the voices of Territorians, which we put forward. That is a huge shame.

We saw the clear picture painted by the CLP government that no matter what you do in opposition or as a crossbench member, your voice and constructive ways forward will not be listened to whatsoever. We expect to see that for the next four years under the leadership of the CLP, whose members will not be accountable to Territorians. They will not be transparent, and they simply do not want any scrutiny applied to them. The CLP government will not listen, and recommendations put forward by the opposition or crossbench will be ignored. These are not thoughts that have just popped up; it is the voice of Territorians being constructive and going through the parliamentary process in the people's House. The process is being obliterated because the CLP is too arrogant to think about including the voices of Territorians in these changes.

I make clear to Territorians that even though the CLP will not listen to you our Territory Labor opposition will continue to do its job with due diligence over the next few years to ensure that your voices are represented in this House. I make this pledge on behalf of our team to make sure Territorians do not feel like they are voiceless and ignored by the CLP government.

The CLP has had the habit of rubbishing Labor for the last eight years and giving history lessons, but it fails to acknowledge the good work the Labor government did. The CLP renamed and are trying to rebadge the things that worked well. Its members do not want to use any type of grace or humility to dignify the important

work they are now building on, just because it was successful under the former Labor government. That shows how small they are in thinking about the good things for the benefit of all; they do not have the grace and humility to recognise, 'Yes, that happened under Labor; it was good, and we will continue to do it.' We will continue to call it out because they want to try to rewrite history and reinvent themselves, but they will continue in this pattern of bad governance for the next few years. We have an important job as the opposition to call it out and make sure Territorians can see the CLP government for what it is.

It is not simply the case when you are in government that you get voted in, then ignore Territorians for the next four years. There needs to be a maturity in government to show that its listening ears are on and that action is reflective of listening and learning. The CLP members pretend that they know the answers. They ignore experts, advice, reports and recommendations. They try to recreate this history, which we know is a bad habit of the CLP.

This Bill denies Territorians the opportunity to challenge the assumptions that the government has made, to suggest improvements in the process of decision-making and to highlight any unintended consequences that the government has not listened to or bothered to do its homework and due diligence to find out about. All the things that enhance decision-making and ensure that decisions for Territorians are made in their best interests are being obliterated by the very government that claims to listen to Territorians.

When it comes to economic growth it is important to show the opportunities and talk positively about the Territory, but it should not come at the sacrifice of the social, cultural and economic aspects. The proposed removal of the third-party merits review will lead to poorer social and economic outcomes for the Territory because it will tip the scale towards unchecked development in our environment, impact our culture and communities and put our resources at risk if things are not done in the proper manner with the correct regulations and processes.

This government continues to deny the wishes of Territorians through these amendments. As with the Territory Coordinator, these amendments do not put environmental protections and resources at the forefront of thinking. They are not best-practice processes that will reassure Territorians about proposals.

Resource protections for the future are needed, but I feel as though I am repeating myself. The CLP government will not listen to these concerns, and that will cause a great imbalance in our economic progress. The government will not give Territorians the comfort and reassurance that things are being done in the proper manner. When people feel as though things are not being done properly they will not have a voice to air those concerns through a safeguarded process.

The CLP government has removed safety protections in the code of practice for the petroleum industry, including the requirements for fracking companies to report hazardous leaks to landowners, keep records of chemicals they are holding onsite and keep safety risks to the public and workers as low as reasonably practicable.

I did not hear this from an activist or a greenie; I heard it from an industry leader who wants to be a responsible corporate citizen and have good social licence. Some of the companies that operate in the Territory do not want to look like they are jumping over safeguards or cutting corners. They want to be responsible corporate citizens. What we are seeing from the CLP government is a one-size-fits-all approach; there is a green light for everything—go, go, go.

Industry leaders met with the Territory Labor opposition and raised these concerns. This is not coming from the activists whom the Deputy Chief Minister apparently does not welcome here. These are industry leaders who say that they want to do things correctly and ensure they have good social licence with the Territory community. They want to be a part of the Territory and see economic growth balanced with Territorians' expectations of environmental protections, safeguards and the mechanisms to raise those issues.

I do not know whether the CLP met with the same industry leaders. I am talking about big companies that spend millions of dollars to grow the Territory's economy. If the government is not listening to the industry leaders who raised this with the Territory Labor opposition, it obviously is not listening to anyone. The government is not listening to Territorians or industry leaders, and it certainly is not listening to anyone who wants to talk about protecting the environment.

It is phenomenal to think that the CLP government, in just seven months, has not started to implement what it said it would during the Territory election to listen to and act in the best interests of Territorians when it comes to important legislation.

We have also seen the removal of safety protections, along with the removal of funding for unions and environmental planning community groups, scrapping the Territory's large emitters and gas emissions policies, practically disregarding the regulation of greenhouse emissions. This is not a Territory thing; this affects the planet.

The CLP showed no regard or respect for the Northern Territory water advisory committees and their members, stakeholders or communities by not consulting with them when the Mataranka and Western Davenport Water Allocation Plans—the work the Member for Braitling has done. He should hang his head in shame for taking away those water advisory committees and disregarding the industries, businesses and the people who care about, live in and operate in those regions. The Member for Braitling took that out quietly with a form that went through the process of removing them—shameful—before Christmas at the end of last year.

The policies and legislation for economic development put in place by the former Labor government were focused on ensuring there were important protections to protect natural resources and our environment and meet community expectations. When we were in government we made sure that Territorians knew they had the right to challenge government because we believe that good governance is listening to and addressing concerns. We are not seeing that from the CLP government, and the Member for Braitling's leadership as a minister.

We believe that Territorians have a right to be heard on important issues that affect them. We continue to see the government slide on a slippery slope away from public scrutiny, public voice, consultation and feedback because it believes it has a so-called mandate. As I said before lunch, 48% of the Territory's population voted for the CLP as their number one choice.

Just remember that when the CLP is talking about having all sorts of licence to do whatever it wants—no. When you are in government you should welcome challenges, hard conversations and constructive feedback. You should work through that with due diligence and make sure that Territorians know you are genuine in that process.

All we have seen over the last seven months of the CLP government is that it pretends to do things in the best interest of Territorians when, in fact, it does not want to know about any concerns, questions, challenges, suggestions or ideas voicing what is important for Territorians in legislation, regulation, programs and policies—the lot. That is not good governance; it is not a democratic system.

That is why our Territory Labor opposition will not support this legislation. It is another slap in the face to Territorians with how this CLP government does not care about the concerns, voices or any opposing or constructive views. The CLP government will continue to silence Territory voices and will not collaborate or look at what is best to make sure that legislation is in the best interest of Territorians.

The processes that Territorians want and expect their government to adhere to and enforce on industry, businesses, community members, pastoralists and traditional owners regarding development on country is that Territory environment, culture and resources are worth fighting for.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, the Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill is also known as the merits review Bill. As far as I understand it, this Bill does one thing across a few laws; it takes away the ability of third parties to appeal to the NT Civil and Administrative Tribunal in regard to decisions made to:

- the *Water Act 1992*—for example, to grant a water extraction licence or a permit to interfere with a waterway

- the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016—for example, for the minister's position to approve an environment management plan for fracking

- the *Planning Act 1999*—for example, for some types of development decisions.

This Bill will cut all third parties out of a merits review process through the tribunal. Landowners, land councils, native title holders, members of the public, environment groups and other third parties will no longer be able to appeal decisions through the administrative tribunal. Instead, these people will have to spend considerable time and money appealing decisions through the Supreme Court. For marginalised groups like Aboriginal landowners this may prove too expensive.

This clearly affects my electorate. At times businesses have sought water allocations, planning approvals and the like. The people of my electorate want an easy process for review if we do not agree with a decision made by the water controller, the minister or other decision-making bodies.

In other places in the NT massive amounts of water have been awarded to businesses. These decisions must be overseen by the people who have a say for the water and land. There must be consultation with and guidance from landowners.

Decisions by this government to increase water allocations in Mataranka and Western Davenport angered the land councils, which outlined that there was no consultation prior to the decisions being made. When no genuine consultation happens it is even more important that there are pathways for people to appeal decisions. The Mataranka plan poses a doubling of the current extraction from the ancient aquifer connected to the Roper River system, including the springs at Mataranka. The government has made billions of litres of water available to businesses for free, but the actual cost could be enormous.

The government claims that this Bill will speed up business proposals. That may be true in some cases, but in other cases it may significantly slow down things. If the only point of appeal is through the Supreme Court, which is already under-resourced, we may see considerable wait times for businesses when appeals have to go through the courts instead of the administrative tribunal.

As I said last week, we know what a land and water grab looks like. This is part of it. This Bill shows that the government wants to clear people out of a process that provides checks and balances and just builds big businesses right on top of us.

As a traditional landowner, a custodian, my responsibility has been handed down through the ancestors to protect country. I do not have a choice in this role; I must do it because I am part of the land, and it is my kin. Yolngu and Aboriginal people know that damage to the land will have repercussions, which is why we will fight daily for the land, and we will not let go of an injustice. If we do that we may as well die, because we will have lost our purpose.

Nurrdalinji Aboriginal Corporation speaks for the country in the Beetaloo basin and has fought for many years, because that is its responsibility. The sacred underwater aquifers of the Beetaloo basin travel to other places. The songlines tell the story of connection to our country, and we know that poisoning these aquifers will have widespread problems, spiritual and environmental. You think through planning and research, but we know because our knowledge has been handed down for thousands of years through our ancestors who tell the stories of the ancestral creators of the water and the land.

About 10 years ago the Telstra fibre was being laid out in north-east Arnhem Land. Near Donydji, where the Mitchell Ranges are, there is a hot spring created by the ancestral spirits who still travel in the underwater aquifers between the springs. The elders spoke to Telstra to say that it could not lay the fibre on this pathway because of the sacred waterholes and the channels that run beneath the ground between the waterholes. I know; I have been educated by our elders, and their elders told them, and their elders told them, and so on.

However, Telstra did not listen and said, ‘It does not matter’. Telstra dug the hole anyway, with a bobcat. The Telstra workers were told not to dig too deeply, but they dug deeply. Sometime later after the Wet Season we noticed there was a storm around that area, and the spirits came out. People went to that place and saw that two holes had opened up where the water was coming up from the ground, exactly where the Telstra fibre ran.

This is why we must be included. Our Indigenous people of that particular land must be included in the consultation. We must have a pathway to appeal because we know the country. We have the stories, and we have the responsibility to protect the land.

Although by itself this Bill does not do the most damage to our people, it is part of a cumulative effect by this government to further disempower Aboriginal people. I am greatly concerned by this trend in the government. It seems that there is a master plan behind the scenes. Since being elected, the government has worked to lock up Aboriginal people in jails without addressing the underlying issues and providing rehabilitation. In Bills like this the government is cutting Aboriginal people out of our rightful decision-making places.

I am not sure whether members in the Chamber can see what I see. This is a worrying concern. This is talking about land where we live and which we own. We can talk together. At least you can come and sit down and talk—can’t you? All we are saying is to come and sit down and let us discuss this. Let us run a proper consultation so that our sacred sites and places of significance will not be damaged.

What if Larrakia people came and said, ‘Can you move this building?’ or ‘We will move this because this is our birthplace. This was once a birthplace for the Larrakia people.’ How would you feel? It is exactly the same the other way round.

Surely, there has to be understanding. This is the government that runs the Territory, and this is what people are seeing. Surely we have to start working together. We have called on government after government, and nothing happens.

In regard to that story I told about the fibre line going through Donydji, I have shots on video when I saw the big rain cloud, and the storm was smashing everything in one circle. It is here; I can show you. I will post it on Facebook.

The land is alive; the land has spirit; and the land deserves to be looked after. We are part of it. I do not know about you, the government people, but we Yolngu are part of the land. How do you find the spirit in a goanna? You have on different spectacles maybe, but that is the spirit of me. The water that flows along the bay here has the spiritual connection with the Larrakia people, and we sing about them and tell a story.

I am sure there are other places where we can do safety checks. Check with the people, and we will work on things for the better. Right now, it is damaging our lives. Come on, CLP, you can change that. Listen—I speak the same English as you people do. What is so different about my language or the English that I speak that it does not get through or is not understood? All we ask is for you to come. Let us work together. Let us sit down together.

This is big trouble when we are being ignored. I am not one of a party. I am from the land and the people, and I carry their message that there is something wrong. We are being ignored. We need to be understood. It is like going to Sydney. The Sydney Harbour Bridge has a channel underneath the water where people go, where there are songlines and stories of the land. Our spiritual beings go from one water channel to the other.

Once we said to our elder—I might put it up on Facebook later—the mining companies came to do the Donydji drilling on the Mitchell Ranges. The people fought slowly and quietly and they won. They say, ‘When you look around, every tree has a name. Every hill has a name. Every rock has a name.’ I do not know where that pipeline would have gone through, but there are sacred sites in between.

It is like the cities of Sydney, Melbourne and New York. I have been to New York. I was driving around, and I saw underground trains or trams going through across to the other side. There are aeroplanes flying. Guess what? We have clouds flying up there if you want to try to take the pipeline over the top, but there is no empty land. Labor said that it is Boundless Possible. What was it talking about? There are no buildings like this.

Please. I am the only one stupid enough to say ‘please’ here in this Chamber. Please come to the people. Listen to the Nungalinya people and Larrakia people; listen to us out there. Let us work on these things so that we can do it safely and live together towards creating pathways, money, wealth and do the same thing. At least we can say that, can’t we? At least we can do that in front of our community out there.

This is the government, the Chamber, the parliament. It is not arguing with one another and the people out there watching. Come on, it is time we all stood up together and talked together.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I start by thanking the Member for Mulka for reminding us of why we are here and that we can work together for a better Northern Territory for everyone.

I oppose the Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill. The government talks about third-party merits reviews like they are trivial, inconsequential and meaningless when it knows that is not true. Merits reviews are essential to good governance. The Deputy Chief Minister would have us believe that they can be replaced by judicial review, but that is untrue. Judicial reviews are hard to access, expensive, and they look at a different thing: the lawfulness of the decision-making process and not whether the decision, considering all the available information, is the right decision of good merit.

In this Chamber we have heard accusations of hysteria and of people with no stake in a project using merits reviews to deliberately sabotage the Territory’s economy. That is also misleading. Merits reviews are not tools of sabotage; they are vital tools of democracy. It is simply not the case that any random third party, without any stake or expertise, can request a merits review. It is not as though me and my dog, Billy, can request a merits review into a planning decision in Katherine or a water licence in Nhulunbuy.

The third party must demonstrate they have standing to bring the complaint; it is not open to just anyone. They must show that they have a legal interest in the matter or are an expert organisation, and they must challenge the decision in the courts. There are essential checks and balances. A third party can be an ordinary person, an organisation, neighbour, individual constituent, community group, landholder, land council or a member of the public who made submissions on a proposal.

I thank the Member for Drysdale for his thoughtful speech, but I am curious as to how he can say that the law must not create anxiety while supporting yet another Bill that we know will undoubtedly create much anxiety for many people whose voices will be silenced and whose rights will be stripped away, as we just heard from the Member for Mulka.

I agree with the Member for Drysdale that economic development and environmental protection should not be mutually exclusive. The scrutiny committee, of which the Member for Drysdale is a member, recommended to include a clear definition of economic development in the Territory Coordinator Bill, yet the government rejected this recommendation.

The ongoing undermining of environmental protections is not economic development with environmental responsibility; it is economic development at the cost of our environment.

I am deeply concerned about the ongoing attacks in this Chamber against those who stand up for the environment. The environment has no voice of its own. What does the CLP think these activists want? The CLP paints environmental activists as though they are seeking to destroy society, but they are simply trying to protect our world for all of us. Unlike private industry they are not motivated by profit; unlike politicians they are not trying to get re-elected. Activists are everyday people—doctors, teachers, tradies, parents, grandparents—standing up for what they believe is right. They are not trying to get rich or to get power. They are standing up for what they know is important. They may be the lone voice in a room of 10, as the Member for Drysdale suggests, but when 10 people are in a room and one person is screaming does that not signal that something is wrong, that someone might be hurt, in danger or in distress? Why would we ignore that cry?

Not all of us live the same lives; not all of us live next to a controversial project or are subject-matter experts, which is why we rely on that one voice: the person who is warning us of danger. We must listen to that voice, not silence it.

Merits reviews are particularly crucial when the government is making sweeping changes to development laws and regulations across the Territory through Bills like the Territory Coordinator Bill. When projects that once would have never been approved are now fast-tracked, when laws that were designed to protect us are being exempted, merits reviews have become even more necessary.

When the government frequently asserts that the Territory is open for business, says that it loves the gas industry and passes legislation which places these industries above the law, it is important to remember that a legal decision is not necessarily a good decision. Bad decisions, decisions that harm a community's health and our environment, can still be perfectly legal. When the government claims that judicial reviews can replace merits reviews, it misses this critical point. Bad decisions can be legal decisions.

We know that our justice system is in crisis; the courts do not need the additional burden of handling civil complaints that should be addressed through merits reviews at NTCAT.

As a member of this Chamber I have seen firsthand how few opportunities ordinary people have to contribute to the laws we create. The decisions made by ministers in this Chamber are not consulted on widely. Our democracy is already deficient in this regard. Why would we remove an opportunity for the public to correct mistakes made by government? Despite the lack of consultation, at the end of the day the government is still accountable to the people. This is how democracy works. This government seems to think it can legislate away that accountability, but it cannot. The public voted in this government, and the public can vote it out.

We are all here as representatives of our community, and our community must have the right to say that was the wrong decision and request for it be reviewed. The merits review is part of that process; it is the final independent check on controversial decisions in our democracy. To remove this form of accountability is not minor or trivial. It will not affect the small minority; it will affect all of us.

Merits reviews are built into the *Water*, *Planning* and *Petroleum Acts* as safeguards to ensure that all evidence is considered before finalising far-reaching decisions. They also act as proactive safeguards against collusion and against corruption.

Let me give you an example. A student taking a test will do their best and follow the rules if they know the test will be graded and reviewed. Decision-makers make better choices when they know their decisions can be reviewed. Without this critical oversight the government is removing an important check on its power. This is not just about protecting the environment or protecting the community; it is about ensuring that fair and thoughtful decisions are made across the Territory.

Other places in Australia like New South Wales, where merits reviews have been available to the community for decades, have refined, elaborated and applied crucial concepts in environmental law like public interest and intergenerational equity. The merits review process does not just benefit the people bringing a particular case; it benefits the wider community by establishing these important and useful precedents by deterring bad decision-making and by making our community safer, better represented and more prosperous into the future.

For the benefit of the Chamber I will explain what kind of decisions we are talking about, who is making them and who is affected by them. Some of these we heard about today. Under the *Planning Act* decisions are made by the Development Consent Authority. This authority governs every planning decision from your neighbour's carport to the Defence Housing Australia development at Lee Point.

The *Planning Act* governs the orderly use and development of land. For anyone in the Chamber who is not familiar with it, I strongly recommend you read the purpose of this Act. It ensures that fair decisions are made that are accessible to the community. With the merits review Bill neighbours will lose access to fair, open decision-making and accountability, and the broader community will suffer as a result.

Planning impacts everything from our footpaths to hospitals and everything in between. The *Planning Act* asserts that fair decisions must be clear and accessible, and neighbours or people who are negatively impacted by developments can demand accountability. However, when this Bill is passed neighbours will lose access to fair and open decisions about development permits and unlawful development, as will the broader community.

Our favourite fishing spots, bike paths and urban bushwalks rely on the *Planning Act* for preservation. The Territory is large, and the Territory government struggles to effectively regulate our planning environment, but as we have heard from many people in the Chamber, Territorians—including all of us—know and love this place, and we have all said that we will always care for it.

People continue to make great sacrifices to advocate for the areas that matter most. The community essentially offers the Territory government a free service when it engages with planning decisions. It helps make these decisions better, and the tool to facilitate this engagement is third-party merits reviews.

Take Lee Point as an example, which is an important area for many people in my electorate. It is loved by thousands; it is of immense significance to Larrakia and the home to trees that are hundreds of years old. In May 2024 Defence Housing Australia bulldozed Lee Point, in breach of its development permit. Despite a ruling that the destruction was unlawful no further action was taken. Using the current merits review process the Friends of Lee Point applied for a review to save these 400-year-old trees. If this Bill passes that opportunity will be lost in the future.

Another example we heard about is that in 2022, under the *Water Act*, a 10-billion-litre-per-year water licence was granted to a farm at Larrimah. The merits review panel overturned that licence after evidence emerged that it could cause the Mataranka Springs, and thus the Roper River, to stop flowing. Without merits reviews, such protections for our rivers and communities will be lost.

To be clear, the Bill we are voting on will make it impossible for merits reviews to stop a project like the Larrimah one from running our rivers dry in the future. That is what we are voting on today. A cotton and interstate wine grower has now reapplied for this same water licence. Should it be granted, should this Bill pass today, the people of Larrimah and Mataranka, who are already disturbed by the changes they are seeing in their river, will have no right of appeal.

There is a saying that water flows to power. What we are seeing in the eastern states is that it flows to power until it does not flow at all. We get only one chance at water, and there are many expert opinions from independent hydrologists who state that the Northern Territory is a 'slow-moving train wreck when it comes to water security' and 'we are about where the Murray–Darling was 30 years ago'. They also warn that changes in our systems that feed the Daly, Victoria, Roper and McArthur Rivers may happen much more quickly than we expect due to the caustic limestone structures of our aquifers.

Territory rivers flow only during the Dry Season because of the springs that feed them. Take too much water from aquifers and we lose our river flows, fishing, food supplies from remote communities and world-renowned biodiversity. That is what we are risking with this vote today.

A judge of water adjudication in the USA, Mr John Thorson, wrote:

> *Water links us to our neighbor in a way more profound and complex than any other.*

The removal of merits reviews from the *Water Act* effectively removes this ability for neighbours or downstream water users to challenge decisions about upstream water use or potential contamination risk—decisions like the issuing of massive water licences, as in Larrimah; the building of massive, billion-litre dams along our rivers and subsequent pumping of water from our rivers to fill those dams; the issuing of wastewater licences where highly toxic water may be left standing for years on end; and the ability of the industry to reinject fracking wastewater beneath our aquifers, against all the Pepper inquiry recommendations.

Further, many of these legislative protections in the *Petroleum Act* and the *Water Act* came about because of the recommendations of the scientific inquiry into fracking, the Pepper inquiry. Recommendation 14.24 of that report is creating open standing; that is, ordinary people and organisations can apply for merits reviews of fracking approvals. The amendment Bill we are voting on today throws away that recommendation. It is unconscionable that taxpayers funded a huge amount of money for such an expert inquiry conducted over two years only to have its recommendations shredded by ill-considered legislative changes like this.

I find it unbelievable how often I say in this Chamber that an amendment is unjustified. There is no case to repeal rights to merits reviews. As we heard, there are few merits reviews open in the NT. The Northern Territory is not being ground to a halt by these reviews, and there is no cause for alarm. It baffles me how afraid of scrutiny this government seems to be; government members are so afraid that they would change the law to avoid having to explain their decisions to the communities they represent and serve. These amendments will not expedite the development of the Territory's wants and needs, and what we risk by removing these protections is far greater than what we stand to gain.

There is a saying that by failing to prepare you are preparing to fail. Refusing to allow merits reviews under the *Water Act* is failing to prepare for mistakes made about our water. It may mean our rivers cease to flow; our aquifers are drawn down; our local economy, dependent on water, loses out; and our groundwater-dependent ecosystems, such as the beautiful springs at Mataranka, are lost.

Refusing to allow merits reviews under the *Petroleum Act* is failing to prepare for mistakes made about how our resources will be used, and there is the potential of surface water contamination with toxic fracking chemicals, the impacts of which could last for millennia and be exacerbated by climate change. Preventing such dangerous failures is exactly why we had 135 Pepper inquiry recommendations designed to mitigate the well-accepted risks of deep shale hydraulic fracturing.

Refusing to allow merits reviews under the *Planning Act* is failing to prepare for mistakes made about our cities and roads and means that we risk not only having well-considered town planning but also losing investment and amenity for many long-term Territorians.

As usual, I have looked hard to find the justification for this Bill, but I cannot find it. The explanatory statement provides little justification for the changes made. It says:

> *The purpose of this Bill is to remove third party merits review in industry development and environment legislation to provide for industry certainty, foster confidence in the regulatory framework and reduce project delays associated with potentially vexatious legal reviews by third parties.*

This Bill is not limited to industry development and environmental legislation; it will remove merits review rights from planning legislation that governs residential and commercial developments and land use changes. The Bill is not limited to so-called potentially vexatious legal reviews; it removes the right of review from everyone.

We also see no evidence that third-party merits reviews have tied up or delayed development. If they had, the government's job is to look after the people and protect them from predatory development, not to make the lives of big industry as comfortable and profitable as possible.

Along with much the legislation passed by this Assembly, this Bill is out of step with other jurisdictions. Other states and the Australian Capital Territory provide opportunities for third-party merits review of planning,

petroleum and water decisions. No other state or territory has removed third-party merits reviews entirely for these areas in the ways proposed by this Bill.

I will take a moment to reflect on what is clearly emerging as a priority for this government and what this government is making clear to its communities. The government's move to eliminate crucial checks and balances provided by merits reviews, just one week after passing the Territory Coordinator Bill, sends a clear message. This government is determined to consolidate power, erode democratic processes, silence public input on decision-making and legislation and prioritise the profits of large industries over the rights and wellbeing of Territorians.

The government's actions continue to threaten the integrity of our democracy and the future of our environment. I do not view the government's decisions in isolation; I view them together. What is emerging from this Chamber is a dangerous lack of regard for the public interest.

Like the Member for Drysdale, I despair at the polarisation in our community fed by those in power. Our job in this Chamber is to work together for what is best for the Northern Territory, not what is best for a political party or private interests and political donors.

Territorians deserve better than what this Bill offers them. As part of that, Territorians need access to third-party merits reviews, now more than ever.

I will continue to fight for transparency, accountability and the protection of our community's voice, and I invite my fellow members of parliament to join with me in fighting against this Bill.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, the rhetoric we have heard today from those opposite has been deliberately provocative and designed to minimise opposition to their agenda.

We heard the Deputy Chief Minister telling Territorians that they are not welcome here and that they should not be here if their beliefs go against this government's agenda. For this kind of rhetoric to come from the second-highest office in the Northern Territory—we should call it for what it is, which is absolutely disgusting, especially on a day when we are debating a Bill which has become increasingly clear will deny the opportunity for development decisions to be scrutinised.

It has been made clear that alternative or evidence-based views do not matter to the CLP government, particularly when it comes to development at an all-cost approach. It is disappointing that members opposite continue to go on a tirade about bureaucracy. Trying to suggest that the processes which give people a voice are just a bureaucratic burden shows what little regard the members opposite have for Territorians.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: Territory Labor supports streamlined and efficient processes for progressing the sustainable development of the Territory economy. However, unchecked development has the potential to incur a great cost, potentially putting at risk our communities, natural resources and our Territory lifestyle.

Those opposite talk about what kind of world we are leaving for the next generation of Territorians and what Territory Labor wants. I can tell those opposite that we want sustainable economic development because it is important to the Territory, but it must be centred on protecting our unique natural assets while giving businesses and industry the certainty to invest in the Territory. It is what Territorians expect of us, and we want what Territorians want.

It is tough for those opposite to hear, but that is what we believe. Third-party merits reviews add an important layer of accountability into decision-making for our water, environment and planning regimes.

This Bill, alongside the introduction of the Territory Coordinator Bill, demonstrates a deliberate erosion of environmental, social, cultural and economic protections when it comes to new developments. This Bill seeks to deliberately exclude Territorians, including pastoralists, traditional owners and native title holders from asking questions regarding developments that impact them.

Those opposite talk about small groups with no care or accountability, but the disrespect they continually show Territorians is unacceptable. They want to talk about socialism, but shutting down the voices of the people is a form of dictatorship. It is undemocratic. We will continue to call out the CLP when we believe it is misleading Territorians or trying to undermine the ability of Territorians and groups to voice their concerns about unchecked developments.

I agree with the Member for Gwoja in regard to removing the rights of third parties to request a merits review on major developments, whether that is to do with the petroleum industry, water resources or planning decisions. It is a step that will remove a layer of accountability in our system. It will lead to poorer social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes. This is not about shutting down and silencing environmental advocates; it is about silencing industry bodies, traditional owners, pastoralists, community members and anyone affected by a water licence or planning decisions where they live.

The Bill is under the purview of the same minister who dropped the prosecution of a cotton farmer who cleared almost 300 hectares of land on the Daly River without a permit. The Daly River is a major driver for the tourism industry, supporting resorts and recreational fishing opportunities. The Daly River must be protected so that it can provide sources for sustainable jobs, food and lifestyles into the future.

This government talks about consequences, but that does not seem to apply when someone commits offences against the environment. Territory Labor is pushing the importance of environmental scrutiny into this debate. Ensuring that we have economic development matched with the appropriate environmental scrutiny is important, but the action of this minister sends all the wrong signals to Territorians. The CLP is ramming through an ideologically based agenda that will make Territorians worse off and put our environment, culture, community and resources at risk.

If this minister has true courage he will refer further legislation to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for review. Although the CLP government wants to silence Territorians that does not give it the mandate to silence members of this parliament in scrutinising legislation that impacts the majority. Merits reviews are not a threat to good governance, accountability and transparency; they enhance it. These amendments are about minimising scrutiny of new developments; they are about denying Territorians the right to ask questions about a proposal and its likely impact on Territory resources.

We will not be supporting this legislation, as it is another example of the CLP government's deliberate silencing of the voices of Territorians.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I support the Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I begin by stating the high level of support that all my colleagues in this government and I have for the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment. I am proud to be a part of this government that is getting on with a year of action, certainty and security.

Despite what the opposition and the crossbench members might say, these amendments do not take away public consultation. They do not affect any other process. All they do is make sure that when a decision has been made—having gone through extensive processes, sometimes taking a very long time—it is final. When I was a kid, which was not that long ago, I used to go to mum and dad. Sometimes I would ask mum if I could do something; if mum said no I knew better than to go to dad to try to get a different answer. That is what we are trying to stop here. We are making sure that once the decision is made and mum says that you can or cannot do something, the decision is made. It is great for their marriage; it is great for the Territory.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank honourable members for their contributions in this debate this afternoon. As we have discussed today, this Bill amends the *Petroleum Act 1984*, the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016, the *Planning Act 1999* and its regulations, and the *Water Act 1992*.

These amendments which facilitate the removal of third-party merits reviews from a range of legislation are designed to support this government's commitment to rebuilding the economy. To rebuild the economy we must provide industry and businesses with regulatory processes that support certainty in development and investment. For years the third-party merits review process has not been used as originally intended.

More recently the merits review process has been used by environmental groups and others opposed to development. These groups seek only to disrupt and delay projects that have already successfully been through rigorous assessments by the regulating agency and have been informed by the public submission processes.

The processes have been used as nothing more than a tactic to stifle development, which is evident when the reviews result in the original decision being upheld, often some months later. By removing third-party merits review provisions, this Bill will reduce the uncertainty, delays and disruption to the decision-making process and project implementation—something the regulatory agencies and project proponents must bear.

The amendments will remove the provision for third-party merits review of a minister's decision to release specified blocks for exploration and grant an exploration permit. They will also amend the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations to remove the provisions for third-party merits review of a minister's decision to approve an environment management plan or a revision of an environment management plan.

Amendments to the *Planning Act* remove the provisions for third-party merits review of the decision of the consent authority to consent to concurrent applications and development applications. Amendments to the Planning Regulations remove the provisions for a third-party merits review of a decision of the consent authority to take no further action in response to a complaint following completion of an investigation.

Finally, amendments to the *Water Act* remove the provisions for third-party merits review of a broad range of decisions of the minister or the Controller of Water Resources, including granting a water extraction licence, a permit to interfere with a waterway, a permit to carry out bore work and a waste discharge licence.

This Bill will benefit a number of key stakeholders. Developers and proponents of onshore gas and water-dependent industries will benefit from increased certainty in decision-making and a reduction in delays to project implementation. This will provide confidence to investors and will have broader flow-on effects for the community through increased economic opportunities, particularly in the regions where many of these activities are undertaken, providing investment and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

On the introduction of this Bill, environmental groups and others opposed to development were vocal that the amendments will remove transparency and accountability of decision-making. There have been claims that it is the beginning of the government walking back the recommendations of the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the NT. The HFI report required that merits review be available for third parties and decisions under the *Petroleum Act* and Petroleum (Environment) Regulations, including those related to the granting of environment management plans. However, it can be argued that merits reviews are not concerned with the safety of the industry or environmental risks, and since these recommendations were proposed in 2018 a robust regulatory regime to manage the risks of the onshore gas industry has been established.

I also point out that there is inconsistency across legislation in this space, as merits review provisions do not apply to mining authorisations or environmental impact assessments and approvals under the *Environment Protection Act*. This should be noted because when Labor was in government it had multiple opportunities to introduce these yet it saw fit not to. Why should some development and environment-related decisions be subject to merits reviews when others are not?

Our planning and environmental protection laws have been reformed over time to be strong, contemporary and informed by experts and independent authorities. These laws have a range of legislative requirements in place to ensure transparency, accountable decision-making and other means for stakeholders to have their views and interests considered. Decision-makers are required to make the decisions public and, in most cases, provide a statement of reasons for their decisions. Stakeholders and interested parties can make submissions during consultation processes, with these submissions required to be considered by decision-makers. That includes consultation on onshore petroleum environment management plans, the proposed drilling and hydraulic fracturing, notification of applications for a petroleum exploration permit, and public consultation on water extraction licences and development applications.

For far too long development in the Territory has been held hostage to the whims of those who have weaponised the use of third-party merits reviews to delay and disrupt development. This Bill puts an end to this. Industry will have certainty that 'yes' means just that—yes—and that when proponents have project approval they can proceed. This assurance will increase investor confidence in doing business in the Territory to help rebuild the Territory economy and facilitate the move away from the heavy reliance on public sector investment that we have seen over the last few years.

I will respond to some of the comments that have been made by those opposite throughout this debate.

The Member for Gwoja commented on some of the current applications facing third-party merits reviews. I will clear up any confusion for other members. Since its introduction there have been 18 third-party merits reviews pertaining to 10 decisions of the Controller of Water Resources. There were three decisions of the Development Consent Authority under the *Planning Act* being reviewed and two EMP approval decisions under the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations.

Others have spoken about land clearing. I will be clear that in the Northern Territory less than 1% of Northern Territory land is cleared.

I thank the Member for Nelson for his questions today.

The Member for Nightcliff made a number of statements about the short and cheap process of a merits review, yet omitted the fact that anyone who has made a submission in regard to one of these processes could be seeking to have a merits review. Essentially, it opens it up for anyone to put in a submission and then have a merits review. Many proponents would argue that it is not short and cheap when large projects are being held up for months at a time whilst they undergo this process.

The Member for Arnhem spoke about consultation. This is exactly why we are all members of this parliament. It is something that Labor Party members often used to speak to us about. Between these Bills being introduced to parliament and when they are passed, it is our job to get out into the community and get feedback from our constituents. I hope that consultation is being held. We have been speaking with many members in the community.

The Member for Nightcliff also spoke about hysteria, as did the Member for Johnston.

The Member for Mulka spoke about the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan and the water advisory committee. I will be clear that water advisory committees were put in place to develop water allocation plans. It is a huge body of work, and the water scientists in the department do a huge amount of work. A number of members, including the Member for Johnston, spoke about the work and that we are not listening to people and taking the facts into consideration.

It is important that we do not disregard the water scientists who spend their professional careers ensuring sustainable use of our water throughout the Northern Territory. I often speak to the people in the department about their frustration. There has been a huge amount of consultation relating to the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan. People go out. The water advisory committee that was in place over a long period under the previous Labor government issued a draft plan which, when our government came to power, we adopted as the plan.

It is important that these water allocation plans put forward a sustainable yield that can be utilised using the best available science. To question it and say that we will be drawing down rivers and stopping the Berry Springs aquifer is the level of hysteria that goes against the best science available.

There were conversations about the DCA, an independent authority, and the fact that taking away merits reviews would lose the ability for fair decisions. I found that completely inconsistent with the way the DCA works. Once again, the process allows for public submissions. Recently in Alice Springs there was a submission to change land use. The members of the community raised their concerns. There has been public consultation as a result of people raising their concerns in regard to the changes that would be made. The DCA always seeks to work in the best interests of the community as a whole, taking into consideration the concerns of some.

It is important to once again acknowledge the work that these independent authorities do over a long time. I have spoken at great length about this.

We are getting rid of third-party merits reviews because we have such strong regulatory processes in place. We have the independent Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority, led by Dr Vogel. Along with his committee, Dr Vogel is ensuring that anything that could harm or impact the Northern Territory is pulled in, looked at closely and, if the authority sees fit, additional conditions are added. The independent Development Consent Authority can look at that.

There is also the independent water controller. There has been a lot of conversation over the past few days about ‘water for your mates’ and all the rest of it. The independent water controller is the person who decides the water agreements; they are independent for a reason.

It is important to acknowledge that we have all these things in place. The decisions made go through rigorous processes. By the time a proponent gets the go-ahead they have been through a range of approvals processes that led to final approval. We want proponents to know that when they have finally gone through it all, approval is just that.

I acknowledge the contributions of everyone who spoke. I will talk about the Member for Drysdale’s contribution; I skipped over that because I wanted to leave it to last. The Member for Drysdale made an excellent point and spoke to the real-world views of the changes this Bill will ensure.

Often in this House we talk about development and the need for additional housing. There have been instances, and there still are, when developments for additional housing in our communities have been drawn into merits review processes. I assure people that merits review processes that are underway will continue, but in the future we want to give proponents certainty, especially as it relates to everything we have spoken about today, so that once they have been through all the processes an approval is just that—an approval.

I thank the Member for Drysdale for bringing it back to a real level by saying that when development in the Northern Territory can get on we can all benefit; I agree with him 100%. When you are close to the community you understand people's need for a strong economy. A number of people struggle to feed their families every week, which is evident in the increased number of people I speak to who utilise Foodbank and other agencies just to be able to feed their families every week. If we have a strong economy and plenty of jobs for people to earn a good wage and feed their families—that is what this is all about. I thank the Member for Drysdale for bringing it back to the core reason we are all here: to make the Territory a better place and give everyone opportunities.

I acknowledge the officers from the Department of Mining and Energy and the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment who contributed to the development of this Bill. They worked hard to provide me with the best advice throughout. I acknowledge the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel staff who prepared the Bill.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail

Clause 1, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 2:

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm when the legislation is expected to commence or go to the Administrator?

Mr BURGOYNE: The Bill will commence the day after the Administrator's assent is declared. I am not clear which day that will be.

Mr PAECH: As soon as practicable; is that correct?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3:

Mr PAECH: On what basis did you not send this Bill to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee?

Mr BURGOYNE: Clause 3 is a technical clause which identifies that Division 1 amends the *Petroleum Act 1984.*

Mr PAECH: The minister has not answered the question. I am aware that clause 3 provides that Part 2, Division 1 amends the *Petroleum Act 1984*. On what basis did you not send this to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee?

Mr BURGOYNE: That question does not go to the clause.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I take the minister's advice that it is a technical clause.

Mr PAECH: I will ask that again in another clause.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4:

Mr PAECH: Speaking to clause 4, Section 16A replaced, how does this materially differ from the current clause, and who did you consult with in making this amendment?

Mr BURGOYNE: Under section 16 the Minister for Mining and Energy must publish a notice inviting applications for the grant of an exploration permit for specified blocks of land. Under 16A the minister must consider the applications received. Section 16A is amended to make it clearer that the minister can determine whether or not to release the specified blocks for exploration.

Mr PAECH: I am mindful that the minister is reading word for word from script to script provided by his staff, but how does this materially differ from the current clause, and who did you consult with in making this amendment?

Mr BURGOYNE: This amends section 16A for clarity and drafting preferences; it changes a decision to reduce blocks for exploration to a determination to release or not to release blocks for exploration. It is for clarity and drafting purposes.

Mr PAECH: Who did you consult in making this amendment?

Mr BURGOYNE: That does not go to the clause.

Mr PAECH: You are failing to answer the question on who you consulted on this amendment.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister has answered in a way he thinks is right.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5:

Mr PAECH: Clause 5, 'Section 57AB amended (Review by Tribunal)', is the area I am asking about. Who did you consult with in relation to this amendment?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will explain this amendment for you as best I can. This clause amends section 57AB by omitting subsection (4), which precludes a person from applying for review for a reviewable decision for reasons of commercial competition. As third-party merits will no longer apply for review of a reviewable decision, this provision is no longer required. This is a consequential amendment only.

Mr PAECH: How many reviews of reviewable decisions have there been since this legislation commenced in the last three to five years?

Mr BURGOYNE: None.

Mr PAECH: Has the government sought external advice in relation to these changes?

Mr BURGOYNE: The question does not go directly to the clause.

Mr PAECH: I think it does, but I acknowledge that you do not want to answer the question.

Are there any other lengthy and costly judicial reviews that this decision would affect? You have removed the need for a merits review and the Deputy Chief Minister spoke about judicial review, although I think he is confused about that. Has the government had external advice in relation to these changes, and have you met with anyone from the judiciary in regard to the expectations of it taking on these reviews?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to acknowledge why we are here in regard to this Bill. This is a consequential amendment only as part of repealing the provisions.

Ms UIBO: I note the answer from the minister about it being a consequential amendment. The Member for Gwoja's question was about the judiciary and any anticipated blockages if there are to be judicial reviews in place.

Mr BURGOYNE: That question does not go to the clause.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6:

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm that this clause means there will be no retrospective application of amendments under this Bill?

Mr BURGOYNE: This is important because it ensures decisions, made under the Act before it was amended, remain legal. Any merits reviews underway prior to the commencement of the amendment Act will not be impacted by the amendments and must run their course.

Mr PAECH: Will any decision currently before the NTCAT remain under the pre-existing terms and conditions?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

Ms UIBO: Does that include up until the day prior to consent for this legislation coming into effect?

Mr BURGOYNE: Until this Act comes into effect the law is as it is. Once this law is assented to it will be the law.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clause 7:

Mr PAECH: What is the material change here, and why is it considered important? It currently says, 'A decision to release blocks for exploration' and will change to 'a decision to release or not release a block for exploration'.

Mr BURGOYNE: This clause is a minor amendment to Schedule 1 to mirror the wording changes that have been made to section 16A in clause 4. This is a consequential amendment only. It makes sure that everything is in line throughout the Act.

Clause 7 agreed to.

Clause 8:

Mr PAECH: What is the material difference here?

Mr BURGOYNE: Once again, this is a minor amendment, this time to Schedule 2, to mirror the wording changes made to section 16A in clause 4 that I spoke about previously. Again, it is a consequential amendment only.

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clause 9:

Mr PAECH: Can you define who is 'A person directly affected by the decision'?

Mr BURGOYNE: This removes the ability of affected and third parties to review the minister's decision to release specified blocks for exploration and grant an exploration permit. To complete that answer, in regard to affected parties, the example I have been given is a pastoralist.

Mr PAECH: How would this impact native title holders or traditional owners when it relates to their land? Would they be denied the opportunity to have the decision reviewed?

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding a third-party review, yes; the intention of the Bill is to remove the ability for third parties. It is important that third parties are still able to pursue a judicial review of decisions through the courts.

Mr PAECH: Will a native title holder or a traditional owner recognised under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act now be denied the opportunity to have this decision reviewed with the only avenue available a costly judicial review process?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to acknowledge that existing legislation provides for a private agreement with native title holders and traditional owners to be in place for every granted petroleum exploration permit in the Territory. These private agreements set up direct relationships between Aboriginal people and gas

companies ensuring that Aboriginal people and their representatives, often land councils, have a direct line of communication to the gas company. The amendments do not affect these laws.

Mr PAECH: Any diversification of the land use agreement—under your changes there are no more merits reviews, they would be required to seek a judicial review, is that correct?

Mr BURGOYNE: In relation to the laws we are changing today, that is correct. There will be no more third-party merits reviews available.

J DAVIS: There is a 10-billion-litre-per-year water licence application on your desk for Larrimah Farms' irrigated agriculture development. The Mangarrayi traditional owners are concerned about Warloch Ponds, a sacred site, and other springs being affected. Should that licence be appealed, does this Bill mean those traditional owners no longer have a right to appeal?

Mr BURGOYNE: I want to be clear: we are currently in the *Petroleum Act* part of the Bill, not the *Water Act.*

J DAVIS: Sorry.

Mr BURGOYNE: That is all right.

Mr PAECH: I would like further clarification. How does this impact tourism operators if the decision impacts their business? Will they then be denied the opportunity to have the decision reviewed—the only avenue being a judicial review?

Mr BURGOYNE: As I have stated before, this removes the ability for parties to seek third-party merits reviews. Third parties are still able to pursue a judicial review regarding decisions through the courts.

Mr PAECH: Who was consulted in making these changes? They are substantial changes.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, the minister has answered this a number of times. I will give him the opportunity one more time if he wishes to, but I will not keep taking this question.

Mr PAECH: I am asking the minister to answer it again. A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Those questions were asked for different clauses, so they cannot be denied the opportunity to be asked.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, I am giving the minister the opportunity, but I have seen the pattern here, and I will pull it up if need be.

Mr PAECH: That is wrong.

Mr BURGOYNE: That does not relate to the clause.

Mr PAECH: Who provided advice to government in relation to these changes?

Mr BURGOYNE: That does not relate to the clause.

Mr PAECH: How many reviews of the reviewable decisions have gone to NTCAT under this legislation in the past three to five years?

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to this Act it is currently zero.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm that a person directly affected by the decision will not be able to seek a review of the minister's decision to grant an exploration licence?

Mr BURGOYNE: As I have outlined, there is a range of provisions that allow for submissions throughout the process for people to have their say in regard to that. Can you repeat the specific question?

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm that a person directly affected by the decision will not be able to seek a review of the minister's decision to grant an exploration licence?

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding the *Petroleum Act*, and the intent to release specified blocks for exploration under a petroleum exploration permit, members of the public are invited to make submissions as an opportunity to have their voices heard. The submissions are to relate to whether the petroleum exploration

could coexist with other existing or proposed industries for a specified block and whether the land of the specified block is suitable for exploration.

A submission may indicate that the land is not suitable for petroleum exploration if the land is subject to intensive agriculture, is of high ecological or scientific value, holds cultural significance or is of strategic importance.

Whilst we are repealing the merits review today, I want to make it clear that there are other opportunities along the way for people to have their say.

K McNAMARA: Have other jurisdictions made decisions similar to this clause, whereby they removed the ability of land councils, registered native title bodies or any registered native title claimant to initiate third-party merits reviews?

Mr BURGOYNE: I do not believe that question relates to the clause.

K McNAMARA: It does. Have the same changes in this clause been made in other jurisdictions?

Mr BURGOYNE: The Acts across other states and territories are varied.

Mr PAECH: Can an affected person seek a review of the minister's decision to grant an exploration licence? I accept that you have responded to part of the question, but I am asking for specifics of whether they can.

Will the consultation you have spoken about be done in First Nations languages?

Mr BURGOYNE: We are removing the ability for affected parties to seek a third-party merits review. They will still be able to pursue a judicial review, should they so wish.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 11:

Mr PAECH: Has the government done any assessment of the likely impact on development of potentially lengthy judicial reviews, given this is the only recourse for a review under these changes?

Mr BURGOYNE: This clause amends regulation 29 by omitting subregulation (4), which precludes a person from applying for a review of a reviewable decision for reasons of commercial competition. As third parties will no longer be able to apply for a review of a reviewable decision, the provision is no longer required. This is one of the consequential amendments I have spoken about today.

Clause 11 agreed to.

Clauses 12 and 13, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 14:

Mr PAECH: How will the government ensure the community has a say on planning decisions that impact it, with these merits reviews being removed?

Mr BURGOYNE: The DCA process and public hearings, which are a part of that, allow for people to make submissions and have their say in regard to the *Planning Act 1999*.

Mr PAECH: What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure planning decisions are made in the best interests of Territorians?

Mr BURGOYNE: The Act sets out the rules by which the DCA, an independent authority, must run those processes. That allows for people to have their say and ensures that the decisions made are in keeping with the Act.

Clause 14 agreed to.

Clause 15:

Mr PAECH: The section being omitted applies when the consent authority consents to a development proposal and allows for a notice of determination to be served on the applicant and those who have made a submission about the concurrent application, including a local authority. What process of notification will now occur?

Mr BURGOYNE: Section 30X establishes a requirement to notify the applicant and third parties, if they made a submission, of decisions of the consent authority on concurrent applications whereby the rights of merits reviews exist under section 117. Section 117 is being repealed, so section 30X and the notice provision it establishes are no longer required.

Mr PAECH: Has LGANT or any planning body been consulted about these changes?

Mr BURGOYNE: That question does not relate to this clause.

Clause 15 agreed to.

Clause 16:

Mr PAECH: What recourse is there for people who made a submission to have a decision of the consent authority reviewed other than via a lengthy and costly judicial review process?

Mr BURGOYNE: The submissions must be considered by the consent authority in deciding whether to approve an application; that is their ability to be heard. Third parties can still pursue judicial review.

What has not been spoken about throughout this process is that when people seek to pursue that judicial review you can apply to the courts to have the costs associated with it reduced or withdrawn as well.

Clause 16 agreed to.

Clause 17, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 18:

Mr PAECH: In relation to section 53B, Notice of consent, is that the same as what you highlighted for clause 16 about the recourse action whereby people may apply to the court to have those costs reduced or have no cost?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will be specific. Section 53B sets out the notification requirements that apply in the event that the consent authority determines under sections 53A or 53B to consent to a development application. Third parties do not have a right to merits review under section 117, as section 117 is being repealed. Section 53B will apply in all cases and is amended accordingly to remove references to section 117.

Mr YOUNG: How can the community be assured that decisions are being made in the best interest if rights to third-party merits reviews are removed?

Mr BURGOYNE: This clause deals with notice of consent; I do not believe that question goes to the clause.

Clause 18 agreed to.

Clause 19, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 20:

Mr PAECH: How have you assessed the likely impact of lengthy judicial review processes on development, given this will be the only recourse under these changes?

Mr BURGOYNE: I do not believe that question is relevant to this clause.

Mr PAECH: How many third-party merits reviews under this legislation are or have been before NTCAT?

Mr BURGOYNE: The advice is that there have been five in total. Three have been dealt with and two are current.

Mr PAECH: Will the two that have not been dealt with be dealt with under the current legislation?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes. As has been stated previously, cases currently being heard will continue to be heard under the existing regulations. Once this all comes into place, anything from then on will be unable to be reviewed in regard to third-party merits reviews.

Clause 20 agreed to.

Clauses 21 to 27, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 28:

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm who will be able to apply for the review of a reviewable decision by the NTCAT?

Mr BURGOYNE: The applicant.

Mr YOUNG: Who would now be excluded through that?

Mr BURGOYNE: Any other parties.

Mr YOUNG: Who would be those parties?

Mr BURGOYNE: Anyone else seeking a third-party merits review.

J DAVIS: In relation to the water licence application on your desk from the Larrimah Farms irrigated agriculture development, Mangarrayi traditional owners are concerned about Warloch Ponds, a sacred site, and other springs being affected. Should the licence be approved under this proposed amendment, will these traditional owners no longer have a right to appeal?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to outline that the water allocation plans put in place to govern the amount of water that can be taken regarding these areas have had wide-ranging consultation. No-one other than the proponent will be able to seek a merits review, but as I have been stating throughout this process they will still be entitled to undertake a judicial review should they so wish.

J DAVIS: We understand that it is in relation to matters of law, not matters of the merit of a decision; is that correct?

Mr BURGOYNE: Merits reviews are based on merit. The judicial review looks at the legality of the decisions made.

J DAVIS: To confirm, because people have raised these concerns with me, traditional owners in these situations would not have access to merits review; is that correct?

Mr BURGOYNE: No, they will not have access to merits review because we are repealing third-party merits reviews.

Clause 28 agreed to.

Clauses 29 to 32, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Bill agreed to.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 16	Noes 7
Ms Boothby	Mr Brown
Mr Burgoyne	J Davis
Mrs Carlson	Mr Guyula
Mr Charls	K McNamara
Mr Edgington	Mr Paech
Mrs Finocchiaro	Ms Uibo
Mrs Hersey	Mr Young
Mr Howe	
Mr Kerle	
Mr Mackay	
Mr Maley	
Mr O'Gallagher	
Mr Patel	
Dr Rahman	
Mr Yan	
Mrs Zio	

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

RESPONSE TO PETITION
Petition No 1 – Suspension of Transitioning Treatments for Children in the Northern Territory

The CLERK: Honourable members, pursuant to Standing Order 123, I inform members that a response has been received from the Minister for Health to Petition Number 1 concerning the model of gender care provided to Northern Territory children. The response below has been forwarded to the Member for Araluen for distribution to petitioners:

NT Health provides evidence based clinical and support services and care in line with the policy and the Australian Standards of Care and Treatment Guidelines for Trans and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents.

In the Northern Territory, NT Health provides a specialised adolescent gender clinic for young people up to 18 years of age.

Pre-pubertal children are not seen and receive no medical treatments in the Northern Territory.

NT Health does not provide surgical treatments for young people with a gender dysphoria diagnosis.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Investment in Healthcare

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Leader of the Opposition as follows:

I propose for discussion this day the following definite matter of public importance, that the NT Government ensures its investment in healthcare meets current and projected future needs of all Territorians.

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

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, Territorians deserve access to high-quality and safe healthcare, no matter where they live. As with all services in the Territory, delivering healthcare comes with enormous built-in challenges. It is hardly a secret that this is due to our small but scattered population, our remoteness and the chronic health issues that afflict a large part of our community, which is a direct result of poverty and disadvantage. None of this is new, but each year it means the demand on our health system continues to grow.

The NT has the highest rates of kidney disease and the fastest-ageing population in the country. This exacerbates existing demands on the system, particularly in treating chronic conditions. The demand for mental health services continues to increase as more people seek treatment for conditions they may have silently dealt with in the past.

Despite the obvious and growing demand for healthcare across the Territory it is concerning to hear the rhetoric from the CLP government that it thinks additional investment into the healthcare sector to address need is a blowout. That is concerning because it suggests the government is warming up to slash healthcare funding in the upcoming budget; all the signs are there.

We have brought forward this matter of public importance to urge the government, in the strongest terms possible, that cuts to the health budget are effectively cuts to the health and wellbeing of Territorians. We have seen the CLP government take simplistic approaches to the complex challenges we face in the Territory, cutting Territorians out of conversations and barrelling on with a range of changes that make the Territory worse off.

We believe our concerns about what the CLP intends to do with the health budget are warranted. All we have to rely on is the CLP's track record on other matters because the Minister for Health has said precisely zero about healthcare. All we have heard is the odd media release here and there about a single initiative and the removal of flags from hospitals. He has offered no vision, direction or plan as to how his government intends to ensure Territorians have access to quality healthcare that meets their needs now and into the future. That is despite it being one of the key issues for Territorians.

That is why we are putting it firmly on the agenda; we know how important it is to Territorians. That is why the former Territory Labor government put strong investment into new healthcare facilities, more healthcare workers and the upskilling of our incredible doctors and nurses.

Like all systems around the world the Territory health service continues to face enormous demand pressures complicated by rising costs, recruitment challenges and ever-changing demographics.

While in government Labor did not invest blindly in the health system; we did it in an evidence-based, strategic way. This approach led to the creation of NT Health under the *Health Service Act* in 2021, of a single integrated entity responsible for the delivery of health services across five service delivery regions: the Top End; East Arnhem; Big Rivers; Barkly; and Central Australia. This strategic approach allows our health services to work together in a unified way with resources allocated where they are needed most—on the front line. It allows NT Health to work in greater partnership with families, the community, Aboriginal health organisations and stakeholders to deliver better health outcomes, because Territory Labor takes the health needs of Territorians seriously and delivers on priorities.

The current government, however, has failed to outline its big-picture plans for the Territory health service since coming to government. Health barely rates a mention by this government. Territorians deserve better than that; they deserve to know how this government intends to invest in and deliver healthcare. More than six months in, there are no answers.

Health barely rated a mention in the policy the CLP took to the election, but we know it had a plan at some point to decentralise NT Health into Top End and Central Australia Health Services. The then Leader of the Opposition mentioned that in a budget reply speech. That policy obviously sank like a lead balloon because we have not heard anything about it since. The entire health sector would be keen to know whether the CLP intends to deliver on this, given the significant impact it will have on service delivery. It would be good if the Health minister could confirm this one way or another, rather than pretending he did not hear his Chief Minister say it.

This government is skittish when it comes to being transparent with Territorians. The CLP is more interested in public relations management than managing the Territory. As I said earlier, and in stark contrast to the former Territory Labor government, the CLP is yet to deliver a firm and concrete health agenda. There is no plan for growth to meet the increasing demand for services, and there is no planning to deliver major health infrastructure projects.

NT Health has 7,300 dedicated health workers who are critical to providing safe and responsive patient-centred care. Surely it is time the government filled them in on its plans. That may be difficult for the Health minister, given his track record on engaging with health staff.

Last year he pulled out of speaking at the Rural Medicine Australia conference because he did not want to face potential criticism from health professionals about the CLP lowering the age of criminal responsibility. This is a highly prestigious conference, organised by the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia. It is attended by approximately 1,000 doctors and health professionals from all over the country. The minister was due to speak but pulled out at the last minute, telling media he had a clash with another event—very believable.

It would have been a good opportunity for him to outline the government's plan for healthcare, but he squandered it. Then again, accountability is not one of the government's, or the minister's, strong points. That is why we remain concerned about this government's plan for health.

It would be a huge relief for Territorians and health workers if the minister could confirm there will be no cuts to any of the Territory's public health services. That is why we are calling on those opposite to ensure that our health services remain funded to meet those needs into the future.

The former Labor government invested record funding of over $2bn a year into the health system in the last two years, ensuring funding for the full spectrum of primary health, public health, community care and acute hospital services. Our former government worked hard with our Commonwealth partners to address funding inequalities, and we are excited to see Territorians benefit from the many recent Commonwealth announcements for health funding in the Territory.

Those opposite will parrot their usual lines about reckless spending, but there is nothing reckless about ensuring that the Territory health system is meeting the needs of Territorians who access these health services.

The CLP government is like a teenager on P-plates—all false bravado and no real-world experience—but it is time that its members knuckled down and got on with the hard work of government. It takes more than finger pointing and introducing overly simplistic laws that do not follow evidence, do more harm than good and that the CLP government thinks are short-term political winners.

Ensuring that healthcare is appropriately funded to meet demand is not a hard decision, it is a necessary one. That includes investing in quality health infrastructure. The former Territory Labor government left a strong health infrastructure legacy to meet future demand, and we urge the CLP government to get on with delivering this, including:

- $22.9m for a new 32-bed modular multipurpose facility at Royal Darwin Hospital
- $1.3bn for the construction of staff accommodation at Tennant Creek Hospital
- $22.6m for upgrades to the forensic pathology facilities at Royal Darwin Hospital
- $25.1m for the mental health in-patient unit expansion at Royal Darwin Hospital, which is jointly funded by the Northern Territory and Australian Governments
- $32.3m to upgrade essential sterilisation services in Territory hospitals
- $20m to construct a new health centre and morgue in Gunbalanya
- $26.9m to construct a new ambulatory care centre at the Alice Springs Hospital
- $6.6m to develop a hybrid operating theatre at Alice Springs Hospital
- $20m for fire safety system works at Gove District Hospital.

That also included new funding of $20m to construct a primary healthcare centre in Borroloola to improve primary care delivery across the Roper Gulf region and deliver care closer to home; and $12m to prepare for the new 120-bed residential aged-care facility at the Palmerston regional health precinct.

That is on top of Territory Labor's strong legacy in health infrastructure delivery, improving health outcomes for Territorians across our cities, towns, regions and remote communities, including delivering the Palmerston Regional Hospital, which the CLP could not do; upgrading the Gove District Hospital emergency department; delivering a new intensive care unit, renal ward, heart clinic and cancer clinic upgrades at Alice Springs Hospital; delivering a new ambulance station in Katherine; delivering a PET scanner at Royal Darwin Hospital; and delivering infrastructure upgrades to remote clinics, including Galiwinku, Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Robinson River and Umbakumba.

Investments such as these provide Territorians with better access to effective and affordable health services, including services closer to home. Territory Labor made pathways towards more community control in the delivery of health services, because involving communities in their own healthcare decision-making greatly improves health outcomes.

The former Labor government oversaw the transition to community control of Miwatj Health in East Arnhem Land, Red Lily and Mala'la Health Services in West Arnhem and the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, with communities delivering culturally appropriate services for their own people. That should always be a key goal of any government that is serious about improving health outcomes for Territorians.

Recognising and enabling Aboriginal leadership and local decision-making processes is only one step towards improving health outcomes in our remote communities. It needs to be backed up with the right investment and resources. The former Territory Labor government worked to ensure all these elements worked together to bring about high-quality health services that address the unique health pressures of the Territory in a sustainable way. We were serious about funding healthcare for Territorians and funding it well. We are yet to see what this CLP government will fund.

Our NT Health workers have our endless praise and support. They do incredible work every day in our hospitals, clinics and communities, often under difficult and demanding circumstances. Health worker shortages are a reality across the country and globally. Addressing shortages here in such a competitive environment requires forethought, planning and innovative thinking. Getting healthcare right is about investment; ensuring that our incredible, valuable healthcare staff have good pay and conditions; growing our local workforce; and attracting more skilled health staff.

The recently announced Designated Area Migration Agreement signed by the federal Labor government has been described as the best deal in the country and provides twice as many places as the previous agreement. It includes a number of healthcare-related occupations and will make a big difference to our capacity to bring in more skilled workers.

Territory Labor has been excited about the health announcements from the Albanese Labor government in recent months. That includes the announcement that nine out of 10 GP visits will be bulk-billed. This will deliver significant cost-of-living relief to Territorians.

The federal Member for Solomon, Luke Gosling, recently pledged a new Medicare urgent care clinic to open in Darwin. Like the Palmerston Medicare Urgent Care Clinic, this will be a game changer for health services in the Territory. The Palmerston Medicare Urgent Care Clinic, which opened in 2023, has already had 20,000 presentations. This new urgent care clinic will provide Darwin residents with an alternative option when seeking medical attention, while helping to reduce pressure on emergency rooms across Darwin and Palmerston. Best of all, visits are bulk-billed.

The Albanese government announced a $51m boost to hospitals in the Territory, helping to ease the burden on services, ensuring better care and reduced wait times for patients.

Territory Labor is excited about these announcements from the federal government. It shows the importance of putting the health of Australians and Territorians at the centre of service delivery, because our health impacts every aspect of our lives. Our ability to participate in the economy, our social life and the Territory lifestyle all rely on being able to access effective, reliable and efficient health services when we need them.

Investment in healthcare is not just about dollars and cents; it is about Territorians and ensuring that every Territorian, no matter where they live, has access to the healthcare they deserve. We urge the government to do the right thing and continue to invest in the health of Territorians in this year's budget.

Mr EDGINGTON (Health): Madam Speaker, this MPI asks that the NTG ensures its investment in healthcare meets current and projected future needs of all Territorians.

I thank the Member for Daly for raising the issues. I will get to some of the points he raised, as I work through my speech.

It is important to remember Labor's performance over the last eight years in trying to manage the health system. I only have to go back to Christmas 2021 in my electorate when Labor was closing health clinics. It was devastating for people living out bush. That year Labor closed the Canteen Creek health clinic, the Epenarra clinic and a number of clinics in Central Australia. This is an example of the way Labor, over eight years, treated people living in the bush. I had call after call, but Labor showed no interest at all in health out bush; it closed the clinics, walked away and left it at that. That is only one example; I will get to many more as I speak.

The CLP remains dedicated to breaking the healthcare challenges cycle; attracting and keeping staff here; and ensuring timely reliable care for Territorians through reforms and targeted investment.

It is imperative to understand the recent history of neglect and failure by Labor in regard to delivering its investment in healthcare to meet current and projected future needs for all Territorians. I just gave one example, but under Labor's reign over the past eight years there was a failure to invest in ageing health infrastructure.

Labor overspent the Health budget every financial year since 2016–17, including an almost $280m budget blowout in 2023–24. I have spoken about the Acacia computer system blowout of $61m, from $259m to $320m. Who would forget—I am sure the Member for Nelson will remember this—the decision to spend $5,000 to hire a Christmas tree? That was the attitude of the Labor government to delivering health services in the Northern Territory.

NT Health violated government procurement policies when it awarded a controversial $700,000 consultancy contract to Ernst & Young without going through a public tender process. The Auditor-General findings included how the contract ballooned to more than $4.3m after multiple variations were reported in the NT Independent on 14 December 2021.

There was $27m spent on overtime hours in Health across the Territory for financial year to 30 March 2023.

This is important. On 4 July 2018 the former Labor government promised to build a $5m BRADAAG facility in Tennant Creek. BRADAAG delivers alcohol treatment, education and rehabilitation services in Tennant Creek. I have the media release. The Minister for Health—one of Labor's Chief Ministers, Natasha Fyles; Labor had three Chief Ministers—announced:

> *… a purpose built resident rehabilitation and transitional outreach accommodation facility will be constructed for the Barkly Regional Alcohol and Drug Abuse Advisory Group (BRADAAG).*

Labor said that building the facility would free up 19 Territory Housing properties that would become available to people living in Tennant Creek. Of course, not one shovel has hit the ground. We know that better housing will lead to better health outcomes. Those 19 houses were never delivered to the people in Tennant Creek because of Labor's failure to invest in alcohol treatment and rehabilitation facilities in Tennant Creek.

It was not just that. In 2020 Labor promised to build 12 one-bedroom units for health staff in Tennant Creek so that we could attract and retain health staff. Again, not one shovel has hit the ground.

Everybody in this House should be getting the picture of how the former Labor government failed to deliver health services across the Northern Territory.

When Labor lost government it left 80 patients waiting for residential aged care. The knock-on effect has meant bed block in our hospitals, which is a significant cost compared with residential care.

The then Health minister, the current Opposition Leader, and her colleague the previous Health minister, Natasha Fyles, waffled on in parliament I do not know how many times, but they provided no solutions to fix the broken health system.

The Territory's healthcare system has been in crisis due to numerous failures of the former tired Labor government, such as surgery wait times blowing out to be the worst in the nation. How many times can I talk about the failed Acacia IT rollout and, most significantly, the failure to act on the assaults on frontline workers in our hospital system and the health system out bush? It is disgraceful.

The fact that the former government spent millions of dollars on security in our hospitals and clinics shows how bad the situation was. Labor spent $13.3m on security in health across the NT, which increased from $10m. Of this, $7.1m was budgeted for the Darwin region, but actually cost $8.1m—another security cost blowout. Even worse in Central Australia it blew out from a budgeted $1.6m to $3.95m. Of the Central Australian funding $1.4m was spent in two remote communities, Papunya and Yuendumu.

Labor's lack of action to address alcohol-fuelled violence and antisocial behaviour not only created unsafe environments for staff and patients at our hospitals but also made it extremely difficult to attract skilled professionals to the Northern Territory. In 2024 a total of 494 assault incidents were reported by frontline staff at NT public hospitals and health facilities. When the Territory is not a safe place to live and work it leads to critical shortages in personnel, including health staff. That is the situation we face. When people are not safe at work and we have high crime rates, it harms our ability to attract health staff to the Northern Territory.

I remind the House of the significant issues surrounding the Health department's troubled Acacia patient health record system. If the Leader of the Opposition recalls, she was the Minister for Health and for

Corporate and Digital Development when the decision to pause the rollout of Acacia to the Royal Darwin emergency department was taken due to risks to patient safety.

In a Cabinet role she was directly responsible for the Acacia system both from a health and an IT perspective. It emerged that the budget for the Acacia project blew out by $61m from $259m to $320m. To this day the Acacia system is not being used at the Royal Darwin or Palmerston hospitals' emergency departments, while the system is enhanced. Despite lives being on the line Labor did very little to sort out the issue in the eight months prior to being turfed out of government. All Labor did was leave us with a $280m overspend in the Health budget. This is yet another health mess the CLP government is cleaning up from the previous Labor government.

Cast your minds back to December 2020 when we heard some hollow lines from one of Labor's Chief Ministers, this time Michael Gunner, about departments tightening their belts and living within their means. The next business day we learnt that Labor had spent $5,000 renting a Christmas tree. I was not surprised, just disappointed.

In January 2024 we pointed out that since 2016 the median wait time for Territorians choosing to undergo a medical procedure had increased by 54%, resulting in an average wait time of 316 days. Median wait times for non-urgent elective surgeries at Royal Darwin Hospital were up by 113%, or 403 days; Palmerston Regional Hospital was up 31%, or 386 days; Gove Hospital was up by 42%, or 327 days; there were no procedures at Katherine Hospital; and Alice Springs Hospital was up by 51%, or a wait time of 148 days.

After a damaging eight years in government Labor allowed a distressing progression of worsening circumstances. The level of non-urgent elective surgeries conducted in the Territory plummeted by a staggering 37%. In stark contrast the number of individuals undergoing non-urgent elective surgeries in Australia's public hospitals has increased by 81.6% during the same period.

To counter the loss of nearly 600 full-time positions from NT Health the CLP has taken back control of our streets, is rebuilding the Territory's reputation and getting our economy moving forward. Rampant community safety issues, exacerbated by frequent assaults on hospital staff, deter healthcare professionals from working in the Territory.

I mentioned earlier that when Labor lost government it left 80 patients waiting for residential aged care. This meant bed block in our hospitals, which is a significant cost compared with residential care. Put simply, a shortage of residential aged-care facility beds is contributing to aged-care related discharge delays, placing increased pressure on NT hospitals. Under Labor the NT has the highest aged-care occupancy rate, being 92.2% and the longest hospital stays for older patients awaiting aged care placement.

In addition the NT has fewer aged-care beds per capita—47.5 beds per 1,000 people over 70, compared with the national average of 67.5 beds. Since coming into government the Country Liberal Party has lobbied the federal government to secure $120m through the Commonwealth Aged Care Capital Assistance Program for a new 120-bed residential aged-care facility in the greater Darwin region.

As recently as last Friday the federal minister for aged care announced that the department would open an expression of interest process to build and run an aged-care facility in Palmerston. It feels like the work we have been doing to lobby the federal government for $120m is starting to pay off. Let us wait until we see the federal budget.

NT Health has been working closely with senior Commonwealth officials to attract interest from registered aged-care providers to build more residential aged-care facilities in the Northern Territory. The NT Government has allocated land adjacent to Palmerston Regional Hospital for a residential aged-care facility, which an aged-care provider could build on. The site is ideally located for co-delivery of care for residents of a future facility.

Since coming into power the CLP government is delivering better access to Royal Darwin Hospital, with planned upgrades to improve safety and relieve traffic congestion. The upgrades will be delivered in three stages and will include a redesign to the current Rocklands Drive and Florey Avenue intersection; temporary access of Damabila Drive and Burnett Road, for emergency access only; and a second permanent entry to Royal Darwin Hospital will ensure that access to the hospital is always maintained for emergency services. These upgrades were well overdue and have been brought forward as a priority. Appropriate access to RDH is a key driver to improving community liveability; these much-needed upgrades will deliver better health outcomes for Territorians while strengthening the resilience of our emergency and hospital services.

The former Labor government continued to put Territorians at real risk while dragging its feet and not delivering these works. Astonishingly, Labor prioritised an NBL high-performance centre and other pet projects over Territorians' health.

The NT Health capital works program includes NT Government-funded projects for health centres and morgues in Borroloola and Gunbalanya. The real question is whether they have been funded under the budget set by the former Labor government.

The designs for Borroloola and Gunbalanya health centres and morgues are well progressed with finalisation subject to current development application processes. The Jabiru Health Centre was completed in August, with Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation Red Lily Health Board commencing operations in the new Jabiru Health Centre on 2 September 2024.

Territorians deserve better, and these works are proof that we are getting on with the job and prioritising infrastructure projects that will improve the lives of Territorians. The Australian and Northern Territory Governments' jointly funded 48-chair ambulatory care renal dialysis building in Alice Springs is waiting for the outcome of the development consent application.

A construction tender was recently declined for the new four-chair nurse-assisted renal facility in Wadeye, as responses were cost prohibitive. The project is now being considered as part of the broader planning for remote renal facilities to ensure value for Territory construction outcomes.

Purple House has benefited from the Commonwealth investment in infrastructure to bring dialysis units into remote centres. The Better Renal Services measure will provide $73.2m to fund up to 30 four-chair dialysis units, including workforce accommodation where required, to provide dialysis on country to First Nations Australians with end-stage kidney disease. Having renal facilities located within remote communities ensures Territorians with kidney disease can access appropriate treatment on country, reducing the reliance on services in town and dependencies on patient travel, visitor accommodation and relatives in public housing.

Labor made the announcement about how it was investing in our future and delivering greater health services across the Territory in its 2023 budget, but progress in health-related infrastructure has been slow. You only need to go back to the federal Labor announcement on 26 April 2022 when it promised 500 new First Nations medical trainees. Federal Labor promised 30 new renal clinics on 22 April 2022. It said that it would double the funding for rheumatic heart disease. Where is this money that Labor promised? We are heading into another federal election, and all we hear are vague promises again by Labor. I would not trust Labor with $50 to go shopping for my grandmother. I would not trust federal Labor with $50 to buy anything for my grandmother, yet on the eve of another federal election Labor is making unfounded promises again. Labor has not delivered from the last election, and it is making further promises.

Work is underway at Royal Darwin Hospital for the new 24-bed mental health facility and the 32-bed ward. The CLP government is undertaking a comprehensive review of patient travel and logistics for road, ambulance and aeromedical services, which will set a new strategic operating model for these services. The review is focused on streamlined and improved command centre arrangements, achieving operational efficiencies and expanded use of digitally enabled remote care where applicable. Several key service contracts are scheduled for renewal by early 2026, and this review will inform contract renewal processes. In addition, work is in progress to expand the Northern Territory Health hub for remote charter travel for NT Government agencies to achieve greater efficiency in the use of scheduled remote charter flights.

The CLP has delivered on our commitments to enhance the NT Pharmacy Scope of Practice program, similar to the model operating in Queensland. James Cook University is admitting NT students to the required training program, with 13 enrolments to date. The earliest completion date for the student cohort is December.

NT Health delivered the urinary tract infection program on 28 October 2024. Pharmacies in the Northern Territory are now delivering this service, and one to two pharmacist-led treatments occur every day. Thirteen pharmacists have enrolled in a relevant course to undertake the necessary training to deliver the full scope of practice activities and are eligible for a subsidy of $8,500.

The CLP is delivering on our health agenda.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this MPI to the House.

I want to talk about homelands for two reasons. Firstly, proper investment in our homelands will significantly contribute to people leading a healthier life. Homelands are our ancestral country, so we can hunt on these lands and be looked after by country. This is much better than living in bigger communities where we are living on someone else's country and cannot hunt, and it is better than living in urban environments. In both places people often eat takeaway and are not choosing a healthy lifestyle. They do not walk to hunt and fish and collect *maypal* (oysters), so they do not exercise.

Many people already live permanently in homeland communities. We have health centres and visiting medical staff. We have schools. These are functional small towns that require new housing so that overcrowding is dealt with and family members who have been forced into the bigger towns can come back onto country.

I point out that investment in homeland towns will help across a number of areas, including:

- mental, physical and spiritual health
- strong two-ways education
- positive pathways for young people who do not connect with crime
- capacity to build small businesses and industry because we are the landowners and the resource owners—this gives us the opportunity for economic independence and business growth.

In many ways investment in homelands today will benefit the government and the people in the future. It will have a significant positive impact on the health of Aboriginal people, which will contribute to closing the gap for Aboriginal people.

There are already many people living on country in homelands. While many of these homelands have medical centres and visiting medical staff, there are big concerns about emergency patient retrieval from homelands in the region.

I raised this many times with the former Labor government and was always promised that something was happening. In 2018 I was advised that there had been a review of emergency patient retrieval by the Department of Health with 131 recommendations. The department promised to keep my office updated on how these recommendations would be met, but nothing followed.

Nothing has changed; we still have significant issues with emergency patient retrieval. In Estimates and through written questions I have asked for the emergency patient retrieval process for homelands, but the response I get never matches what is happening on the ground.

I am told that a St John ambulance will travel 100 kilometres from Nhulunbuy, but that only covers very close homelands, and often the ambulance will not be dispatched in case there is an emergency closer to town or because it may already be tied up with patients being taken to meet CareFlight at the airport.

I am told that the CareFlight plane would be dispatched beyond 100 kilometres, but even in this situation the CareFlight twin-engine plane cannot land on most homeland landing strips. Often homeland residents are left waiting while medical help comes on a chartered plane with a homeland medical worker rather than a paramedic. While I understand that there have been business cases prepared for a helicopter in the region, there have been no outcomes in the eight years I have been talking to the government. I am saddened and frustrated that we still have no solution.

Two years ago I spoke in Estimates about the death of Mr Marika, a 38-year-old Yolngu man. He was attending a funeral in a homeland when he became ill, and there was no emergency response. Family members were on the phone, and eventually they said that they would drive to meet the ambulance closer to Nhulunbuy, but it never arrived. The man died on the way.

In the past, MAF charter planes were retrieving patients who needed a stretcher and a bed but there was nothing on board. One pilot told of a person with a broken pelvis who had to sit in a seat and travel to Gove. Following this, MAF engineered a bed that is certified for patient travel, and this can be used when the health provider books a plane, but it is not available on call.

To make this model work we need this aeroplane with a pilot on standby. At the moment, if this plane is needed—it may be doing charter flights, and all pilots may be booked on charter flights. In the future we need

an aircraft for the region—a single-engine plane, a helicopter or both—based in Gove to service across the entire region.

Across our communities we need more programs on prevention and community education on health issues. Diabetes can be prevented, but we need clear programs on these kinds of issues to give people knowledge on how to create strong, healthy diets.

I take this opportunity to thank the health workers in our region: Miwatj health; Gove Hospital staff; Allied Health; St John staff; Laynhapuy health; Marthakal health; the aged-care health workers; the private healthcare workers in our region; and all the elders and community members who still practise and teach traditional healthcare.

Health issues in our region are complex. We have many people with health issues and many wonderful healthcare workers who do their best to look after the people of the Mulka electorate. We need resources for our homeland towns. Investment here will bring a better future.

Debate suspended.

CONDOLENCE MOTION
Honourable Grant Tambling AM

Madam SPEAKER: I draw the attention of honourable members to the passing of Hon Grant Tambling AM, former alderman of the Darwin City Council, Member of the Legislative Assembly representing the Fannie Bay electorate, Member of the House of Representatives, senator and the Administrator of Norfolk Island. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome to the family and friends of Hon Grant Tambling AM.

Members: Hear, hear!

Madam SPEAKER: I remind honourable members that on completion of this debate, I will ask members to stand in silence for one minute as a mark of respect.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly expresses its deep condolences to the family and friends of Hon Grant Tambling AM.

Tonight we honour a proud Territorian, a leader, a statesman and a man of deep conviction. I send our thanks to the people in the gallery, the friends and family and, of course, Sandy—people who loved and cared about Grant very deeply.

Last week we were all at Grant's state funeral, an opportunity to honour his life in the highest possible way. Hundreds of Territorians filled that room, honouring his life, remembering his legacy and paying tribute to a great man.

There is no question that Grant Tambling dedicated his life to serving the Northern Territory and Australia. He was a devoted husband to Sandy, a loving father to Coryn and Amalia, and a cherished grandfather to Reuben, Hamish and Grace (Castiella).

His was a life of public service, but more importantly he was focused on making a difference, whether it was in the halls of parliament here or in Canberra, across our vast communities in the Northern Territory or through the countless individuals whose lives he touched. He was more commonly known by his friends as Tambo.

Grant was born in 1943 in Wondai, Queensland; he was the eldest of three children. After his father's Army service, the family permanently moved to the Northern Territory in 1946. He was a local lad, attending Darwin Primary School, Darwin High School and later went to Adelaide Boys' High School, matriculating in 1960.

When Grant completed his studies, he worked and studied by correspondence for four years before moving to Sydney. While in Sydney he struck gold, meeting his beautiful, wonderful love of his life, Sandy, who was a young trainee nurse at the time. They wasted no time in getting married and starting their beautiful family and long life together.

Grant's deep connection to the Territory remained strong, and he returned here when he came to work in Darwin, Arnhem Land and Gove. That pull to the Territory was strong. As he later put it, he continued in his career 'until Cyclone Tracy blew away all my clients in December 1974'.

His dedication to the Territory was evident very early on. He became increasingly active in community affairs and politics, starting with his role as an alderman on the City of Darwin Council from 1972 to 1974. He was bitten by the bug; he realised he had more and more to give.

In 1974 he ran for the Country Liberal Party and was elected to the first fully elected Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, representing the seat of Fannie Bay until 1977. Within months of that government, Cyclone Tracy struck. His involvement in its aftermath highlighted his dedication to rebuilding and advancing the Territory in one of our darkest hours.

He was a foundational member of the Country Liberal Party and instrumental in shaping the Territory's political landscape. I think we all had the benefit of sitting down and speaking with Grant over the years, seeing his wisdom, kindness and patience with us. I enjoyed many a conversation and opportunity to spend time with Grant.

He was the deputy leader of the Northern Territory majority party, which was the fledgling CLP, from 1975 to 1977. He was fiercely passionate about statehood, economic development and regional advancement, which defined his career in politics, championing those issues.

In 1980 Grant was elected as the federal Member for the Northern Territory in the House of Representatives, and off he was, getting frozen half to death in Canberra—a bit of change from here. The national stage really helped to shape his key political interests around Aboriginal advancement; again, statehood—a major issue; Defence; and stronger ties with Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia.

In 1987 he returned to federal politics as a Senator for the Northern Territory, serving Territorians in the Australian Parliament until 2001. In his first speech to the Senate, Grant declared:

> *I will never be apologetic about being parochial in my advocacy for the Northern Territory.*

Grant championed major infrastructure projects, including the Alice Springs–Darwin railway. He supported the expansion of mining and Defence industries and remained a tireless advocate for the Territory's rights and, of course, self-government.

His work in Indigenous affairs was both significant and, at times, controversial. He pushed for accountability in government spending while also fighting for meaningful progress in Indigenous education, health and employment.

Grant was also a principled politician willing to stand firm on what he believed. He opposed the override of the Northern Territory's voluntary euthanasia legislation, arguing that it was an undemocratic infringement on Territory rights.

Grant was a vocal supporter of the Northern Territory's push for statehood, but beyond politics, policies and debates he was a man of great character. He had a love for the world beyond politics, which for some might be hard to believe. He was an explorer at heart, with a passion for gardening, drama and reading. For many of us here today, Grant was much more than a leader. As I said earlier, he was a mentor to many, a colleague and a friend. Beyond politics he remained deeply involved in community life.

After retiring from the Senate, he took on various advisory roles, chaired reviews on public policy and served as Administrator of Norfolk Island from 2003 to 2007. In the eulogies last week, we heard of the impact Grant and Sandy had during their time there—in such a small, foreign community compared to the Northern Territory—and the huge difference they made in the lives of those people.

In 2011 Grant was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for his service to the Parliament of Australia, to the community of Norfolk Island and to the Northern Territory through his contributions at all levels of government. He remains the only person in the country to have ever served in all three levels of government, which is truly remarkable. I often wonder if he questioned his life choices at any point, Sandy. He took that with him; perhaps we will never know.

Grant courageously battled with illness over the past several years, with Sandy by his side that entire time, providing so much love, care and support. Sandy, your patience and dedication was truly remarkable, and it was witnessed by all of us. It is a credit to your love and commitment to your marriage and to each other, as undoubtedly, best friends.

Grant Tambling passed away at the age of 81, leaving behind a legacy of leadership and service. Above all, he was an amazing husband and a devoted family man. To you, Sandy, your beautiful children and grandchildren, we offer our deepest and most sincere heartfelt condolences.

Tonight, we honour a proud Territorian, who gave so much to this place and to its people. To you, Grant, we thank you. We offer you our deepest gratitude, and we honour you with a state funeral and tonight's condolence motion to recognise your contribution to the Northern Territory in the past, and indeed forever.

Let us all continue his work by striving for a stronger and fairer Northern Territory for everyone.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to stand alongside my parliamentary colleagues to commemorate the life and legacy of Mr Grant Tambling. On behalf of my Labor opposition team, we offer our deepest condolences to Mr Tambling's family, his friends, former colleagues and, indeed, all Territorians who had the privilege of knowing him.

Mr Tambling was not just a politician; he was a dedicated Territorian, a strong advocate and, above all, a man who cared deeply about his community.

Grant's journey into public life began as an alderman in 1972. His career took him to these sacred halls and then, from the Northern Territory halls, to politics on the federal stage as a senator until 2001.

He was never one to shy away from a complex challenge, and he fought hard for what he believed in. For more than 40 years, Mr Tambling dedicated himself to improving Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory, pushing for better outcomes and ensuring that Indigenous voices were heard and respected. Mr Tambling's legacy in this space will live for many generations, and we thank him for that legacy.

Grant's story started in Wondai, near Kingaroy in Queensland, but his heart belonged to the Territory. After moving to Darwin as a child, he attended Darwin Primary School, Darwin High School and later, as we heard, Adelaide Boys' High School. He was a bright and determined young man, who understood the value of hard work from a very early age. He carried that work ethic into his career at AMP, first in Sydney and later in Darwin, Arnhem Land and Gove, where he further developed his deep passion for Aboriginal affairs, which cemented his values in that area.

When Mr Tambling entered the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly in 1974, having won the seat of Fannie Bay, he quickly made his mark. As deputy leader of the Country Liberal Party, he held key portfolios like Community Development, Finance and Local Government. Beyond the titles and responsibilities, Mr Tambling always focused on making a real difference for his community. His hard work laid the foundation for progressing statehood, Defence, Territory economic development and building relationships with our Southeast Asian neighbours.

Although Mr Tambling's time in the NT parliament lasted just one term, he left with his head held high. He never wavered in his beliefs and values, despite party politics. He stood firm on Aboriginal advancement, the rights of Territorians and ensuring that the Northern Territory had a strong voice in the national discussions. Mr Tambling's work continued in the federal arena, where played a pivotal role in shaping the future of the Northern Territory.

Mr Tambling was never one to simply follow the crowd. He had the courage to stand up for what he believed in, even if it meant going against his own party. In the mid-1990s he opposed the Liberal Party's private member's Bill that sought to override the Northern Territory's euthanasia legislation, fighting for the Territory's right to self-determination. Mr Tambling also crossed the floor in 1981 to support an amendment to the Airlines Agreement Bill, a move that demonstrated his strong independent streak and a deep commitment to fairness and opportunity for all Territorians.

Beyond politics, Mr Tambling was a man of principle and integrity, who genuinely cared about the people he represented and impacted on. His work in securing investment for the Northern Territory, supporting major projects like the Alice Springs–Darwin railway and the expansion of our mining industry reflected his vision for a stronger and more prosperous Territory.

We take a moment today to remember Mr Grant Tambling for not just what he did, but also who he was. He was a fighter, a leader, a mentor and a friend to many. He was someone who left the Territory in a better place than when he found it. Although we mourn his passing, we also celebrate his life and his many contributions to our Northern Territory community.

Rest in peace, Mr Tambling. Your legacy will be remembered.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to a true Territorian and remarkable Australian, Hon Grant Ernest John Tambling AM.

Many in this Chamber and across the Northern Territory knew him simply as 'Tambo'. Although titles like senator, member, Administrator, alderman and honourable might be written next to his name, the truth is that he earned every one of them, because Grant Tambling was more than just a politician; he was a public servant in the truest sense of the word. He was a man who dedicated his entire life to serving the people of the Northern Territory and Australia.

Born in 1943 in a small Queensland town called Wondai, Grant was the eldest of three children. It was in Darwin that he grew up, lived, studied, worked and built a life grounded in service. His father, Ernest 'Tam' Tambling, was a much-loved teacher in the Territory—affectionately known as the 'swaggy teacher'—who walked the tracks to Katherine, educating children in the bush. Grant's mother was also a teacher who moved to Darwin in 1938. In many ways, service to community ran in Grant's blood.

After the war, the Tambling family returned to Darwin, and young Grant completed high school here before moving to Adelaide for senior schooling. He did not come from privilege; he worked hard, studied by correspondence and understood the value of opportunity, education and earning your way.

Grant's political career is nothing short of extraordinary. He is believed to be the first Australian to have served in all three levels of government. That tells you something, not just about his capability but about the trust people had in him at every stage of his life.

He served as an alderman on the Darwin City Council from 1972 to 1974. Then in 1974 he was elected as the Member for Fannie Bay in the first Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. He was part of the founding class—the first team building the framework for self-government in the NT. That is history-making.

In 1980 he was elected to the House of Representatives as the Member for the Northern Territory. Then, in 1987, he returned to federal politics as a senator, serving until 2001. For nearly two decades he was a loud and proud voice for Territorians in Canberra.

I want to share something he said in his maiden speech to the Senate, because it tells us everything we need to know about Grant Tambling's character. He said:

> *I will never be apologetic about being parochial in my advocacy for the Northern Territory.*

That is a man who knew who he was and what he stood for. He was never afraid to fight for the Territory, to speak up for the people who live here and to push for things many others would not touch.

He believed in the Territory. He believed we were not second-class Australians, and he made it his mission to push for full statehood. He believed that Territorians deserved the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as everyone else in this country.

He was not afraid to tackle big issues. He spoke strongly on euthanasia, self-governance, Aboriginal rights and development. He pushed for better infrastructure, better access to education and health and a stronger Defence presence in the north. Even toward the end of his career he was still pushing and thinking about what was next. He spoke about the need to improve Aboriginal health and education, tax reform for people in remote areas, Defence investment and even a space base on our Indian Ocean territories.

What I admire most is that Grant Tambling had the humility to reflect. In one of his final speeches in the Senate, he stood up to say sorry, personally and publicly, to Aboriginal Territorians. He said:

> *So I say sorry. I say sorry very fundamentally for the things that I have not accelerated fast enough … I did not get enough done, and I hope that others will pick up many of those important programs.*

Those words stick with me, because in politics it is easy to talk about what you have achieved. It is rare for someone to acknowledge what is still unfinished. That is courage, honesty and leadership.

Outside of politics Grant continued his service to Australia as the Administrator of Norfolk Island from 2003 to 2007.

Even after all that, he returned to the Territory, the place he loved most.

In 2011 he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his service to politics and the community. That honour was well earned.

We use the word 'legacy' a lot when we speak about people who have passed, but with Grant Tambling it truly applies. His work helped shape the Northern Territory as we know it today. He paved the way for a generation of leaders who now stand where he once stood. He inspired people to care about the Territory, to believe in it and to fight for its future.

To his wife Sandy, his children, grandchildren and everyone who knew and loved him, on behalf of my colleagues and the people of the Northern Territory, I say thank you. Thank you for sharing him with us. Thank you for supporting him so that he could serve. Thank you for standing beside him as he gave so much of himself to others. Grant Tambling was a fighter, a builder, a thinker and a Territorian to the core. We honour his memory, and we carry forward his vision for a stronger, fairer and more united Northern Territory.

May he rest in peace.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, I extend my condolences to the family of the late Hon Grant Tambling AM, who was born on 20 June 1943 and recently passed away on 24 January 2025.

Grant was born to Ernest Tambling and Edna, nee Williamson, both schoolteachers. Ernest Tambling came to the Territory in 1925 as a teacher for a year but ended up staying for 45 years. He was known as the 'swaggy teacher' for moving around isolated communities in the Top End, bringing education to children. He later taught at the Darwin school and, for a time after World War II, worked in the NT administration before returning to school teaching as the head teacher at Bagot.

I share that quick insight to showcase the long-term relationship the Tambling family have had with the Territory and their dedication to Territorians. Because of this service in education by Grant Tambling's father, Ernest, the street bordering my electorate of Wanguri and the electorate of Casuarina is named Tambling Terrace in honour of that service to the Territory.

Grant was educated at Darwin Primary and Darwin High and completed his education in Adelaide. When Grant returned to Darwin he, like me, came to work in the financial services industry, selling insurance for AMP in Darwin and. Like his father, he travelled the Territory to remote areas and looked after the greater Darwin region, Arnhem land and Gove for many years.

Grant used this time to understand the needs of the community and move into politics to advocate for the community at a government level. He first served as an alderman and then moved into the first Legislative Assembly for the Northern Territory as the Member for Fannie Bay in 1974.

Following Cyclone Tracy, which decimated Darwin in 1974, Grant was the Commissioner of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission between 1975 and 1978. The commission was tasked to oversee the rebuilding of more than 2,500 homes. They did that in three years. With distance from the rest of the country, this was an amazing feat. The affected families during that time would have appreciated having a commissioner who understood the work involved because of his passion for Territorians.

My colleagues in this Chamber have highlighted all the great things Grant did at all levels of government, including being the Administrator of Norfolk Island, but I want to say thank you to Grant and his family. Thank you for your service, as many of us who decide to run to represent our constituents only look at one level, but Grant did it all. He believed he could make a difference, and he did it at all levels: local, state and federal.

I wish to extend my gratitude to his family, where Grant is survived by his beautiful wife, Sandra, known to many as Sandy; children, Coryn and Amalia; and grandchildren, Reuben, Hamish and Castiella. Grant and Sandy were married for nearly 56 years, which most couples never get to achieve. It was clear at the state funeral last week in his honour—we heard from many speakers—the love and support they had for each other and combined dedication to the Territory. His family supported Grant so that he could do his best for all Territorians. I recall Coryn saying that the family had to watch every news channel so that his dad was across all the issues of the day.

I wish to extend my deepest condolences to Grant Tambling's family and heartfelt thanks for lending your husband, father and grandfather so that Territorians had a voice at the table.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to Hon Grant Ernest John Tambling AM, who passed away on 24 January 2025. Although I did not have the opportunity to get to know Grant personally, we all acknowledge that he was a dedicated man of service who made significant contributions to the Northern Territory and Australia throughout his long career.

Grant was also a husband, father, grandfather and a friend to many. From what people have told me, Grant was known by all who met him as an absolute gentleman. He served as the Member for Fannie Bay in the first Northern Territory's Legislative Assembly from 1974 to 1977, paving the way for those who followed in his footsteps, including me.

Grant's achievements demonstrate his lifelong commitment to the development and governance of the Northern Territory, for which he continued to advocate throughout his political career. As the current Member for Fannie Bay, I am honoured to continue the legacy of service that Grant Tambling began in the electorate. His commitment to our community and his tireless advocacy for the Northern Territory serves as an inspiration to all of us in public office.

Grant Tambling's passion for the development and progress of the Northern Territory was evident throughout his career. He held executive responsibilities for Community Development, Finance and Local Government during his time in the Legislative Assembly. His work laid the foundation for the growth and prosperity we see in Fannie Bay and across the Territory.

As we remember Grant Tambling's contributions to his family, I pledge to carry forward his spirit of dedication to our community. I will do this by working tirelessly to ensure that Fannie Bay remains safe, secure and thriving. Grant's legacy reminds us of the impact that one person can have on their community and their nation. As the Member for Fannie Bay, and as I am sure that Grant would have, I will remain engaged in community services and focus on issues that are important to Territorians.

Grant was known for his fierce advocacy and willingness to challenge ideology. He was a strong advocate for all his constituents and for the Territory as a whole. I am sure that I speak on the behalf of everyone in the Chamber when I say that we sincerely thank Grant Tambling for his service. Even more so, we thank his family for giving him to the NT and allowing him to do what he loved. The NT is a better place for having Grant Tambling as a part of its history.

I place on my record my appreciation of Grant's long and meritorious public service and tender my profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, thank you to everyone in the House for the opportunity to speak today, and thank you to everyone in the gallery who is joining us tonight for the opportunity to share in this occasion.

I speak in memory of Grant Tambling AM. As we have heard around the House, Grant served as an alderman with Darwin City Council from 1972 to 1974, before being elected to the first Territory Assembly from 1974 to 1977 as the Member for Fannie Bay. He then became the deputy leader of the CLP for two years before moving to the House of Representatives for four years, and he then moved again to Canberra in 1987 until 2001 as a senator. He served in all three levels of government, plus as an Administrator in Norfolk Island between 2003 and 2007. Goodness me!

Tonight I will not detail his long list of services and offices, as others have already done so exhaustively. I will spare us another one of those. Instead, I will provide a couple of brief personal reflections, because I had the opportunity to know him a little over time. I want to draw on two things: his generosity, and his intellectual depth.

Politicians are busy people, and in the time that Grant served he was often representing even more constituents than some of us. But even with a larger number of people to represent, he always made time for others. That is a common refrain, I have found. He made time to go out bush and be in the city. He made time. Indeed, he made time for me as well. He helped me enormously with some of my early career research.

I remember visiting Grant and Sandy in their apartment in the Sentinel building, and I remember interviewing him on the balcony, many times over, for the first major piece of research I did about welfare reform in north Australia. It was something he was very passionate about as well because he was a parliamentary secretary involved in that area for an awfully long time. The depth of his knowledge was profound, and he was always extremely generous with sharing his insights and his connections, which were very helpful when I needed interviews with people who otherwise would not open doors for me. He was generous in that regard and a loyal CLP stalwart for years—for decades, in fact.

It is worth remembering that he was genuinely committed to bipartisan cooperation for the benefit of Territorians in a way that few Territory representatives have been, and he is to be commended for that. I was reminded of this fact by Sandy just the other day. She kindly spoke to me at an International Women's Day event. We were talking about the fact that Grant took the time to get out and about in the bush, and it teased out the idea that this partly happened because he and some of his colleagues fought for better terms and conditions to be able to represent the Northern Territory.

I wanted to take Sandy up on that point, so I hunted down former Senator Trish Crossin—who crossed over with Grant Tambling for a term—to get some of her reflections and find out how much of that was real. I am grateful to former Senator Crossin for sharing some generous reflections. She pointed out that by the time she got to the Senate, Grant was a real stalwart; he had been there for a long time, and he was a senior figure. Despite all of that, he was extremely generous in offering counsel and guidance to somebody from the opposing party, no less, in Canberra, because they shared a common interest in fighting the Territory's corner. Down in Canberra, it was the two of them against the rest of them, as he saw it.

I was told by former Senator Crossin that Grant used to maintain a spreadsheet of issues relevant to the Territory across all the federal portfolios. Can you imagine if you were new to the Senate and relatively clueless, having been parachuted in, having to come in and try to be across all of that? He used to share that information so they could champion ideas. Sometimes, even when they were not ideas that he could champion, he would feed them off to her so she could do something with it. He was a skilful politician.

Speaking to that remote engagement, they worked together on some practical nuts and bolts stuff, like vehicle access to get out bush and work the city. I note today that our Chief Minister had to fight our corner with the Remuneration Tribunal, and they did the same thing in Canberra to try to get some of their air charter entitlement turned into a vehicle allowance so they could get out bush more often. It was a time of bipartisan cooperation in the background.

Former Senator Crossin also shared that Grant did extensive work on copyright vis-a-vis Indigenous art. Again, that was research shared, and it continues to affect our landscape to this day. One of her final observations was in relation to her own maiden speech. At the end of it, Senator Tambling came over and said, 'It was a great speech; well done, but just quietly, you might have said something about the Katherine floods.'

Senator Crossin, at the time did not know what to make of it, but then got advice from Senator Tambling that she could still make up for it by speaking about it in a special adjournment. She had to query what a special adjournment was. He was extremely generous across the board in that regard; that is worth reflecting on.

They got into a bit of trouble. They had such a collegiate relationship that there were some incidents when they alternated images of one another stuck to one side of the House or the other, trying to goad each other into voting for things they were not allowed to vote for. Perhaps it is a tactic we should start employing around here. Her key observation at the end of it all was that Grant Tambling 'never played the person, only the ball'. I think that is testament to his character.

Another thing I want to reflect on is his depth. Politicians are increasingly lightweight in the modern era when committing their ideas to paper. It is too difficult, too risky and you get caught out. Grant Tambling was somebody who did not shy away from putting his thoughts out in the public domain to be tested.

I was the beneficiary of some of his work. I dug out a couple of things he gave me that, honestly, I am still referring to even to this day.

In his capacity as shadow minister for Regional Development, External Territories and North Australia, he wrote discussion papers that tackled big issues like social security, welfare and poverty in north Australia. These are reports from the 1990s. It is interesting that some of the things they go through are still pertinent to us today. There is lots to be learned; there is wisdom to be gained from these documents that he, his staff and his office worked on.

They engaged with tax reform; Commonwealth Grants Commission models and whether they are fair; contributors to poverty; the high cost of service delivery in the Northern Territory; remote tax allowances; zone tax allowances; and even truancy and non-attendance at schools. Issues concerning Aboriginal people and Aboriginal poverty were also forefront in his mind, and he did not shy away from committing his thoughts and ideas to paper. He was a man of conviction.

Probably my favourite quote of his that I have is in this discussion paper from what used to be called the North Australian Research Unit based at the Australian National University. This is from the 1998 discussion

paper 11, ‘A Social Policy Research Agenda to take the Territory, and the Nation, into the 21st Century’. It is a comprehensive paper written. It is worth reflecting on when we think about some of the things that we do in this House, because if we are not mindful of what people have done in the past, we are doomed to repeat mistakes.

There are a couple of quotes I want to draw out, because they are worth mentioning. The first is:

> *The unique characteristics of the Northern Territory—with high Aboriginal and ethnic population components—demand constant testing of needs and equity matters.*

We are still fighting that fight all this time later. It is worth remembering that we stand on the shoulders of giants in building some of these arguments to prosecute our arguments better with the federal government—all the more worth remembering on a night when the federal budget is being released.

Here is another quote I drew out of this paper. In his opinion:

> *It is our role as politicians, academics, policy advisers, bureaucrats and leaders to ensure that we develop social policy that is adaptable and flexible enough to meet the demands of our changing world and region. We must address the needs of all in our policies and in doing so ensure effective and efficient service delivery.*

A final quote I want to draw out of here is about the gravity of his role:

> *I do not take lightly my responsibility as a Federal Senator. It saddens me to see the politics of division that is being practised by the One Nation Party. Pauline Hanson and her advisers are showing a total lack of social responsibility by promoting a return to economic and social policies which would see Australia quickly attain the status of a world pariah and make the prospect of Paul Keating's banana republic look positively cheery.*

Grant Tambling was a heavyweight. More than just being a skilful politician, he was a true parliamentarian and a servant of the public in the truest sense. He was a man of principle, conviction and sincere dedication to the Northern Territory.

I offer my sincere condolences to Sandy, Coryn, Amalia, Reuben, Hamish and Castiella. Verily to God we belong, and to Him we shall return.

Vale, Grant Tambling.

Madam SPEAKER: I also extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends of Hon Grant Tambling.

Motion agreed to.

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

Madam SPEAKER: I thank honourable members for their contributions to this evening’s motion. Light refreshments are available in the Main Hall for the family and friends.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Investment in Healthcare

Continued from earlier this day.

Mr O’GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker; I extend my condolences to Grant Tambling’s family. He was a fantastic champion of the Territory. If we can follow in his footsteps we will be doing very well.

The matter of public importance asks that the NT Government ensures its investment in healthcare meets the current and projected needs of all Territorians. I think I speak on behalf of the whole Assembly, because we have a number of things in common, when I say that we all want a first-class health system to serve all Territorians. I believe we all want well-staffed hospitals and healthcare facilities; the Territory to be a place where health professionals want to come to work and live, rather than leave; short waiting times; and, noting that my son is a paramedic, to reduce the need for ramping services to support our hospitals. I think we all have the same aspiration.

Unfortunately, this is not the system we inherited upon coming to government. We inherited a broken system. The Minister for Health alluded to many of the issues. Members, particularly opposition members, will not be surprised that I will take them back to our plan. We said that we would restore our lifestyle. Part of that was access to healthcare when it is needed. There are a couple of elements to this plan. I will touch on them, and others have already spoken in detail about it, including the Minister for Health. The plan says that we will:

Fix the Broken Hospital System

We will stop Labor's endless code yellows by relieving the pressure on hospital emergency departments. We will tackle alcohol related harm that is increasingly rising in emergency wards with stronger laws and rehabilitation.

That includes laws against those who assault workers, including health workers:

We will work with the Federal Government to increase aged-care facilities to help free up hospital beds.

As part of the federal election coming up, our government will be making representations to our federal counterparts. The plan continues:

This will also improve the wait times for Territorians on much needed surgeries.

Better access to cheaper medicines

Families will get easier access to cheaper medicines and vaccines.

We have seen what we have already done with meningococcal and others:

This will save time and money for families and take pressure off GP waiting rooms.

Then we have disability services. I know that the minister is looking forward to and working towards improving access to a greater range of disability services and additional special needs schooling.

That was what we put out to the public. We recognised that the system was broken. We need to understand how we can fix this broken system. A key element of fixing the broken system is being able to fund it. Labor made lots of promises, but it did not fund them. That is not right; it does not work that way.

We are definitely about trying to fund the health system by rebuilding our economy. How will we do that? This is something that Labor never understood. We need to rebuild the economy to fund our essential services, be it health, education or police. We need to get the economy going, and that is what this government is focused on.

The legislation we recently passed needs to be looked at through the lens of building the economy. People say, 'That coordinator legislation, we should not have done it'. It was all focused on getting our economy going and making it easier for the economy to grow. Our payroll tax reform is there to support and grow the private sector. We just had the merits review Bill go through. That will take out the red tape for projects. Sure, there has to be due diligence and the appropriate scrutiny, but not the overly bureaucratic third-party stuff coming in to delay projects that generally can get up and get the Territory growing.

I think it was the Member for Johnston the other day who said, 'We do not really want the private sector; you are too focused on the private sector.' I am a champion of the private sector, and I have aspirations where it can fund our budget, but we have to let the sector do it; we cannot hold it back. A lot of our initiatives are to free it up so that we can get own-source revenue, the gas industry and our onshore royalties going.

The Member for Nightcliff said that we do not get royalties from INPEX; that is offshore, and those royalties go to the Commonwealth Government, not the Northern Territory Government. If only people would understand these things. We have to get our own revenue.

I say again that I believe we all have the same aspirations. Unfortunately, Labor failed and did not deliver. We are committed to delivering, but we will do it in a funded way. We are fully committed. I am pleased to be the assistant minister for Health, and I support our government's initiative.

Thank you for bringing on the MPI.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to talk about health in the Northern Territory. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this important issue to the Chamber.

Like the Member for Mulka, I begin by thanking our incredibly hardworking and dedicated health workers, including the nurses, doctors, allied health professionals and everyone who works tirelessly to look after the health needs of our communities. These professionals are the backbone of our healthcare system, and their efforts are nothing short of heroic.

In a roundabout way health brought me to the Northern Territory. I first came 30 years ago to visit my brother who was working as a young doctor, drawn like so many by the complex and acute health needs of the Territory. Like so many people who have worked hard for the health of the Northern Territory he continues to have a connection through Menzies. Through him I gained an early insight into the health challenges the Northern Territory faces, and what we are facing now is nothing new.

We face huge challenges to address our unique social determinants of health. Access to housing, education, employment, social networks, healthcare and wraparound social services are all fundamental to improving health outcomes. We must also acknowledge the cultural determinants of health across the Territory that encompass the different ways that culture, traditions, values and practices influence the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Therefore, it is important that when we talk about health spending we are not just talking about physical health, but also addressing the social and cultural determinants of health.

To make meaningful progress in improving health outcomes it is essential that we invest in upstream public health measures in addition to the traditional primary and emergency healthcare services that are so vital for the health of our society. These upstream measures address the root causes of health issues, targeting the social, economic and environmental factors that contribute to poor health outcomes.

Long-term generational investment in these initiatives can help reorientate our health services towards more localised preventive health models. These models serve to improve overall health, prevent future health issues, reduce disparities and ultimately lead to stronger, healthier communities. These are the critical elements of overall wellbeing.

As the Member for Daly mentioned, we must also recognise the importance of working in partnership with local communities to develop appropriate healthcare solutions. Local communities have invaluable knowledge of their own needs, traditions and challenges. Involving them in the development and delivery of health services ensures that these services are culturally appropriate and accessible and will work. Collaborating with local communities will help us tailor healthcare services to their specific needs and ensure better health outcomes for all of us in the long term.

In my electorate, like so many of us, I see firsthand how many people struggle with accessing appropriate and timely health services and care. This is not just a local issue; it is a Territory-wide challenge that demands our immediate attention.

The broader health needs of the NT are significant and urgent. Access to quality healthcare in remote and regional communities remains one of the Territory's most pressing issues. In fact, remote communities in the NT experience some of the worst health outcomes in the country. Life expectancy in remote areas is, on average, 11 years lower than in urban areas, with Aboriginal Territorians living 9.5 years less than non-Aboriginal Territorians.

Over 30% of the Territory's population is living in remote or very remote areas where healthcare services are scarce and access to primary healthcare is severely limited. We heard about this from the Member for Mulka. Residents in these areas often must travel hundreds of kilometres to access basic healthcare services, leading to delayed treatment, preventable hospitalisations and significantly poorer health outcomes. Emergency evacuations, which do not always go right due to inadequate local healthcare services, are an ongoing reality.

For mental health crises, a lack of immediate local support can lead to emergency department visits and unnecessary hospital admissions and exacerbate an already-stretched system. Mental health services in the Territory are particularly under-resourced. Over 25% of Territorians report experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress compared with the national average of 13.5%. Without early intervention and community-based mental health services, individuals often reach crisis point, overwhelming emergency departments and hospital services.

Early intervention across our whole health system saves lives, reduces pressure on hospitals and ultimately saves the government significant resources. Funding must be targeted at supporting people before health reaches a crisis point, and we need to ensure that people receive timely care closer to home. In my electorate I hear from residents every day who are unable to access healthcare when they need it most.

Again, I recognise the amazing work our healthcare system does. I have been a lucky recipient of incredible healthcare in the Northern Territory public health system over, unfortunately, myriad health issues, and it has been incredible. The service my family and I received has been amazing.

Many people are unable to access healthcare when they need it most, whether it is long wait times where the average wait for a specialist appointment exceeds 12 weeks; the lack of culturally appropriate services; the desperate shortage of healthcare professionals; or the pressure this puts on healthcare professionals. All these barriers are real and are affecting people's lives every day.

The broader health landscape in the Northern Territory is equally concerning. Chronic diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular disease and respiratory conditions are more prevalent here than anywhere else in Australia. For example, the rate of diabetes in the NT is more than 2.5 times the national average. Aboriginal Territorians are four times more likely to be hospitalised for diabetes-related complications. Aged-care services are also under immense pressure, and we know that many beds in our hospitals are taken up by people who need to be in appropriate aged-care services.

The social services and wellbeing sector is the largest employer in the Northern Territory. Supporting this sector through targeted funding will enhance care quality and reduce stigma around health issues.

We must prioritise health support for Aboriginal communities. Closing the gap in health outcomes is not just a policy goal; it is a social justice imperative. We heard from the Productivity Commission two weeks ago that the Northern Territory is going backwards against eight of the Closing the Gap targets, including female life expectancy and birth weight. Aboriginal Territorians are 3.5 times more likely to experience avoidable hospital admissions and 2.5 times more likely to die from preventable causes than non-Aboriginal residents. Culturally appropriate services and support for Aboriginal health workers are essential components of any effective health strategy.

Health is, of course, closely linked to broader social issues such as housing, food security, education and safety. Addressing these factors is critical to improving health outcomes. Policies that support safe and affordable housing, food security and healthy, violence-free relationships enable Territorians to manage their health more effectively and lead fulfilling lives.

As we look at ways to improve health outcomes in the Northern Territory, we also must be acutely aware of the impact that industrial development can have on the health of our people, especially in our more vulnerable and remote communities. The risks posed by these industries are not abstract; they are real and immediate.

Member for Karama, I am not opposed to private enterprise; I did not say that, and I am not opposed to building our economy. If we are opening the Territory for business, we need to make sure that this business will not make us sicker.

In 2023 Northern Territory paediatricians—hardworking practitioners who look after all our children—asked for research and evidence on the impact of oil and gas development on our health because their pledge is to do no harm, and they were worried about the health impacts of this development on their patients. I remind this Chamber that these specialists, these doctors, have pledged to do no harm and their only agenda is to look after our sick children. I wonder whether these are the people—the activists—that the CLP wants to leave the Northern Territory.

The outcome of this research is clear. I have it here, and anyone is welcome to look at it. It is The Risks of Oil and Gas Development for Human Health and Wellbeing: A Synthesis of Evidence and Implications for Australia. It shows us clearly that extraction processes such as hydraulic fracking and drilling can have significant environmental and health impacts.

These operations release harmful chemicals into the air, soil and water, all of which can directly affect public health. Studies have shown that exposure to these chemicals can lead to a range of health issues, respiratory problems, cardiovascular disease and neurological damage, to name a few. People living in proximity to these operations, including in areas like the Beetaloo basin and around the Middle Arm precinct in Darwin Harbour, are at an increased risk. Our healthcare system, already stretched thin by the demands of chronic

disease and mental health challenges, will face even greater burdens as these health impacts begin to manifest.

Beyond the direct health risks, the environmental consequences of oil and gas extraction are also of great concern. Contamination of water sources, disruption of local ecosystems and the destruction of wildlife habitats could exacerbate the already significant pressures on our environment and communities.

If our commitment is to continue to improve health outcomes we must ensure that we are not trading one set of health risks for another. The Northern Territory cannot afford to ignore the mounting evidence of these health risks.

The health challenges we face in the Northern Territory are not insurmountable, but they require a united effort. We must continue to advocate for better healthcare services, chronic disease prevention, mental health services and programs that break the cycle of disadvantage. We must also protect our environment from industries that threaten to harm our land, air and water and the health of the people who call this place home. Let us make health our priority because our communities deserve nothing less.

I seek leave to table this report.

Leave granted.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, 'that the NT Government ensures its investment in healthcare means current and future projected needs of all Territorians'—that is indeed a matter of public importance, and I welcome the opposition raising it, but there is something of a perverse irony that the Labor opposition would raise it, noting its chronic lack of investment in the healthcare system over large tracts of time. I can only imagine that those opposite have raised it today serendipitously hoping to capitalise on the federal budget and announcements that may paper over their negligent conduct in this area.

Investment is about more than just buildings; it is also about people, and that is where the last eight years of Labor government was abysmal. I specifically want to talk about a durable healthcare workforce, which I have raised before in other forms. I am astonished that this is the item the opposition chooses to draw attention to because, as the Minister for Health pointed out, we are working aggressively and at pace in this space to do all manner of things that Labor dropped the ball on over a long time. I am not ordinarily predisposed to playing 'kick the last lot for the last eight years', but this is taking the prize today.

In the relentless pursuit for financial capital over the last eight years the Labor government dropped the ball on human capital, and I have raised this point before. In the Treasurer's Annual Financial Report (TAFR) that came out late last year, if you look carefully you will see that health is the government sector's largest expenditure category. It is ideally illustrative of the Labor government's mismanagement. The TAFR reiterates, as did the Minister for Health, that there has been:

> *… increased expenditure relating to: hospital services largely driven by skilled workforce shortages requiring increased utilisation of high cost agency labour hire and overtime …*

Why has that happened? Why is our system bankrupting itself by having to rely on a two-tier system where we are paying differential rates and having to rely on agency workforce to keep the system from collapsing? It is because of poor economic policy choices that have been made over time. While I applaud the federal Labor government for kicking in from time to time in our healthcare arena, and likewise federal Liberal governments, there is little that Territory Labor can lay credit to over the last eight years in that regard.

We have facilities that are underserviced with an inadequate workforce to provide high-quality healthcare, and it is a disincentive for people setting up shop and sticking around in the Northern Territory. That is the point that the Minister for Health made. We are working on these issues holistically. Yes, there is a component about buildings, plant and capital, but there is also a component about making this place liveable and making it safe for the healthcare workforce, not just attracting healthcare workers but also finding ways to retain them. I am astonished in this regard.

The quantum of that utilisation of high-cost agency labour hire and overtime was:

> *health spending increased by $228 million from $2.02 billion in 2022–23 to $2.24 billion in 2023–24, as a result of increased expenditure in hospitals, largely driven by skilled workforce shortages requiring increased utilisation of high cost agency labour hire and overtime …*

It is astonishing that those opposite would draw attention to this area of policy ineptitude. Successive Territory Labor Treasurers and Health ministers neglected this issue because, quite frankly, it was in the too-hard basket. This is not in the too-hard basket for this government.

You will note that when Labor refused to talk about population decline, we have tackled it from day one. It is just the beginning in this regard. At the moment, we are trying to stimulate the residential construction sector and housing supply and incentivise small business to spend money. All these things are working in tandem to try to create the preconditions for a place where people want to stick around.

It is not only us who have a healthcare worker shortage; there is a global shortage of healthcare workers, as the Deputy Opposition Leader pointed out. In order to be competitive in the marketplace you have to provide a reasonable offering. We are trying hard to set the preconditions to make it possible for people to want to come, stay and succeed here, because that is simply not the case now.

I am committed to working with the Minister for International Education, Migration and Population and the Minister for Health on creating sustainable, new workforce pipelines in healthcare. I say 'new' because we have had so many mis-starts, false alarms, red herrings and *Utopia*-esque announcements in this place that it is embarrassing.

You can go back to September 2023 to find the last lot of pseudo-engagement done by the then Deputy Chief Minister on a mercy mission to Kerala in India to try to set up new workforce pipelines with nurses, purportedly, and create aviation sector options. Where are those nurses? What do we have to show for that MOU with Kerala? It is astonishing that those opposite would raise this of all things.

I will give the Labor opposition a fairer hearing than anyone in this place. There are things Labor members could point to that they did successfully. Why not talk about them? Perhaps those opposite are being extremely brave to highlight how negligent they were in the policy arena in relation to workforce development over such a long period. I am not inclined to speak on matters of public importance, but this is so important that I had to speak on it.

I am committed, as I said, to working with the Minister for International Education, Migration and Population and the Minister for Health on creating sustainable, new workforce pipelines. Where Labor failed to do anything other than make *Utopia*-esque announcements, we will deliver. Just because you cannot see it does not mean there are not things happening in the background in a range of areas.

Yes, the headline-grabbing material is all about deregulating our environment and trying to create business confidence. I am the first to admit that the government is pushing an aggressive agenda in that regard, but it is not the only part of the agenda that we are pushing. There is a threefold agenda to try to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore lifestyle. Under those, lots of different things are happening in every regard. Whether they all work perfectly or at the same time remains to be seen.

Quite seriously, after years of negligence in workforce, population, talent acquisition, migration and higher education, what does the former government have to stand on in this regard? It dropped the ball entirely on the labour component of the Labor equation. It astonishes me that it was this fixated over this period on major projects and infrastructure.

The underlying problem is demographic decline. I have spoken about this at length, so I will not go through it again. The key thing to remember is that demographic decline has workforce implications. Good luck servicing any industry if you do not have people. That is why we are working on trying to bring people here and creating the preconditions for people to come, stay, live and work here. The healthcare workforce is an important part of that equation.

Our demographic decline has undermined, not fostered, economic development. It has an attendant impact on the quality of life for all Territorians. It has diminished it, not improved it. Demographic decline is at the root of the workforce crisis in healthcare. Be clear that is exactly what it is: a workforce crisis in healthcare.

I want to be careful about what I say because the people in our healthcare system are working as hard as they possibly can to provide the best quality of care they can, but they are working with the policy odds stacked against them, and they have been for a number of years now.

It is serendipitous that just yesterday one of my constituents, a gentleman I know named Sijmen Grunbauer, in desperation wrote a letter to the NT Independent. I highlight this letter because it speaks volumes about the situation we are in. The letter is titled 'Stroke victim left in limbo at RDH with no rehab services'. I had

been trying to help Sijmen Grunbauer to the best of my ability because his wife, Elva, recently had a stroke. She received care at RDH and has been redirected to palliative care. It is Sijmen's contention that she should have the option for rehabilitative care.

I know the people in RDH are doing their darnedest to provide the best possible service they can, but the contention made by my constituent is:

> *It seems that RDH does not have the expertise or staff to deal with any but the mildest form of stroke and therefore send the rest of us to die regardless of age.*

That is a harsh charge. But what I will say is this: RDH does not have facilities for mechanical thrombectomy or specialist stroke physicians; RDH has a limited number of neurologists, and those who are there work overtime and flat out to try to keep up with demand. They are not to be pilloried for their service; they are to be lauded. The people who are to be pilloried for their negligence are the former government members who did not do anything to incentivise those specialists to come to and stay in the Northern Territory. They did not have transitional mechanisms in place to fill the gaps when we lost critical specialists and were unable to get people to fill those gaps.

I feel for Sijmen because there is little I can do for him or his wife, Elva, at this point, short of advocating for access to the rehabilitative care they are seeking at Palmerston hospital. That is a medical decision, and it will be made by medical specialists. Stroke is a perfect illustration of something that requires people with high-end skills and not after the fact, but at the time of the incident and the onset.

I struggle to see why we would be discussing this, except because it is worth shining a light on. Perhaps that is what we take from today. When all is said and done Labor's commitment to facing the NT's economic reality—which is a quagmire of catastrophe of its own creation—is something we are just starting to have to accept. Our government will make lots of noise about negligent conduct and economic mismanagement going forward, but people's lives are at stake in the bush and urban areas; this matters. All browbeating aside, all of us want a better, stronger, robust healthcare system.

I grew up here when investment in public health, housing, education and infrastructure was sufficiently strong to provide the preconditions for people to succeed. Successive governments over a number of years have dropped the ball. That process accelerated over the last eight years when we stopped paying attention to sustainable demographic growth to underpin sustainable economic growth.

I make the case frequently to my colleagues on the government side that it is great they have these industries that they want to concentrate on, but we will need people to fill all of them. That is what we are trying to do. We are making this a place where people across those sectors will want to live, work and enduringly stay here. People in critical areas like healthcare will want to do the same.

Remember that investment is not just about plant and capital, bricks and mortar or buildings and hospitals; it is about people. We all share concern for the state of our healthcare system. It is one of those things we need to band together on and face the reality so that we can move forward constructively. Unless and until we accept that we have a population and workforce problem—unless we can find some sort of bipartisan consensus on moving forward with that agenda, accepting that both sides dropped the ball on this over a number of years and now we need to figure out how to attract, retain and develop populations—the Northern Territory will be at a crossroads. Our economic development is not the only thing at stake; it is our existence and our capacity to exist rather than just subsist within this jurisdiction.

We cannot continue to joke, 'When in pain get on a plane'. Those days are done now. We know that there are critical issues in the healthcare sector, and it is time for us to face them head on. I commend the Minister for Health for facing those challenges and investing in our system appropriately.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Mr Deputy Speaker, I speak on this matter of importance for all Territorians; that is, ensuring our healthcare investment meets the current and future needs of our communities, no matter where they are in the Territory.

Health is not just another policy area; it is central to positive outcomes, particularly out bush. Good health is the foundation for good families, happy communities, economic productivity and, indeed, the Territory's collective future. This is why it is vital that the Northern Territory Government commits to not only maintaining but also enhancing its investment in healthcare infrastructure, staffing and services.

Our healthcare system should be responsive, accessible and reliable, now and always. It is what the people who sent us here expect of us.

Friends, when I speak about health, I speak on behalf of my constituents in Arafura. They know all too well what happens when governments do not invest: clinics are understaffed; dialysis units are too far from home; and family members wait weeks for appointments or fly hundreds of kilometres for basic care. In places like Gunbalanya, Maningrida and Wurrumiyanga healthcare is not always a short drive away; it is often a long journey, sometimes with difficulty and delay.

Health out bush is vital. The former government understood this reality which is why we prioritised health. Since 2016 the former Labor government delivered significant reform and investment in remote health, including transitioning health services to Aboriginal community control in places like Maningrida, Docker River, Yulara and West Arnhem and supporting the establishment of the Red Lily Health Board. This transition empowers local communities to take the lead in their own healthcare, reflecting the principle of local decision-making.

The Labor government delivered new health centres in Galiwinku, Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Robinson River and Umbakumba. The primary care pilots in Maningrida and on Groote Eylandt and the Tiwi Islands are strengthening care pathways and easing the pressure on emergency departments.

We invested in the staffing and local workforce initiative, launching paramedic and nurse practitioner trials, expanding telehealth services and progressing the remote workforce action plan in partnership with AMSANT, NT PHN and the Australian Government. New training pathways and programs helped grow and retain our local health workforce.

We also prioritised community safety for health workers. To protect those on the front line we implemented security upgrades to staff housing and provided personal safety devices in partnership with police and private security firms.

Significantly for my constituents we worked on a new clinic in Gunbalanya, a federally funded project secured under Labor and designed in partnership with the community. This is in limbo, so I will ask the CLP about it soon. Our community is still waiting for delivery of its medical clinic, a project already budgeted and with federal funding, but inexplicitly delayed. The community needs and deserves answers.

Delays in vital projects such as these have real human costs. People should not be forced to travel hundreds of kilometres to access basic medical care.

I have stated before that when an elder comes into town for medical assistance they bring the whole tribe. This situation places undue pressure on families and our urban centres, contributing to issues such as overcrowded housing and increased rough sleeping. We just need to look at some of our parks to see this.

The delay is not just an administrative oversight; it is a betrayal. The people of Gunbalanya deserve better. If the CLP is looking to balance the budget by cutting crucial health projects in the bush, it should come out and say so. The people of Gunbalanya are urgently calling on the government to complete this project. They deserve to see action; the resources have been allocated and the funds provided.

The health system is powered by fantastic health staff, and the government needs to invest in healthcare workers, especially in remote communities. Doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and administrative workers are the backbone of our health system and deserve our full support. Investment must include robust recruitment and retention strategies, better incentives and support worker environments that respect and value these individuals' enormous contributions to our community.

It is the same situation out bush as it is in town. We must also look to future needs. Our population is growing and ageing. Chronic illnesses, including diabetes and kidney disease, are at alarming rates in our remote communities. Investment in renal clinics and new health centres, like the one recently established in Jabiru, must continue.

I acknowledge the support from our Labor colleagues in Canberra who have consistently prioritised healthcare. Their initiatives include GP emergency Medicare clinics and strengthening bulk-billing initiatives, reflecting a strong commitment to rebuilding and revitalising healthcare nationwide. It is essential that the Territory government matches the commitment and ensures all Territorians are included and no-one is left behind.

I acknowledge the vital support from our federal Labor colleagues who consistently prioritise healthcare. Federal Labor and our Territory representatives have delivered the largest-ever Medicare investment—$8.5bn to ensure GP visits are free for most Australians by 2030. They have also established 50 Medicare urgent care clinics nationwide—including successful clinics in Palmerston and, soon, Darwin—offering bulk-billed extended hour services to ease pressure on our hospitals. They are tripling bulk-billing incentives, doubling GP training placements with Charles Darwin University and delivering cheaper medicines to restore faith in our healthcare system.

The health of our community cannot afford to be compromised by political games and bureaucratic delays. No matter where they live, Territorians deserve and expect immediate and sustained action. This parliament knows too well the healthcare challenges facing Territorians. It is time we committed to ensuring that our healthcare system meets and exceeds these challenges, today and for generations to come.

Mr CHARLS (People, Sport and Culture): Mr Deputy Speaker, ensuring the NT Government's investment in healthcare meets current and projected future needs of all Territorians is indeed a critical matter, as healthcare is fundamental to the development of our community.

As the Member for Sanderson and part of the current CLP government, I wholeheartedly agree with the importance of ensuring quality and futureproofing healthcare investment. However, it is important to critically assess how effectively previous investments have translated into better outcomes for Territorians. We must look closely at the past to clearly understand the challenges and define our path forward.

Although the previous Labor government from 2016 to August 2024 significantly increased healthcare staffing levels, it failed to match this growth with a corresponding enhancement in service quality or outcomes. The budget documents clearly reflect this disparity. Full-time equivalent numbers increased, yet quality indicators and patient experiences deteriorated.

The healthcare sector is home to many dedicated professionals who are committed to delivering the highest standard of care to the people of the Northern Territory. However, the reckless and misguided expenditure of the past eight years under Labor is only now drawing alarm for the opposition.

Let us consider the facts. In reviewing the health budget papers from 2016–17 to the most recent 2024–25 agency budget statement we observed significant growth in healthcare expenditure, yet despite such increased investment the system under Labor continued to suffer, which in turn can lead to a degradation in service quality.

Hospital wait times escalated dramatically. Patients across the Northern Territory were waiting longer for critical procedures and treatments, even though the population has remained relatively stable. For example, waiting times for elective surgeries and emergency department treatments have seen substantial increases year on year, putting undue stress on patients and their families.

I facilitated a meeting yesterday between representatives of the ministerial advisory committee for seniors and Minister Edgington. Their number one concern was the critical shortage of aged-care beds which has directly led to numerous elderly Territorians occupying hospital beds instead. This situation starkly highlights the former government's lack of action and foresight, causing many senior Territorians who spent their lives working hard and contributing taxes to spend their final days in hospital beds rather than in the dignity and comfort of appropriate aged-care facilities.

The previous Labor government members might attempt to justify these deteriorations by citing COVID-19 as a contribution factor. However, it is important to highlight that the impact of COVID-19 in the Northern Territory was negligible compared with other regions of Australia. It cannot explain the consistent degradation we witnessed over multiple years.

Moreover, the previous Labor government's era was marked by a significant expansion of administrative overhauls. The growth in healthcare FTEs predominantly occurred in administrative roles rather than frontline health professionals who directly improve patient outcomes. Increased bureaucracy has not translated into better care; instead, it created layers of inefficiency, diluting the impact of every healthcare dollar spent.

When considering the evidence of patient feedback, staffing distribution and quality performance metrics detailed in successive budget papers, despite higher spending key performance indicators suggest patient satisfaction and timely care delivery worsened. The previous Labor government allowed inefficiencies to grow unchecked, disregarding practical outcomes for Territorians.

The Member for Daly spoke highly of the previous government's support for staff, but, let us be honest, the reality tells a different story. One of the most damaging decisions made by the former Gunner government was the introduction of the public sector pay freeze. Labor called that responsible budgeting, but in truth it was a blow to the heart of our health system. The people most affected by this were our hardworking social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, pharmacists, speech pathologists, dieticians, Aboriginal liaison officers, hospital support workers and frontline administrative staff members who form the backbone of our hospitals and health services. These are the people who show up every day, often under immense pressure, to care for our community. Instead of being rewarded or recognised, they were told to do more with less. This is not just about wages; it is about respect, retention and recognition.

The consequences have been devastating. The pay freeze led to staff morale plummeting and contributed significantly to the workforce shortages and burnout we are now grappling with across the Northern Territory.

During the previous Labor government crime was skyrocketing, alcohol-related presentations were on the rise, and our hospital and clinic staff were bearing the brunt of it all. Health workers who dedicate their lives caring for others were becoming the punching bags of antisocial and intoxicated individuals under the influence of alcohol and other drugs. The level of abuse endured by our frontline health staff during this time was nothing short of appalling. Verbal threats, physical assaults and constant fear became part of their daily working environment. These are not just statistics; these are real people doing vital work who were left exposed and unsupported. The government of the day failed to protect those who were protecting us. Its inaction allowed this culture of violence and disrespect to take root in our health system, and the damage it has caused to staff wellbeing, morale and retention has been immense.

When we hear praise for the previous government's support of staff we need to call it what it is—empty rhetoric. The former government said one thing but did the opposite, and our health system is still paying the price. Our government now faces the task of recalibrating this imbalance. Minister Edgington's priority is clear: investment in healthcare must be strategic, accountable and outcome focused. The CLP government will rigorously ensure each dollar allocated to healthcare achieves measurable improvement in health outcomes for Territorians.

The Labor opposition members raised this matter of public importance, but it is their record that demands scrutiny. Territorians deserve better than higher costs for deteriorating services. Our CLP government is committed to restoring efficiency, quality and accountability in healthcare investment to meet current and future needs effectively and sustainably.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, this matter of public importance affects all Territorians—that is, health. Our Territory Labor opposition brought forward this matter of public importance because we are deeply concerned that the current CLP government is following in the footsteps of its predecessors, the previous CLP governments which neglected our health system. Now we have a Health minister who refuses to talk about hospitals, maternity wards, access to essential health services across the Northern Territory and our health workforce capacity.

Territorians will remember that under previous CLP governments they suffered greatly due to the lack of planning for current and future demand on our health system. Health services were delivered without evidence-based strategies, and they failed to produce real outcomes for Territorians to improve health. Former CLP governments neglected hospital capacity, renal services in urban and remote areas, essential hospital amenities and infrastructure for remote primary healthcare centres across the Northern Territory.

Seven months into its term we have not heard of any vision from the CLP government or the Health minister about what they plan to do in this life-saving space. Sadly, we feel this is a repeat of history and not for the better by the new CLP government. Between 2012 and 2016 the CLP had five different Health ministers. No wonder there was no long-term health vision in that chaotic four years.

Despite promising a PET scanner over three federal election cycles, the CLP failed to deliver this for Territorians. It was the Territory Labor government that secured the federal funding, committed the Northern Territory resources and delivered the PET scanner and the cyclotron.

The federal Labor government continues to invest in our health system and the wellbeing of Territorians, with initiatives such as the Medicare urgent care clinics, providing bulk-billed healthcare where families in the Territory need it; cheaper medicines, reducing prescription costs for Territorians; and record Medicare investment, the largest single boost to bulk-billing in Australian history.

This is in contrast to when Peter Dutton was the Coalition's Health minister. He gutted our healthcare system. Peter Dutton tried to dismantle bulk-billing by forcing patients to pay a tax when they went to see a general practitioner. Peter Dutton cut $50bn from public hospitals across Australia. He was voted the worst Health minister in Medicare's history by Australian doctors, the experts in the field. Peter Dutton imposed a six-year Medicare rebate freeze, forcing doctors to raise fees and cut bulk-billing services for many Australians.

We cannot afford to let the health of Territorians, whether they be in urban, regional or remote areas, suffer due to budget constraints. There is nothing more important than your health, which is why in Budget 2024 the former Labor government delivered a record $2.2bn health budget. This investment included $32m for new healthcare facilities to ease hospital pressures; the planning and early works for a new aged-care facility in Palmerston; a new healthcare centre in Borroloola; and $10m to service land at the Palmerston regional health precinct for a 120-bed aged-care facility and $2m for its detailed design.

Increased numbers of suitable aged-care beds will reduce emergency department and hospital bed pressures, given that the number of Territorians over 65 years of age is projected to increase to 35,000 Territorians by 2041.

The new $20m Borroloola health clinic will transform primary healthcare delivered across the Roper Gulf region in the Health minister's own electorate of Barkly, providing better healthcare closer to home and more access for those living in that region, yet we have heard nothing publicly from him about this critical health project. You would think that a project of this significance—which will change lives for thousands of people in that part of the Territory—would be spruiked, no matter what side of politics you come from. The new Borroloola health centre will offer consulting rooms, emergency bays, dental services, X-ray facilities, a hearing booth, renal services and a morgue.

The Member for Arafura spoke about renal services. Last year I was honoured to be the Health minister who released the Northern Territory's renal strategy 2024–2029. A workforce component for community kidney workers was included in that new strategy. Several weeks ago I wrote to the Health minister—I am yet to receive a reply—for an update on this game-changing part of the strategy whereby local community members in remote communities will be trained to become kidney health workers to support more community members staying in their community on country to receive life-saving renal care. I await that update.

Primary healthcare infrastructure reduces hospital pressures, and we need to attract and retain our amazing healthcare professionals in the Northern Territory—government as well as non-government. As part of the 2024 budget our former Labor government also boosted the health operating budget by an extra $200m in 2023–24 and an extra $100m in 2024–25. These additional investments ensured that resources would go where they are needed most so that Territorians, no matter where they live, can access the quality care they deserve. The system is not perfect, but we all have to work together to make sure it is always improved.

We hear the CLP's mantra of blowout costs in health. I want the CLP to be up-front and tell Territorians which healthcare services it will cut, which clinics it intends to close to save a dollar and which healthcare professionals it will sack to see this budget lowered. The CLP is not being genuine about many things in this place, but it must be genuine when it comes to Territorians' health.

Territorians deserve to have the best healthcare possible, regardless of where they are. Mr Deputy Speaker, I see you agreeing. This is not just a policy issue; it is about the quality of life, dignity and wellbeing of Territorians whom we all serve in this place. Every dollar we invest in healthcare services saves lives, prevents suffering and strengthens the health and wellbeing of communities. When the Territory government invests in health services, it ensures that all Territorians have:

- stronger hospitals that can meet growing demand
- better access to doctors and specialists, especially in regional and remote areas
- improved maternity services so that families get the best start in life
- more aged-care facilities to keep our elderly Territorians safe and well cared for
- more mental health and wellbeing support in appropriate ways for those who need it the most.

We cannot afford short-term thinking when it comes to the healthcare of Territorians. A failure to invest in our Territory health system today will cost us more money, increase hospital admissions, see worsening health

outcomes overall for Territorians, including the number of people with chronic and preventable diseases, and create further pressure on a system that will eventually buckle.

Last week we did not hear a single word from the CLP government or the Health minister, who is also the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, on the national Closing the Gap statement, strategy and targets. The national Closing the Gap strategy is extremely important as it reflects the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorians—one-third of the Territory's population, may I remind the House. There was not a single whisper, comment or one of the many press releases that the CLP is fond of releasing that do not necessarily create impactful action. No thought was given by the CLP government or the Health minister to a response on behalf of the Northern Territory about the national Closing the Gap strategy. That is appalling.

It is easy to find statistics about life expectancy, but we must remember that the numbers have the stories of Territorians and Australians attached to them. The life expectancy comparison is one of the starkest contrasts of the national Closing the Gap strategy. The life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females is 75.6 years compared with 83.8 years for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females; that is a difference of 8.1 years. The life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males is 71.9 years compared with 80.6 years for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males; that gap is 8.7 years.

Today I turned 40, and I am already halfway through my lowered life expectancy as an Aboriginal woman in Australia. What a sad statistic, to know that I am now at middle age when it comes to my race and gender, living in the luckiest country in the world. It is hard to think that the people we love and whom we represent in this Chamber may have a shorter life expectancy, and that based on your attributes you will live less, purely because of who you are, how you are born, your background and gender.

We will work with the CLP government on those key closing the gap initiatives for health and improving the life expectancy of remote and urban Aboriginal Territorians. The Territory Labor opposition offers our support to go past politics to make sure that all of us in this place are contributing.

I thought the Minister for Health would use his time in this matter of public importance debate to outline his vision for health in the Territory, but he wasted the opportunity we gave him, almost on a silver platter. All he did was rubbish things from the former Labor government. Rubbish, rubbish, rubbish—there was no vision. Maybe those opposite are not allowed to have a vision if they are not the Chief Minister. Maybe they are not allowed to speak out about the great things they want to see in the Territory, those they want to continue and the areas of improvement they want the opposition to support.

Guess what? We are four members representing four remote electorates with some of the most challenging and complex regions in the Northern Territory when it comes to health. We come with experience, great ideas and solid networks across our four electorates in our capacity as the Labor opposition to contribute in a genuine partnership. I offer my hand to the Minister for Health and Aboriginal Affairs and his CLP government, if they are so interested, to work together to close the gap so that this time next year and the years after that prior to the next four-year election cycle we can say that we made a difference in this place to support the advancement of healthcare for all Territorians.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, it breaks my heart to have heard that straight from the Leader of the Opposition's mouth. The Labor members represent four of the most marginal electorates in the country with terrible health outcomes, and all four of them, who are now sitting in opposition alone, represented those seats under a Labor government. For eight years, for two years and for three years—if I remember that correctly—each of them sat in power in government and did not deliver for their constituents. I cannot understand how we had a Labor government for 19 of the last 23 years, yet those opposite say that the CLP government, eight months in, is not doing enough to close the gap.

Those opposite now spout federal politics and say how great Anthony Albanese is for his $150 power bill and slightly cheaper Medicare rebates, while he is doing nothing to help with the poor health outcomes we have in the Territory. I hear it from the Member for Daly's constituents. They reach out to me and ask what we are doing about Dundee and health services out towards the Daly. It breaks my heart to know that he was in government—he was the Speaker at one point—yet he could not achieve anything for his electorate.

The Member for Arnhem, the Opposition Leader now, was a senior minister under Michael Gunner, Natasha Fyles and Eva Lawler. What health outcomes did she achieve for her electorate? It honestly astounds me that they said in this place tonight that the CLP government after eight months has no vision for health …

Members interjecting.

Mr MACKAY: They are interjecting now because they do not like to hear the truth. They failed their own constituents …

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Let the Member for Goyder be heard in silence, please.

Mr MACKAY: For 19 of the last …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! I believe the time has now expired.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, there is still time.

Mr MACKAY: The clock never started for my …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is two minutes 20 seconds on the global time.

Mr MACKAY: I appreciate the Member for Arnhem's attention to detail, but I wish she had paid some of that attention to the constituents in her electorate, as she could have improved their lives.

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Cease the interjections!

Mr MACKAY: She could have genuinely made a difference in this place, and it is terrible.

Ms Uibo interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, be quiet. Order!

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Cease the interjections. Let the Member for Goyder be heard in silence. Everyone else was heard in silence.

Mr MACKAY: If the Leader of the Opposition had done some research she would know I am quite passionate, especially about the Tiwi Islands and what is happening out towards the Daly River and at Wadeye. I want to make the Territory a better place. I understand the best way to, long term, look at reducing crime in the Northern Territory is to make sure we invest in our communities. If we can turn it around we can make them great places to live and we will have fewer transient people and fewer issues.

Now, after 19 of the last 23 years, Labor members will get up and say that in seven months we have not done enough to close the gap. What did you achieve in 19 of the last 23 years, with eight years as a senior minister under three Chief Ministers? You have the audacity to say that the CLP is all about cuts, and the CLP will do this. Why did you not invest? You spent billions of dollars you did not have. Why did you not put it into health? I do not understand how we got here today, when all of a sudden those opposite will rewrite history. They have some federal talking points from Anthony Albanese. They attacked Peter Dutton in their speeches. Their priorities are utterly wrong, and if they had spent any of their time in this Chamber, in the meetings and in Cabinet looking after their constituents, they would not be here tonight saying, 'Poor us'. Why did you not invest?

I cannot understand why you would fail your own constituents. They are the people who voted for you—or at least the 30% of them who vote. How on Earth can you look yourself in the mirror tonight and think, 'I did a good job and raised an important matter, although I failed them for eight years'.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr MALEY (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, last weekend I attended the 41st conference of the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association. I was lucky enough to give a presentation early on Friday and then attend the dinner with over 1,000 other attendees at the Convention Centre.

The NT cattle industry is dear to my heart. I have spent time out in the yards, working on bulldozers, mustering wild buffaloes and chasing the odd pig across the flat. The cattle industry is vital to the Northern Territory. It is an industry that spans the Northern Territory, providing jobs to thousands of people. The cattle industry is the backbone of the bush, providing jobs and supporting our regional communities. It boosts the economy. That shows just how important the industry is. I support that industry.

Romy Carey is the new CEO of the NTCA. I have known Romy Carey for a long time. We used to chase polocrosse balls around the paddock together on horseback. I know how passionate she is about the industry and how much she is driven to make sure the cattle industry goes forward.

I understand that the federal government neglected this industry and it neglected to settle the class action, which it started in 2011 when it banned live export. It is disgraceful how the federal government has not dealt with it over many years and left this industry hanging, because we know how important this industry is and what it does for our economy and the families in those communities. Those families work in difficult and challenging situations, and they get by; they thrive, in fact. I shout out that I support them, and this government supports them, and we intend to do whatever we can. We want to expand the cattle industry's markets, help secure live export success, unlock new opportunities and a stronger future for our producers, which the previous government did not do.

My portfolio of agriculture deals with biodiversity and biosecurity. Biosecurity and surveillance are important, with foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease to the north of us. We need to be ready. If these terrible diseases get into the Northern Territory we will need to help this industry because it will be crippling across the board. The industry is the backbone, and we are here to support it.

I will speak about another rural venture. The Southern Districts Football Club (Crocs) recently won the flag. I went to the game and supported the boys, who had a great game. It was a tight tussle, but they were strong and came out on top.

The Member for Goyder and I went to the Crocs' junior presentation on the weekend. There were kids everywhere. They had blow-ups and dunking machines. In fact, the line to get dunked was longer than the line to throw at the machine; the kids loved it.

The Southern Districts Crocs fielded more than 32 teams last season, and 17 of them were in finals. We won four premierships. This club is going from strength to strength. In some of the finals the junior teams were playing each other—Crocs versus Crocs. That is how big the junior footprint is in the rural area.

The Crocs do a wonderful job. The club takes children from across the rural area and gets them onto the sporting field where everyone is equal. It does not matter where you come from or what sort of background you have, you just throw on a pair of boots and start kicking the footy around. It just shows how a team brings people together.

From my experience of playing football—I was more of a league player; I played for the Litchfield Bears—sometimes you have a down week or a few problems at home, but you go to training and the team gets beside you and helps to push you through. It makes you a better person, especially for younger people who may be heading down the wrong path in life. When you get into a sports team like the Crocs or the Bears, the team gets beside you and helps you, and the senior players can be mentors.

I went to the Swampdogs Rugby Union Club junior presentation, along with the Member for Goyder. There were lots of kids and parents in attendance. I went to the club's home ground, which is called the Swamp, at the back of Freds Pass. It has a pavilion. The afternoon was a bit overcast, and it was nice. The B-grade seniors missed out one week before the final, so they did not get into the final. I played for the club when I was a bit younger.

Sport in the rural area is moving forward. It is the teams and the bonding that help people in the community going through tough times. I give a big shout-out to the Swampdogs and coach Brenton Marschke. I went to school with him, and so did you, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker.

Madam ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am familiar with that name.

Mr MALEY: I played rugby league and union with him. He is a stalwart of that club and has been the coach for a number of years. He told me how strong the club is and how it is going from strength to strength. A big shout out to the Swampdogs; good luck for next year.

Ms BOOTHBY (Brennan): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I place on the record some incredible students from my electorate. Zuccoli Primary School is in my electorate for this term of parliament, which is exciting. It has a number of students who are leaders of their community and their school. It has a large cohort of student representatives since the beginning of the year. I will mention who these wonderful students are because they will be the future of the Northern Territory; hopefully, they will choose to stick around.

The house and vice captains of Zuccoli Primary School for this year are Addison Rice; Airlie Stephens; Alexander Calderon; Alizabeth Maxfield; Atlanta Marsh; Austin Cook; Darryl Ruhinga; Evagelos Tambouras; Hamza Zoheiry; Harrison; Isabel Lycett; Kaden Medbury; Koa Waterman; Maliana Koloamatangi; Quinn Jasinski; and Quinton Veal. Well done to those students.

The Northern Territory Learning Commission selected students from Zuccoli Primary School. A big shout-out to those students who are leaders at the school and amongst their peers at other schools as well: Abigail Keast-Jones; Alyssa Bibby; Delaney Goodwin; Ella-Rose Milburn; Jumana Mahmoud; Madison Sharp; Meadow Wright; Naiya Quinlivan; Nathan Tarranza; Olivia Fletcher; Sienna Veal; Sky Son; Vada Stephens; and Vasilios Chalatsis.

There is a group of students at Zuccoli Primary School who are labelled the Changemakers. We are all about change, so these students stood out to me: Alijah Miranda; Fleuris Bravo; Isabelle Shearsby; Jared Edobor; Jethro Gavin; Maddex Jasinski; Maddison Bibby; Molly Breslin; Olivia Mackey; and Parthiv Desai.

The school also has a Sustainability Squad. I do not know what is on the squad's agenda to achieve this year, but I am going to Zuccoli Primary School in a couple of weeks to meet all these leaders. I cannot wait to hear what this Sustainability Squad will be doing this year. The students in the squad are: Aaliyah; Aamelia Cowan; Aly Zoheiry; Amelia Lyness; Archie Barrett; Aurora Marsh; Bao Nguyen; Blake Sellwood; Cameron Pratt; Casey Mende; Dewayne; Elianna Oybines; Fallon Noblet; Jayme Lake; Katlyn Gonzales; Lachlan Wight; Layla Mukhlis; Natalia Yonas; Nilkanth Patel; Noah Nowland; Oliver Wight; Savannah Jones; Stefania Kampouris; Tenika Pilakui; Vihaan Manish Nair; and Willow Marshall. Well done to all those students. It is a huge group, but they are all deserving of those leadership roles.

I place on the record my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Palmerston College School Council. We had an important meeting a couple of weeks ago with people from the Department of Education and Training to talk about the middle school reforms. I was joined by my colleague the Member for Drysdale. It was a special council meeting because we said goodbye to a few of the parent representatives on the council who had been there for a number of years.

They include Nikki Elliott, who was the Chairperson of the Palmerston College School Council for 2024 and had spent six years on the council. That is an incredible achievement. Her children went through the school, and 2024 was their last year, being Year 12. She is moving on now. A big congratulations to her.

Nikki has been in education on committees from childcare to primary, middle and secondary schools and worked with NT COGSO as a regional representative for more than 20 years, which is a fantastic effort. A big thank you to Nikki. She is a wonderful person who will be dearly missed by the committee as it finds new parent representatives.

I thank Michelle from NT COGSO, who fulfilled the treasurer's role in 2024. If I remember correctly, she has been there a number of years as well. She has certainly been there every time I have been there over the last number of years. Michelle is an absolute stalwart at NT COGSO. She helps out many schools; I have seen her at other schools, not just Palmerston College.

We also farewelled other parent members who had been there in 2024, but because their children were moving on they could no longer be on the school council. They will be dearly missed. They are Adrian Skipper; Susan Lowry; Shirley Aby; Penny Seamer; Jacinta Gerein; and Anita Wickremesena. Anita sadly passed away. I believe it was last year.

Vale, Anita.

Everyone who brings their knowledge, experience, kindness, support and passion to school councils is very much appreciated. Each one of them is dedicated to their school, the students and their outcomes.

Nikki sent me a copy of her last report for the school council. It has a number of agenda items, so I will ensure that I meet with the ministers for Education and Infrastructure and a bunch of other ministers to get some

good outcomes. She has left a great legacy of the actions they have already taken, but there are still a lot of things we need to help the college resolve. I very much look forward to the work we will do together.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I will only do a short adjournment speech.

I pay tribute to the education staff of the Legislative Assembly who look after our school groups when they come in. I reckon they do a magnificent job.

This morning I was fortunate to catch up with students from Manunda Terrace Primary School. I understand that my colleague the Member for Fong Lim went there when it was called Sanderson Primary School. The students were visiting parliament as part of their studies, which is a fantastic thing for all schools to do.

When I was in the gallery I asked them whether they had any questions. A number of students got up and openly said that they would like a new playground for the school. I thought, 'Fantastic; they are lobbying for their own school. This is great.' I applaud them for lobbying directly to me for something that is important to them. They are Year 5 students. I will discuss this suggestion further with the school principal and my parliamentary colleagues.

One of my thoughts is that I will go back there and to help further their studies I will suggest that they put up a petition. If they get together a petition amongst themselves and their parents they can bring it in and I will happily lodge it in parliament on behalf of the students of Manunda Terrace Primary School.

Of course, that petition will have to go to the Public Accounts Committee, of which a couple of my colleagues are members. We will seriously consider whether we forward this petition for debate. That is an important decision to make because these are the students who have come here and want to learn. I would hate them to see their studies cut off by it not going to debate. I would like them to come to the debate and see how the parliament debates petitions. It would be a great example for our young people.

I am a bit conflicted: do I have to declare a conflict of interest? I will have to work through that myself, but we always take petitions from our local constituents and bring them forward, whether we agree with them or not. On this matter, I agree.

Again, the work of the education staff here is great. All members should encourage their schools to come along and enjoy it. If the Manunda Terrace Primary School students put together a petition, we will put it to the PAC—I hope—and the PAC will make the right decision to put it to debate. Let us see how it goes.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, an event we have coming up in a few weeks' time in Johnston is the annual Jingili Water Gardens Community Easter Egg Hunt. It is a community initiative from the previous member, which I have been reminded of by several of my younger constituents. They have told me that they are eager to see it continue. In fact, I received this letter from Eleanor in Millner in one of my first weeks as the Member for Johnston:

'To Justine,

'Hi, I am Eleanor, and I live around the corner in Gulnare Street. I am seven years old. I like Gulnare because I am close to the Water Gardens. I have good friends, but they are all grown-ups. I am close to the markets. I just want to tell you that I think the slide in the gardens might be better if it was a little bit bigger. I really liked Mr Bowden's Easter Egg Hunt. Can you do one too?

'Love from Eleanor

'PS I love you'

Eleanor, of course we will do an Easter egg hunt, but this year we will do it a little differently. One of the things we love in Johnston is finding ways to bring people together from across the community. We have been talking to lots of people about what they would like to see happen this year.

Ruby said that she was worried that if we hid chocolate eggs and did not find them all, maybe her dog would find one, eat it and get really sick. Taren said, 'Eggs are about birds. Maybe we could have a bird hunt instead?' I said, 'Maybe we could hide boiled eggs', but everyone thought that was a bad idea. Ellie said, 'We definitely need chocolate', and everyone agreed.

As we talked to people, we developed a new idea for our Easter egg hunt this year. We will have a scavenger hunt to identify local birds in exchange for Easter eggs. Yes, I promise they will be chocolate, and people will get them at the end in a little nest. We are partnering with two of our amazing local organisations, BirdLife Top End and Rapid Creek Landcare. Atticus, a wonderful 13-year-old artist and a keen bird lover has drawn wonderful local birds for our bird hunt. Rapid Creek Landcare Group will celebrate our local flora and fauna and help people learn all about the environment we live in and depend on.

I cannot wait for this fun community event, bringing people together, celebrating and enjoying the wonderful Water Gardens that we are so lucky to have in Johnston, and bringing together organisations that connect our community with our electorate's beautiful, natural and unique environment.

Our community Easter Egg Hunt will take place in the Jingili Water Gardens on Thursday 17 April, and we extend the invitation to people from beyond Johnston to visit the most fun electorate in the Northern Territory.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, let me begin by congratulating you on your promotion and ascent to the Speakership, albeit temporarily.

This past Saturday I had the pleasure of representing the Minister for Arts at the Darwin Symphony Orchestra's 2025 inaugural season opening concert, Romance and Revolution. It was an extraordinary performance of three works, *The Chairman Dances* by John Adams, excerpts from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and Brahms' *First Symphony*.

It is a privilege to hear such high-quality concert programming in Darwin, and it is something that a lot of us take for granted. I note that the performance was supported by the arrival of a new concertmaster, and a series of new principals. For the uninitiated amongst you, that is 10 high-calibre musicians who have moved to Darwin from all over the country to take up professional paid chairs in the orchestra to improve the orchestra and help it to grow. Welcome to those new section principals and the concertmaster; I hope that you will be with us for a long time and enjoy your stay.

For the first time in a decade the Darwin Symphony Orchestra is going on tour through the Territory and taking music back to the people. It is worth remembering exactly what this institution represents for the Northern Territory.

Mrs Hersey: Hear, hear!

Dr RAHMAN: Member for Katherine, I take your interjection. On Tuesday 8 April the Darwin Symphony Orchestra will be performing at the arts and culture centre in Katherine.

On Thursday 10 April the orchestra will perform in Tennant Creek. Member for Barkly, you will be delighted to hear that, as I know what an avid lover of classical musical you are.

Member for Braitling, on Saturday 12 April the orchestra will perform in Alice Springs at the Desert Park in association with Parrtjima–A Festival in Light. The open-air orchestral performance will be set against the ancient MacDonnell Ranges. It is a program that is worth celebrating. In addition, there will be a DSO deconstructed chamber music concert on Saturday 13 April at the Araluen Arts Centre.

Notwithstanding the professionalism that I alluded to and the new hires that the Darwin Symphony Orchestra has brought on board, it is important to recognise that this is an orchestra of the people. It is an orchestra for the people with deep community roots. The orchestra's story goes back a long way. In order to get an accurate picture of how far back it goes, I got in touch recently with Darwin's original maestro, Professor Martin Jarvis OAM, who was kind enough to share with me some of his reflections on the orchestra.

A symphony orchestra for the Northern Territory was high on the agenda of Chief Minister Paul Everingham, according to Daryl Manzie—all the way back then. Every state at the time had its own federally funded orchestra via what was then called the Australian Broadcasting Commission. It was something of a status symbol; every other capital had an orchestra, and the government wanted us to have one as well.

There were so many music lovers in that CLP government that at one point it even considered self-funding it when the Australian Broadcasting Commission rejected the offer to fund an orchestra in-house. However, the government realised that it would be cheaper to charter airbuses and commute everybody from here to Sydney Symphony Orchestra concerts in the Opera House than it would be to fund a homegrown Northern Territory orchestra. Therefore, it remained an objective, or maybe a dream, for a long time for a number of people in the Northern Territory to have that kind of ensemble and artistic outlet.

It was not easy, but that dream was realised over many years, and it was by the dedication and devotion of many people in the community who have performed for the love of music and sharing it with others. When federal funding was finally achieved in 2005 it became the first and still is the only non-professional orchestra in Australia that is centrally funded by the ABC. Since its inception in 1989 it has been an extremely high-profile orchestra; it has garnered a lot of media attention and exposure because it has such a unique status and reputation.

Some of you may not be aware, but the Darwin Symphony Orchestra over the years has performed in locations like Katherine Gorge, literally floating on pontoons; in Gove in the Member for Mulka's electorate; at Nourlangie Rock; on Groote Eylandt; in the Todd riverbed in Alice Springs; in front of the escarpment at Glen Helen Gorge in the West MacDonnell Ranges; and in Borroloola in the Gulf country.

The Darwin Symphony Orchestra is a cultural institution. It is not a bit of elitist nonsense that goes on in the Entertainment Centre; it is an orchestra for the people, and it has been making music for the benefit of the Northern Territory for a long time.

The roots of it go back a long way. It has been a 50-year gradual evolution since the 1970s when we had a Darwin Chamber Orchestra which gradually led to in 1983 the Darwin String Ensemble and in 1984 the first performance as the Darwin Symphony Orchestra, but it was a one-off performance at the time. I located some of the letters written at the time by then Chief Minister Ian Tuxworth who wrote individually to every member of the orchestra to thank them for bringing this important marker to our city, which is a city on the rise. That first concert combined the Darwin City Brass Band, the concert band, the string orchestra plus members of the Youth Orchestra, and it had to be held at the Marrara Indoor Stadium because there was nowhere for an orchestra to make that kind of music at the time.

The project to build the Darwin Performing Arts Centre was led by Tom Pauling QC at the time. He later went on to become the Administrator of the Northern Territory. When the soft opening for the DPAC was finally held on 3 and 4 May 1986, it was the Darwin Symphony Orchestra that provided the entertainment.

The permanent Darwin Symphony Orchestra was re-established from 1988 onwards. It was based on the Darwin Chamber Orchestra and its partner in crime, the Darwin Chorale, finally moving towards us having a fully-fledged orchestra. From June 1989 we finally had the Darwin Symphony Orchestra the likes of which we now regularly see.

That is a crude history of that institution. I am reliably informed that Professor Martin Jarvis at CDU has a book in the works in which he will talk about the evolution of that organisation over time. I very much look forward to reading it when the time comes. You can expect some other interesting stories in that book. It is worth marvelling at the orchestra's association with the Kangaroo 1989 Military Tattoo and the Katherine Gorge floating pontoons. Can you imagine an orchestra playing *Bolero* on floating pontoons?

Mrs Hersey: Amazing.

Dr RAHMAN: I take the interjection; the Member for Katherine was there.

If any of you have not seen it, the ABC documentary *Have Orchestra Will Travel* is hilarious and worth watching for one of the tours, which I think was run in the mid-1990s.

I draw attention to the longstanding beneficial association that the Darwin Symphony Orchestra has with Charles Darwin University. In fact, it is so longstanding that it predates Charles Darwin University, going back to the Northern Territory University and the Darwin Institute of Technology. I hope that partnership will endure because the university is richer for having the orchestra based there, providing another outlet and hive of activity in that place.

Whilst quirky and parochial, the Darwin Symphony Orchestra is truly Territorian and for the community. It is not the London Symphony Orchestra, and it does not purport to be, but it performs music of a really high standard, is increasingly professional and, most importantly, maintains a commitment to making music for the people. We are lucky to have it.

Fellow members of the Assembly, I encourage you all to please support the orchestra in its upcoming endeavours. If you have occasion to see the Darwin Symphony Orchestra in Katherine, Tennant Creek or Alice Springs—those of you in bush electorates—please make the time to go and support the orchestra. The work it does is for the good of the community. It offers something unique to our landscape in terms of contributing to our lifestyle across the spectrum.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, it is with great honour that I acknowledge the Tracy Village Football Club and the outstanding achievements of its players, coaches and supporters.

On 7 March I had the privilege of attending the NTFL women's division 1 grand final, and what an unforgettable event it was. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the division 1 women's team on their impressive victory. Their hard work, determination and unity on the field was truly inspiring to witness.

A special mention must go to Krystelle Jones, the division 1 women's premier coach and recipient of this year's Club Person of the Year award. Krystelle's leadership, commitment and passion played a huge part in the team's success, and she is a true role model for the club.

The Tracy Village senior presentation night was another highlight of the season. The evening celebrated the hard work and talent of the club's players. I acknowledge this year's award winners:

- women's division 1—best and fairest, Kloe Mcelhinney; runner-up best and fairest, Olivia Schneider; and most consistent, Gloriana Luta

- women's division 2—most consistent, Beverly Pavkovich; and runner-up best and fairest, Chelsea Jennings.

- women's overall awards—coach's award, Annie Robbins; and players' player, Elgina Kaitap.

- men's division 1—best and fairest, Darcy Reid; runner-up best and fairest, Travis Cowley; most consistent, Christian Borgonovo; coach's award, Cadeyrn Mullins; and players' player, Darcy Reid.

- men's division 2—best and fairest, Luke Pavey; runner-up best and fairest, Keenan Dreckow; most consistent, Josh Knechtli; coach's award, Corey Bell; and players' player, Corey Bell.

To all players, coaches, volunteers and supporters of the Tracy Village Football Club, I applaud you for an outstanding season. Their passion and commitment are the heart of this club, and it is evident in the success they achieved. From the players who give their all on the field to the coaches and volunteers who dedicate countless hours to ensuring the success of this club, your hard work does not go unnoticed.

I look forward to celebrating more victories and achievements in the years to come. Congratulations to all the winners and the entire Tracy Village Football Club for a fantastic season.

Mrs HERSEY (Katherine): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I put on the record a contribution of condolence for Ian McBean AM. This is a contribution from his daughter Cathie from the service that was held in February. Cathie's contribution was as follows:

'Dad's journey began with humble beginnings, arriving in the Territory with nothing more than a swag, a saddle and a racing pad. He started out near Alice Springs on Elkedra Station in 1953; he was 22 years old. His early days were spent as a horse tailer and then drover, traversing some of the roughest country in Australia through Queensland, Quilpie, Camooweal, the Barkly and VRD regions in the Northern Territory.

'During this time dad met and married Myrtle, my mum, who accompanied him on many of those droving trips on the road for months at a time, with a mob of sometimes up to 1,500 head. His dedication and resilience in these earlier years really laid the foundation for what would become an amazing career that spanned over six decades in the bush.

'In 1964 Dad's life took a significant turn when he drew first in the ballot for the 1,500-square mile Innesvale Station. With determination, he transformed this undeveloped property into a thriving cattle station. At Innesvale Dad first settled on the banks of the Victoria River, downstream from the current Victoria River bridge. Home consisted of a tent and cane grass bough shed kitchen. The kids, Eddie and Margie, slept in the rusty old caravan. However, it was an Aboriginal stockman, one of the local elders, who soon pointed out that the site he had planned to settle and to build a home on would flood regularly.

'As a result, they moved lock, stock and barrel to the new station site in 1967, which is where the station homestead is now situated. Of course, there was nothing there and they to start from scratch. The first home here was a shed that dad built with dirt floors, four walls and a roof. Eventually dad employed a builder, Neville O'Farrell, to build our first real home.

‘During this time Doug, Craig and I were born. Around this time Wendy and Stan also came to work for dad and stayed on as governess and mechanic. We will hear a tribute from Wendy later. Steve Hawe also started as a head stockman during dad’s time at Innesvale, and we will also hear from him.

‘After 16 years at Innesvale dad acquired Bradshaw Station, one of the largest in the Northern Territory at the time. His tenure at Bradshaw further cemented his reputation in the industry. Through hard work and determination dad thrived, and those years built the foundation of a remarkable career.’

I will ask the Member for Braitling to read Sam’s contribution, who is one of the younger sons. Cathie continues:

‘Beyond these early ventures, dad was a stalwart advocate for the cattle industry, which a number of people will touch on today, but beyond these accolades dad loved horses. He was not just a cattleman, he was a horseman in the truest sense. He understood them, respected them, valued them and had a bond with a special few. He kept meticulous records of all his horses, including their breeding, who broke them in or where they had come from.’

It was interesting to hear the tales of that on the day:

‘Whilst mustering he knew a good horse could save your life. We also knew when mustering we were one of the crew and likely to be yelled at just as much as anyone. If we were in the wrong place at the wrong time, look out.

‘Like any good cattleman, dad could not stand seeing cattle get away. Everyone knew that when he was up in the helicopter with the shotgun you had better watch out and stay clear if something broke away from the mob, because if you were in pursuit some of those pellets might just come a little too close—or so my brothers tell me.

‘He helped all of us learn how to ride from dressage to gymkhanas, campdrafts and some on to rodeos. We would pack up the big red truck and head to the Katherine Show, Timber Creek races or the Costello Yard gymkhana. We would camp at the grounds with the horses and sleep in the back of the truck. He loved his community and was a life member of the Katherine Show, the Douglas Daly association and the Timber Creek races committee.

‘Dad was meticulous in all that he did and nowhere was this more evident than in the diaries he kept throughout his whole life. Every day he recorded the events of his world—weather patterns and rainfall, cattle movements, station business and personal reflections, even down to the phone calls he made each day.

‘One of the things you will hear about dad is that he treated everyone equally, and this included the young men who worked for him who often arrived from tough backgrounds looking for a purpose. He became an authoritative figure in their lives who set the bar high on what he expected from them, and many went on to become great men running their own properties or just succeeding in life. He set the example and they all tried to keep up.

‘I have heard of many 4 am starts that may have been a little too early with everyone sitting around waiting for daylight before they could start the muster. Dad could not sleep, so everyone else needed to be up.

‘Coming from humble beginnings dad was always very unassuming and modest—never flashy. He worked hard, saved and got ahead. He reused what he could, and God forbid if you used too much tie wire when fencing. He also used old World War II blitzes as pick-up trucks when bull catching, way into the 1980s and early 1990s. They were hot, had very little flooring and no windows, but they were tough like him and just kept going.

‘One of dad’s defining traits was his loyalty. When he could he repaid those who had helped him out, never forgetting a favour, especially those who helped us out in those early days when we did not have much. Dad looked after those who looked after him. I know when he managed to make a quid he sought some old mates out to repay the favour.

‘Dad had many friends who have been part of his life for many years, including Cooee and Jeff Hill, who knew dad from Camooweal; Jim Long from his days at school in Sydney; and Bob Gartery, who has now passed away but worked on Gurley and Avon Downs Station with dad. Dad kept in touch with them all throughout the years.

‘In closing, dad’s legacy is his children and his grandchildren. He loved to hear what we were all up to, and we are all so proud of what he achieved. However, I must attribute the success of our blended family to the two great ladies dad married. Although he thought it was by his design and doing, it was because of them that we remain one connected family.

‘Dad, you set a great example of how to live a great life, and we hope we can all live up to this.’

I will continue with Sam’s contribution, as I have time:

‘Dad lived a full and remarkable life. Most of my memories with dad involve what most would call work, but to him it was just a way of life.

‘We moved from Innesvale to Bradshaw in 1984. My first memories are from Bradshaw. I was about six years old and recall being woken up at 4 am, getting in the Toyota and heading to Wombungi. For those of you who do not know, Wombungi was about a 15-gate drive away, every 10 minutes for the next two hours, dad would lean over and wake me up with the words, ‘Mate, can you get the gate?’ I am still unsure if he was wanting to spend time with his son or he just needed to get there in a hurry.

‘Dad was passionate about his properties and animals, particularly horses and cattle.

‘He was a great father; however, I would say different to most. Growing up as a kid I was very privileged to live where we did and learn all aspects of the life that he loved so much. I am sure that many who have worked for dad and many here today would agree dad was a great mentor and a great teacher. There were, however, a few prerequisites to get into his class. You had to give 110% all of the time, and you needed to learn fast, every time. If you did not do these it was unlikely you would pass.

‘I believe dad’s happiest place was in the stock camp at Bradshaw sitting under a coolibah tree, a mob of coaches pulled up at Dinner Camp, having a cup of tea and a corned beef sandwich with a bunch of ringers who all respected him so much.

‘In 1996 mum and dad decided it was time to slow down—semi-retire, I guess. Selling Bradshaw and moving to Bonalbo in the Douglas Daly, dad was 65 and he thought the time was right to slow down. Now let us be clear: slowing down for dad meant changing from working 15 hours a day seven days a week to 12 hours a day seven days a week.

‘Looking back at dad’s life, he was always a thinker, a pioneer of sorts and, even in his so-called retirement, he was developing and clearing properties, trialling new improved pastures and fattening his beloved cattle.

‘Family is what made dad proudest. He was a staunch advocate for education and despite the tough times early on, always prioritised it for all of his kids. Dad tried to keep up to date with his grandkids’ whereabouts and paths they were taking, always proud and there for support if anyone needed anything.

‘Dad was lucky to have had two wonderful women in his life. Kay, my mother, has been dad’s greatest supporter for the last 50 years. I am sure many here have heard the emergency calls over the radio, ‘Do you read, Kay? Do you read, Kay? Do you read, Kay?’, said with such urgency as if there had been an accident. Mum would rush to the radio only to find out dad was just letting her know he was coming home for smoko.

‘Thank you, mum, for being by dad’s side over all the years, but in particular the last few. He often said how much he loved you and he would be buggered without you.

‘I think if we asked dad today what were some of his proudest achievements, they would include being a part of the initial group of producers to start the Northern Territory Cattlemen’s Association. He was very proud of the NTCA and all it stands for. He was an active member until very recently, attending branch meetings, voicing his concerns and encouraging people like myself to be a part of the organisation.

‘He often said, “If you want to influence policy affecting our industry and livelihoods, you need a strong advocacy group. It is no good sitting outside whingeing about it; get involved and try to fix the problem.”

‘Receiving a life membership to the NTCA in 2008 was treasured by Dad. I believe there is no-one who has been more passionate about the Northern Territory cattle industry than Ian. Receiving an AM in 2012 was also recognition of 60 years of dedication to the industry.

'As one of Ian's sons there are many things I admire in dad. However, I believe his greatest trait came to him very naturally; Dad gave everyone a go. He was very fair and treated everyone equally. It did not matter if you were black or white. It did not matter if you were well off or not. It did not matter if you had an education. Dad could talk to the Prime Minister in a fancy office in Canberra or a ringer under a tree holding up a mob of cattle. He would give all people the same respect. He could talk comfortably to the Prime Minister or the ringer, as long as they could talk cattle or cricket. Equally, if either man did not agree with dad he was happy to tell them they were full of shit.

'Well, old fella, the time has come to say goodbye. You lived a great life. You have inspired many, and the legacy you leave will live on. Rest easy, but for Christ's sake, keep the bloody lead steady.'

Thank you for giving me extra time, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Mr Deputy Speaker—surprise, surprise—I will talk about sporting achievements from people in my Fannie Bay electorate and across the Northern Territory.

A couple of weekends ago I met for the second or third time a young man named James Smith who was representing the Northern Territory at the NT Championships at the amazing Parap swimming pool. James went on to compete at the 2025 New South Wales State Open Championships in Sydney. I am pleased to say that he returned home with some gold bling around his neck. The 19-year-old placed first in the men's 1,500-metre freestyle with a personal best time and an NT record of 15:34.87. James is an amazing young man and a credit to his community. As a long-distance swimmer he recorded some other amazing results at that competition. A big congratulations to James.

Three Territorians have been selected to represent the under-16 Joeys hockey team in a tour to the Netherlands and Belgium in April this year. Charlie Beath, Niesha Casimiro and Maya Nunn will participate in that competition. They are dedicated athletes who have worked tirelessly to develop their skills. The tour offers a unique opportunity for them to compete against top-tier teams, gain exposure and develop their passion. I was lucky enough to donate a meat voucher to those guys to assist in their fundraising. They raised $1,600 from that voucher, which was great for their travel expenses.

I met a young lady at the Tamil Society function last weekend. Her name is Kothai Ponnusamy, and she is competing in Malaysia on 5 and 6 April in the 16th World Cup Championship in Yoga Sports. Her dad, Vijay, showed me some photos and videos of her amazing talents. The things that she can do, staying in a position for that amount of time—all I can say is congratulations for getting into that competition, participating and having a crack at it. A big congratulations and good luck to Kothai, who will be travelling at the end of March.

A number of students from Darwin Middle School and Darwin High School have been selected to represent the Northern Territory in the national beach volleyball competition in Coolangatta at the end of this month. They are Isabel Gardiner, Zhalara Tove, Giselle Barrios, Erin Lukitsch, Hannah Jeffery, Arianna Parmenter, Daniel Nguyen, Lincoln Wilson, Austin Van Der Zwaag and Rohan Thennadil. These young athletes are some of our strongest and most committed volleyballers, ready to represent the Northern Territory on the national stage for beach volleyball. They compete in female and male divisions. Competitors from Darwin and Alice Springs are competing this year, which is the first time Alice Springs competitors have attended. The opportunity to represent the Northern Territory on the national stage is a tremendous honour for our young athletes. They have trained hard to get there, so good luck. They have been training three times a week for a long time. Thank you to their coaches and all the support staff travelling with them.

A young girl named Anika from Darwin High School has been selected to represent the Northern Territory at the Under-17 National Netball Championships in Sydney this year. Anika is 15 years old, and she is a strong young role model in our community.

I did a Facebook post about this, but I want to put it on the record. I know International Women's Day was on 8 March, but I feel we should keep going for the whole month and make March 'International Women's Month'. In keeping with that theme, along with some colleagues I attended the Nichols Medal on 9 March, and I will call out to some of the amazing women who won awards.

Jasmyn Hewett from PINT Football Club—my favourite team—won the Women's Premier League Best and Fairest for the third time, which is an amazing achievement. Cassie McWilliam from the Nightcliff Tigers was the Women's Premier League Leading Goal Kicker. Shakaila Gardiner-Dunn from St Mary's was the Women's Premier League Rising Star.

Leah Reilly from Banks Bulldogs Football Club was the Women's Division 1 Best and Fairest. Charlotte D'Ambrosio from the Nightcliff Tigers was the Women's Division 1 Leading Goal Kicker.

Sasha Byrnes from the Jabiru Bombers was the Women's Division 2 Best and Fairest for the second time. Desiree Nadji from the Jabiru Bombers was the Women's Division 2 Leading Goal Kicker.

Eliza Caldow from PINT Football Club won the Volunteer of the Year award. I know that Eliza does amazing work for the football club and supporting women in sport.

I commend those ladies for their success. They are inspirational. I have trained and played with Jasmyn Hewett, who is an amazing football player. We could only aspire to have an ounce of the talent that she has.

We have amazing sportspeople in our community. I commend everyone in the Fannie Bay electorate who has received any kind of commendation or award for the sports that they contribute to and thank them for being the role models that they are for their community. Congratulations.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, tonight I honour the memory of a fantastic Territorian, Roy Manaway.

When I was growing up in Batchelor, Roy was a local legend, being the proprietor of the Rum Jungle Recreation Club. I was not old enough to visit the club back in the 1980s when he was there, but I heard his name spoken of quite frequently and always in respectful tones, as Roy ran a tight ship at the club. I was lucky enough to run into Roy in 2020 when I was doorknocking. By that point many years had passed compared to when he ran the club, but he was still quick-witted and had that sharp glimmer in his eyes.

I will read an amended version of the eulogy that was spoken at the celebration of his life by his son Rod Tremlett, who has given me permission to read it for the record.

He thanked all who attended the celebration of the life of Roy Manaway. In his speech Rod said that even though Roy was not his biological father, Roy was truly his dad. Roy was the loving partner and husband to Rod's mum, Val, until her passing in 2010, and was the father figure in Rod's life from the age of five.

Hughie Roy Manaway was born on 22 April 1938 to parents, Hughie Robert Manaway and Mavis Elizabeth Manaway, in Mackay District Hospital. Roy was the oldest of six siblings with brothers, Richard and twins Peter and Paul; and sisters, Heather and Caroline. We acknowledge the Manaway family members, our condolences are with you all.

Roy's early years were spent in Farleigh, north Queensland, where his mum and dad operated a sugarcane farm and established a home for their growing family. As a young boy Rod was fortunate enough to meet Mr and Mrs Manaway and can fondly remember how proud they were of all that Roy was achieving, managing pubs in Darwin—but more of that soon.

Roy was a physically fit young fella, and during what I would imagine were pretty tough times post-World War II he learnt how to protect his family and himself. Rod recalls Roy telling him that at a young age he had a disagreement with an overzealous school principal which resulted in a physical altercation and Roy's subsequent expulsion from the school after giving the principal a bit of a touch up.

In the 1950s and 1960s Roy continued to work in the family cane farm and pursued his talent for boxing. This pursuit saw him become a member of the famous Jimmy Sharman boxing tent troupe that travelled the region, putting on shows for the locals. At the time Roy was also ranked number six in boxing in Australia in the middleweight division. He retained a healthy respect for the sport of boxing for many years.

As his life continued in Mackay, Roy married and had six children of his own, Darren, Rory, Julie, Tracey, Avril and Lisa. Roy was proud of all his kids and despite his first marriage coming to an end, they all held a special place in his heart.

In the early 1970s Roy decided to make the move north in search of further adventure. His physical conditioning and ability to use his hands landed him a job as a heavy machinery operator on the Tiwi Islands before a further move to Darwin saw him work a number of jobs, including working on the construction of the Darwin Travelodge which at the time was Darwin's tallest building.

As a way of supplementing his income Roy would work security at the local pubs, drawing on his experience in the ring over many years. He quickly earned a reputation, along with his crew of bouncers, for maintaining

and managing appropriate behaviour in licensed establishments in what at the time was a very challenging environment.

Roy worked at and managed many of the local pubs around Darwin, but it was his time at the Dolphin Hotel that many old Darwinians would remember. The Dolphin was a pretty rough frontier pub where many locally diverse characters gathered. Times were different from what they are today, and staff had to be pretty creative in how they handled the rowdiness of the crowds. Roy always took great pride in ensuring the safety of his patrons and staff by employing any means necessary to ensure that this occurred. I am sure some of the practices used back then would be frowned upon today, but he always got the job done and the local police presence were regularly thankful for his assistance.

Roy also met the woman who was to become his partner and love of his life, Valma Tremlett, at the Dolphin Hotel. They fell in love and were inseparable from that time on, working hard together, often with Roy in the pub and Val running the kitchen. The two were married some 20-plus years later on 8 August 1998. Roy and Val spent seven or eight years at the Dolphin Hotel and in that time they worked hard, had fun and made lifelong friends with patrons and staff alike.

On Christmas Eve 1974 Roy and Val, along with some staff, were enjoying Christmas drinks after closing time. As many of you know, Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin that evening. Roy, Val and the staff had to take cover in the central bar fridge in the saloon bar of the hotel. As the eye of the cyclone passed over the town Val exited the fridge to get food supplies for everyone, just making it back in time before the winds started again. On ensuring everyone's safety and now understanding the ferocity of the storm, Roy held the fridge door ajar with his hands to ensure they were not trapped in the fridge as the destruction unfolded around them.

The cyclone caused significant damage to the town, and the Dolphin was not spared its ferocity. Roy and Val spent much of 1975 focused on servicing patrons from makeshift facilities and overseeing the rebuild of the pub.

As time passed Roy's experience in licensed venues became recognised by owners of some of Darwin's biggest hotels, and his skills were keenly sought after. Roy's roles meant that Rod and the family moved from the Dolphin Hotel to the Lim's Hotel and then to the Railway Institute over the next few years. Then one day Roy received a call from NT Breweries asking whether they would go to Tennant Creek and manage the hotel there. Not long after, the family had packed up their things and were about to head to Tennant when they received a call advising that the pub at Batchelor, a small town an hour south of Darwin, needed assistance and were asked whether they could go there first. Roy agreed and what was supposed to be a two-week stint ended up being a stay of 15 years.

As it turned out Roy ended up managing the Rum Jungle Recreation Club until his retirement. In that time, with member funds accumulated through his outstanding management, the makeshift club building was demolished and a brand-new bar and bistro was built. It was a major upgrade from the hangar-style building previously enjoyed by the members. Roy took great pride in overseeing the upgrade of the premises at the Rum Jungle rec club and serving patrons in Batchelor for many years.

Whilst the nature of Roy's job ensured interaction with many people, due to the nature of the work—often seven days a week, 363 days a year and many 14 to 16-hour days—few people got to know and understand Roy. Despite the demands of his job he always made Val and Rod a priority and sacrificed a lot to make sure they always had what they needed.

Roy valued respect. He taught Rod to treat people the way they treat you, regardless of who they are. Roy could hold a conversation with the Chief Minister or the Administrator, and often did, one moment and be lending someone who was down on their luck $20 in the next. He treated everyone the same.

Roy valued loyalty. He had the ability to build a loyal team who worked hard for him. Rod said at times he could be hard to work for as he set high standards for those who were led by him, but once you earned his trust he would do anything to ensure you were okay.

Roy loved to help the community whenever he could and always felt, with the role the clubs and pubs played in the fabric of the Territory, that he was in a privileged position to do so. Roy has been described by many as a true Territory icon who contributed to the fabric of society in the Top End in the 1970s and 1980s. Roy loved the Territory, his home for more than 50 years. There are many people he positively affected along the way.

Rod, in his eulogy, made special mention of the staff at the Juninga aged-care centre in Coconut Grove, where Roy lived the last few years of his life; Royal Darwin Hospital; and the Darwin hospice.

The family is immensely proud of all that Roy achieved and are thankful that he is now in a place of peace, finally reunited with his loving wife, Val.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, tonight I give a shout-out about some great achievements in my Wanguri electorate.

Recently some of the students have been trying their best and had some success in making the Darwin region education sports 2025 teams in AFL and football. When I say football I mean soccer. They will go on to represent their respective sports at the inter-region championships in April and May respectively.

Five students were successful at the recent Darwin regional meets. Khaleesi Fluri and Ruby Daly will represent the girls 12 years and under, and Kairon Sutherland and Dante Pollock will represent the boys 12 years and under at the AFL inter-region championships. Nathan Sherratt will represent 12 years and under at the football inter-region championships. They all attend Wanguri Primary School. Khaleesi, Ruby, Kairon, Dante and Nathan, I am sure you will train hard in the lead-up and represent yourselves and Wanguri Primary School with pride.

Last week was Harmony Week, and there were a number of community events across the Territory. I was fortunate to start the day last Friday at Leanyer Primary School which had a Harmony Day community breakfast, where there must have been more than 1,000 students, parents and grandparents. The students with Greek Cypriot heritage led the entertainment this year, showcasing traditional dance. They even danced the Zorba and got the other students and teachers involved, which highlighted our community encompassing the successful integration of migrants into our community. Leanyer Primary School has representation from more than 60 countries. Harmony Day is about inclusiveness, respect and belonging for all, regardless of cultural or linguistic background.

The breakfast featured bacon and egg or sausage sandwiches, cakes and drinks from the school canteen, and Ken's Crepes had a line beyond the basketball court. Families were encouraged to wear cultural dress or a splash of orange in support of cultural diversity and inclusiveness in Australia. As I mentioned before, there are students whose families are derived from more 60 countries, and it was wonderful to see the children proudly wear their traditional clothes.

I congratulate The Buddhist Society of the Northern Territory which celebrated its 40th anniversary of the International Food Festival at the Buddhist Temple in Leanyer last Sunday afternoon. The Member for Casuarina and the Leader of the Opposition were there and can attest that it was a wonderful way to finish off the weekend and celebrate 40 years of achievement.

For many years I have attended and bought food delights from this event, as it is a major fundraising event for the temple. It was more special this year to attend as the Member for Wanguri. While attending other events there in recent months I noticed that the society's Northern Territory flag had begun to fray, so I presented a new flag to President Udara Weerasinghe to replace the old one and proudly fly high going forward. Madam Speaker, I know your office assisted with coordinating and providing this flag, so thank you very much.

Dishes from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand were sold to fundraise, and even the children sold Zooper Doopers to play their part in the fundraising efforts.

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the International Food Festival it was also wonderful to see other community groups supporting this event. There was a jam-packed program of performances from OPA Dance, the Greek dance company; the Australia China Friendship Society, which did traditional Chinese dance; the Lankan Dance Academy; the Filipina senior dance group; and Keltikka Irish Dance. The cutest performance was from the Sunday school whose little singers sang a song with their hearts' delight. It was great to see the temple being used in a harmonious way.

I thank the committee of The Buddhist Society of the Northern Territory, as I know it takes months of planning and hundreds of volunteer hours to run a successful event like this.

Mr EDGINGTON (Barkly): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak about a medal presentation ceremony held in Tennant Creek at the Barkly Business Hub last month. Held on Thursday 5 February 2025,

the medal presentation ceremony formally recognised the contributions of those who responded to the 2023 Barkly bushfires.

The Barkly fires burnt an estimated 2.8 million hectares of land. An emergency declaration for this event was issued from 12 to 15 September 2023 when the fire, burning on multiple fronts, threatened the Tennant Creek township; surrounding communities, including Epenarra and Canteen Creek; cattle stations; the Stuart and Barkly Highways; and feed supplies.

Thank you to the Administrator of the Northern Territory, His Honour Professor the Honourable Hugh Heggie AO, PSM, who visited Tennant Creek and presented the medals and citations.

The initial fire started about 4 September 2023. On 4 or 5 September 2023 Gordon Noonan, a resident who lives not far from the Barkly Homestead, started sending me videos of the fire burning at the back of the Barkly Homestead. I was later advised that a fire started on the Epenarra road between Epenarra Station and the Barkly Highway. As the fire threat increased, Bushfires NT volunteers mobilised in response.

A massive fire developed further west of the Barkly Homestead and eventually spread to the northern part of the Barkly Highway. With a range of wind changes, the fire threatened the town of Tennant Creek. As the fires continued to spread we saw a shift from management by Bushfires NT to the eventual declaration of an emergency. The local emergency response committee and operations centre was stood up and all the stakeholders in Tennant Creek came together.

All of government worked together, including Bushfires NT, to provide that response to the bushfires around the Barkly. I thank the Police, Fire and Emergency Services personnel and all the government agencies that participated during that emergency period at the emergency operations centre.

I saw incredible work being done in the field by volunteers, representatives from Bushfires NT, police, pastoralists and contractors. The Australian Defence Force was called into Tennant Creek and conducted a range of duties around the Barkly. The crew of NSW Rural Fire Service Citation FS 201 helped to map and provide information on the location of those fires. A range of volunteers from Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Darwin and no doubt other parts of the Northern Territory provided assistance. We also had assistance from the NSW Rural Fire Service, the South Australian Country Fire Service and the Central Land Council. Everybody pulled together to deal with the emergency unfolding.

It is important to thank those who gave support behind the scenes. They are the partners, husbands, wives and families of people fighting fires. On the stations they were the ones who provided support by making lunches, offering emotional support and carrying out all the little but important things that often go unnoticed. A lot of work goes on in the background with these families who are part of the pastoral industry. I thank them for everything they have been doing and continue to do across the Barkly region.

With that being said, I wish to congratulate and put the following names on the record. Medals were presented by His Honour Hugh Heggie, Administrator of the Northern Territory, to Matthew (Matt) Blankenspoor, Tennant Creek bushfire volunteer and auxiliary firefighter; Clarissa Burgen, Tennant Creek bushfire volunteer; Donald (Don) Coleman, Tennant Creek bushfire volunteer; Mark Fitzgerald, Tennant Creek bushfire volunteer and auxiliary firefighter; Eleanor Fordyce, Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, as it was at the time; Natalie Fraser, Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development; William (Bill) Jeffery, Tennant Creek bushfire volunteer; Nathan Mills, Tennant Creek bushfire volunteer; Patricia (Trish) Stout, Tennant Creek bushfire volunteer; Sally O'Callaghan, Regional Director, Barkly, Department of Logistics and Infrastructure; and Justin Hankinson, Tennant Creek bushfire volunteer and captain of the local bushfire brigade.

Citations were also issued to Hugh Annear, NTES volunteer; Werner (Tom) Appel, NTES volunteer; Daniel Cookson, auxiliary firefighter; David Cowling, senior station officer; Bushnu Lohani, volunteer firefighter; Samantha Mattarollo, NTES volunteer; Roko Qalo, volunteer firefighter; Jeremy Trotter, auxiliary firefighter; Jordan Vickers, auxiliary firefighter; and Alex Webb, auxiliary firefighter.

Congratulations to all those volunteers, government workers and everyone who received a medal or citation. Thank you for the work you did during the emergency in response to the Barkly bushfires.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge different events I have been invited to in my electorate and across the broader community. I will highlight several of these events and draw attention to the diverse and vibrant population that makes up the Northern Territory.

On 22 February 2025 for the first time in the Northern Territory we commemorated Purple Poppy Day at Mates4Mates in Stuart Park. This significant occasion recognises the service and sacrifice of war animals who bravely stood alongside our troops. Observed annually on 24 February Purple Poppy Day honours the invaluable contributions of these animals in both war and peace. The purple poppy, introduced to Australia by the Australian War Animal Memorial Organisation in 2013, symbolises their courage and sacrifice.

On 22 February 2025 the Chung Wah Society Darwin hosted an incredible Chinese New Year Festival, celebrating the rich culture, traditions and strong community spirit that define the Northern Territory. This remarkable event brought people together in a vibrant display of heritage and unity. I extend my sincere gratitude to the dedicated volunteers whose hard work made this festival a success. Their efforts in setting up, organising performances, managing stalls and ensuring the smooth running of the event were truly commendable. Without their passion and commitment such celebrations would not be possible.

On 22 February 2025 I was hosted by Mr Le, President of the Vietnamese Community in Australia NT chapter, and Phuong Le, the executive assistant to the president, to celebrate the Vietnamese Lunar New Year 2025. It was an honour to join them in celebrating Tet, the most cherished occasion in Vietnamese culture. The year 2025 is the Year of the Wood Snake, symbolising wisdom, resilience and transformation—qualities that were reflected throughout the evening's festivities.

On 2 March 2025 I attended the second NRNA NT Table Tennis Tournament held in my electorate of Sanderson. I extend my sincere appreciation to the dedicated NRNA NT committee for its ongoing commitment to organising events that bring together the Nepalese diaspora in the Northern Territory. My gratitude goes to Sanzeev Gorkhali, Trilochan Sapkota, Bhawani Paudyal, Navaraj Sapkota, Prativa Devkota Sharma, Priyasha Nepal and all committee members for their tireless efforts. The tournament showcased remarkable talent across the youth and senior divisions. The youth games set a high standard, culminating in an exciting and action-packed final. I was pleased to share this event with my parliamentary colleagues the Members for Port Darwin, Brennan, Namatjira, Casuarina, Fannie Bay and Wanguri.

On 6 March 2025 Tennis NT hosted the first Women in Sport network meeting for 2025, bringing together women and men to strengthen connections, exchange ideas and collaborate across Northern Territory sports. I thank the CEO, Tania Tandora. The event featured Delfina Shakespear from Sports Integrity Australia who shared insights on the Empowering Women and Girls in Sport Integrity Program Strategy. She emphasised the importance of supporting and encouraging women's active involvement in all aspects of sport. I was joined by the assistant minister for People, Sport and Culture, Laurie Zio, for this event.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Anula Primary School captains Chloe and Keira and vice captains Pippa and Eva. They undertook the important role of leading the school's leadership team, embodying the Anula school values of responsibility, collaboration, respect, honesty and doing your best. House captains Huon, Isaac and Marley, supported by vice captains Indi, Angad and Aidan, demonstrated exceptional leadership in guiding their sport houses. Through their dedication they encouraged sportsmanship and upheld the school's core values.

The Finocchiaro CLP government was proud to support the community-led celebrations for International Women's Day on 8 March, reinforcing our commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. More than $108,000 in grants and sponsorship was awarded to support diverse events across the Northern Territory, all featured in the official International Women's Day calendar of events. This year we supported 39 community-driven events, including 15 new initiatives, ensuring that women's voices, achievements and aspirations were recognised. These events not only celebrated the contributions of women but also fostered meaningful discussions about equality and empowerment.

On 9 March 2025 I had the privilege of meeting with the 22 members of the 2025 NT Youth Round Table who gathered in Darwin over the weekend. It was a powerful platform that allowed young Territorians to voice their opinions on the key issues affecting their communities. During our discussions we focused on pressing issues such as education, employment, youth justice and community connections. Members also raised concerns about housing affordability, the cost of living, mental health, domestic violence and substance use, which reflect the challenges faced by young people across the Northern Territory.

On 9 March 2025 I had the pleasure of being hosted by the President of UMNT Mohammed Raziuddin at the annual UMNT Interfaith Iftar. The Interfaith Iftar event served as a platform for individuals from diverse religious backgrounds to gain insight into the practice of fasting during Ramadan. Its primary objective was to educate the community on the significance of Ramadan and the spiritual discipline of fasting, facilitated through guest speakers and cultural performances.

The evening had a performance and painting and calligraphy awards for the youths. It was truly remarkable to witness individuals coming together to not only partake in the breaking of the fast but also engage in meaningful dialogue, exchange knowledge and celebrate diversity. The atmosphere was warm and inclusive, fostering environment in which all participants felt welcomed and valued irrespective of their faith.

On 9 March 2025 I had the privilege of attending my first Nichols Medal awards night, and it was truly an unforgettable event. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Brodie Filo who made history as the first male player to secure three Nichols Medals, an extraordinary achievement reflecting his dominance in the Northern Territory Football League. Likewise, Jasmyn Hewett further solidified her legacy as one of the greatest NTFL players with yet another Women's Best and Fairest win.

On 14 March 2025, as Minister for Veterans and patron of the Darwin Probus Club, I had the honour of presenting the Northern Territory flag to Allan Mitchell ahead of the club's visit to Ambon. I extend my deepest gratitude to the group for its commitment to preserving our history and honouring those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

On 15 March 2025 I had the pleasure of celebrating Holi with the Gujarati Cultural Association of Darwin alongside my colleagues Matthew Kerle and Khoda Patel. Holi is the festival of joy, unity and the triumph of good over evil, and it was wonderful to see the community come alive with music, dance and vibrant colours. I give a sincere thank you to the Gujarati Cultural Association for organising such a fantastic event and preserving these rich traditions in the Northern Territory.

On the same day I also attended the Holi Festival celebrated by the Nepalese Association of Northern Territory at the Waterfront where the Darwin community came together in a vibrant celebration of Holi, embracing unity, joy and cultural harmony. It was truly inspiring to witness people from all backgrounds join in this festival of colours with laughter and energy.

On 15 March 2025 I attended the NTFL grand final. I congratulate St Mary's Football Club on winning the women's premiership and the Southern Districts Crocs for claiming the men's title.

On 16 March I attended the Eric Johnston Awards. Thanks to NT Rugby Union for hosting this event. I had the opportunity to meet Naomi Roberts who attended the awards for the first time since the award was named after her 10 years ago.

The Member for Blain has just paid tribute to Roy Manaway and read the eulogy from his son Rod Tremlett. I will also mention Rod Tremlett tonight, but I would like to do it wearing my hat as the minister for Sport. Rod may be known by some in this House as a long-term local basketball coach and has been recognised for many years in his role as a Basketball NT high performance coach. In November last year Rod won a role down south as the NBL1 women's coach for the Illawarra Hawks. This also saw Rod take a role as an intern coach for the men's team.

For those who follow the sport, the Illawarra Hawks won the national NBL Championship on Sunday with a thrilling win in Game 5. Rod Tremlett was able to experience that win as part of the coaching team. What a fantastic experience for a local Territory coach to be exposed to that level of national competition. I pass on my congratulations to Rod and the Hawks on a great win.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.