

Infrastructure Projects

Mr HIGGINS to CHIEF MINISTER

You went to the last election on a platform of openness and transparency, it was your mantra. Trust, you said; it is all about trust. It all seems forgotten. Last Wednesday my office contacted the office of the Treasurer to request a briefing from the Departments of Treasury and Infrastructure.

There are some really important issues for Territorian businesses regarding the uncertainty of future projects. What projects are to be cut? When are they going to make these announcements? When do they start, when are they gearing up for tenders? Your Treasurer's office has refused access to these departments and instead offered a briefing from political adviser.

This is an extraordinary move; never before have we stopped you from having these briefings. Why the closed shop? What have you got to hide? Why are you refusing the opposition with the normal run-of-the-mill briefings and are you providing these briefings to journalists?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. He raises an important question of trust and we will be a government that can be trusted and our Treasurer is working through with Cabinet a series of questions about what it is that we defer from the CLP's infrastructure budget, those decisions that they made.

It is important at that point that we acknowledge that we are not talking about changing economic activity in the Northern Territory. We are spending the same amount of infrastructure budget, except for the additional \$100m that we have promised in stimulus in 2017—18 and 2018—19. We are adding to the economic activity in the Northern Territory.

These are decisions we are working through. We are happy to provide briefings to the Leader of the Opposition but they are asking for briefings on things that have not happened. We will be doing that and we will be briefing our Caucus as well; we will be upfront with Territorians too. The Leader of the Opposition can have access to Treasury and other departments if he wants to talk about things; those briefings are available.

The things at the heart of what he is asking for are things that have not happened yet, a process that we are working through knowing that the summits are coming up. We will be working through the summits on the priorities that face the Territory over the next 10 years and how our first budget should be shaped, knowing that Treasury (inaudible)—the works we are looking, the ones on the forward works list that are uncontracted, untendered.

What we are looking at really falls in those forward years 2017-18 and 2018-19. They naturally form a part of our Budget 2017-18 conversations. Essentially there is a body of work that is happening and which the Treasurer is leading on, both as Treasurer and as the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

Treasury and other departments remain available for briefs for the Leader of the Opposition, any Independents or members of my team if they want to catch up with departmental chiefs and ask questions about things that are happening in those areas.

This is essentially a Cabinet-level decision that we will need to make. When we are at that point, through the summits and looking at the budget Cabinet process, when we look at what we have done and where we are at we will be upfront with Territorians, and the Leader of the Opposition can have all the briefs he wants at that point.

He can have briefs now too; he just wants to have general briefs of Treasury; Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics; my department and others. We will be an upfront, transparent government. There is a body of work that we are doing at the moment that the Treasurer spoke to last week in Question Time. There is a body of work that we need to do and we will be upfront about doing that body of work, as we were before the election and have been since.

Jobs, Population Growth and Attractiveness of the Northern Territory.

Mr SIEVERS to CHIEF MINISTER

Chief Minister, why is population growth so important for supporting and creating jobs and what is your government doing to ensure the Northern Territory is an attractive place to live and work?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Brennan for the question. It is an important one that goes to the heart of issues in Palmerston as it does across the Northern Territory.

We have a bright future in the Northern Territory, but we face some significant economic challenges that we have to deal with; one of those is something that emerged during the last term of the CLP government when it comes to the question of population.

We also have the challenge posed by the failure of the CLP to manage the Budget and their \$900m deficit. As I said, which goes to the heart of much of the feedback the Member for Brennan gets in Palmerston, we have the challenge of the significant population drain we had during the CLP's four years.

The question of population is one that vexes us. It is probably the most significant cost facing government and business. Every time we lose a Territorian we lose \$10 000 in GST revenue. I am sure you will agree, Treasurer, that this is something we need to address. We also know that the biggest challenge facing business in the Territory is the loss of population—skilled and trained workers, people who would spend money, invest, live and raise a family here. It is something that is crucial for us to address.

The population growth of 0.4% is largely due to natural increase, with significant net loss to interstate migration during the last three years of around 8348 people—high numbers of people leaving the Territory and a drop in the number of people wanting to move to the Northern Territory. It is a major threat to our economic future. It is a vicious cycle of fewer people meaning fewer jobs, and fewer jobs meaning fewer people, and so on.

We have to find a way to make the Territory an attractive place to live and work. It is a problem that has been evident in our economy for the last four years, and it was not tackled or addressed by the previous government. We have to address population drift.

We understand the importance of this issue and are working on reducing the loss. To do this, to make the Territory a more attractive place to live and work, I have announced today that, under a Labor government, in the Northern Territory Christmas Eve and New Year's, from 7pm to midnight, will be part-day public holidays. These changes will come into effect this Christmas Eve.

We are making decisions to try to make the Territory a better place to live and work that go in with all our packages around population—changes to first home buyers, changes to buy local. We have to keep working. We have not done the job yet. This is one more thing in a series of reforms we have to make to ensure we address population in the Northern Territory.

The Territory has to remain competitive and attractive as a workplace for Territorians. We are behind other states when it comes to public holidays. Victoria has 13; we have 11. South Australia has 11, with these part-day public holidays.

It is critical to remain competitive and attractive for Australians to want to live and work in the Territory.

Infrastructure Program

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to TREASURER

Madam Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer. I want to give the Chief Minister a break because he just answered two questions in a row. Congratulations, Chief Minister! You must need a five-minute break after that.

Treasurer, we have heard from CommSec this week that the Northern Territory has the fastest economic growth in Australia, a legacy that you inherited. We know, though, that the Northern Territory is in transition as the Ichthys project winds down its construction phase. It is vital at this time to have measures in place to

lessen the impact of this transition on local businesses. Since taking office, Chief Minister, you have killed the \$2000 Home Improvement Scheme, you are looking to can \$223.5m of planned infrastructure projects. You have provided no certainty to the business community about future work, which we heard in the answer to your last question. You could not answer a straight question about the future of the Zuccoli primary school and you refused us briefings from Treasury and Infrastructure. Why are you playing silly games with such a serious matter? Why are you not being up front with businesses about the infrastructure program? What do you have to hide?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for her question. You are welcome to have briefings on Treasury and Infrastructure. We are happy to arrange those for you. We will be making sure that we have a chat with you about it. My office has let your office know those can happen. The invitation was there and it was made available to you.

With regard to where you are with the questions you have asked, yes, we know we have inherited a budget with its challenges and we are currently seeing some interesting times in the Northern Territory. Yes, we are going through a period of transition and we are faced with some real challenges in the economy. Yes, when the CLP came to government, it was given one of the greatest gifts it could have, which was the \$34bn INPEX project to help drive and grow the economy. In that time, we all knew this period of transition would come and that construction would eventually phase down and we would be moving away from that.

The last government clearly failed to plan for those times and where we are now. We knew these were coming up and ahead. That is why, when we were in opposition, we consulted broadly and listened to business and the community about those concerns and what we could do as a government to make sure we continue to drive the economy, grow jobs and do what we should do as a government to grow the Northern Territory. It is critical.

We have plans for the upcoming economic summit. I am proud of that body of work, We will sit down with those key sectors of the Northern Territory from key regions and listen to Territorians to make sure we make the most of every opportunity ahead as it presents itself. We are committed to continuing the work of the \$1.7bn infrastructure program that commenced under the previous government and of making sure we support the economy in this time of transition. It is critical we ensure government infrastructure projects are flowing through to local businesses at this critical and important time.

So yes, there is a lot of work ahead but we are certainly ready for the challenges of that and what comes with it. We have hit the ground running as a new government. We are determined to grow jobs and the economy as a new Labor government and there is a lot of work ahead but we are committed to doing it. Thank you Madam Speaker.

First Home Owner Assistance

Mr PAECH to TREASURER

As a person who has benefitted from previous Labor government first home own initiatives, could the Treasurer please tell the Assembly how this government's increased first home owner assistance package is encouraging families to call the Territory home? How does this support and create jobs?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker and I thank the Member for the questions because it is a good question and we just asked about the work that we are doing in these times in the economy to keep people here in the Northern Territory. Population is going to be one of those critical areas.

Yesterday I was absolutely delighted to meet Relesh. He is building his life here in the Northern Territory in Karama. He is doing that he was able to access buying his very first home thanks to the change to stamp duty program and assistance that this government is delivering.

It was lovely to go out there yesterday to meet Relesh to find out his story of being a university student here 10 years ago. He now works in the Northern Territory for Territory Generation. He wants this to be his home forever. He loves it here in Darwin and now he has bought his very own slice of the Northern Territory and he has signed up to stay here forever. It is a wonderful thing.

So far since we have introduced our changes to the Stamp Duty concessions and made sure that we have now a \$10,000 home renovation grant for those established homes to give first home buyers even more incentives to get into the housing market.

We have had over 250 inquiries through Treasury and Finance. We have had 42 applications that have come through and 29 of those applications are now signed off and delivered. The Member for Araluen will be delighted to know that 10 of those have been from Alice Springs and I know you have been a fierce advocate in this place for what the previous government's decisions, and the impacts they had on the first home owners markets and established housing market in Alice Springs but there you go. Alice Springs is certainly punching well above its weight with 10 already.

We have had 10 in Darwin, eight in the Palmerston and rural area and one in Katherine. We have not quite got to Tennant Creek there yet, Member for Barkly, but I am hoping that will happen very soon.

We are at a time where it is critical to make sure that we support population growth in the Northern Territory. It is important that we keep people in the Northern Territory and we all know that owning your own home plays a very big part in where you decide to stay and call home. We have absolutely made sure that we are targeting our government's capacity to support first home owners to get them to stay in the Northern Territory with the changes we have made to our First Home Owner Scheme for established homes to get more people into the Territory housing market, buying their own home and staying in the Northern Territory forever. Our \$10,000 first home owner renovation grant is out there, also as an incentive to get into the market, but also to support local Territory businesses. It has been a great start and I look forward to reporting back to the house on the progress.

Local Business – Contracts for Palmerston Regional Hospital.

Mr WOOD to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING and LOGISTICS

Your government approved a Palmerston Regional Hospital contract to a company, Nilsen, despite the company, according to news reports, not having the minimum CAL limit of \$20m. Why were the normal rules not followed? What does this say to companies who do have the correct CAL accreditation and who missed out? Does this decision say that you do not support CAL accreditation program; and which minister or CEO stepped in or made this decision and why?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Nelson for the question. I think everybody wants to see the progress of the Palmerston Regional Hospital going along very well. One thing I will give the previous government credit for is the commitment to making sure the contracts that flow out from the Palmerston Regional Hospital are targeted at local businesses; we do want to see such a significant infrastructure program in the Northern Territory to have benefit to local business as well as having a wonderful hospital in the end, which we all know that we need and want to see.

Member for Nelson, the works packages from the Palmerston Regional Hospital are targeted at maximising local industry engagement. To date, all trade packages have been awarded to local businesses.

Nilsen NT Pty Ltd has been awarded the electrical package, valued at approximately \$17m. Nilsen has maintained a local Darwin office on Berrimah road for more than 16 years and it currently employs 21 local staff in the Northern Territory.

Due to the size of the trade packages for the Palmerston Regional Hospital, the department has allowed shortlisted contracts—the opportunity to apply for CAL, or contractor accreditation limited, to upgrade their CAL rating. In this instance, no local company had the necessary CAL rating and the two local companies were invited to seek and upgrade to enable further consideration. Nilsen received its CAL upgrade in advance of the award of the package.

I have received from the department is that there is not breach of any procurement or CAL rule for this matter, Member for Nelson. They said that work is already out there and happening on the ground. The company has had quite a significant local presence for a very long time, almost 20 years now with 21 people on the ground and that they did satisfy the rules for procurement there.

I thank the Member for Nelson for the question. If you would like further briefings on the matter I will make sure I get that arranged for you.

Indigenous Health Workforce

Ms MANISON to MINISTER for HEALTH

How is this government supporting Indigenous employment in our health workforce, one I utilise a lot because I am accident prone and living out bush? How is this improving health outcomes? How is this investment going to deliver to supporting jobs in the bush?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for Stuart for his question. I am very pleased to share with you how this government is building indigenous employment in our health workforce. We value cultural diversity. We need to have indigenous Territorians working with us to achieve our aims and having this representation in our workforce is vital.

Firstly, the Indigenous Cadets Program supports indigenous people studying full time undergraduate degrees at recognised tertiary institutions. We currently employ 26 cadets across nursing, midwifery, medicine, psychology, allied health communications, law as well as medical science; an important pathway for them in achieving their dreams and then putting that into our workforce.

Of these, six are on track to finish their degrees in 2016 and they will be offered employment within the health service.

Another initiative is the Special Measures Plan to enable preference in recruitment for Indigenous application for all advertised vacancies across Northern Territory health. Under the plan there has been significant increase in the attraction of applications from those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and we have seen a huge represented improvement.

Of particular interest is these Indigenous people approved appointed to clinical roles over this time; something that is so vital in turning around our health outcomes for our indigenous Territorians.

We have 18 Aboriginal health practitioners, 2 medical officers, 69 nurses and 52 allied health professionals.

A third initiative is the Aboriginal Health Practitioner Scholarships Program where scholarships of up to \$5000 per annum for up to two years are offered to indigenous people and Torres Strait Islanders to study a certificate in Aboriginal Primary Healthcare.

These initiatives are not only growing real jobs for indigenous Territorians but they are building a pool of qualified skills workers within our health professions: something that is so important. We know that health outcomes improve when services are culturally safe and appropriate. Employing a workforce that is a representative of their local community, possessing unique skills and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, is vitally important. By building our Indigenous workforce we can provide not only better health services with a deeper understanding of cultural issues amongst non-Indigenous staff, but we can add to further improve delivery of culturally-sensitive services.

The combined benefits of a strong, sustainable Indigenous workforce will lead to improve planning and policy outcomes for all Indigenous Territorians. It will lead to healthier children who have the opportunity to pursue not only their own goals in whatever they achieve because they have had a healthy staff to life, but perhaps they can have a career in health themselves.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to CHIEF MINISTER

Following the announcement of your ministry, including your assistant ministers, your assistant minister for bringing back the Arafura Games promptly headed off on the first overseas junket of your new government. This trip was flagged in advance and full details were provided of the purpose of the trip and exactly how much it would cost. Wow, a new era in openness and accountability. But there has not been a peep since then.

Chief Minister, why have you not published details about your upcoming overseas trip. Where are you going? How much will it cost? Is it true that a 20-person entourage, including public servants, is travelling with you? What is the total cost of the trip for you, your office and each of the departmental officers travelling with you? How many assistant ministers are going with you and will they be available for comment or do they fall under your blanket of silence?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the deputy Leader of the Opposition for the question. I thank the assistant minister for bringing back the Arafura Games for taking that trip at the invitation of the Chamber of Commerce, who said in my first meeting with them, 'We love your promise to bring back the Arafura Games. We have this engagement coming up. We would love it if someone could come with us.'

I flagged that it would be very tight timing with the selection of the Cabinet and the team, but we were able to make it work. The Member for Sanderson was able to make the cost public before going and will be reporting on that trip.

I will be doing the same. I will make my costs public before I take my trip. As I have spoken of already—maybe the deputy Opposition Leader missed this—I will be going to Japan, South Korea and China as part of that trip, and I will be making the cost public beforehand. We are looking at a very large team of businesses, which are paying their own way, being on the Chinese leg of that trip, to Rizhao, as part of a Team NT approach, which is really important.

I am going to Japan to repair the reputation of the Northern Territory in Japan. Under the previous government we saw some unfortunate incidents, and I am hoping to restore the reputation of the Northern Territory while I am there.

One of them was the appalling treatment of the then Chief Minister, in my opinion – I will not ask the current member for Blain for his opinion on that. I thought that was a poor way to handle the visitation of a first minister to another country. Obviously, we there were other incidents that were less savoury around racking up taxpayer expenses in Japan.

This is crucial work I will be doing. As a result of the CLP's behaviour in travelling overseas, we made an overseas ministerial promise to Territorians. We will tell them where we are going, how much it will cost and why we are going. When we get back we will report on the success of that trip. I will be sticking to that promise. The member for Sanderson stuck to that promise, I will be sticking to that promise. We will be up front with Territorians and doing our best in our overseas engagements, not just in Japan, but across the board, to make sure we repair the reputation of the Northern Territory on the national and international stages and we deliver for Territorians. One of the most important steps in doing that is being up front with Territorians about the cost of the trip and why we are going.

I have had great joy in talking to people about why I am going. I addressed everyone at SEAAOC about accepting that invitation from INPEX to take that first step in Japan. In conversations through SEAAOC it became clear that I should also visit South Korea. Obviously I want to have that smooth baton change between the last government and this one about the investment in Rizhou so we do not let that investment slide.

Extending Penalty Rates – Effect on Economy

Mrs LAMBLEY to CHIEF MINISTER

I pick up on a comment he made earlier about growing the economy. How does extending public holiday penalty rates to Christmas eve and New Year's eve grow the economy, placing pressure on businesses, causing them to close on the New Year's eve and Christmas eve, possibly causing a loss of jobs? How does that stack up? How does that grow the economy? Are you not just kowtowing to the unions?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Araluen for the question. We have significant problems and challenges in the Northern Territory at the moment that we need to address, as a government. One of them is the loss of population. It is not enough to do nothing. We have to have a very clear package for workers in the Territory. Workers are under significant pressure in the Northern Territory. It is a constant point of conversation about the pressure that workers are under.

I make no apologies as Chief Minister of a Labor government that I will speak for workers and I have a relationship with unions. We will grow the Territory economy, address those population concerns and make sure we are a positive Territory and are competitive with the jurisdictions around us. We cannot do what the CLP did last term, which was stick their heads in the sand and be in denial about the population problem in the Northern Territory. We have to be a positive government, a government that makes decisions when it comes to population.

These changes will ensure that Territory employees at work on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve are given a fair go and compensated for the sacrifice that they make so that we can enjoy our Christmas Eves and New Year's Eves. It goes beyond business—I know the Minister for Territory Families used to operate a 24 hour women's shelter that had the same issues. We have got to be fair for all workers and certainly this government will lead the way by ensuring nurses, police, firefighters and others who work at this time will be supported for doing so.

We make no mistake for being a government that sticks up for those workers. We make no apologies for being a government that addresses the population concerns that we have got in the Northern Territory.

Right now we are facing a Territory that is only growing due to the natural birth rate: that is not good enough. We have got to make the Territory an attractive place to live and work and that is what we will do. It is good for workers and it is good for business. That person working on a Christmas Eve is likely to go to the Boxing Day sales and spend their money. We have got to be good for those workers in the NT

Mrs Lambley: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Relevance for Standing Order 110: who is running the Territory Chief Minister; you or the unions?

Madam SPEAKER: No, that is not a point of order. Sit down.

Mr GUNNER: Madam Speaker, a Labor government is running the Northern Territory and this is the decision of a Labor government.

We are looking after workers in the Northern Territory and giving them fair recompensation for the sacrifice they are making on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. Without doubt working on Christmas Eve, December 24 7pm to midnight, is different to working 7pm to midnight on December 18. It is a different day. We are going to be giving a fair recompense to those workers. We are going to be a government that addresses the concerns of the population of the Northern Territory, it makes us an attractive place to live and work. That is what we have got to do and what we will do. It goes hand and arm with the changes that we are making to things like first home owners.

We will be a positive government for all Territorians.

Madam SPEAKER: Chief Minister, your time has expired.

Investment in Schools

Mrs WORDEN to MINISTER for EDUCATION

How will Labor's \$124m additional investment in schools support jobs in the Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker and thank you Member for Sanderson for your question. As we know, education is the key to prosperity in the Territory. This government is going to restore the devastating cuts made by the CLP to our schools; cuts that have seen drastic reductions in the number of teachers in our classrooms and the number of staff providing important support to our schools.

There was a reduction of 373 school based full-time equivalents from June 2012 to June 2016. The CLP cut teachers; they cut a great part of the Territory's workforce. Teachers are wonderful Territorians and good citizens in the Territory. I would like to know where those 373 teachers had to go. Did they leave the Territory? Are they part of the reduction of our numbers in the Territory?

Ms FINOCCHIARO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 241. We ask that the minister tables he note she is reading from.

Madam SPEAKER: That is not a point of order; sit down please. Minister, are they your private notes?

Ms LAWLER: They are my private notes. Those facts are all available in the annual report. We have listened to parents and educators and we have a better plan to support education and create Territory jobs; we are investing in an additional \$124 m in funding to schools over the next four years; this includes an additional \$20 m per year directly into school budgets. With an additional \$20 m a year in their budgets, schools will be able to recruit more classroom teachers; specialists and support staff. This funding gives schools the capacity to employ an additional 164 classroom teachers; that is an additional 164 employees in the Territory and, as I said, teachers make great citizens.

To support these new teachers and retain them in our system in the long term this government will provide mentoring support to early career teachers focus on developing their expertise. A well performing and properly resourced school system is fundamental to a prosperous future in the Territory. We know that the jobs of the future will be even more complex than the jobs of today and we will need employees with higher levels of education and technical skills. Students will need to proficient in coding; the language and text of the modern industrial world,. Our government is introducing compulsory coding training into primary and secondary schools; so students will have the skills they need to participate in the workforce now and into the future.

In addition to the \$124 m extra into the education budget, we are also creating jobs and economic stimulus through the Building Better Schools initiative. 300,000 in minor new works will go to every Territory school over the term of this government. There will also \$5 m to improve the 26 homeland schools operating across the Northern Territory. This funding will be allocated over the next four years to allow for schools to properly plan and for local businesses to better manage their workloads. Together these commitments provide much needed support to improving education in the Territory.

Dundee Boat Ramp

Mr HIGGINS to PRIMARY INDUSTRY and RESOURCES

In your speech in reply to the Administrator you said:

This government will complete the Dundee boat ramp, something the previous CLP government could not do over its four-year term.

Have you at any time since the commencement of construction inspected, in person, the new Dundee boat ramp? Can you tell me exactly how your government is completing the ramp? Have you offered additional resources? Have you reworked the budget? Once this ramp is finished, where can we expect the next investment in fishing infrastructure? What is your plan?

Visitors

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of the Wadeye youth leaders. Welcome to Parliament House. I hope you enjoy your time here.

Members: Hear, hear!

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Opposition Leader for the question. What a fantastic opportunity to talk about fishing and infrastructure at the same time. I appreciate the question; it is fantastic.

The Michael Gunner Labor government will finish the Dundee boat ramp. We will complete what your government could not do, what your government promised then started and never finished. Like your government, it was chaotic. The good people of the department, trying to deal with a bad government, have done it tough over the last four years. The department has worked tirelessly to try to complete this project. As I said, the Michael Gunner Labor government will build and complete the Dundee boat ramp.

We have a great story. Have I been there? Not for a while, but I went out there continuously when I was in opposition, unofficially, looking at what was going on and enjoying the wonderful country there. I looked at what an opportunity it will be for recreational fishers to go to Dundee and enjoy a boat ramp which we will have completed.

Do we have a plan? Of course we do. We have a \$50m infrastructure spend in recreational fishing. We have invested and we are working with recreational fishers in the NT. We are working with Territorians on how to deliver that. We, unlike your government, will deliver.

We have promised upgrades to Channel Island and Shady Camp. We are installing CCTV and new toilets at Dinah Beach. We are upgrading parking amenities at Middle Arm boat ramp and putting in place artificial reefs and other fish aggregation devices. We are also increasing land-based fishing. That is what this government is doing. We are doing what was asked of us and what was promised by us—what your government could not do.

Older Workers' Retirement – Government Support

Ms AH KIT to MINISTER for TERRITORY FAMILIES

How is this government supporting our older workers as they transition to retirement? How will this strengthen the economy ...

Mr HIGGINS: A point or order, Madam Speaker! Under Standing Order 1 in the Northern Territory it states that where there is not a specific reference to procedures that we would reference...

Madam SPEAKER: What is your standing order number, Opposition Leader?

Mr HIGGINS: Standing Order 1. It states that if we do not have any standing orders covering certain aspects of what happens in this House, we refer to the *House of Representative Practice*. The *House of Representatives Practice*, (6th Edition), clearly states:

Assistant ministers could ask questions of ministers but not of the minister whom they were assisting.

This is clearly a question by an assistant minister to the minister they are assisting. If we have assistant ministers we need clarity over their roles.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Opposition Leader. This came up last week and I have some information I will read to honourable members of the research we have done:

Standing Order No 1 provides that the Speaker or Member presiding in the Chair is guided by previous rulings and practice in this Assembly and where required, will refer to the most recent edition of the House of Representatives Practice concerning matters not previously decided in this Assembly.

The sixth edition of the House of Representatives Practice provides some detail on the status of and history of Parliamentary Secretaries or Assistant Ministers in the House at page 70 onwards.

The Northern Territory Assembly does not have these same approach because the status of Assistant Ministers in the Northern Territory is a courtesy title under arrangements made by the Government and is not prescribed in legislation with specific status and unlike the House of Representatives neither the Northern Territory Government or the Assembly itself have given Assistant Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries ministerial responsibilities in the Chamber as in Canberra.

Since 1992 in the House, Parliamentary Secretaries have had the status of Ministers in all respects, except for the answering of Questions. Parliamentary Secretaries may also not ask Questions of Ministers.

The House Standing Orders are instructive.

Standing Order 98 in the House at paragraph (b) says that a Member may orally ask a question of a Minister (but not a Parliamentary Secretary or Assistant Minister) without notice and for immediate response.

House Standing Order 99 also states that a Member may ask a question of another Member who is not a Parliamentary Secretary or Assistant Minister where that member is responsible for the matter being asked about.

In the Assembly, Standing Order 107 permits questions to Members who are not Ministers but has no specific exclusion regarding Assistant Ministers.

Last week I ruled questions cannot be asked of Assistant Ministers.

I confirm that ruling today.

I rule on the basis of the lack of formal status on the Assembly of Assistant Ministers and on the precedent and guidance of the House of Representatives as well as our own 42 years of practice in this Assembly.

Should Members wish to consider this matter in detail, the best venue is the Standing Orders Committee which will meet for the first time in this Assembly on Wednesday 26th of October.

The Membership of that Committee includes the Opposition Leader and two non-party independent Members as well as the Government Members.

Until the Assembly determines otherwise through a resolution or in new Standing Orders, I rule that the practice in the Northern Territory is:

Questions to Assistant Ministers are out of Order.

Assistant Ministers may ask questions of Ministers

Senior Territorians – Transition to Retirement

Ms AH KIT to MINISTER for TERRITORY FAMILIES

How is this government supporting our older workers as a transition to retirement? How will this strengthen the economy and support jobs?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Karama for her question. I think it an important question which the Member for Daly would be particularly interested in. It is important that seniors have a voice in this place.

I am very proud to be the minister responsible for senior Territorians because they are an important part of our community. As the Chief Minister rightly pointed out, we have to address population decline. It is an important issue for us because it drives our economy. To grow only through our natural birth rate is a big concern, so we will act strongly in this area. We need to stop senior Territorians retiring to the south. We need to keep them here in the Territory where we need their expertise, history and corporate knowledge. We will be working through the Office of Public Employment...

Mr Wood: I am not going.

Ms WAKEFIELD: It is good to know you are not going; we are very pleased, Member for Nelson. Continuing to work into older life is very important in terms of having meaningful and important things to do as a senior person and, as we know, it keeps you young. We think that it is an important part of the public service in the Northern Territory that we can help people with the transition into retirement. Rather than hitting 65, getting a clock, and walking out the door, people can perhaps go to part-time work, look at more flexible holiday arrangements and shorter days. We need to look at all those things as part of keeping Territorians living here.

We have made some commitments around helping with the cost of living in the Territory for senior Territorians and we will be delivering on those. We have been working with the department about how best

to do that in the most effective way; I have met with Seniors NT and I know the Member for Karama has met with COTA and spoken about the significant issues and barriers that are being faced by senior Territorians; and one of the things is cost of living. We will be looking—and we have made a very clear commitment of \$700 to senior Territorians over two years and we are looking at how we can provide flexibility; that is not just about travel; that is about a range of government services that impact on the cost of living; power bills; motor vehicle registration. We will be continuing to work with those two important groups, COTA and Seniors NT to deliver the best to senior Territorians.

Sports Funding in Alice Springs

Ms LAMBLEY to MINISTER for TOURISM, CULTURE and SPORT

Whilst in opposition, you promised to support a master plan for sport in Alice Springs. I believe there is a master plan in place; what will you do to start the process of ensuring that all funds allocated to sport in Alice Springs are allocated on the basis of this master plan?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Araluen for her question. Again, I was in Alice Springs very recently enjoying one of the Territory's greatest sporting events, the Masters Games. I really did have some great opportunities to talk to people about sports and sports facilities in Alice Springs, including Damien Ryan the mayor and I look forward to continuing to talk to him about those strong partnerships with council.

One of the things I did get to do while I was there was be part of opening the Pat Galahad Netball Centre down there. I acknowledge the work that was done by the former government around that netball centre and the great partnership that was undertaken with a range of different people but including the town council to achieve that.

There is a master plan in place and we look forward to implementing the master plan. There was a broader master planning exercise that was done by the former government as well around sports and it is important that we make sure that there is implementation strategies that exist around these plans and they do not just sit on a shelf. There is certainty going forward, we have made a range of different commitments across sport right across the Northern Territory.

I look forward to implementing them and working with you, Member for Araluen, about what you see as the priorities—you are all out there on the ground and I encourage you to be in touch with me about what you see going on and telling me about how that is happening.

Sport is an incredibly important area for Territorians. Let us not just have plans let us actually be out there making sure that we are working to priorities in sports. We want to bring back the Arafura Games. We want to make sure we have got the appropriate venues and facilities across the Territory to be hosting really big competitions.

I look forward to working with all of my colleagues.

Housing Investment – Jobs for Indigenous Territorians

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for HOUSING and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Madam Speaker, thank you for acknowledging my electorate and the correct one.

How would the Labor government's record \$1.1bn investment in remote housing create jobs for Indigenous Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Arnhem for her question. It is important to note that Labor's record investment of \$1.1bn over 10 years is also designed to leverage Commonwealth funding after 30 June 2018. We hope to be able to influence the Commonwealth and we are looking at match funding, if not more. This will give capacity over that 10-year cycle of not only delivering in housing and infrastructure but it will also be underpinning those important policy developments that the Labor government has planned around health, education, justice and wellbeing.

It is important to note also that the local organisations that will deliver the programs are the linchpin in this policy and work has already begun in terms of scoping capacity and making contact with those organisations across the Northern Territory.

Think of the elements of the policy where you build capacity through repairs and maintenance—then from repairs and maintenance Labor's innovative Room to Breathe policy, where the people are skilled and normalised in the workforce are participating in the construction activities within their community and can logically move on to the next stage where there will be renovations, outdoor living spaces and granny flats. This will provide certainty that we mean business not only to industry, but to community. Logically you then go to new home builds.

This policy allows great opportunities for Territory businesses to partner up. A lot of accredited trades will be needed and we want to see those sectors in industry marrying up with community organisations to train our workers, deliver the skills and have local people participating in the construction industry for homes.

I really enjoyed my visit to the Menzies forum on rheumatic heart disease last week. There was a very powerful speaker there who influenced my thinking around regular, cyclical repairs and maintenance of houses. It has improved health outcomes in the APY lands and we aim to do that in the NT. It is important to build this local capacity and partner up with local businesses. Our plan around five-year funding agreements will deliver on that. It gives certainty to industry.

The Chief Minister is very determined to ensure we grow jobs and give certainty to industry. When you talk about five-year funding agreements, it translates to apprenticeships and traineeships, and sustainability and capacity across the sector. I am a proud member of this team that has planned it, and now we will deliver it.

Police Stations and Skywalk

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to MINISTER for POLICE, FIRE and EMERGENCY SERVICES

Last week you tried to defend Labor costings showing that funding for the second half of the new Palmerston police station would only be available in 2021, after the election. The people of Palmerston are not the only ones waiting; Labor is committed to building a new police station in Katherine but has only put up half the money in this term, the other half being allocated post-election 2020.

The Member for Katherine wants to scrap the \$10m skywalk over Nitmiluk Gorge, a 300 m glass walking platform from Pat's Lookout would create jobs for locals and capture high-value tourist dollars. Why is Labor against jobs for locals and growing our visitor economy? When will the smoke and mirrors end? Will you commit to build the skywalk and build both halves of the police station in Katherine in this term of government?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, there were a couple parts to that question - the police stations and sky walk. I will deal with the police stations first. I said very clearly that the police station will commence and be available this term of government. That is a promise we made to the people of Palmerston and its suburbs. I stood with the member for Brennan, Tony Sievers. They will have a door that works before the next Territory election. It will be available and housing police officers before the next Territory election. We made that promise.

The Chief Minister at the time called it a donga. For \$15m you will get more than a donga. What became clear after that was the CLP, in following in our footsteps, doubled the size of the station it wanted to build. It started talking about different facilities being added to that police station.

We thought, 'We will listen and do a second stage to the police station'. There are two stages to this police station. The first stage we announced with the member for Brennan. The member for Drysdale is also a very strong supporter of this police station to make sure the people of Palmerston have a police station in their suburbs, just as the people of Darwin have one in their suburb of Casuarina. We will be making that good investment for the people of Palmerston, responding to their concerns.

The second question was about Katherine and talked about the sky walk and what we are doing for police in Katherine. The member for Katherine spoke about the lack of consultation and conversation with Jawoyn at Nitmiluk National Park. That was public before the election. We expressed our concerns before the election about how the CLP, in classic CLP style, with a thought bubble, without any work going in to

whether it would work or local traditional owners would even support it or want it and without any consultation or work in any way, shape or form to see if this sky walk would work, just threw it out there.

We said it was clearly the wrong way around in doing this work. You have to talk to the local landowners first about what they would like and what would work, and consult with the people who have a strong passionate interest in the park at Katherine and obviously are keenly interested in growing tourist numbers. Interests do align.

They were not supportive of the sky walk. That was clear feedback from before the election. The member for Katherine ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! With 30 seconds to go, relevance. Can the Chief Minister commit to building both halves of the Katherine Police Station in this term of government?

Mr GUNNER: I am not aware of the Katherine Police Station being split in half and us having to do two halves of the Katherine Police Station. What I am talking about is our commitment to consultation around what people want for tourism when it comes to Nitmiluk National Park. We did have a commitment of \$5 m towards Katherine to those frontline services and infrastructure and we will be investing that in this term of government in Katherine. Thank you.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION Police Stations and Skywalk

Ms FINOCCHIARO to CHIEF MINISTER

Will the Chief Minister commit to building the complete Katherine Police Station in this term of government?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we promised \$5m this term and that \$5m will be invested this term.

Indigenous Rangers — Employment and Pathway Support

Mr COSTA to MINISTER for ENVIRONMENT and NATURAL RESOURCES

Indigenous ranger groups play a central role in conservation and natural resource management across the Northern Territory. They also provide significant employment opportunities and training incentives for Indigenous Territorians. Can the minister inform the House on how the Gunner Labor government will support this important employment pathway?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Arafura for this very important question. I have spoken about the Indigenous ranger program as part of my Address in Reply speech and other members of this Chamber understand how invaluable their work is in the Territory and how significant their role is in terms of protecting our environment and looking after country. Every day across the Northern Territory our Indigenous ranger groups are undertaking crucial activities to conserve our unique and precious environment; it is one of our biggest assets, this beautiful country that we get to work and live on.

They are front-line in dealing with feral animal management; fire management; weed management; and monitoring and managing wildlife and significant sites. As I said, the work they do is absolutely invaluable. They are about so much more than just conservation and natural resource management; they deliver significant economic and social benefit to remote communities; providing employment opportunities and incentives for education and training, which I am sure the Minister for Education will be pleased to hear as well. They are doing this all on country.

There are currently over 40 Indigenous ranger groups helping to manage more than two thirds of the entire Northern Territory with around 1000 rangers employed on a full time, part time or casual basis. They have a very big job to do; and we recognise that so we want to make sure they are properly recognised and supported and that they have the tools they need to do their job; and we are doing that in a range of ways. Firstly, we will be amending the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* to specifically recognise the role that our Indigenous rangers play in managing natural and cultural assets across the Northern Territory

and work is already under way on these changes, which will include new enforcement powers so rangers can do more to effectively manage their lands.

This will provide opportunities for them to undertake further training so that they have the qualifications and confidence to exercise these powers. Not only does this send a really strong message that we absolutely back our Indigenous rangers and the work that they do but it provides hundreds of Indigenous Territorians with new pathways and opportunities to build on their skills and expertise in the job.

Our support for Indigenous ranges does not stop there. We have talked about a \$4.1m investment so that our ranger groups can buy the equipment that they need: vehicles, boats, radio and communications equipment. We will be investing \$8m in a land management and conservation fund to improve conservation practices on Aboriginal land and sea country.

There is a range of other ways that we plan to support our Indigenous ranger groups; so incredibly important to our economic and environmental future here in the Northern Territory.

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

**ANSWER TO QUESTION
Woolianna School**

Ms MANISON (Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics): Madam Speaker, I just want to respond to a question I took on notice for the Member for Daly with regard to Woolianna School. Labor did not have commitments for a new Woolianna School; however, we are a government for all Territorians and I would be very keen to formally meet with you so I can better understand the needs of the Woolianna School community and the infrastructure you have proposed. I will make contact with your office to arrange that.