Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I acknowledge in the Speakers gallery the Honourable Neil Bell, former member of this parliament—Member for MacDonnell it is now Namatjira—welcome to Parliament House.

Government Vehicle Accident Howard Springs

Mr HIGGINS to ATTORNEY–GENERAL

I have reason to believe that a government vehicle rolled at Howard Springs last Tuesday, with a health department client on board in a single vehicle accident. It is my understanding that the client on board was unrestrained in the backseat but was thankfully uninjured. Can you please advise the particulars of this accident, and why there was no public alert issued after the accident, which occurred on a Territory road and involved two health staffers one who was driving the vehicle being taken to hospital?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I am aware of an incident that took place and the department has advised me of that. When we are dealing with these clients, these people, there is legislation that ensures that protection of identity is in place. I would be more than happy to offer the Leader of the Opposition a briefing. We have all been aware in the media in recent times, under this government and previous government incidents, and Territorians have expressed frustration that they would like to be informed. I am currently working with the Department of Health, department of corrections and police around protocols that we can put in place.

Sadly, if there is a death in custody there is a clear process that is followed by police in terms of notifying the public and the media. This is something that we are working through presently in terms of putting those protocols in place. I am aware of an incident that did take place. I do not have those specific details in front of me or the advice of whether it is appropriate to speak or not, but I would be happy to provide a briefing to the Leader of the Opposition and also further update to the House at some point, once I get advice.

I thank him for his question. It is not an attempt to not want to talk about the issue. I was just asked some questions outside by media and I did, as always, remind that when we are talking about people that are subject to court orders and at times there is suppression orders around names and details. I would prefer to get the information and be accurate than to inadvertently cause an error, so I thank the member for his question.

Pastoral Land – Fees Increase

Ms FINOCCHIARO to MINISTER for PRIMARY INDUSTRY and RESOURCES referred to MINISTER for LOCAL GOVERNMENT

You intend to increase fees for pastoral land. A land tax would not apply to crown land or leaseholds. Is this just a way for you to impose a de facto land tax on pastoralists before you tax all other privately owned land?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, you have the wrong minister I will pass to Minister McCarthy who has carriage of what you are talking about—local government.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Anyone who is happy to answer the question, I am happy to hear the answer.

Mr VOWLES: I am happy to talk for three minutes on primary industries but to get the answer you want, I will pass over.

Mr McCarthy: Madam Speaker, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I believe you are talking about pastoral leases, is that correct? Then I will hand that to the minister for natural resources or the minister for primary industries.

In terms of my portfolio around local government, we can talk about conditional rating on pastoral properties, if that is what is written on your paper?

Members interjecting.
QUESTIONS – Wednesday 7 February 2018

Alcohol Consumption – Alice Springs

Mrs LAMBLEY to MINISTER for TERRITORY FAMILIES

What we know in Alice Springs, and indeed across the Territory, is an increase in alcohol consumption equals an increase in domestic violence. As a local Alice Springs member of parliament and our only Alice Springs voice in cabinet, what are you doing to stop the out of control alcohol consumption in Alice Springs at the moment? Why have you allowed your government to let the rivers of grog flow freely in Alice Spring like we have not seen for years? Why are you ignoring your Brailing constituents who are crying out for police to remain outside bottle shops? What are you doing to save our town?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the rise in alcohol-related assaults in Alice Springs is of a concern to everyone on this side of government. We take very seriously any issues of violence. I caution you in whether it is domestic and family violence. There is a difference between alcohol-related assaults and domestic and family violence. My CEO is meeting with the Commissioner of Police to raise those concerns about domestic and family violence statistics and making sure Territory Families have the right information and we are giving the right service delivery across the Territory. He has asked for the detail about that.

I need to reflect that whilst alcohol impacts on domestic and family violence throughout the time I was CEO in Alice Springs through the CLP time in government—I ran the women's shelter—there was an increase in women seeking support for domestic and family violence services, even with the alcohol policy in place. We need to be clear—we can get rid of all the alcohol in the Northern Territory tomorrow and we will still have issues with domestic and family violence.

That being said, I am not dismissing the seriousness of your query. I have raised these issues with police. We know we have more to do. There are many people concerned in Alice Springs. The whole Cabinet is aware of that. But we also know that these issues are complex and are not happening in the last six months, they have been happening over a long period of time.

That was one of the reasons I was very proud to—as part of this government—announce a 10-year strategy for domestic and family violence. All the evidence tells us that this is generational change we need to be putting in place. We need to be looking at a range of factors, including gender equity and making sure we have the right service delivery models in our towns and regional areas in particular. We also need to ensure we are making those services accessible and flexible to the needs of the women who are addressing them.

It is also important to acknowledge that we are taking on board the Riley report which has over 200 recommendations, which show the complexity of the issues. This morning I was surprised you argued against urgency on our reforms to the alcohol because it is an issue that is impacting now. We know there are businesses in our community impacting on …

Ms WAKEFIELD: I have very clearly outlined a range of measures, both urgent now, as well as long term.

Escapes from Secure Health Facilities

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to ATTORNEY-GENERAL and MINISTER for JUSTICE

In your justification for hiding the truth from Territorians about recent escapes from secure health facilities you said the people involved as health patients do not necessarily warrant a media release due to concerns for the welfare of the patient. Now you have completed your critical incident review, complete with eight recommendations, can you please advise at what point an escape of this nature triggers a public notification to advise the community of the situation and that their safety may be at risk?

ANSWER
Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question. As I spoke of in my first response, this is a complex area. This is something the Member for Araluen and I were speaking about on radio on Friday. We have a number of clients across the Northern Territory—and it is a growing cohort—the court orders to be custodial or non-custodial supervision and what programs they undertake, where they reside and what they participate in.

Regarding communicating with the community about whether someone has breached an order, the process is that Community Corrections often monitor these people through electronic monitoring, and Health would notify police. Police are the best people in the Northern Territory to decide on community safety. Clearly, Territorians feel that they should be informed more regularly. A number of these people are under court orders and some are custodial and others non-custodial.

In terms of that process going forward, it has not been finalised. We would seek the advice of the agencies involved and the court process. Police provide advice around a notification and there are varying examples; a health patient may leave a hospital premises and be at risk to themselves if they are a dementia patient, here police will put out a safety notification. This is a concern for welfare.

As a minister I have said we will take responsibility for past critical incidents and come up with a new process going forward where work is done between agencies, that has always taken place be it a Labor or CLP government. Going forward we will have a robust and clear process in place so that the threshold for advising the community through police around community safety is upheld.

VISITORS
Jocelyn Uibo

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of a sister, Jocelyn Uibo. Welcome to Parliament House. We will ask you later how you think she is going.

Members: Hear, hear!

Taxes Promised During Elections

Mr HIGGINS to CHIEF MINISTER

You committed to making your government open and transparent. You said at a property council meeting in 2016 that there would be no land tax under Labor, yet 18 months in we see you backtrack on your promise and try to introduce a land tax. Will you apologies to Territorians for breaking an election promise? Will you commit to dropping your grossly unfair, unnecessary and unwise land tax?

ANSWER

I can guarantee we will not do to Territorians what the CLP did and introduce without notice a 30% cost increase on power, water and sewerage without declaring it before an election. In fact, they went to the election declaring they would cut the cost of living and the very first thing they did was slug Territorians; we are not doing that.

Despite attempts by the CLP to mischaracterise what we have gone out on, we are clearly saying to Territorians before our second budget, you get an opportunity to have a say on the shape of that budget. This is something all governments can learn from; going into our second budget Territorians have the opportunity to have their say on how we do business as a government. This is an excellent step in opening up the decision-making of government to make sure everybody can have a genuine say in how we go about the business of government.

We are not doing what the CLP did, a 30% slug without any notice despite what they took to the election. We are going through a very considered approach, saying, here is our second budget; what are your thoughts? This is a very good, open and honest approach to Territorians about the shape of a budget. In every budget ever written in the entirety of Australian history, governments have considered their revenue and spending measures. For the first time ever, we are telling Territorians they have a chance to have their say and ask them what they think we should do in our second budget.
This is an upfront, honest approach to Territorians. The CLP are running a scare campaign which they have no credibility for because of the way they behaved when they were in government over four years of chaos when they hurt Territorians. They smashed Territorians. We understand 2018 will be a tough year and there are Territorians doing it tough. We will be in the trenches with those Territorians and I can guarantee the shape of our second budget will be built around the needs of Territorians.

We will not do what the CLP did and kick those hard-working Territorians, households and businesses in the guts with a 30% power rise. Shame on the CLP. Territorians will see this government as one they can be proud of that will put them first. We will build our second budget around them and they get the unprecedented opportunity to shape that budget. They will not get from this government the kick in the guts they received from the previous CLP government.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION
Half Day Public Holidays

Mr HIGGINS to CHIEF MINISTER

If the Chief Minister is so forthcoming in consultation with the Territorians and public, can he explain the consultation he went through prior to introducing the two half-day holidays?

ANSWER

I have very strongly defended the absolute fairness of looking after workers on Christmas Eve and New Years’ Eve before and I will do it again.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr GUNNER: The absolute fairness of people who are out there busting their guts—nurses, police, I have gone out on patrol with police on both Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve—there are people out there who cannot choose where they work on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve. And I find it outrageous that the CLP cannot take the side of workers.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr GUNNER: Cannot take the side of frontline workers.

Time after time, when the opportunity emerges for the CLP to kick hard working Territorians in the guts, what do they do? They kick them. There is only one approach to CLP will ever take that is against ordinary hard-working Territorians.

Labor stands for hard-working, frontline workers. The CLP do not. And again, shame on them. Shame on them. They should be embarrassed of themselves.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Aboriginal Justice Agreement

Mr GUYULA to ATTORNEY-GENERAL and MINISTER for JUSTICE

I have been listening to some concerns of elders in community and I share their concerns. We would like to know, will the Aboriginal Justice Agreement be a one-size-fits-all approach or can the agreement be adjusted to meet the needs of each community? Negotiating an agreement correctly with the elders and leaders of each community.
ANSWER

Sadly, Aboriginal Territorians are overrepresented in our justice and corrections systems. That is Australia-wide, but nowhere more so than the Territory. Although only 30% of our population is Aboriginal, approximately 85% of prisoners in the Territory are Aboriginal. It is unacceptable and as a government we have started the work of working with Aboriginal Territorians from right across the Territory about how we can reduce these rates of incarceration.

We need to put in place the plans—the early childhood plans—giving kids the best start in life. All the work that my colleagues are doing in that space.

What we have done is established an Aboriginal Justice Unit within the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. It is a small team led by Leanne Little and they are doing a wonderful job. They are out there across the Territory consulting. They have visited communities and they are now doing return visits so people can understand what this is about and what they would like to see in an Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which is the main aim of the Aboriginal Justice Unit.

One of the key aims is to look at the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people within our justice system. It needs to look at the high rates of disadvantage, the high rates of incarceration, the high rates of reoffending and also the services that we need to provide people. The basic human rights services and supports that all Territorians deserve.

There have been around 50 consultations held right across the Territory, and as I have said they have gone back and they are doing a second round of consultations. I believe that they are currently in the Central Australia area.

With this body of work we will then form an Aboriginal Justice Agreement that will take us forward in how we tackle these issues and reduce those high rates of incarceration.

But also giving Aboriginal Territorians the ability not to be caught up in our justice system. The Department of Justice is providing free birth certificates to Territorians. That has been off the back of the Banned Drinker Register.

But what we have seen in communities across the Territory is people that do not have any formal documentation and that is clearly a barrier that is place, and that is not acceptable. Then as they get older and they would like to get a driver’s licence, if they do not even have the basic identification certificates, it then puts in place a barrier and then the flow starts.

These are the broad ranging issues not always in what you would say would be a negative context, but in a positive context around giving Aboriginal Territorians what they need to participate in our community and participate positively in our justice system.

In terms of your specific question around will there be different aspects per community, this consultation will ensure that every area of the Territorians is represented in that final Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

Labor Government Promises

Mr HIGGINS to CHIEF MINISTER

Whilst your government will say it is just a discussion paper, you would not have released it if you were not intending to hike up tax price others and introduce others. Why is the Labor government trying to cripple the economy further and tax the Territory out of existence? It is clear you are not listening to business or Territorians. The Real Estate Institute of the NT’s CEO, Quentin Kilian, describes moves to introduce a land tax as ‘grossly unfair’ and ‘quite ludicrous’.

The CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, Greg Bicknell, says, ‘We believe the government should get its own House in order before looking to the private sector to replace lost GST share’.

When will you start to listen to Territorians and businesses, and drop your plan for massive tax hikes, including catastrophic new land taxes?
ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we know 2018 will be a tough year for Territorians. We are shaping our second budget around the needs of Territorians and responding to their needs and that of Territory businesses.

We will not do what the CLP did, which was sell Power and Water, sell TIO, and massively slug Territorians’ households and businesses with the 30% increase in power, water and sewerage costs. We are not the CLP, and Territorians know that. Like every government we will have a budget, and as part of that budget we will consider our revenue and spending measures. We are giving Territory businesses, Territorians an unheralded opportunity to have a say in the shaping of the second budget.

I promise we will not be like the CLP. We will not sell public assets, like the CLP did with Power and Water and the TIO. We will not slug Territorians with a 30% increase in power prices, 40% increase in water prices and 20% increase in sewerage prices—to be specific. That hurt Territory households and businesses. We are not the CLP.

Our budget will be built around the needs of Territorians and recognising of the fact times are tough. They want government in the trench with them to do the heavy lifting, stimulate construction and jobs and make sure that jobs are a priority of this government. They are our values and priorities, and that is how we will shape our second budget.

The CLP’s values and priorities were slugging Territorians and businesses, and selling Power and Water and the TIO against the needs of Territorians. Small things, but important things—like scrapping the first home owner support, making it harder for Territorians to buy their own little piece of the Territory. In every year the CLP sat, under all that chaos, after the 20 Cabinet reshuffles and two-and-a-half Chief Ministers, every time they had to make a decision they chose the one that made Territorians hurt.

Mr Kirby: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; I cannot even hear the response from where I am sitting.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Member for Port Darwin. I ask all members to keep the volume down, as well as your interjections.

Mr Gunner: Every time the CLP had the chance to make a decision—and it had 20 different Cabinets, so it got to test every combination for decision-making—it chose the one that hurt Territorians.

We are on Territorians’ side. We know they need more local jobs and support. Our budget in 2018 will be shaped around their needs. I guarantee that. We understand what Territorians need and that Territory businesses need confidence and certainty. They want local jobs to be created, and we are giving them a chance to be part of the budget process. This is important. We will make sure we deliver in our second budget what the Territory needs.

Palmerston Council – CEO Resignation

Mr Wood to Minister for Essential Services

Was the ex-CEO of Palmerston Council, Ricki Bruhn, forced to resign or did he resign voluntarily? Was he paid any money after he resigned, and was he required to sign a confidentiality agreement? If so, what was the reason for that?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, that question needs to be directed to Mr Mark Blackburn, who is administering the City of Palmerston council. He is doing an excellent job in Palmerston. He conducts regular council meetings where there has been a great turnout from the public. There has been a resounding level of support, and now a great level of interest toward the next election.

I remind the residents of Palmerston that nominations close on 2 February and the election will be held on 17 March. The Member for Nelson knows these protocols …

Mr Wood: A point or order, Madam Speaker! The question was simply whether Ricky Bruyn been forced to resign or resigned voluntarily. Was he paid any money? Was there a …
Ms FYLES: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Mr WOOD: … confidentiality agreement. The minister knows the answer …

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Nelson. Thank you, I think …

Mr WOOD: He is not answering the question.

Madam SPEAKER: The minister understands the questions. He has minutes to answer. Do you have a point of order, Attorney-General?

Ms FYLES: Standing Order 112. The minister is answering the question and has provided a response.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you. Answering …

Mr WOOD: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: He is answering the question to the best of his ability …

Mr WOOD: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Can I read Standing Order 110?

Madam SPEAKER: Sure.

Mr WOOD: Standing Order 110 says:

   Answers will be concise and directly relevant to the question …

Ms FYLES: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Mr WOOD: That is what should be happening.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nelson and Member for Nightcliff.

Minister, if you just get to the point of answering the question the member for Nelson has put to you in your Local Government ministry capacity.

Mr McCARTHY: Madam Speaker, once again I will respond to the Member for Nelson. The Member for Nelson should put that to the administrator, Mr Mark Blackburn …

Mr Wood: But he is your appointed …

Mr McCARTHY: … who is doing an excellent job in the City of Palmerston. The Member for Nelson knows very well these protocols. He knows very well how the local government system works and that Mr Blackburn can supply him with that information, as the administrator is the appropriate person to direct those personal questions to …

Mr Wood: They are not personal, they are public …

Mr McCARTHY: They are personal questions. I call on standing orders to assess that question because I believe the Member for Nelson is stepping outside his brief now. He should go to Palmerston. He should test this in Palmerston …

Mrs LAMBLEY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110: relevance. The minister is not answering the question.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Araluen. Minister, you have the call.

Mr McCARTHY: Madam Speaker, I have answered the question twice.

Onshore Gas

Mr HIGGINS to CHIEF MINISTER
Your revenue discussion paper is an attack on Territorians to fund your reckless tax and spend agenda. The revenue discussion paper is a plan for lots of pain on the economy for little gain. There is a real game changer in the form of onshore gas. Deloitte Access Economics found onshore shale gas production has the potential to drive significant economic growth into the Territory, including $961m increase in government revenues and the creation of up to 6300 jobs. When will you make a decision on onshore gas? When will you start working on the regulations for onshore gas? When will you give the green light to these 6300 jobs?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from the Leader of the Opposition. It is important to take every opportunity we can to repeat what we said going into the election …

Mr Higgins: Oh, we will not introduce a land tax?

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr GUNNER: … that we would have a moratorium and independent inquiry and at the end of that independent inquiry we would make a decision about either banning fracking in the Northern Territory or allowing it in highly-regulated circumstances in tightly-prescribed areas.

The Leader of the Opposition is choosing to quote some statistics which he knows, out of context, can be misleading. The industry’s own paper showed that those returns, if they happen—there is no guarantee they will—will come in the mid-2020s.

I and my team have taken a very deliberate approach of having an inquiry, independent of government as we promised and no decision we make either to ban or to allow in highly-regulated and tightly-prescribed areas until after the independent report drops. We will make that decision as soon as possible after that report drops, recognising the importance of certainty for everyone involved in this debate. There are a lot of people who have invested in this debate.

We have said that repeatedly and I say it again today. We will make that decision after the independent inquiry hands down its report, and the decision will be very straightforward. It will be to either ban fracking in the Northern Territory or to allow it in highly-regulated circumstances in tightly-prescribed areas. We are very clear about our promise. I do not think there is any confusion.

I do not think the CLP has heard me say it enough because they have asked the question again today. I feel like I have said this a lot. That is the process we said we will do. That is the process we will follow. That is the decision we are confronting and have to make. The report is coming down soon. As I said, we will make the decision as soon as possible after that report drops. The decision will be between banning fracking in the Northern Territory or allowing it in highly-regulated circumstances and tightly-prescribed areas. We are very clear about our promise. I do not think there is any confusion.

The independent inquiry is a deliberate attempt to restore trust to how government make decisions. One of the reasons we are having this argument about fracking in the Northern Territory is because Territorians lost complete trust in the CLP’s ability to make a decision during the chaos of the CLP years.

This process is about making a decision on fracking but it is also about showing how we can restore trust to government making decisions in the Northern Territory because of the tragedy of the CLP years, the tragedy of the chaos and the two and a half chief minister’s—a lot of cabinet reshuffles—they had many different attempts to try to get people in a room who could work together and make decisions. They failed in every single circumstance. We are showing that you can have stability, you can have a clear process and independence and we will make that decision after the independent inquiry delivers its report.

Members: Hear, hear!

National Indigenous Cultural Centre Alice Springs

Mrs LAMBLEY to MINISTER for TOURISM and CULTURE

Yesterday I was listening to the Chief Minister’s illuminating statement about the economy and jobs, and I did note that he listed the Alice Springs CBD revitalisation, the National Aboriginal Art Gallery, the $20m injection in to the Alice Springs Mall, the Alcoota fossils but he did not mention the National Indigenous Cultural Centre. Could you update the House on what is happening with the National Indigenous Cultural
Centre—why the Chief Minister would not include that in his very important statement launching the 2018 parliamentary calendar, and just allow us to feel very confident that it is proceeding as you promised?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I have spoken about this a number of times in the House. I note that the Member for Araluen is yet to take me up on my offer to come and talk to me and get a briefing on where these things are up to. I am very happy to note that we are talking about two projects in Alice Springs, the National Indigenous Art Gallery and the National Indigenous Cultural Centre that I believe and know that Central Australians believe will be really important game changers for Central Australia. They will be economic boosts in Central Australia. They are going to be fantastic in terms of the visitor experience and these are going to be places that people should go and visit if they want to truly immerse themselves in Indigenous culture, art and stories that have led us to be the nation and the Territory that we are today.

I know that the Chief Minister recently met with Harold Furber and Owen Cole at Nganampa Anwernekenhe Development Corporation and I met with them that week as well to discuss the next steps. For the cultural centre, because as I have said before, they are the organisation that is taking the lead on the cultural centre. They did a two day workshop at the end of last week where they invited a whole range of a national and local stakeholders to come together to talk about the concept and how they will move forward on the cultural centre. They are now coming to me with their final report on that workshop and their next steps and we are working with them to do that.

We have provided a resource, the Department of Tourism and Culture, to help them to progress that consultation and their concepts. We have provided funding towards that consultation that they are undertaking. We are on this journey together with them and we continue to be and I would very much encourage the Member for Araluen to get in touch with them. They are very passionate about the project and we look forward to continuing to work together with them. I am sure Harold and Owen would be very happy to meet with you to discuss the way that they see this coming together and going forward—we have and will continue to—and I am really proud that we are a government that will put culture and arts at the forefront of our decisions and moving forward. These are things that make us different from many other places, not only in Australia but across the world. We will continue to progress these really important projects.

**Industry Participation Plans**

Mr MILLS to CHIEF MINISTER

Your decision to review the Industry Participation Plan agreements is welcomed by industry. Can you advise if you will be supporting the making of industry participation plans public and available to industry?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, we have not made a decision on that but happy to talk about it with the Member for Blain and talk it through. We want to do everything we can to make things as local as possible and make our decisions as quick as possible. We have made some significant reforms in this area already when it comes to buying local. A lot of these reforms are now being grouped under the buying local headline although they obviously go beyond that in some ways.

We have reduced price to equivalent or below local content weighting. Whilst we have been making these changes, they actually impact the tendering process because of the weighting issues. We have reduced the weighting of price to make it either equal to or below the rating of local content, requiring all local content to be driven right through the tender process to make sure we are doing as much as we can for the Buy Local scheme.

I am not sure if you have met the new Buy Local advocate, Member for Blain, but I am happy for you to meet with Dennis Steadman. He is on board and doing a great job. I thank Doug for his acting role before Dennis could come on board. The Buy Local advocate has been very active in this space and been very helpful. As local members we all have concerns around when people tell us they are not sure how this contract works or that it feels unfair.

It is really good to now have someone who can independently look at these things, whether it is about how government made a decision or a how a contractor who won that decision is implementing their tender; it is both sides. It is about government and businesses doing what they says they will.
The Buy Local advocate is offering us a lot of advice in these areas and I turn to Dennis for his considered opinion on these things. He is seeing how things work on the ground; it is really important to get practical advice as well as theoretical. It provides more avenues into government for advice. We have had a lot of advice through the Manufacturers Council, the Chamber of Commerce, Master Builders, directly from businesses and so on.

I have been on bus trips with the Treasurer talking to businesses about how our procurement tendering works. The Buy Local advocate provides a new and stronger approach to get that work…

Mr MILLS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! With respect, Standing Order 110. The heart of the question was, do you support the making of participation plans public?

Mr GUNNER: I am pretty sure I answered that at the top of the question and then went into some general approaches. I am happy to meet with you further to talk directly as well. I have gone further to say we are happy to do all we can to make these issues public and as transparent, local and quick as possible.

Royal Darwin Hospital Capacity

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to MINISTER for HEALTH

The Royal Darwin Hospital emergency department issued a code yellow for the first time in its history yesterday as it could not keep up with patient demand. Elective and day surgeries have been cancelled due to overcrowding and a lack of capacity.

The AMA have said that the RDH has been operating at well over 100% for years and is currently at 140%. Critical care surgery co-director, Dr Brian Spain, stated that the new Palmerston hospital would not solve the overcrowding problem and more was needed to alleviate it in the long-term.

Rather than crying foul to the Commonwealth, what are you doing as minister to solve the health crisis in Darwin?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I love the opportunity to talk about…

Members: Interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Member for Spillett!

Ms FYLES: Madam Speaker, thank you. She asked a question but does not even have the respect to listen to it. I love the opportunity to speak about healthcare and Territorians right across the Territory deserve access to high quality health services.

Currently there are ongoing and increasing demands for services through the emergency department and Royal Darwin Hospital and it has stretched us to overcapacity. I want to thank all staff from doctors to carers and personal assistants. I was there this morning meeting with staff and personally thanking them for their work, not only over the last few days but months and years.

I am not blaming the Commonwealth, that and the inaction of the CLP is what led us to this point. We have worked closely—I spoke to the Chief Executive of Health Monday night and the head of Top End Health Services and the hospital manager yesterday as well as visiting the site. I sincerely thank our staff for their efforts in this situation. Multiple strategies are in operation and I am pleased to report that we have seen an improvement.

We are still stretched in terms of providing healthcare, it is at about 100% capacity down from the 140% we saw on Monday evening. There is no one solution for this nor one reason why we have seen it. There are a number of factors and it has been consistent over 12 months of high demand across our healthcare services. Royal Darwin Hospital is unique in the fact that it provides tertiary healthcare for a large part of northern Australia and we do not have that ability to decant into other hospitals as you would to see interstate.

Palmerston, when it will come online—I spoke yesterday about the debacle of that was under the CLP government and have updated the House—it is well on track to open this year and when it opens it will have
a 32-bed emergency department. It will provide support, but yes we need to do the long term planning and that is what is being done.

We have got a clinical infrastructure plan that we are out there consulting. We will come up with a plan, not only for Royal Darwin Hospital, but for Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs as well as our 80 odd remote health clinics so that Territorians can be assured into the future that we do not see debacles such as the Palmerston Hospital, where decisions are made—we see press conference stunts, that we have the forward planning to deliver quality healthcare that Territorians deserve.

I apologise to any Territorians who have inconvenienced. Appreciate the community support. On social media, people were saying thank you to our nurses, thank you to our doctors. It is something that is a focus of this government and we will continue to deliver for Territorians.

Air Routes to Remote Communities

Mr GUYULA to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING and LOGISTICS

I noticed that Air North have announced some new route they will be flying from Darwin to Alice Springs. This is very good. I also noticed that this has been supported and subsidised by the government. Last year I appealed to the Chief Minister to support remote communities in accessing cheaper travel. Can you tell me what the government are doing to support and subsidise the existing air routes to remote communities Galiwinku, Maningrida, Milingimbi, Ramingining, Gapuwiyak and other communities.

ANSWER

It is important that people from communities have access to air services out there. We do know that particularly in the north of the Northern Territory it does present some real challenges when the wet season and the monsoon kick in, and with access to certain communities. Because we still have the issue with roads and trying to get as much sealed as possible to communities more accessible year round.

There is going to be a body of work happening at a federal level looking at the subject of regional air services, which of course will look at places like remote communities and level of services that do go out there.

That is going to be a very important body of work and I would urge you to make a submission—but I am sure you have already done that—with regards to how airline services can service Territorians better going out there across the Northern Territory.

We did invest in extending the centre run, which is the run that goes from Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and back, because that is something we need as well. It is an important service and that is one thing that I will thank the previous government for where they got that trial up and running. And we have continued that as well, to see if we can see some commercial operation happening there. Because it is an important service.

But what is so fantastic about this dry season is that that is going to extend from three days a week to five. That is going to test some of those commercial opportunities there, about making it a more viable and sustainable route for Territorians to travel on in getting up and down the track.

Looking at regional transport, it is an important area to look at those accessibility issues. Getting out to community. I know it is a tough cost of living pressure if people have only air transport to use. It is something I would be keen to discuss with you further Member for Nhulunbuy and happy to have a bit of a conversation so I can understand the needs of your constituents a bit better.

In the meantime we have managed to make sure that we invest in airstrips as well because that is very important infrastructure. I know Milingimbi, that has been an issue there and we have put significant funds into it through the budge to look at the widening and the issues there with the airstrip.

We would be more than happy to sit down with you, Member for Nhulunbuy, to understand some of those transport and accessibility issues. But again, I think it is going to be a really important body of work that we see through those questions that the senate committee look at with regards to remote and regional air services. And looking forward to seeing what comes out of that and where there are more gaps that need to be filled in ways in which we can ensure that there is more sustainable and cost-effective airfares for people who live out bush.
Pensioner Concession Scheme

Mr HIGGINS to MINISTER for TERRITORY FAMILIES

I do not think I have ever asked you a question before.

Last week my office heard from a pensioner who received a letter instructing her to collect her prepaid electricity concession card from Katherine and that the card would not be posted to her. That means she had to drive a nearly 200 kilometre round trip to collect her card. The irony of this should not be missed. The notice to collect it was actually posted to her!

How many pensioners in places like Pine Creek will need to collect their pension cards this way? What is the cost saving to government to have pensioners collect their cards rather than having them posted? Will this silly oversight be rectified and will concession cards be posted to eligible Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it is great to get a question from the Opposition Leader, especially on an area where we have made some significant reforms.

One thing we have done through this reform is making more places where people can get service delivery across the Territory. That has been one of the advantages of placing this concession scheme into Territory Families. There are more offices across the Territory where people can get face-to-face service delivery.

I understand there may be an issue here, and I am happy to get the details of this. If you can forward it on to me I am happy to look at the details. We are in the position where we need to cut down opportunities for fraud, making sure everyone registered on the scheme is eligible for it as part of the reform process.

There were opportunities under the last system. Administratively it was not strong enough to ensure that taxpayer dollars were directed to the people who most needed it. We are going through that process, but I am happy to look into the specific circumstance.

We are talking with as many people as possible about any issues they have. In my electorate we have spoken to just about every senior in the last couple of months to make sure they have a good understanding of the fact they will get $500 every year for travel under this reform. People will continue to be grandfathered under this reform.

We will make sure this scheme is sustainable and includes all senior Territorian—unlike your government, Opposition Leader. I am grateful for your concern regarding senior Territorians, but it would have been great if you had done that while in government and not cut people so brutally out of this scheme.

I am happy to make sure your constituent gets the service delivery she needs.

Aboriginal Representation in Government

Mrs LAMBLEY to CHIEF MINISTER

It goes without saying that Aboriginal people are better equipped to make decisions about Aboriginal people. Why do you not employ Aboriginal people into your key Aboriginal positions on level five? Why do you not make an Aboriginal person the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs? You have five Aboriginal colleagues who would love the job, I am sure.

Ms FYLES: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 109—asking the Chief Minister for his opinion.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is not particularly personal.

Madam SPEAKER: I do not believe it was for an opinion. Please start the question again.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It goes without saying that Aboriginal people are better equipped to make decisions about Aboriginal people. Why do you not employ Aboriginal people into your key Aboriginal positions on level five? Why do you not make an Aboriginal person the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs? You have five Aboriginal colleagues who would love the job, I am sure. You have placed the former Member for Nhulunbuy, Lynne
Walking into a well-paid advisory position in your office of Aboriginal Affairs. Why did you not choose an Aboriginal person?

Madam SPEAKER: The question is in order. It is asking the Chief Minister why something was done or not done.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we came into this term of government on the back of some very big promises about how we wanted to work on Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory. When we came in we were the first Territory government in history to say we are supportive of having a treaty process and negotiations and we want to do that. We came in saying we wanted to go through a very strong process about local decision making. We thought that might take about 10 years and we have gauged very strongly at the moment how we can transfer responsibility across. We have come in with a very big agenda we are very keen to carry out.

I, as the first minister, have taken on the portfolio. There is a reasonable argument about whether our first minister or an Aboriginal person carries it. I do not know if there is a right or wrong, but there are certain things that come with being the Chief Minister—certain abilities to work with government and directly with the public service which is an advantage of being the first minister, or the Chief Minister in this instance. It is like whether the former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, held the portfolio or whether it was with an Aboriginal colleague.

We have some significantly talented Aboriginal members of the Caucus who would make fantastic minister. We have Ken Vowles doing a brilliant job as Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries. For me, it is not a question of talent, but simply I am the Chief Minister and I wanted to take on that very serious responsibility.

Within my office, the head of my Aboriginal Policy Unit is Steve Rossingh, an Aboriginal man—he just is. He does a fantastic job. We have varied Lynne’s position. She is very good at writing policy and has been very helpful to us over a significant number of years now. Essentially, it is a quick tweak to an existing role. Let us be clear, Steven Rossingh is head of the Aboriginal Affairs Policy Unit within my office. We have a significant policy. You have heard the Attorney-General talk before about our Aboriginal justice agreement policy.

As a government, a team and a Caucus, we are working 100% on what are very significant issues in the Northern Territory, and have been significant issues for a very long time. We often talk about it within the remote focus, but we have—and it should never be forgotten—Aboriginal people living all through the Territory in all walks of life and all types of industry and government. They have 50% of our land mass, 85% plus of our coastline and are 30% of our population. They are the future of the Northern Territory—absolutely.

We have to ensure that all Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory are involved in the mainstream economy, contributing significantly to the future of the Northern Territory. That is a massive challenge for us and every government and one we have to take on board. We are talking a lot about that as a government, but we are putting a lot of things in place. I note the Minister for Housing often talks about the housing we are building, but importantly it is not just about building housing, it is about making sure locals are doing the building and making the decisions. It is 50% at the moment and that number has to get much higher. So, 50% of locals are working on those housing projects and we have to get that number higher.

Palmerston Council CEO

Mr WOOD to MINISTER for HOUSING

The Anderson report regarding Palmerston Council does not show any reason for sacking the CEO. Now, because of your directions regarding the suspension and then sacking of the council, one good man, Ricki Bruhn, has lost his job, his reputation is in ruins and now he and his family will probably leave the Northern Territory. Did you know that Mr Bruhn worked for 37 years at the York Peninsula Council and seven years with Palmerston Council with not one black mark against his name? Did you know he was also a JP in South Australia? Did you know he is the national president of local government professionals of Australia? Did you know he is president of the local branch? Could you tell the parliament what this good person, Ricki Bruhn, did wrong or illegal that justified the injustices that happened to him by you, your department and your appointed manager?
ANSWER

Madam Speaker, in response to the Member for Nelson, the process that I conducted, as minister, following an independent investigation into the City of Palmerston council was to dismiss the City of Palmerston council. Under the act, that is a collective of individual elected members?

Mr Wood: What did he do wrong?

Mr McCarthy: That is what my responsibility was and it is the very important decision I had to make. I have made many statements about why that was the case. There is a very specific story to tell that I could supply the Member for Nelson with, but I direct the parliament’s observation and knowledge to the independent report because it provides very good recommendations for all councils across the Northern Territory ...

Mr Wood: You should check.

Mr McCarthy: The Member for Nelson is trying to tie me to an event that took place in relation to the ...

Mr Wood: You suspended the council. You sacked them.

Mr McCarthy: … City of Palmerston council and its operations.

I will once again respond to the Member for Nelson. I took a very important decision on behalf of the government and the people of the great city of Palmerston. I suspended those members and then initiated a perfectly independent investigation which recommended that council be dismissed. There were a number of reasons for that; there were some major issues around governance, conflict, appropriate consultation and communication.

I refute the Member for Nelson trying to tie me personally in Question Time into a very unfortunate situation for all those involved. That is how the act works and is there for and this is my responsibility as the minister. I am looking forward to nominations, election and certainty, trust and accountability for the people of Palmerston. I will continue to do my duty as the Minister for Housing and Community Development towards supporting the good people of Palmerston.

Gender Equity in the Workforce

Mr Mills to CHIEF MINISTER

Since your election in 2016 your government has had a noticeable focus on delivering on a social agenda. One of these issues has been gender equity in NT fire and emergency services, an objective to achieve 50% female workforce by 2020. Clearly this is an achievement important to Labor, what instructions have you provided to the Education minister to get 50% males into our classrooms?

ANSWER

I support...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Ms Lawler: You are wasting Question Time!

Mr Mills: It is a waste of time, is it?

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Blain! Member for Drysdale! Order!

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I want to hear the answer.

Mr Mills: I did not ask the Chief Minister during estimates, I asked you.
Mr GUNNER: I…

Ms Lawler: … And you got an answer.

Mr Mills: Not a satisfactory one.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, just start.

Mr GUNNER: Madam Speaker, thank you. I support the direction that the Police Commissioner has taken in consultation with NTPFES but it was not actually a direction I gave the Police Commissioner, it was a decision they have taken as a group which I fully support. As a group they decided to try for 50/50 with the fire service. it is an ambitious target they have set themselves.

I have been talking to firefighters and inspecting some of the infrastructure. I was at the Palmerston fire station the other day and there are some challenges a bit like we are facing in sport. The Minister for Tourism and Culture was well aware when we built these things, and some even quite recently, that they were not built with women in mind. We are having to go through and do my repairs and maintenance and new works to allow for female change rooms and evolutions for females to be part of that work environment.

We have taken on that challenge and it is a good one. It really adds that diversity to the firefighting mix without affecting the ability to respond to emergencies or fight fires in any way. You have to go through the full training process, no exemptions are made. You have to be able to do the job 100% and women can do the job.

It is an ambitious target with over 200 firefighters to go through that. I fully support it and think big sides are being made. We are seeing increasing numbers of women come to the recruitment processes. They have had some come and try days so people are aware of what is involved and can train for it.

There were some challenges earlier where there are things that require techniques—you should be taught techniques, and they were proving a barrier when they should not have been and we have made some common sense changes to that making it much easier to participate in that training and recruitment process. These are some very simple things we have done upfront, so that is what…

Mr MILLS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110 Relevance. Back to the classroom.

Mr GUNNER: I believe I have answered that question because I did not provide a direction to NTPFES around this and they have taken this upon as an entity and as I understand the Minister for Education has already answered that question in estimates.

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