

CONTENTS

VISITORS	1479
Shane Stone.....	1479
Good Shepherd Lutheran College.....	1479
SPEAKER'S STATEMENT	1479
Media Coverage of Budget.....	1479
APPROPRIATION (2017–18) BILL.....	1479
REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL	1483
(Serial 22)	1483
APPROPRIATION (2017–18) BILL.....	1485
(Serial 20)	1485
VISITORS	1492
Good Shepherd Lutheran College.....	1492
MOTION.....	1499
Construction of a New Alice Springs Hospital by 2030	1499
MOTION.....	1510
Importance of Local Government Across the Northern Territory	1510
MOTION.....	1529
Assessment of the Northern Territory Onshore Gas Industry	1529
ADJOURNMENT	1536

Madam Speaker Purick took the Chair at 10 am.

VISITORS
Shane Stone

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the public gallery of the former Chief Minister, Shane Stone.

Good Shepherd Lutheran College

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I also advise of the presence in the gallery of Year 5 students from Good Shepherd Lutheran College accompanied by their teachers, Janet Boyce and Laura Warrender. On behalf of honourable members, welcome to Parliament House, you very clever rural students.

Members: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT
Media Coverage of Budget

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, pursuant to the motion agreed by the Assembly yesterday I now call on the Opposition Leader to make his contribution to the Appropriation Bill debate immediately followed by Government Business notices.

As is the normal practice each year I have given permission to the media outlets to film the Opposition Leader's reply to the budget speech. I call the Leader of the Opposition to the Despatch Box.

APPROPRIATION (2017–18) BILL
(Serial 20)

Continued from 2 May 2017.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, yesterday the Treasurer said this was a budget for optimists but I say, more than at any other time, this is when we need the government to be realistic.

A budget needs to be factual and realistic. We have seen what happens if one relies on overly optimistic estimates. The government has continued to make announcements seemingly based more on hopes and good feelings than on a cool, rational assessment of facts. Its announcements are based more on what sounds nice, rather than what stacks up financially. Perhaps it is the Treasurer's blind optimism that has prevented her from acting in her first eight months to reign in the deficit.

Every week the Treasurer would have received updates about how dire the deficit was looking. When there were calls for a mini-budget, when the Treasurer was getting warnings on the deficit, she was optimistic and did nothing. It continued yesterday. The Treasurer has not outlined a plan to start to pay back the government's debt. Her optimistic approach is, 'It will work itself out'.

On this side of the Chamber we have unbounded confidence in the potential of the Northern Territory. This is tempered by our grave concerns that the Gunner Labor government is not acknowledging the true economic and fiscal burden it is placing on all of our shoulders, that of our children and grandchildren. We have again reached the projected \$5.5bn in debt which saw Labor lose government in 2012. It took the last Labor government 11 years to be in a position to forecast a debt at that level.

This time it has taken just eight months. They inherited a debt to revenue ratio of 27% and are projecting this will rise to 87% in the forward estimates. The Treasurer is an optimist. Yet the Treasurer's budget marks the end of a period of economic prosperity and an era which ran from the introduction of the GST in July 2000, almost 17 years ago. We are now entering a new, more volatile and depressed period. Unemployment is rising, the deficit has tripled and Territorians continue to suffer from a huge increase in crime.

Territorians are hurting, and what do we get from the Labor Party? We get a museum-led recovery. We get announcements on museums, art galleries, art trails and cultural centres. We get an economic recovery led by museums, sorry, by cultural institutions; an economic resurgence led by art galleries; an economic rally led by cultural centres.

On our side of the Chamber we see no problem with museums, art galleries or cultural centres, but we know you cannot build these centres willy-nilly because there is a limited market and they are extremely expensive to maintain. We also know that museums will not deliver the economic recovery the Chief Minister and his ministers are claiming it will. The great museums of the world are based on private investment. To claim that spending on art galleries is what the Territory needs to improve the economy is delusional.

The Gunner Labor government's legacy will be huge debt for decades, money which needs to be repaid. The only thing we hear from the government about the massive deficit is the Bart Simpson defence, the 'I didn't do it' line—it is hard to utter that with a straight face—while at the same time announcing massive government spending across the CBD. It ignores the issue. The issue is the highest deficit on record in the Territory's history. This is the highest deficit since self-government. It is a clear and present danger to the Northern Territory Government's ability to provide services and representation to Territorians over the next generation and beyond. An excuse is not a plan to deal with it. The only plan the Gunner Labor government has to deal with debt is a media plan.

The last Country Liberals budget focused on stimulating the Territory economy with substantial investment in infrastructure. The \$1.7bn infrastructure spend was aimed at creating jobs and opportunities while improving public facilities across the Territory. It was investment in strategic infrastructure for future generations of Territorians. The budget provided additional resources for frontline services and diversification of the economy, and encouraged private investment in the Territory.

The 2016-17 budget also put downward pressure on the cost of living through a 5% reduction in household electricity tariffs from 1 January 2016, a continuation of the Sports Voucher Scheme, the Back to School Payment Scheme and the early childhood services subsidy.

The previous Country Liberals budget invested directly in services and infrastructure to support Indigenous Territorians. It provided initiatives that focused on economic empowerment, delivery of essential infrastructure and key government services to regional towns and remote communities throughout the Territory.

Since the election the Gunner Labor government has cancelled the successful Home Improvement Scheme; then after a four-month hiatus it reinstated the measure. The CLP contributed \$20m to the last budget for the stimulus package. Labor has banned a national anchored tenant, Dan Murphy's, at Darwin International Airport, sending a clear message to them, a dozen other businesses and at least nine construction companies who expressed an interest in the project that the NT is not open for business.

Now we have yet another review, expert panel and considerable time delay before this government makes a decision. This has now been escalated to an inquiry. They have imposed an onshore gas moratorium and set up an independent inquiry, which will not report until December 2017. At the rate this government makes decisions there will not be one until well into 2018, sending a message that the NT is not open for business.

In the NT there are estimated gas reserves of 234 trillion cubic feet. What does this government do? It does not meet the challenge to provide a climate for private sector investment; it puts in place processes to stop investment and lose the opportunity to create long-term sustainable jobs.

The Gunner Labor government has said too often that the former government did nothing to create jobs after the INPEX construction phase. The former government commissioned Dr Allan Hawke AC to undertake two inquiries with the result that certainty was provided to investors and a roadmap to reform the environmental regulatory framework was produced.

If you had any idea how to manage the economy you would have immediately called a halt to this moratorium and let the private sector get on with developing the Territory under a best-practice regulatory regime recommended by Dr Hawke. I remind honourable members of this House that the inquiry made into the recommendation was consistent with other Australian and international reviews.

The environmental risks associated with hydraulic fracturing can be managed effectively, subject to the creation of a robust regulatory regime. Further, the substantive weight of agreed expert opinion led the inquiry to find there is no justification for the imposition of a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in the Northern Territory.

The Territory economy is facing two challenges. The first challenge is an imminent chasm in major project investment from when the Ichthys construction period ends to when the defence infrastructure spending, as outlined in the 2016 Defence White Paper, starts to ramp up; our economy is already slowing in anticipation and Territorians are being laid off as we speak. The second challenge is an incredibly dire deficit situation which is making it harder and harder to provide Territorians with the services they need because of the debt repayments, which are at a level unprecedented in the Territory's history.

These are the two major factors: the gap in private investment between INPEX and the Defence White Paper, and the massive deficit. When you identify the problem clearly it helps to identify a clear solution. We need an increase in targeted government spending to sustain the economy until the Defence spending comes online, and then we need to wind down the stimulus spending as efficiently and harmlessly as possible.

We need this targeted spending to develop economic infrastructure, the kind of infrastructure that will help grow the economy and sustainable jobs. New roads will create opportunities for tourism, and beef and mango exports. More importantly, it will connect Territorians. For too long we have accepted substandard infrastructure in the region as part and parcel of living out bush. There are potential innovations, ideas and businesses waiting to be unlocked when we connect Territorians with each other and connect those isolated places and communities with the rest of us.

We need infrastructure that leaves the Territory wealthier and more productive after it is built. When seen from this perspective we know what needs to be done; we need targeted expansionary spending on economic projects over the next two years—economic projects that generate ongoing and sustainable employment—and then the government needs to return to living within its means and aim for a surplus as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, the recently announced budget is the worst possible budget for this time. The next two years have limited new spending, but after that the government is planning the largest amount of spending—at which time we assume the Defence spending will already be in full force—which is targeted at building uneconomical infrastructure. In fact, it is spending which will likely be a drag on the budget after construction, not that which will grow the economy.

We need the spending now; we need the money out the door now and the spending to be winding down in two years to tackle the debt situation. It seems that for the next two years the government will be merely making announcements, continuous reviews and moratoriums, conducting feasibility studies and consulting. That is the time when we need to be winding down the spending to tackle the dangerous levels of debt. The Labor Party's budget does the opposite to what is needed. Labor's budget is exactly the opposite of what people want and what the Territory needs.

If we look at the forward estimates we see that our debt only gets worse, even when we should be aiming for a surplus. Much has been made of the various levels of deficit; the Country Liberals' budget predicted a deficit of \$413m today and, more importantly, a plan and pathway for tackling the debt and achieving a surplus in 2019-20. This was a calculated and calibrated response to macroeconomic pressure at that time.

In that budget we also had the highly successful Home Improvement Scheme stimulus. As we have witnessed, what has unfolded since that time we may well have expanded that program but what the Labor party is proposing is not wealth-creating infrastructure. This is not infrastructure that will help unlock private investment and private industry. This is spending for spending's sake without business cases, determining the project's viability or having a plan. It is the Field of Dreams approach to infrastructure spending: build it and they will come.

Tourism is another example of this budget missing the point with spending. Cutting funding to tourism will cause a decrease in the number of visitors to the Northern Territory. Cutting the infrastructure grants and cutting funding to regional tourism associations is not the way to grow the number of tourists. Improving our tourism infrastructure is what we need.

Visitors come to the Territory looking for a product, something to engage in, something special that cannot be done elsewhere. We still have no details for what all these announcements mean. What does \$50m get us for the old hospital site? How much of an underground car park will \$20m get? How many degrees lower will the temperature be? Will the temperature be lowered in other parts of the city, or just in the Supreme Court car park? Why start there; will the new museum have a car park? Why hide one car park and build another one at the RDH, way out in the open?

What will the \$20m in works in Alice Springs provide? I understand there are no details and the first meeting regarding this vital plan was organised after the announcement. The Treasurer announces figures with pride as if bigger is better, but surely, planned and researched project identification and expenditure would be better.

What happens when all these galleries, centres and museums open? Who will pay the running costs? Are these envisaged as profit making ventures? What happens to the current museum and art galleries of the Northern Territory at Bullocky Point? Are there any subsidies, studies or research to suggest there is more demand for museums and art galleries than is currently provided? If a museum is to be built, we need it to be an iconic drawcard to bring visitors to the Territory.

The one striking example of a newly built museum being a drawcard to a town is the Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart. The difference is that MONA is privately funded. You may recall the Country Liberals in government proposed a new art gallery in State Square. It was designed by a local architect in conjunction with the designers of MONA; however, we did not proceed as it was clear the Territory budget would not allow that spending at that point in time.

Budget is not just announcing spending; that is the easy part. Anyone can put out a media release or make a speech with big numbers included. The skill in the budget is when it comes to stopping spending, managing spending and prioritising one project over another. The skill in the budget is making sure the money gets out the door when it is needed and stops when it is not. It is against these criteria that we assess the budget, and it is against this criteria that the budget is found wanting.

The Labor Party has missed the point of the budget. It is not a competition as to how much money you can spend. You do not win by spending more. Spending money is the easy part of government; it is the fun part. The hard decisions are where the Chief Minister and Treasurer are earning their salaries. We are yet to see evidence of these hard decisions. Against any criteria for a responsible budget the Gunner Labor government has failed, and the Territory will pay the price now and into the future.

The Labor Party has again failed the economic test. They have not only failed the test of economic strength of character, they have also failed their own test. They have manifestly failed to live up to their own rhetoric on transparency, evidence-based approaches and accountability. There was plenty of rhetoric about consultation.

For eight months the Labor Party has kept a hamster wheel of government turning through inquiries, committees, committees of inquiry, panels of experts, economic summits, audit surveys, advisory boards, consultation boards and feasibility studies. Yet when the rubber hits the road they announce major infrastructure upgrades with no plans, no business cases, no test of viability, no studies, no vision and no money for their ongoing expenses. There is just very large amounts of money from the back of an envelope; \$50m here, \$100m here, \$20m over there and four lots of \$10m as well. Aren't we lucky that in reality it adds up to such a wonderful round number?

Let us go though some of Labor's broken election commitments. The most relevant election commitment was to balance the budget. I applaud that Labor actually recognised the importance of balancing the budget. I wish they had made some effort into finding a path to surplus or at least told us the path for decreasing the deficit.

Many public servants will be shocked when they read of the savings the government based its budget on. The budget states there will be savings made up of \$789m across the budget cycle. This is a huge amount. Planning on making these savings and actually making them are two different prospects. Apparently these will be made by limiting wage rises, not filling vacant positions and making cuts to frontline agencies, as quoted from the budget.

Another commitment from the Chief Minister was that Labor would close Don Dale immediately. Eight months in and Don Dale is not only still operating, but it is being revamped at a cost of over \$11m. Another commitment was the 24-hour, seven-day-a-week police station at Nightcliff, which the Member for Nightcliff has repeatedly promised her electorate. Once again, it appears the Member for Nightcliff was unable to sway the Treasurer.

Revitalising the Darwin CBD is an excellent idea, but there is more to be gained from rental price dropping and working with landlords to introduce more flexible leasing arrangements than from building white elephants. The best way to revitalise Darwin's CBD is not through building more unfunded buildings, but by the government doing its core business of policing and tackling crime and antisocial behaviour.

A commitment to my area—Chief Minister, you made a commitment to build Weddell. Where is the money for that commitment? When the opposition wants to see development, we do not think the government should reach into its own pocket every time it wants a new building, especially not with such a huge deficit hanging around the government's debt and around Territorians' debt. These areas are prime bits of real estate, and there may be private investors who have ideas and plans for these areas, ideas which might generate money rather than cost money.

The only way for the Territory to grow is to allow private enterprise to invest, use our natural advantages—geography, people and resources—and do what private industry does best, which is to get on with the job. The government's complete antipathy to private investment comes when we throw in the extra part-day holiday and the ridiculous ban of Dan Murphy's, a company wanting to come here and invest its own money to build and construct now, not a few years in the future when the government plans with public money, but right now. That is private money which will grow our economy.

Think about what these messages send to interstate and overseas investors. This Labor government fails to understand investment and how it works. The signals it is sending only drive jobs away from the Territory. It is the opposite of being open for business. With the two extra part-day holidays, it has let its employment agenda be set by the unions. This hurts small business, the largest employer in the Territory. Remember the rationale for doing this: to grow the population, something not borne out in the budget papers.

The Dan Murphy's decision has let alcohol policy be set by AHA. The 50% renewable energy target has let the federal Labor Party set its energy policy, despite the very different energy generation mix in the Territory. The only time we see determination, focus and zeal from the Gunner Labor government is when it comes to announcing another review and spending other people's money. The only time we see any gumption from the Chief Minister is when it comes to announcing more debt for Territorians.

The Chief Minister and Treasurer have stated many times that the Country Liberals did not have a post-INPEX plan in government. We did. I have previously raised this, and I raise it again. Here it is. It was a direct and straightforward plan to diversify our economy into the seven key pillars: energy; minerals; tourism; agribusiness; international education and training; Defence supply; and services.

On our side of the Chamber we want to pursue priorities which help, not hinder, Territorians' businesses, and which grow, not burden, Territory taxpayers. We want to see strategic infrastructure to support Defence and civilian services capabilities. We want a safe and regulated onshore gas industry.

For tourism we want increased marketing and upgraded infrastructure. We want to see the government get back to the Northern Territory's strength of trade with Asia. We want a realistic government. That is what Territorians deserve.

Debate suspended.

REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (Serial 22)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms MANISON (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

This bill provides a number of important revenue measures as part of the government's 2017–18 budget.

In response to the challenging fiscal times, the bill proposes amendments to the:

- Gaming Machine Regulations
- Motor Vehicles (Fees and Charges) Regulations
- *Stamp Duty Act*.

To ensure the revenue-raising effort required of Territorians is fair and equitable and to a level that is closer to the state average. This bill also makes various administrative reforms to the *Gaming Control Act*, *Payroll Tax Act*, *Stamp Duty Act* and *Taxation Administration Act*.

I now turn to the first of these revenue measures.

Late last year the government took the responsible step to restore the caps on community gaming machines in the Northern Territory. The bill provides for further reforms to the sector by amending the Gaming Machine Regulations to return profit tax thresholds to pre-2009 levels for clubs and to increase taxes on hotel gaming machines.

In 2009 tax relief was provided to hotels, taverns, pubs and clubs to support businesses as they moved to becoming smoke free. Patrons have now adjusted to indoor smoking bans and tax savings have been applied to renovations to provide outdoor smoking area.

From a previous peak of almost \$80m in community gaming machine profits in 2008–09, which generated tax receipts of \$26m, profits will now be over \$90m in 2016–17, yet tax receipts have remained much the same. In recognition of this, from 1 July 2017, adjustments will be made to the profit thresholds applying to gaming machines in clubs, and the progressive tiered tax rates will continue to be applied.

- The lowest rate of 12.91% will apply to gross monthly profits of up to \$5000
- A rate of 22.91% will apply between \$5001 and \$50 000
- 32.91% for profits between \$50 001 and \$150 000
- 42.91% for monthly profits over \$150 000.

For gaming machines in premises with a hotel licence, tiered rates will continue to apply and changes will be staged over two years. From 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018, hotel gaming machines will continue to be taxed consistently with clubs; however, from 1 July 2018, hotel gaming machine taxes will further increase:

- A new rate of 17.91% will apply to gross monthly profits of up to \$5000
- A new rate of 27.91% will apply to gross monthly profits between \$5001 and \$50 000
- The 32.91% tax rate will apply for profits between \$50 001 and a lower threshold of \$100 000
- The 42.91% tax rate will apply for monthly profits over \$100 000.

I now turn to the amendments to the Motor Vehicles (Fees and Charges) Regulations. The fee component of total motor vehicle registration costs are currently among the lowest of all the states and territories across all categories of light vehicle types and much lower than the state average. Fees were last increased in 2015 in line with the consumer price index.

The bill proposes to increase motor vehicle registration fees in the regulations from 1 July 2017 while still maintaining total overall registration costs below the average of the states. Annual registration fees increases range from \$5 to \$7 for motorcycles, \$22 for a small car, up to \$30 for most medium to large cars and about \$60 for a large four-wheel drive.

The impact of the fee increase to the overall cost of registration is about 4% or less for most vehicles and about 7% for larger vehicles with an engine capacity of over 3.5 litres.

Another key measure in the bill is the proposal to increase the conveyance stamp duty rates on high value property transactions. From 1 July 2017 the stamp duty rate for transactions between \$3m and \$5m will increase to 5.75%. For transactions \$5m and above, the rate will increase to 5.95%.

The increase in the maximum stamp duty rate will be limited to about 50 or 60 large commercial transactions each year and generally not impact home buyers or small to medium businesses. The revenue raised will also help to offset the cost of the stamp duty for first home owner discounts, which the government acted to reintroduce quickly as a high priority last year.

Revenue raising decisions are never easy, and these measures have been carefully considered. They are tough but fair, given the fiscal challenges facing the Northern Territory.

The bill also proposes a suite of minor administrative amendments to the Northern Territory's revenue legislation. Firstly, the bill makes minor amendments to the *Gaming Control Act* to align legislative references to the payment of taxes and levies by casinos.

This will ensure that administrative provisions operate as intended, with effect from related Budget 2015–16 changes.

The bill also amends the *Payroll Tax Act* to make a minor update to reflect changes to the motor vehicle rates in the Commonwealth income tax legislation. This will also ensure that the Territory's *Payroll Tax Act* remains harmonised with other Australian jurisdictions.

The *Stamp Duty Act* is amended to provide that the stamp duty senior, pensioner and carer concession is available to those who are eligible for but have not yet received an NT Pensioner and Carer Concession Card at the time they purchased their property.

The *Stamp Duty Act* is also amended to ensure a transfer of a renewable energy certificate issued under the Commonwealth's *Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act* is exempt from stamp duty. This gives effect to the Territory's longstanding position that stamp duty should not be imposed on the transfer of these certificates.

Finally, the bill amends the *Taxation Administration Act* to enable the Commissioner of Territory Revenue to comply with new Commonwealth reporting requirements.

This is consistent with reciprocal arrangements that state and territory revenues offices already have in place to share transactional property, company and employment information with the Australian Taxation Office and other law enforcement agencies.

Madam Speaker, I commend the bill to the honourable members and table a copy of the explanatory statement.

Debate adjourned.

APPROPRIATION (2017–18) BILL (Serial 20)

Continued from earlier this day.

Mr McCARTHY (Housing and Community Development): Madam Speaker, I have declared my hearing impairment in this Chamber on a number of occasions. Did anybody hear the Leader of the Opposition talk about health, education, Territory children or housing? I really do not understand the Leader of the Opposition and his neglect of support to Territorians.

I speak in support of Budget 2017–18–18. It is a difficult time to craft a budget and I thank the Treasurer for her hard work. I also congratulate her on a budget that suits hard times, and on her energy and enthusiasm in embarking across the Northern Territory to communicate this budget with Territorians.

While the Leader of the Opposition has been critical of the budget, he fails to address that this budget is necessary to address the years of CLP dysfunction that slowed our economy, left us with a declining population and led, in part, to our recent reduction in GST. The Leader of the Opposition needs to take some responsibility, and his speech writer needs a history lesson. He helped put us on the path we are on today. It is going to take a Labor government to get us out.

On coming to government, the Labor government had to act to revive the economy and did so immediately with a \$120m stimulus package. This was carefully targeted, Leader of the Opposition, and planned for maximum benefit for the Northern Territory. After the CLP government oversaw a decline in population of around 8000 residents, we needed to act to stop the exodus.

Ms Lawler: Cut 500 education workers and they will leave town.

Mr McCARTHY: Absolutely. We have seen the effects of this decline through a slowing of economic growth and a decline in GST revenue. By attacking the government's decision to spend to stimulate the economy, the Leader of the Opposition is attacking Territory businesses, the construction sector and jobs across all industries.

I quote, for the Leader of the Opposition, from the ABC:

The head of the Northern Territory's Chamber of Commerce, Greg Bicknell, said the headline \$1.75 billion infrastructure spend was a strategic investment and an example of 'good debt'. 'There was an expectation that the Government would need to spend, as we come to an economic slowdown,' he said.

'It's a Government that was faced with some pretty stark choices, and for them to still have the courage to spend on some of these infrastructure projects we believe should be applauded.'

After a decade of growth and prosperity, the chaos of the previous CLP government brought much of the work in the Territory to a halt. The Leader of the Opposition fails to defend the CLP's plan for life after INPEX. How could the CLP have any credible plan when they were a dysfunctional, chaotic bunch? They were incapable of being in the same room together and that dysfunction lowered business confidence. The population declined and there was no plan for one of the biggest infrastructure projects that this country has seen.

They sold our assets and they failed to manage budgets. This government has a huge job ahead of us to deliver our policies on housing, health, education, justice and wellbeing in a slowing economy. We know very well that the key to future prosperity of all Territorians is jobs. Investing in infrastructure protects and creates jobs, increases productivity and provides economic growth. We are investing in infrastructure to support our policy priorities while providing opportunities for local businesses and workers.

We are also targeting infrastructure spending to provide job training for Territorians. Let us be very cognisant of the fact that this Leader of the Opposition, a minister in the previous CLP government, was very much a part of selling TIO, leasing the Port of Darwin for 99 years, selling the Darwin bus service and getting rid of the Government Printing Office. Where are the proceeds of those funds, Leader of the Opposition? You took the money, borrowed more and left the Northern Territory in \$1bn worth of debt at the end of your term, Leader of the Opposition.

By any measure the CLP failed dismally to manage the economy, and the Michael Gunner Labor government have been left to clean up after the worst government the Territory has ever seen. This government will not shy away from the job. It will take a huge effort and a disciplined team; there has been sensible planning and it is focused on targeted investment. Despite a drop in GST a responsible government must invest to support jobs now and into the future.

A strategic investment in infrastructure will spread work across a range of Territory industries while delivering on the commitments the Michael Gunner Labor government was elected on. It is interesting the Leader of the Opposition's very shallow budget reply—the speech writers need a bit of a history lesson because they have not been around long and have no real understanding of the chaos the Territory was left in. It will take a brave and courageous government, like Michael Gunner's Labor government, to stand up and deliver.

It was very encouraging to hear the Treasurer articulate the careful, targeted planning for each of the budget initiatives. The Leader of the Opposition failed to comprehend those important links.

I liked the comment from the Treasurer when she spoke about building a bridge to a better NT future. What that means in an economic sense is significant spending in tier one stimulus projects, or what I call the big end of town. These are macroeconomic projects that are economic drivers that foster and encourage private sector investment. These are very clear economic strategies for the Northern Territory.

Complementing that is a record investment in repairs and maintenance across the Northern Territory, addressing government assets and the institutions our communities depend on, such as remote schools, services and frontline service institutions. When you invest in that level of the economy you feed a middle level construction sector that puts bread on the tables of Territory families.

Leader of the Opposition, I remind you of the previous CLP government's approach of savage price hikes, cuts to public servants and cuts to Territory jobs. Our Minister for Education is addressing that—front and centre of reminding the CLP of that disgrace, cutting teachers for our schools and kids.

You destroyed business confidence. When I speak about putting bread on the table, Leader of the Opposition, the CLP government's chaotic and dysfunctional economic policies prevented families from

going to local cafés in regional towns to buy sandwiches. They were in fear of their jobs and the future of the Northern Territory. People stopped spending, business confidence was reduced, and we started to see a contraction across the NT. You crow about a final budget; I call it the last roll of the dice because come 2016 the CLP were at the end of what was the most dysfunctional period in the Territory government's history.

You have no excuses and no credibility when you simply criticize what is targeted, planned and strategic. The Northern Territory Government's plan for attracting private investment into the NT economy travels from the big end of town, our capital city, through to regions. Capital city infrastructure is the opportunity of attracting private investment and people, not only tourists, to come to the beautiful Northern Territory with their families and work here.

We are speaking about regional initiatives for agribusiness, agriculture, horticulture and mining and resources. We are speaking about capitalising on Defence. The Leader of the Opposition briefly touched on roads, and he spoke about a road that sounded like it connected his previous mango farm to major infrastructure. This government is speaking about regional networks. I am proud to go home and advice of \$35.7m into beef roads projects just in the Barkly. What does that recognise? It recognises an industry that is booming and has potential to provide jobs and an economic future.

We are speaking about investment in infrastructure but, more importantly, the Leader of the Opposition completely failed to address the CLP plan for investing in Territorians and children, something that was obviously missing in his budget reply.

Throughout the portfolios I am responsible for, we are going to unlock opportunities for all Territorians regardless of where they live. Good housing is a right for all Territorians. A home is the foundation for people to connect and contribute to society. The Northern Territory has significant housing problems that have severely impacted on many Territorians for too long, something this government is committed to addressing, as this budget will demonstrate.

The largest commitment made in the lead-up to last year's election was to Territorians living in remote communities to improve their access to housing, reduce overcrowding and improve the capacity of families living in these areas to access education, health and other government services. It is widely recognised that an adequate supply of safe and secure housing will lead to improvements in education, health and social outcomes for Indigenous Territorians. This government is committed to making a difference in improving the lives of people in regional and remote communities.

In addition, the Gunner Labor government is committed to increasing community development and local decision-making. We listen to remote communities about the need for better engagement and more consultation, and increasing the role of local decision-making in developing government policy and programs. I firmly believe local people make the best decisions about their future and issues that impact on them.

I am proud to announce that Budget 2017–18 delivers on these election commitments, with an unprecedented 10-year commitment of Territory funds to deliver the \$1.1bn Remote Housing Investment Package, together with further funding, to help Territorians living outside urban centres in the Northern Territory. This commitment of funding delivers an opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of remote Territorians and, indeed, all Territorians, for the better.

The 10-year \$1.1bn Remote Housing Investment Package will provide \$500m for the construction of new remote public housing, the HomeBuild NT package; \$200m to construct new government employee housing in remote communities, including housing for local employees; \$200m to build additional living areas in existing houses under the Room to Breathe program; and \$200m for repairs and maintenance to better look after houses.

In Budget 2017–18 the Remote Housing Investment Package provides \$50m for HomeBuild NT; \$20m for Room to Breathe; \$10m for government employee housing; and \$20m for remote housing, repairs and maintenance. This is a \$100m investment in remote housing in the Northern Territory, from the Northern Territory Government, in one year. It is a significant commitment and I welcome that.

It should be noted that the government has brought forward \$10m for Room to Breathe and \$5m for the remote repairs and maintenance funding to address the urgent need to ease overcrowding in remote houses and provide additional economic stimulus for the Territory in 2016–17.

The Remote Housing Investment Package is an ambitious plan to improve the lives of Territorians living in remote communities. These communities currently do not have sufficient serviced land to permit the delivery of a program of the magnitude of the Remote Housing Investment Package. We recognise this shortfall, and to avoid potential delays in delivering the Remote Housing Investment Package this government has approved an additional \$44.5m for an infrastructure package, namely headworks for remote communities, \$20m of which has been approved for the 2016–17 financial year and \$24.5m for the 2017–18 financial year.

These funds will facilitate the delivery of the Remote Housing Investment Package in the short term by creating subdivisions, allowing new houses to be built and delivering the critical infrastructure, such as sewerage and electricity, required to service these houses.

The investment of Territory funds in the bush through the Remote Housing Investment Package comes on the back of the 10-year \$1.8bn package of joint Territory and Commonwealth funding for 72 remote communities, the National Partnership on Remote Housing and the Remote Australia Strategy.

The 2017–18 financial year will be the final year of the funding for that package, and it sees the final investment of \$113m for housing upgrades and new housing in remote communities. At its conclusion, this funding will have delivered some 1400 new and replacement houses, 2900 rebuilds and refurbishments, and 1800 upgraded houses in the bush.

While this has been a significant undertaking and investment of taxpayer funds, the disadvantage of those living in remote communities remains. Overcrowding in dwellings leads to continuing disadvantage contributing to health issues, non-attendance at school and increased potential for domestic violence. It heavily affects other social outcomes as well.

While the investment of Territory funds through the Remote Housing Investment Package will improve some housing outcomes for Indigenous Territorians, the Australian Government has yet to commit funding beyond 2018. Negotiations are continuing with the Australian Government and it is hoped it will match the funding effort of the Territory government, if not more, so there can be a significant impact towards improving the living conditions of remote Territorians. The Michael Gunner Labor government has the plan to do that.

In addition to the Remote Housing Investment Package, remote infrastructure works, and Australian Government funded works, Budget 2017–18 provides a further \$46m for new works. That is a total of \$263.3m for new works. Additional new works programs for the bush include a further \$5.9m for teacher housing and a \$3.1m investment to undertake minor new works on existing dwellings. Additionally, the refurbishment of urban public housing stock will continue with a rolling program of \$20.2m for refurbishment, \$3m for upgrades to existing stock and \$13.4m for minor new works.

This much-needed funding is not only for our public housing system; with the funding the government is delivering more jobs and economic activity to build stronger communities and support the wellbeing of the Northern Territory.

Budget 2017–18 provides \$627m for the operations of the Department of Housing and Community Development. Just over 50% of these funds, \$323.3m, are provided as grants to community and local government organisations, with \$256.6m in current grants and \$66.7m in capital grants. Budget 2017–18 provides \$97.2m to support local government services and infrastructure. These funds support jobs, boost local economies and strengthen communities across the Northern Territory.

I acknowledge the work the local government sector does. We strongly support this important work to deliver services and appropriate community infrastructure that improves the lives of Territorians.

Leader of the Opposition, you failed to mention anything about local government in your budget reply speech; however, I believe you want to talk about local government tonight during General Business, which I am looking forward to. I am sure Territorians in the local government sector would be rather disappointed that there was no mention of local government in your budget reply speech to the Northern Territory today.

Of particular note for local government in Budget 2017–18 is the implementation of new and ongoing funding for a \$5m strategic local government infrastructure fund. These funds are available to regions and shire councils to use for projects designed to increase liveability and community development outcomes. Works could include resealing internal community roads, storm water management, upgrades or repairs to parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, waste management sights and other worthwhile projects.

That is a good example, Leader of the Opposition, of an opposition that consulted with the community, stakeholders and local government; prepared it into a strategic, targeted policy; took it to an election; got the votes; and is now delivering. You have the hide to get up here and try your shallow rhetoric to criticise Budget 2017–18.

Other funding in Budget 2017–18 for local government includes \$33.9m in Commonwealth financial assistance grants for general purposes and road works, \$25.9m to councils from the Northern Territory operational subsidies grant bill, and \$7.9m to continue Indigenous jobs development funding for regional councils to support core local government service delivery. The government will also provide \$1.3m in budget assistance grants to the Victoria Daly and the West Daly regional councils.

As part of grant funding, Budget 2017–18 also provides \$75.1m for Indigenous essential services to continue to provide electricity, water and sewerage services in 72 remote communities.

The government is committed to developing communities and providing a more inclusive model for local decision-making in remote communities. It is recognised that in many remote communities English is spoken as a second or third language by some. Around 35 000 Territorians speak an Aboriginal language at home. To address this, in addition to the \$3.5m in Australian Government funding for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, through Budget 2017–18 the Northern Territory Government is providing an additional \$1m for the employment and training of Aboriginal interpreters to facilitate successful implementation of the Remote Housing Investment Package and other community development and local decision-making initiatives. Well done to the Aboriginal Interpreter Service.

Budget 2017–18 provides jobs and economic development opportunities across the Territory, including opportunities for Indigenous business enterprises. The Department of Housing and Community Development owns some \$2.7bn worth of houses and assets across the Northern Territory. It is important for the government to provide funds to maintain these assets. Budget 2017–18 delivers as never before in this regard.

For dwellings located in urban areas the budget provides \$32.6m in 2017–18, including an additional \$5m in economic stimulus funding to provide work for local tradespeople. For remote housing the budget provides an unprecedented \$20m from the NT funded Remote Housing Investment Package for repairs and maintenance, together with \$40.7m under the National Partnership on Remote Housing. The funding under the National Partnership on Remote Housing is part of a budget capacity of \$81.9m for property and tenancy management inclusive of rents received from remote housing tenants.

Whilst I am speaking of maintenance it would be remiss of me not to mention that Budget 2017–18 has restored funding for the Homelands Extra Allowance and increased that funding by \$1m to a total of \$6m. The former CLP government discontinued the funding for maintenance of housing in homelands beyond the current financial year. This government has reinstated and increased the funding as part of its commitment to remote communities and homelands.

Budget 2017–18 also provides \$5.8m for the homelands jobs program. This program employs Aboriginal people, through service provider organisations, in homelands and town camps to assist in the delivery of municipal and housing maintenance services. It was also not funded by the former CLP government beyond the current financial year. Shame on you, Leader of the Opposition, a bush member.

A further \$22.3m has been allocated in the budget to continue providing municipal and essential services to homelands and outstations. The government recognises the growing importance of the community housing sector in providing social housing as an alternative to government owned public housing. Community housing organisations are able to access taxation advantages and Australian Government funding not currently available to Northern Territory Government owned public housing. The sector is also able to provide a range of additional wraparound services and support to tenants, who tend to be the most disadvantaged in our community.

As an important policy initiative the government is looking to grow the community housing sector in the Northern Territory to expand the housing options available to disadvantaged Territorians. To this end Budget 2017–18 provides a \$10m incentive fund whereby expressions of interest will be sought from community housing providers to partner with developers and the Territory government to build and manage social housing properties on an ongoing basis.

I was privileged to have a conversation this morning at the Treasurer's budget breakfast with a recognised community housing provider, acknowledging that initiative and the outcomes we can achieve in the public housing sector.

As well as expanding housing options for disadvantaged Territorians this initiative will provide more jobs and economic development opportunities for local businesses and tradespeople.

The Northern Territory Government is committed to supporting vulnerable Territorians. Budget 2017–18 maintains the government's support for housing and homelessness support programs with funding of \$23m. Importantly, the government has restored funding for the Apmere Mwerre Visitor Park and Stuart Lodge in Alice Springs. Funding for these facilities was not programmed to continue in the 2017–18 year under the former CLP government.

Both these facilities cater for visitors from remote areas. They provide safe and secure accommodation and reduce the incidence of people sleeping on the streets of Alice Springs. Apmere Mwerre in particular is attributed with a reduction of incidents of anti social behaviour and overcrowding in town camps and public housing dwellings. Stuart Lodge, currently run by Mission Australia, provides accommodation for people who are homeless or need somewhere to stay while accessing vital medical services in Alice Springs.

NT Home Ownership provides home loan products and services to help eligible Territorians own a home. It lends to eligible members of the public, principally low to middle income earners. This program helps people get a foot in the door of the private housing market and to own their piece of the Territory.

In an environment of reducing interest rates an additional \$1.2m has been provided to NT Home Ownership in both 2016-17 and 2017–18 to recognise its reduced revenue earning capacity.

I am proud to deliver a budget that will create jobs and opportunities for economic development across the Territory, as well as address the needs of the most disadvantaged Territorians. I am just one of this Labor team, a united team. The Leader of the Opposition needs to seriously reflect on that disgraceful presentation to Territorians this morning—shallow, lacking detail and lacking vision.

I will conclude by saying the Leader of the Opposition also raised an attack on our cultural institutions. I remind the two CLP members left in this House that the Territory's culture and people are literally the life blood of its future. The rest of Australia and the world want to come and learn about that. That is what the iconic arts trail, stimulating the economy and building our cultural institutions represents. It represents jobs, tourism, our future and, most importantly, celebrating who we are.

Mrs WORDEN (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on Budget 2017–18 and how it will affect the people in my electorate of Sanderson.

I am pleased to report that before the announcement of the budget I already had local business owners in Sanderson commenting that things are starting to turn around for them, particularly in relation to the economic stimulus we have been putting out and our buy local focus. It is a nice reinforcement that we are on track.

Budget 2017–18 carries on that good work. Yesterday the Chamber of Commerce said it wants to see the government lead the way and invest in infrastructure. Budget 2017–18 does that. Our moderating economic conditions require an increased infrastructure spend. With construction contributing 19.3% of gross state product, infrastructure is the only really smart place for our government to invest.

I am pleased that despite the federal government's slashing our GST we have not carried on that trend. We are in no way slashing the Territory for a short-term gain, as we heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about this morning. This budget invests in people, implements our election commitments and invests in the critical areas to turn the ship around, a ship that under the CLP was on a direct path to smash and take out the pier along with everybody standing on it.

We are investing in making the Territory an attractive place for others to live and invest by supporting and driving key projects and, most importantly, investing in people and kids for the future.

As we have rightly heard from our Treasurer, the focus of the budget is jobs, children and community. In Sanderson this focus is more than welcome because that is what we are, a community made up of individuals, families, kids, tradies, office workers, seniors, teachers and firefighters. You name it and we are it, a real representation of what it is like to be a Territorian.

Over the last few weeks we have seen some pre-budget announcements rolled out, and I am happy that most of these support the delivery of our election commitments, in particular the first home owner discount on stamp duty of up to \$24 000, \$10 000 renovation grants, as well as the first home owner grants of \$26 000 for construction of a new home.

A lot of the 'for sale' signs now have 'under contract' on them, or even better, 'sold'. We keep very busy welcoming new home owners into the electorate of Sanderson, and we love it. Just last month we had more than 60 people coming onto our electoral role and fingers crossed some of them are new to the Territory. After all, one of the big jobs for our government is to boost our population growth.

This government is bringing our young families back to our suburbs, schools and local business. It has unlocked their ability to live close to their families that provide them with so much support and allow them to stay in the areas they grew up in. In this budget there are three important elements, which are direct, indirect and growth investments and initiatives. All three are aimed at improving and supporting the lives of the people of Sanderson, but all three are very distinct and different.

A direct investment is when we are supporting projects and programs within our electorate itself, such as schools and sporting and community infrastructure. An indirect investment is when we are supporting projects and programs outside of the electorate that will directly benefit the people of Sanderson, such as fishing infrastructure and increased resourcing in our policing and health sectors.

A growth investment is when we are supporting initiatives to build the Territory as a whole, such as boosting Tourism budgets and investment in mining. Due to time limitations, because there is just so much to speak about in this budget, I will pick a few examples of the areas that may possibly have the most impact in the coming budget year.

In regard to direct investments, the government's four-year \$56.4m Building Better Schools commitment is providing \$300 000 to 54 schools, two of those in Sanderson, for important refurbishments and upgrades. There will be \$16.2m invested across Territory schools in this budget. That will help to improve education outcomes, create local jobs and support our construction industry; that is a threefold advantage.

We already know that Sanderson Middle School and Wulagi Primary School will receive their \$300 000 this budget. Sanderson Middle School will upgrade three science laboratories, and Wulagi will undertake some much-needed security upgrades. My other schools are putting their heads together at the moment and will be expressing their interests in term four for projects in the next year's budget.

It is an exciting time for school councils, particularly as they are busy planning for the projects that most benefit their schools, and they can tailor projects to meet student and teacher needs. It is a really exciting time for Territory schools, full stop, with Budget 2017–18 injecting \$20m of our \$124m election commitment so schools can invest in kids' futures.

Budget 2017–18 provides \$7.1m to continue the Back to School Payment Scheme, which provides every student with \$150 to assist parents and families with back-to-school expenses. Many parents in my electorate rely on that to try to help their kids access the extra things they may not be able to afford, like school excursions. For my constituents with young children the continued \$6m to support early childhood services is very valued because, let us face it, it is really unusual in 2017 to find a family where both parents are not working. It is simply that they cannot afford to buy a home or support their children to thrive; that subsidy is very valuable to them.

For my constituents with young and very active children this government's \$11.5m investment in grants to support school sports in the Northern Territory, including the sports voucher system, is also very valued. It is great to see the voucher system still in place, given that it was a former Labor government initiative. After speaking with some parents and activity providers recently, I am hoping we will have a good look at it and possibly broaden it the coming years to allow a wider range of activities so that all kids, regardless of their activity of choice, can be covered.

Over the last few months I met with a number of community and multicultural organisations that are starting to benefit from the \$50m of Immediate Works Grants that are already stimulating our economy inside and outside the Sanderson electorate. It is fantastic that Budget 2017–18 adds a further \$20m to this project. There is much more that can be done. In turn, that will have an estimated economic impact of \$37.4m, which is a great figure.

In Sanderson, under that program, the Jingili BMX Club has received \$190 522 that will upgrade their track in Marrara. Similarly, the Darwin City Brass Band will continue their much-needed upgrade works with \$14 974; that is on top of recent community benefit fund grants that saw them recarpet and install solar panels to their building in Marrara.

VISITORS
Good Shepherd Lutheran College

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Year 5 students from Good Shepherd Lutheran College, accompanied by their teacher, Elizabeth Walker. Welcome to Parliament House. I hope you enjoy your time here.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs WORDEN: In addition, the toy library run by Frances and her team, which I visited last week, is starting to look really fresh. They had a break-in and the place needed a pick-me-up. They received a grant of just over \$42 000 to continue further fencing, security and car park upgrades. They are very pleased. It is a wonderful organisation providing great services to young families, particularly kids with developmental needs and disabilities. If you have not been there yet, in the words of Molly Meldrum, 'Do yourself a favour'.

I am stocking up my house before the grandkids visit next time. They have an amazing yard of jungle gyms and trampolines. It is a superb facility.

Other organisations that have benefited already are the Somerville Community Services in Wagaman, which is upgrading its facility, and the Pint Club and the Darwin Golf Club are putting solar panels on their new roof. They are moving towards a more sustainable future for their members and the local community. Darwin Basketball is installing new backboards, lights and air conditioners. Many of the community multicultural organisations are upgrading their facilities through the top end of Marrara.

I am out with them weekly and see the joy and relief this funding has bought them. I look forward to more news as the \$20m starts flowing in this budget.

I spoke at great lengths a few months ago about a welcome election commitment of \$25m and \$10m, respectively, for the new home of rugby league at Warren Park and the new indoor netball stadium. These projects will stimulate the economy, provide many jobs and provide the necessary infrastructure for those popular sports to thrive. It will provide a top-notch place for athletes to develop their skills so they are more on par nationally. It will be a better facility where we may attract some national and, hopefully, international games for us locals to enjoy.

Our seniors are a critical part of the fabric of the Sanderson community. I do not think I heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about them either. We want to keep our seniors in the Territory. We want them to stay here with their families and social networks. They are an important part of our economic growth. We do not speak enough about how important seniors are to our economy.

We are not considering our support for seniors as a one-dimensional response. We need to look at the cost of living, lifestyle opportunities and better accommodation options. Budget 2017–18 considers all those elements. As we committed in last year's election, we will consult further on the reforms to the pensioner concession scheme to ensure it is fairer and more equitable, and best meets the needs of senior Territorians. That work will kick off later this month.

It is fair to say this is a complicated area, and it is taking longer than we thought it would. We will be delivering a two-tiered concession scheme on 1 January next year. That scheme has to be more efficient, sustainable and not open to fraud or rorting. The Minister for Territory Families is giving that a lot of consideration.

I look forward to the seniors of Sanderson electorate having their say as the program evolves. Budget 2017–18 is delivering free bus travel for seniors over 65 from 1 July. It provides \$500 000 towards facilitating the release of land to build retirement villages in Alice Springs, Darwin and the rural area.

I am running out of time today, but there is a lot in this budget to talk about. I will briefly mention the Home Improvement Scheme before I talk about some of the indirect investments that are supporting Sanderson.

There are lots of tradies and homeowners in Sanderson who are pleased with the small jobs as they continue to flow with the improved Home Improvement Scheme. Those jobs that people have been putting off for a while are now getting done. I can see them around the electorate: air conditioners being installed; driveways being paved; doors and roofs being replaced. That is keeping our economy quietly ticking over while we are in tough times.

Budget 2017–18 has excitingly outlined and funded the start of five major projects to begin in this term of government. Territorians have asked us for leadership and these five clear projects give that. They say we will invest in areas that support further growth and unlock private investment so all Territorians can benefit. We have listened through the economic summits to hear and put into action things Territorians—homeowners, business owners, workers—want to see happening.

There is no doubt that in the last few years there has been a rise in anti-social behaviour in suburbs, and Sanderson is not immune to that trend. Alcohol, more specifically access to alcohol, has been a large factor in this. We went to the election with a promise to tackle alcohol-related harm and this budget delivers on that promise. The \$17.2m commitment to re-establish the Banned Drinker Register, coupled with best-practice health-based alcohol harm reduction initiatives, will start to have an impact. I am sure of that. I am sure that we, as a government, will be judged on our ability to make some inroads in that area.

I am hoping that we will see a way, as community leaders, to start changing people's attitudes towards alcohol and allow the next generation to see that drinking to excess is just not cool. It is harmful, and there are much more constructive and better things to do with their time. Police officers are looking forward to the reintroduction of the BDR. They tell me that at our regular catch-ups. They are also very happy with the additional \$5m provided to resource recruitment, and we are working towards that target of 120 more police officers.

The people of Sanderson feel safer at home and in their community. This investment builds on our recent legislative changes that allow the use of body-worn cameras and electronic bracelets. Additionally, Budget 2017–18 provides \$18.6m as the first part of the \$45m necessary to replace the PROMIS system. Many police, current and former members, will be ecstatic that it is finally happening, as the PROMIS system has presented more challenges than it has solutions.

It is also pleasing that Budget 2017–18 provides a \$33m investment across the board to tackle family and domestic violence, including \$700 000 over two years to expand the work of Charlie King on the No More campaign. That is supported by \$350 000 to CDU and Menzies to review key domestic and family violence reduction programs in the Northern Territory, particularly their impact and effectiveness in remote communities. That is coupled with \$150 000 to NTCOSS to build the capacity of the domestic and family violence sector.

We should start to see traction in this area and a reduction in harms associated with domestic and family violence as soon as in the next 12 months. Well done. I will have a lot to say on this over the next few years as our policies and programs take effect, and I look forward to having those discussions inside and outside of the House.

Sanderson people are a very mobile lot. We like to work in, visit and make use of our great city. The news that \$100m will be spent in our CBD is fantastic; it is definitely one of my favourite top five major projects. Creation of destination Darwin—I call it that—will finally commence properly, not a bit here and a bit there. There will be a number of cohesive and strategic projects to bring the city together as a real tourist, worker and shopper destination. With my former local government hat on, it is pleasing that this government is prepared to consider and invest prudently in some of the projects in the well-thought-out City of Darwin master plan.

It is refreshing to see two tiers of government working together in the interests of Territorians. Fingers crossed the feds see that getting in on the action is a good deal with real investment in the north, an opportunity for them to put in place some goodwill in the Territory.

Creating a new city entrance through Barneson Boulevard and linking the Waterfront to Cullen Bay has to happen. Darwin is rated as a very walkable city, but we need to establish routes of interest, connections that capture the attention of locals and tourists alike, and keep traffic flowing smoothly so there are no bottlenecks like we see in poorly-planned cities across Australia and throughout the world.

I very much look forward to seeing the plans for rejuvenating State Square unfold; Darwin absolutely needs a fine arts gallery. The previous statements of the Leader of the Opposition were unfathomable in that respect.

The museum development at the old hospital site will finally bring an end to the constant indecisiveness of successive governments. Ensuring the Stolen Generation are part of that development is not only smart, but compassionate and the right thing to do. A new journey can start, and I am very much looking forward to being part of that. While speaking about our capital city, I briefly mention the \$10m investment in Budget 2017–18 to get the Darwin luxury hotel development project kicked off. It will continue to deliver on our theme of jobs, unlock private investment in a big way and, without doubt, add a special element to the destination Darwin campaign.

What has not been mentioned at all is that people in my electorate will actually like to use the hotel when it is up. It has no doubt provided a great place for a staycation without leaving our hometown. Those of us who have dogs can go home and visit them during the day time. What an opportunity to give yourself a bit of luxury in your own place. People currently leave Darwin for that sort of experience; we do not speak about that but it keeps our money here. It is really important stuff.

By looking at the boats in the front and back yards across Sanderson—many of my constituents were jumping for joy at our investment in the budget of \$5m as part of the overall \$50m recreation and fishing infrastructure package. I am not much of a fisherperson, I probably do not have the right level of appreciation for that area, but many people in my electorate clearly do. Sorry, Member for Brennan.

The sealing of the Middle Arm boat ramp car park, upgrades to the Shady Camp boat ramp and the Dundee Beach boat ramp car park will make Territorians very happy. There is no point working hard if you cannot enjoy your downtime when living in one of the most amazing places on the planet.

Another little indirect investment in Budget 2017–18 is the \$9.7m to establish a purpose-built Darwin renal centre. I have heard the criticisms about wanting to devolve those projects but, sadly, most people do need to come into Darwin, particularly at that end point. I have lots of personal experience in that space with my beautiful auntie Pat losing her struggle earlier this year, having been on dialysis for more than 10 years. She would be smiling at this announcement because the cruel disease often means that patients and families are sitting in hospitals for long periods amongst a plethora of other people who do not necessarily understand what is happening.

Purpose-built renal centres provide purpose-built environments; it is a bit like palliative care. Sufferers get to spend that precious time with their families in a purpose-built environment; it is great. I will not go on about the \$3m commitment to help the feds get the PET scanner. You know how those things go at RDH. It is just the right thing to do. It is part of our maturity as a city.

Another pleasing project I will quickly mention is the \$12m multistorey car park at RDH. Most Sandersonites will welcome that. Whether you are a visitor or patient, imagine the relief of being able to arrive at an appointment on time because you found a park, you did not have to pay for it and you did not have to walk for miles, particularly if you are in pain or discomfort. It is another very welcome election commitment funded in this budget.

A lot of Sanderson kids go to Darwin High School, so it is pleasing to see the development there. I will move on to the growth projects that are fantastic. There are a number of bigger projects in the budget that benefit all Territorians and are equally as important as investing in small, direct projects. They are going on in the background and doing their work over time.

It is great to see \$8m invested to attract visitors to the Territory and \$5m invested over two years to attract more tourists from China and India. It makes sense and it is smart. The tourism industry in the Territory is a big employer and, in fact, many of my constituents are either directly or indirectly affected by fluctuations across that industry, as well as all the projects going on across our CBD and suburbs.

Our art trails developments are fantastic. Improved sporting infrastructure helps support and develop a more attractive tourism story for potential visitors.

For years I have been telling anyone who would listen that Darwin needs to capitalise on its water availability and have a Waterbom park right here. I welcome the recent announcement of the feasibility study. We have to have the right drivers for projects with the right private interests. We need to know if it

will create a sustainable drawcard to the Top End. I am glad we have taken the initiative. That is what the government should do; it should lead the way.

Other projects like the new marine services hub and the \$100m shiplift facility are smart investments that are unlocking hundreds of jobs.

The \$3m in the budget to establish a long-awaited ICAC—about one person a week asks me when it is happening—is an election commitment with the potential to assist us in restoring trust in government. Coupled with the parliamentary reforms under way and an inquiry into political donations, these actions will show Territorians we believe they deserve better. We are capable of putting public interest ahead of our own. We are not afraid of transparency.

Trust is a foundation of good government. Every Labor government member in this House is working incredibly hard, one-on-one with our constituents to win back their trust and for them to see we are not all selfishly motivated. We are here to make life better, not our own lives better. That will take time, so the investment in an ICAC in Budget 2017–18 will help that happen. The legislation to make that happen is already being developed. I look forward to the commission being operational next year.

Budget 2017–18 shows we are capable of delivering on our election commitments of investing in kids, jobs and our collective future. It shows we are capable of long-term gain while ensuring we get there without losing too much skin. We are focused on making this a better place, the best it can be, not just now but for 20, 30, 50 years from now so our kids have something to stay for.

Despite a massive \$2bn cut to our GST over four years by the feds we have not lost that focus. We are here to steer the ship into calmer water. As captains of that ship we need to remain calm and show leadership. Budget 2017–18 shows that leadership. Whilst a \$1.3bn deficit is pretty good for the budget, at the same time we are investing in jobs, our future and kids. We have outlined through this budget the same priorities we outlined in August last year. The same priorities were carried forward to ensure the Territory continues to be a great place to live, invest and raise your kids.

There is no frivolous expenditure in Budget 2017–18. We remain on the path to surplus, just not within the time frame predicted prior to the GST hit. We will get there. We will not let the Territory go backwards during that painful process.

A number of sporting groups have contacted me over the last couple of days enquiring about funding for the Arafura Games; it would be remiss of me not to mention this. I can assure each of them this is an election commitment we will be upholding. The games are scheduled for 2019. We expect the first of the money earmarked to support the games flowing realistically in 2018–19 budgets. Do not fear; we are still on track to deliver the games. We will ensure they will not only deliver a great sporting event, but also leverage the maximum economic benefit for Territorians and build our relationship further with our closest neighbours.

My constituents have a great deal to talk about and a lot to look forward to. I thank them for their continued faith in me as their local member and part of the Gunner Labor government to start delivering what we said we would through Budget 2017–18. It puts our money where our mouths are and shows we have listened and are prepared to act.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the budget debate today.

Mr SIEVERS (Brennan): Madam Speaker, I speak in support of Budget 2017–18, noting it is the Treasurer's commendable first. She has done a remarkable job considering we are in tough economic times, perhaps the toughest of economic times in the history of the NT.

Territorians are aware of the recent and significant \$2bn cuts by the federal Liberal government to the NT's GST. This equates to approximately 8% of our total generated government expenditure, representing a huge blowout to our Territory economy.

We must face the real facts that the previous government, which I note took no responsibility today, did not plan for the impending slow down of the INPEX construction phase, and as a result of putting its own interests before the interests of Territorians we faced a record number of people leaving the Territory over the past four years.

Population decline has certainly played a critical role in our GST funding cuts. The previous government did sell the farm. It cut critical frontline services in education and our youth programs. It sluggish our seniors. It ousted the Arafura Games, which we are bringing back. It sold our TIO, they gave out a 99-year lease on our port and then they hit Territorians hard again in the back pocket with enormous increased costs for power, 30%, and water, 40%.

All these items have contributed to the demise of the Territory's local businesses and economy. It has caused many locals to leave the Territory, which in turn had a negative effect and impact on our critical GST funding.

This was the lead-up to now, the 2017 economic times. As I reflect on the difficult past it is now time to look forward to the bright future. I therefore commend our Treasurer for taking on this most difficult job. I applaud her professional integrity, strength and confidence to meet the challenge ahead.

I am pleased that this Labor government and all my colleagues in the House are focused and up to the task at hand with a view to stopping the nonsense, working hard and getting on with the job for the Territory. We must ensure we turn this around and head in the right economic direction.

This budget is critical to getting the Northern Territory back on track by bringing people back, creating jobs, building trust and investing in infrastructure to rebuild the Northern Territory's reputation as a good economic contender not only as a state and territory competitor, but also an international competitor. We will become a place that people from around the world want to come and see to spend their time and their dollars, and invest in our local businesses, our families and, most of all, our Territory.

We cannot do this alone. Everyone in the Territory has their part to play in ensuring we get the Territory back on track for better economic times, services, investment in infrastructure, tourism, opportunities and contracts for our local industries.

We are all in this together. The resilience and strength of Territorians has kept this great place on its feet through these tough times. As they say, when the going gets tough, the tough gets going. I know Territorians are tough. They put their shoulder to the wheel in these times and they grind it out. We are people who come from hard environments, and we have a never give up attitude. I am proud to say that I am part of a team that shares that attitude.

The Treasurer has announced the pathway forward. Now is the time for this government to invest and support the people who work, live and raise their families. This government has a clear message to all: it is not selling the farm. This is a government that is reinvesting in the Territory and its people to make it more productive, more efficient and more sustainable so our children and their children will have a better place to live, work, stay and invest in. The Treasurer has outlined the government's vision on how we do this. It is a long-term and stable budget. It is a plan that puts Territorians and local businesses first.

The announcements for my electorate are very exciting and include investments in Palmerston. Whenever I talk about Palmerston I highlight that we are now becoming a very fast-growing independent city. In fact, Palmerston is now the second largest city in the Northern Territory, second only to Darwin. Our new suburbs and population growth are distinguished by the recent rezoning conducted at the last election, in which the number of electorates in Palmerston increased from three to four. Palmerston is its own city and this government understands that it should operate and be sustainable as its own city.

The 2017 budget announcements confirm that this government respects, supports and trusts the people in the services of Palmerston to operate within its own jurisdiction. The Treasurer's announcements that are exciting for Palmerston include the new fully-funded \$26m Palmerston police station, which is a major infrastructure announcement that this Labor government prioritised and planned to bring forward well ahead of schedule.

The construction of the new Palmerston police station is very exciting. The advertisement for tenders is well under way and the build is to commence well ahead of schedule in the 2017–18 financial year. This means the entire Palmerston police station will be completed in one project and earlier than planned. It will operate as a 24-hour police station, offering an around the clock presence in Palmerston.

This government is also investing \$45m to replace the Northern Territory Police Force's outdated Police Real-time Online Management Information System, or PROMIS as we know it. This is our Northern Territory Police Force's core policing system, enabling them to do their jobs more efficiently. We also have

a commitment to the NT Police recruitment process to ensure we have appropriate police numbers for Palmerston and to provide 120 more police officers in the Northern Territory.

The Palmerston hospital—a commitment of \$36m to its fit out and commissioning with the welcome announcements of an additional \$2.5m for hydrotherapy pool, which is a great outcome for Palmerston and Territorians.

I have visited the Palmerston hospital site on many occasions over the past eight months with the Minister for Health. I am very pleased with the local employment there and the work that has been taking place to have this delivered on time. The hospital is moving so fast it has plaster on the walls and wires hanging out of the walls. They are doing a fantastic job there, and I commend everyone who is involved in that project.

I also welcome the PET scanner and the cyclotron at the Royal Darwin Hospital, which will also help many people in my electorate.

This government is serious about addressing the alcohol issues which are well known to be a key factor in family violence. This government is reinstating the Banned Drinker Register for all Territorians. We are turning the tap off before alcohol gets into the hands of those who are known to have issues with it.

It is well known that the vast majority of alcohol-related violence and crime is due to takeaway alcohol. This legislation represents some of the toughest in the country and is part of our commitment to tackling alcohol abuse. If you are not serious about tackling alcohol abuse you are not serious about tackling alcohol-related violence and crime.

The new BDR is well on track to come into operation by September 2017. We will have the added benefit of freeing up police and emergency services. The Banned Drinker Register will be Territory-wide, so no longer will it be the case of simply shifting problem drinkers around the Territory or interstate. This is a Territory-wide solution for what is a Territory-wide issue. I am very pleased to say it is a strategy that is welcomed by our hard-working frontline services.

I take this moment to thank all at the Health department who are working on the BDR and bringing it back as soon as possible. They have done an enormous amount of work and I congratulate them on that.

Addressing crime and antisocial behaviour—this government is investing in programs and strategies that will address and work in collaboration to reduce family violence and crime. It includes the No More campaign; a campaign that has been driven by Charlie King and supported by myself, the Minister for Territory Families and many other members of this parliament; a campaign that is giving a clear message to all Territorians that family violence must stop now.

We are making record investments in youth services to address youth crime and support families affected by crime. This includes investments in victim conferencing, bail systems, police resources, diversion services and bush camps—a program that is long overdue in the Territory. I thank the Minister for Territory Families for all the hard work she and her team have done in that area. We are looking forward to those developments.

This government understands that we must have proper programs in place to tackle our recidivism rates, and we must have those short-, medium- and long-term plans, especially in the early years to ensure they get the best possible start in life. We must provide critical support to those families who need it the most. I have visited the Families as First Teachers program, and the Minister for Education is doing a great job in that area as well.

This government's First Home Owner Grant Scheme includes discounts for established homes on stamp duty of up to \$24 000, \$10 000 for renovation grants or up to \$26 000 for first home buyers building new homes in the Territory. I am pleased to say a lot of people in Palmerston have taken full advantage of this program. Many families are now investing to stay and raise their families in Palmerston.

This is a critical policy area which will go some way to abating the population drift we have accrued under the lack of guidance from the previous government. It is quite clear that if we want to invest in the Territory we need to invest in people. That means giving people an opportunity to purchase their own home in the Territory.

The Building Better Schools commitment will provide \$300 000 to every school in the Territory for important upgrades. Bakewell and Roseberry schools have been working with the Minister for Education and her

departments. They have been some of the first schools to apply for this funding. The school councils and boards are pleased as this funding will support long overdue upgrades to local schools and benefit local workers, students, parents, teachers and staff. The future of Territory children and their education are in very good hands. That remains the centre of this government's policy.

The announcement of \$11.5m for grants to support sports in the Territory—I thank Minister Moss and her team for all their work in this area—including the Sports Voucher Scheme, helps many local sporting businesses, services and families. It allows NT youth to access and gain skills in the sports they wish to develop in and, perhaps, one day represent our great NT.

We have \$7.1m to continue the Back to School Payment Scheme which provides \$150 per student to support local parents and families with back-to-back school expenses. It is a great scheme that takes pressure off local Palmerston parents and families. There is more; \$6m is committed to early childhood services to offset the high cost of childcare to local parents and families. What a package for Territorians, families and children.

It is no secret that if you live in the Territory there is a good chance you enjoy fishing, although maybe not the Member for Sanderson. A lot of people in the Territory love fishing, including me. We have some of the best fishing opportunities in the world. The \$50m recreational fishing investments have already supported repairs to the Palmerston boat ramp and released over 100 more barramundi into the local Brennan Sanctuary Lakes. I hear fishing is well at the moment. All the local kids are there trying to catch the million dollar barra.

The package includes the development of the Middle Arm boat ramp car park, plus an upgrade to the Cannel Island boat ramp car park. Palmerston people love their fishing and there are many more upgrades going on across the NT to support local tourism, businesses, fishing families and this great recreational activity. These investments are fantastic for locals and visitors alike. I thank Minister Vowles and his team for all their work in this area.

There is an investment of \$3m into the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, an election commitment that will ensure past and present governments are responsible and accountable to the people. One of this government's key election platforms was to return trust and integrity to government, and an ICAC is a key part of this plan.

Most importantly, we must look after seniors. I am pleased to hear that from 1 July all people over the age of 65 will be able to travel again on the public bus network for free. There is \$500 000 in Budget 2017–18 towards facilitating the release of land to build retirement villages in the Territory, to keep seniors, grandchildren and families together. The budget also provides \$33.9m for a new, fairer Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme. The new scheme will commence from 1 January 2018, with extensive consultation to occur over the coming months.

There are many other projects happening, as the Treasurer announced yesterday. There are a lot of developments I cannot mention today because I do not have the time, but I will mention others that will bring investment to the Territory, especially Palmerston, such as the shiplift project and the development of a marine business park; the Home Improvement Scheme; and the Immediate Works Grants, which have recently helped Palmerston Crocs rugby team and the netball teams upgrade their facilities. The Minister for Education and I visited last weekend and they have done a terrific job.

I must mention the great Warren Park developments we are looking forward to, as are all the rugby teams across the Territory. It is a great place to play rugby. The Member for Sanderson has mentioned the Darwin netball stadium. I am looking forward to that, as a retired netball player.

I must not forget the Royal Darwin Hospital multistorey car park. The list goes on, as we have heard from the Treasurer and members of the House. Our commitment to the Territory has not changed. Budget 2017–18 is committed to investing in the Territory's future, local jobs, businesses, families and Territorians.

The Treasurer has delivered a budget that is responsible, accountable, transparent and achievable in tough economic times. It is a budget that will see the Territory trade out of deficit in the long term. It is a budget that invests in local businesses, local infrastructure, tourism, jobs and growth for the Territory. In short, it is a budget that puts Territorians and the Territory first.

I thank the Treasurer for delivering a fiscally responsible budget in hard economic times, a budget that will see investment and growth in the Territory, that will attract people from different states and different

countries, that will appeal to investors and, most importantly, that will benefit Territorians and their families in the long term. I commend the Treasurer.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly suspended.

MOTION
Construction of a New Alice Springs Hospital by 2030

Mrs LAMBLEY: Madam Speaker, it is a delight to stand up and talk about this wonderful idea of building a new hospital for Alice Springs by 2030. That is one of the most exciting things that I could ever turn my attention to.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Araluen, you must read your motion first.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I move that the government commences planning for a new Alice Springs hospital to be built on a new site by 2030.

Apart from my excitement at being able to move this motion this afternoon, it is a very good, practical idea that is desperately needed. I first moved this motion in parliament in May 2016. It received a mixed response. No one in the Chamber at the time said, 'No, it is a bad idea. We do not need it.' There was a lot of discussion about people not being ready to support the motion, that it was premature in some way, they had not been given enough preparation or information, there was not sufficient clinical evidence and, generally, I was well before my time in promoting this idea.

People have had time to think about it now. It was not in yesterday's budget; it came as a huge surprise that this government had not turned its attention to the number one item on my list of priorities for Central Australia. I provided all ministers and most relevant members of parliament from Central Australia my list of visionary ideas that I would like to see happen in Central Australia over the next four years. At the top of that list is a new hospital for Alice Springs.

The reason this is on the agenda is very simple. The current hospital, the Alice Springs Hospital, was built in the 1970s, which was 45 years ago. They commenced building in the late 1960s. It was built as a big hospital for what was going to be a large population. The population at the time the hospital was planned was forecast to reach 38 000 people. At that stage it was at around 10 000 or 15 000, and the population was forecast to possibly increase to 60 000 by the year 2000. That has not happened; the population in Alice Springs has been stagnant the whole time I have been there, which is 23 or 24 years. We have been sitting at around 28 000 people in Alice Springs for that period of time.

The current hospital is theoretically big enough. It was planned for more people, but it is an old hospital. It is a hospital that even since my time in Alice Springs has been patched and fixed up and added on to, but the core of it is an old building with antiquated technology. In some parts of the hospital they still do not have oxygen outlets at the bedside, which is standard in any hospital these days.

Putting that aside, the site of the current hospital is too small. Recently there have been discussions in Alice Springs Town Council about the hospital not meeting its car parking requirements, but I will move on to that a bit later. The Alice Springs Hospital is unique; it is unlike any other hospital in Australia. We have a unique health demographic; some of the most disadvantaged people in Australia require service from the Alice Springs Hospital.

It currently has 183 beds, which is the largest of the regional hospitals in the Northern Territory. Tennant Creek Hospital has 20 beds, so Alice Springs Hospital is nine times the size of Tennant Creek Hospital. Katherine Hospital has 60 beds, so Alice Springs Hospital is three times the size of Katherine Hospital. Gove District Hospital has 30 beds, so Alice Springs Hospital is six times the size of Gove hospital.

It is not a small hospital in the scheme of things, but it is a very important hospital. It services a region of over 50 000 people and crosses the vast geographical area of Central Australia which stretches from Elliott into the Pit Lands and parts of WA. It services local people, Aboriginal people, non-Aboriginal people and a significant number of tourists. When I first came to town in the 1990s and worked at the hospital, I did a lot of work as a social worker with tourists coming through and getting sick, so there is quite a demand there.

In the last debate we had on this issue of planning for a new Alice Springs Hospital by 2030 some speakers, including the former shadow minister for Health, Lynne Walker, who is no longer in parliament with us—she tended to want to compare the Alice Springs Hospital with smaller hospitals. She was here to represent the small community of Gove, Nhulunbuy, and she wanted to make those comparisons. I do not think you can compare the Alice Springs Hospital with Tennant Creek, Katherine or Gove hospitals; they are much smaller hospitals which are not servicing the size of population and geographical area as what the Alice Springs Hospital currently services.

Like a lot of services in Alice Springs, the Alice Springs Hospital punches well above its weight. We do things at the Alice Springs Hospital that you do not see in any metropolitan centres. Interns, young medical officers and nurses are often blown away by the types of illness and problems they see, but also by the methods of treating those people. It is a real eye-opener for them. It is recognised throughout Australia as an institution that educates nurses and doctors. It has linkages with the Flinders Medical Centre and University, Baker IDI and, obviously, the Royal Darwin Hospital.

Repairs and maintenance for the Alice Springs Hospital, even in yesterday's budget—I noted over the forward estimates there is \$20.38m to continue remediation and upgrades to the Alice Springs Hospital. Then you have the storm rectification works that were meant to be \$11m, which this government has reduced to \$3m, miraculously. I am not sure how they explain that.

These old hospitals cost a lot of money to repair and maintain. When I was the Health minister the projected forecast for repairs and maintenance for the Royal Darwin Hospital was estimated at \$1bn over the following 10 years. A huge amount of money has to be put aside for R&M of these old hospitals. Alice Springs Hospital's estimated R&M over the same 10-year period was approximately half—\$500m, a huge amount of money.

If you plan on spending that amount of money on repairs and maintenance of the Alice Springs Hospital why not think outside the square? Why not start planning for a new contemporary hospital that does not consist of adding bits on to an old core that has passed its use by date? Why not create a new complex or facility that reflects the needs and unique circumstances of Central Australia?

Alice Springs Hospital, like the Royal Darwin Hospital, was designed interstate and has that peculiar feature in which the windows are shaped and designed to offset the flow of snow. It is hideous and indicative of the fact the architecture chosen 40 to 45 years ago for these hospitals was not reflective of the unique climates and people they service.

Alice Springs Hospital is an inside hospital. There are very little outdoor areas. We know Aboriginal people do not like to be inside in air conditioning. For treatment they have to spend time indoors, but at every opportunity Aboriginal patients and families like to go outside.

At the moment we are seeing a complete congestion within that block at Alice Springs Hospital. There is no room to move and very little in the way of outdoor areas. People gather on footpaths at the front of hospital. It is a lovely, unique feature of all our hospitals throughout the Northern Territory that we have people sitting outside, relaxing and enjoying the company of their family and friends, but at the Alice Springs Hospital there is no room for these people to relax and enjoy themselves. We have outgrown the block.

Car parking is a major issue. The Alice Springs Town Council has been discussing this issue on and off for the last six to eight months. They are aware of the shortages of car parking at the Alice Springs Hospital. I am led to believe there is a shortfall of about 30 to 40 car parks at the moment.

I ran into a young nurse the other day, who said to me, 'Robyn, I go to work, I do shift work, I turn up in the middle of the night and I park out the back on uneven dirt. It is an occupational health and safety issue. In the middle of the night I often have to go back to my car parked in the back blocks of the Alice Springs Hospital, and I feel unsafe. Robyn, something has to be done. It is dangerous and I don't feel safe about where the car park is located or that it is on uneven ground and I could fall over and hurt myself.'

This is a huge issue at the Alice Springs Hospital. It needs to be discussed in this parliament. If this government is not willing to take the bold step of planning a new hospital then, at a bare minimum, this government needs to look at car parking at the Alice Springs Hospital.

Eleven-million dollars was taken away in November from the Alice Springs Hospital storm rectification works and given to Royal Darwin Hospital to build a multistorey car park at the cost of \$13m. At the time this seemed unfair on a lot of levels, but when you consider that car parking is a big problem at the Alice

Springs Hospital it seems even more unfair and irrational. The Alice Springs Hospital at a bare minimum also needs a multistorey car park, probably not to the same scale as what they are planning for the Royal Darwin Hospital, but we definitely need to provide safe and secure parking for staff and visitors to the Alice Springs Hospital.

I do not know where you will put that multistorey car park because there is no room to swing a cat. With the new palliative care hospice they have had to bulldoze staff accommodation in order to build that facility. Everything is being squeezed into the current block of land, but we are fast running out of room. The only room left on that block is to go up and culturally that is not ideal for people who are Indigenous, or for anyone really. We are in a small town of 28 000 people. Rather than go up, why not spread out and enjoy the beautiful climate of Alice Springs. We need a multistorey car park if the government is not willing to take the risk of planning for a new hospital at a new site in 2030.

The staff accommodation is another huge problem. I was recently approached by a lady who spent some time living at the Alice Springs Hospital nurses' quarters. I stayed there when I first came to town and I know that the nurses' quarters have not been upgraded for many years. They are virtually the same as when they were built 30 to 40 years ago.

The person who approached me said the nurses' quarters were run down and very basic, and she complained there was no Wi-Fi for the staff that live there. By and large the nurses' quarters are no longer adequate as it does not meet the needs of the nurses who stay there. They are generally disappointed by the quality of accommodation provided. To upgrade those facilities would probably cost almost as much as starting again somewhere else. Having done a lot of refurbishments over the years personally, often you end up paying almost as much as if you were starting from scratch and building something new.

Over the years the hospital has been brilliant at responding to the changing health needs of people of Central Australia, absolutely brilliant. Something I have noticed over the years is the response to the broader identification of chronic diseases in our community. We have increased the response to renal dialysis across Central Australia, chemotherapy services have changed and improved and, of course, palliative care services have changed.

Every time you change your response, you implement a stronger response or a more modern response, it requires changes to the infrastructure and technology that supports those health services. That is where you can see the wear and tear on the Alice Springs Hospital; you can see that this old building is struggling to respond.

Last year I had the misfortune to spend quite a lot of time in the hospital during a recent relative's illness. My husband and I, who both worked at the hospital years ago, could not believe how dark the hospital has become. We sat there and asked, why is it so dark? It is because bits have been added on and the natural light has been pushed out further and further to the point that a lot of places that had natural light no longer do. It has become dark, aged and in need of lots of love and attention to the point where it is probably easier to look beyond that to start again, to build a new Alice Springs Hospital.

As the former Health minister, I spent two years planning for the Palmerston Regional Hospital. I learned a lot during those years about how to fund hospitals in this modern era, contemporary ways of procuring health services. We looked into private-public partnerships and various modern ways of attracting funding to primarily public hospitals. Design, build, operate, maintain, DBOM, was the procurement option we followed for some time until I was removed from the Health portfolio and the decision was made to clock back into a traditional government build and operate model.

With 13 years between now and 2030 this government, or whoever is in government, has plenty of time to explore those options. You will not be under the pump, you will not be under any political duress to dump this and make rash decisions that are not necessarily in the best interests of Territorians and the government coffers.

One of my biggest regrets for the Palmerston Regional Hospital is that a public-private partnership was not pursued. It could have happened and it could have meant more money in the coffers for the Palmerston Regional Hospital. With a new hospital for Alice Springs there is plenty of time to build relationships with private health service providers, collect information, and build knowledge and expertise on how to construct and plan for a new hospital.

In my time as Health minister it was all new. We had not built a hospital in the Territory for 40 years or so, a long time, well past the memory of everyone in this Chamber and in the previous government. It is an

opportunity to use the knowledge you have gleaned, gained, developed and acquired through the building of the Palmerston Regional Hospital. Use that information to now move on to the next hospital.

One of the reasons the Palmerston Regional Hospital has been built is an acknowledgement that the Royal Darwin Hospital is an old hospital. It is not going to be the only tertiary hospital in Darwin. The main tower of the Royal Darwin Hospital is an old building, exactly the same as the Alice Springs Hospital. It has a use-by date. The money spent to maintain and refurbish that main tower of Royal Darwin Hospital could be better used in further developing the Palmerston Regional Hospital site. That is a decision for this government to make about how it will operate those two hospitals that may not be required into the future. It is a highly controversial issue and is not what I am here to talk about today.

With the opening of the Palmerston Regional Hospital next year, it is possible the Royal Darwin Hospital services will transfer across to the Palmerston Regional Hospital over time, that the site, which is huge—I think it is over 40 hectares—could be developed into a massive, beautiful tertiary hospital, rather than trying to battle on with old infrastructure at Royal Darwin Hospital.

In Alice Springs we have a large hospital, larger than what we anticipated, on a block that has no space whatsoever. You only need to walk around the Alice Springs Hospital to see that is the case. There has been a lot of development over the years. Most recently we have had the education centre open. There has been the new ICU. I had the great pleasure of opening the emergency department a few years ago, which was planned and built by the former Labor government. Those services and amenities in 10 years' time will be old and will be ready for refurbishment again. That is the cycle you see when you work in and manage a hospital.

Now is the perfect time to think about a new hospital, ease off on non-essential repairs and maintenance at the Alice Springs Hospital over the next 10 years, and put that money aside with private funding and interest in the new hospital. Putting it aside to build a new hospital would be easy to do, particularly with the knowledge acquired through the building of the new Palmerston Regional Hospital.

If this government does not support this—I am under no illusion; there is no reason why this government would support the Independent Member for Araluen in this great idea. It is not your idea so I am not expecting any great support, but at a bare minimum we need a new car park. We need a multistorey car park for the Alice Springs Hospital. That needs to be made a priority. Perhaps in the next budget this government can see fit to prioritise that because it is not fair on the staff and visitors to the hospital.

I have made most of the points I wish to make tonight without rehashing my full speech from last year. I will conclude by reading into *Hansard* some of the comments made by Lynne Walker, the former shadow minister for Health, on 25 May last year when this similar motion was debated. She said:

It is a very considered motion and, like the Health minister...

John Elferink at the time:

... we agree with the need to plan for not only the Alice Springs Hospital, but all hospitals in the Northern Territory.

She was acknowledging we need to plan for the infrastructure of hospitals. Governments need to plan for the eventual replacement of old hospitals and potential repurposing of hospitals. My view is the repurposing of the Alice Springs Hospital would be an easy thing to do. You do not have to remove a lot of the services, many of them could remain there. The core of the hospital, acute services, could be transferred somewhere else.

That involves picking a new site which would be of interest to most people in the community. It may be controversial because there is not a lot of room in the middle of Alice Springs, but I have always thought Crown land close to the Alice Springs airport would be ideal.

Lynne Walker also went on to say:

Our blueprint for health in the Northern Territory ...

Referring to the Labor opposition at the time,

... was released in February this year. I launched it on the steps of the Royal Darwin Hospital. As part of the blueprint we want to see a health system that focuses on the front end, the prevention side and the infrastructure that keeps people well.

I would like to know what the current policy of this new Labor government is for health infrastructure. What is your commitment to hospitals throughout the Northern Territory, particularly the Alice Springs Hospital?

It would be possible to attract a lot of interest and investment, even across the world, into this hospital. What happens in the Alice Springs Hospital is unique and is of great interest to many people across the world.

With regard to the motion for a new Alice Springs Hospital by 2030, Lynne Walker said:

Territory Labor is not in a position to support or oppose the motion but, member for Araluen, we recognise your insights as a previous Treasurer and Health minister, and long-term resident of Alice Springs. We also recognise the need for master planning for Alice Springs Hospital and all other hospitals in the Northern Territory. We want to understand the clinical requirements of the Alice Springs community alongside the clinical needs and priorities of the rest of the Territory within budget considerations. Technical and expert advice is required for these decisions.

Then she says, referring to me:

She is quite right; it is about commonsense planning.

On that note I will look forward to the contributions of my colleagues in the Chamber, and I hope they have the heart and the commonsense to support this vision for a new hospital in Alice Springs by 2030.

Ms FYLES (Health): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Araluen for bringing this motion into the House. I read the speeches from last year; I certainly recollect the debate. I state from the outset that we support the intent of the motion, but I feel the words are formally too prescriptive to agree today.

It is a body of work that I, as the Minister for Health, and the government are undertaking in terms of strategic health planning in the Northern Territory. It is one of the items the Chief Minister has asked me, as Health minister, to look at—Health infrastructure across the Northern Territory—and have a plan going forward.

What that means is we will be planning for the Northern Territory's future for the delivery of health services. We deliver services in a very remote context, and we deliver a range of services from community clinic based care to specialised acute care. It is very important for a government to be planning now for the future health needs of the Northern Territory. It is something that I am personally very passionate about, so I can assure the Member for Araluen that we are undertaking that master planning work across the Northern Territory, including Alice Springs.

We are looking at Health infrastructure around those strategic plans we put in place. I need to point out that this Health infrastructure master planning needs to be clinically driven; we need to listen to those clinicians and staff who work every day on the front line in hospitals and clinics, supporting Territorians, particularly vulnerable Territorians. When you are unwell you need the support of expert care.

I thank the Member for Araluen for the motion. It is something I am pleased to be debating. We acknowledge the Alice Springs Hospital plays an important role in the region. It serves not only the township of Alice Springs and the broader region, but many tourists. Up to 60 000 people are served by this acute hospital every year. We, as a government, are committed to this facility. In particular, we are delivering ongoing improvement and expansion at the Alice Springs Hospital.

We are putting Territorians and their safety first. We note that the Alice Springs Hospital covers a huge area; I think it services 1.6 million square kilometres. I acknowledge that the member has raised some issues, some of which I was aware of, and we will continue to work through some of those issues of staff safety; they are very important.

The Alice Springs Hospital is a unique hospital. The Member for Araluen works and lives in the region, as do my colleagues the Members for Namatjira and Braitling. They know the context of how that hospital delivers services. It is the only major secondary referral hospital in the region, and it has a very unique

context in supporting not only Territorians, but people across the borders in remote areas of South Australia and Western Australia.

In spite of its remoteness, as the Minister for Health and as a government, we are very proud of the daily efforts and achievements of the hospital and those staff who deliver a range of specialist services. They deliver emergency medicine, intensive care, surgery, general medicine, ENT, paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, renal services, rehabilitation, palliative care and psychiatry, just to name a few.

Another strength of the Alice Springs Hospital is the opportunity it has as a teaching hospital and a campus of the Northern Territory clinical school of the Flinders University of South Australia. Medical, nursing and allied health students receive clinical training at the hospital. I was pleased to be at Alice Springs Hospital earlier this year with my colleague, the Member for Namatjira, at the opening of one of the new purpose-built training rooms. It is a state of the art room where nurses, doctors and medical staff can undertake clinical assessments on mannequins in a very real life environment.

When Territorians need to move interstate, or go interstate to do further study, they often do not come back. I was very proud to be there, opening that facility which will benefit the hospital and the broader Alice Springs community. It is very important that we provide training and education resources within the Territory.

Alice Springs Hospital is accredited by the Northern Territory Postgraduate Medical Council on behalf of the Medical Board of the Northern Territory for intern and junior medical officer training and has an active clinical training program.

It provides excellent clinical training opportunities and experience to relevant rural general practice and it is affiliated with the teaching hospital of the Universities of Sydney, New South Wales and Queensland. There are many clinicians who come to the Northern Territory to gain training and experience and they never leave. We very much welcome them. It provides us with a great resource to care for Territorians. They fall in love with the Territory. These clinical training opportunities provide opportunity for people to come to the Northern Territory, and we are grateful when they make the Territory their home and become passionate about it.

There have been major investments in the hospital by leading health institutes and health bodies. The hospital in Alice Springs has a strong affiliation with the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute for research and clinical services for cardiovascular disease and diabetics. The Centre for Remote Health, a joint venture between Charles Darwin University and Flinders University of South Australia, is also adjacent at the site.

The Alice Springs Hospital has 183 in-patient beds. Additionally, the campus provides facilities for staff accommodation, mental health services, engineering offices and the mortuary. It is located in the heart of Alice Springs. I have been to the hospital a few times; I welcome the opportunity whenever I am in Alice Springs to visit the site. I extend an offer to every member in this Chamber, whether they are a member from Central Australia or the broader Territory; if they are in Alice Springs and would like to visit the hospital they are more than welcome. We have some fabulous, hard-working staff and great facilities. I think it is important that every member of this Chamber understands the role the Alice Springs Hospital plays.

The local language groups respect the current ASH campus and consider the area as safe and neutral, something that is very important to make sure we provide culturally appropriate care. It is a very important aspect of the hospital to consider each time someone visits. I am very pleased to observe the cultural sensitivity that is displayed throughout the hospital campus.

We acknowledge that the hospital was originally constructed 40 years ago; however, since around 2000 there have been extensive works to refurbish, upgrade, remediate and expand the hospital facility. This is an important point to touch upon. When we look around the world and Australia historically—if you look towards Melbourne, Sydney and big overseas cities, hospitals are centrally located because that is where they were historically built. They have been expanded and built upon, but their locations are generally inner-city because historically that is where they were built.

In regard to the site of Alice Springs Hospital, we can plan for and provide additional services to the residents of Central Australia at that site, which is centrally located. The paediatric ward was purpose-built around 2000 on the ground floor. It provides suitable indoor and outdoor play and waiting areas. I have visited that area. It is a fabulous space.

When the Member for Araluen was the Minister for Health, Darwin received a new paediatrics ward in conjunction with the federal government. One of the concerns raised by staff and families is that it is located on the fifth floor; it does not provide outdoor space. There is a new playground at the hospital being built, but the Alice Springs Hospital has the space where patients can easily go outside, particularly in the paediatrics area.

Local community groups kindly support the hospital with play equipment, and further plans to expand the facilities available for children and families are currently under consideration.

The works in this period led to a large ongoing program of redevelopment and remediation that was essential and is still continuing. The program of works has been challenging within the restrictions of the litigation processes with the previous contractor, which I am sure the previous minister will be well aware of.

There have been rectification works carried out across the campus. I will name a few: the operating theatres; mental health unit; medical ward; surgical ward; intensive care unit; high dependency unit; and maternity ward along with the birthing suits. These works have been an opportunity to expand and upgrade appropriately.

A review of the budget papers over the years shows the following long-term commitments and upgrades made to the Alice Springs Hospital: in 2000–01 there was \$16m allocated for the redevelopment of the hospital, including the provision of a private wing upgrade, modification to existing facilities in the main ward block and external works in landscaping, walkways and roadworks; \$4m was allocated over subsequent years for staff accommodation upgrades, renal facilities, fire safety, main ward plant room chillers, and a new plant room constructed above flood levels; in 2007–08 nearly \$11m was allocated for upgrading the emergency department, renal facilities and emergency power and electrical systems. That ED upgrade was significant and I was pleased to recently tour that space.

In 2009–10 a further \$7m for fire protection, air conditioning, remediation and further upgrades to emergency power and electrical systems was allocated. In 2011–12, \$16m for remediation upgrade of operating theatres and the essential sterilising supply department was also allocated. In 2012–13 there was \$5m for remediation of upgrade and operating theatres and wards. In 2013–14 there was a significant upgrade of \$21m for fire protection and air conditioning works. Last year there was \$5.2m for the multidisciplinary teaching and training facility; I spoke of that earlier when I spoke about the Member for Namatjira and I visiting Alice Springs Hospital earlier this year.

A significant amount has been spent upgrading Alice Springs Hospital over recent years. There has been \$125m invested by the Northern Territory Government and supported by the significant investments made by the federal government. We acknowledge, particularly in the space of health and health infrastructure, that relationship with the federal government.

I deviate briefly to point to the recent announcement of the PET scanner and cyclotron for Royal Darwin Hospital, which is an example of both levels of government working together to provide health infrastructure for Territorians.

The investments have provided the local community with new and expanded facilities, such as the emergency department and MRI services. The member is personally passionate about the new 10 bed hospice, which is under construction. I was pleased to announce that early on. That will be a hospice, not a facility used for other purposes.

When you talk to those involved and visit other hospices you can understand the purpose of them and how they support patients and families at a sad time. It can provide much-needed support. I was pleased to announce that \$6.3m hospice would be specifically for that. I was pleased in January to open the new intensive critical care unit, a facility that will serve the community for many years to come.

Health infrastructure is an investment in Territorians while also providing support to those on the front line, such as nurses, doctors, health professionals and allied health staff. It provides them with the resources to do their jobs of caring for our families, friends and community when they are vulnerable, have suffered trauma or are ill.

We have a planned process for the future of Alice Springs Hospital. We have a process for all hospitals in the Northern Territory.

We accept the intent of the motion but not the specifics, because we do not want to rush into unplanned reactive responses to future health needs. As a government, we have committed to undertake the development of a strategic asset plan for a long-term review of major Health infrastructure.

In her speech the member spoke about Royal Darwin Hospital and some of the challenges that it faces, but we have seen significant investment in that site. Part of this strategic planning is to firstly undertake a review of the quality and suitability of the physical facilities currently in use, and prepare a plan for the systematic renewal and upgrading of those facilities across the Northern Territory.

We need to have a whole-of-Territory plan to ensure we have facilities that are fit for purpose in efficiently meeting the healthcare needs of Territorians and visitors. I am very proud that we are moving to this long-term view of our health system, and that it is well considered, supported and driven by a clinical services plan. That needs to be first and foremost; what do our clinicians need? What services do they need? The member was speaking about the changes we have seen in medicine and the delivery of healthcare, and we also need to look at population planning and forecast planning. We need to have a considered, well-thought-out plan around health services in the Northern Territory.

The asset strategic plan will address all the Territory government assets, including the Alice Springs Hospital, and all the assets at the Royal Darwin Hospital campus except for the Darwin private hospital. The first stage of the audit process of our public hospitals is to add to the audit of remote primary health centres, which was conducted in 2015.

During this year an Alice Springs Hospital master plan will be developed on the Northern Territory's clinical services plans. These processes work hand in hand to forecast the demands for Health services and the best ways to meet those demands.

In regard to costs, we have been speaking about how we manage the Northern Territory's budget going forward and how we responsibly look after taxpayer funds. I have been advised that the anticipated cost of a replacement Alice Springs Hospital and a new site would be in the vicinity of \$800m to \$1bn, which is no small investment. That is the costings I have received from the Department of Health. When we consider how much we have invested, particularly over the last decade and a half, in the Alice Springs Hospital—we need to consider that as much as we want to deliver healthcare we need to look at the economics.

The Alice Springs Hospital site is master planned. We will continue to work with clinicians and the local community. The Minister for Territory Families will add to my remarks from her local perspective, having also worked at the hospital. As the Minister for Health, I do not consider that we can support this motion this evening. We support the intent of providing better health facilities in Alice Springs and we are not debating that. When we look at the considerable work that has been done—the site is suitable.

The member raised some issues and I will be looking at those, particularly staff safety. We are very focused on making sure we are responsible with taxpayer funds and provide key health infrastructure across the Northern Territory. We are passionate not only about delivering acute healthcare, but about the generational change we need to see in the Northern Territory.

We need to focus on the primary health space. If we can prevent disease before it becomes acute we not only provide for better lives of Territorians, but we save substantially. We have a strong plan for working with women when they are pregnant, and with children in their first 1000 days of life so we can set them on a lifelong journey of better health and education.

We are focused on key infrastructure planning for our acute needs, but we are also focused on health. Finally, the clinical core system is a key piece of infrastructure that will be rolling out across the Northern Territory, and Alice Springs Hospital will benefit from that.

We support the intention of the Member for Araluen in bringing this motion forward. I am happy to speak about health and what we can do, as a parliament, to support Territorians. But as the motion stands, the government is unable to support it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Country Liberal opposition to speak on the motion brought forward by the Member for Araluen. The Country Liberals believe that a new hospital should be constructed in Alice Springs to meet the growing needs of its local community. Every Territorian, no matter where they live, should have equal access to health services. The Alice Springs Hospital holds a special place in the hearts of those who live in the Red Centre, and I am very much looking forward to visiting the Alice Springs Hospital this Friday.

The site the current Alice Springs Hospital occupies was selected in 1963, and by 1968 there was a planned four-storey medical facility. Construction of the current hospital began in 1972, and it was officially opened in 1976, some 13 years after its inception. This time line highlights the forward planning required on projects of that scale.

The current Alice Springs Hospital contains three main wings and, due to its age, the maintenance bill is consistently rising. The Member for Araluen, herself a former Health minister, projected the estimate of maintenance costs to 2030 as half a billion dollars. By 2030 the hospital will be almost 55 years old. This is in stark contrast to the Palmerston Regional Hospital, which when completed will have a lifespan of approximately 50 years.

Clearly in the next 13 years, as the existing hospital reaches 55 years of age, there will come a time when the current Alice Springs Hospital is no longer efficient to maintain or suitable to deliver the standard of health services required of it. The current hospital has been added to and improved on over its 40-year history. The site is now constrained, making future expansion difficult without building on top of the existing infrastructure, which it may or may not have been originally constructed to withstand. Therefore it is clear that if the current medical offerings at the Alice Springs Hospital are to be improved, a new hospital on a new site will need to be identified, master planned and constructed.

When the original hospital was planned for Alice Springs the population forecast for its catchment area was 38 000, with the possibility of reaching 60 000 by the year 2000. The current population of Alice Springs has now decreased to around 25 000; however, the medical needs of those who live in Central Australia have increased and diversified drastically since the hospital was built, over 40 years ago.

The increased prevalence of renal disease is just one example of this, and the demands on this health service alone have placed great pressure on the current available facilities. Unfortunately, this Labor government appears not to value the incredibly important services the Alice Springs Hospital provides to its local community.

Nothing demonstrates this better than the recent referral of the \$11m storm rectification works which were budgeted to take place but have been put on the back burner by this Labor government since it has come to office. The Minister for Health and the previous government put the price of constructing a new hospital in Alice Springs as between \$800m and \$1bn. This is a substantial sum and one that, given this government's extreme spending, is unlikely to be funded in its entirety by the Northern Territory Government alone.

For this significant piece of Health infrastructure to become a reality it will likely require a partnership with the private sector. A public-private partnership can certainly be an answer to delivering a new hospital to the residence of Alice Springs. It is something the Country Liberals support in the lead up to 2030.

To conclude, the Country Liberals support the motion of the Member for Araluen and support the view of the people of Central Australia, who deserve a contemporary and modern facility that can treat the complex health needs of its residents. The opposition believes the time frame outlined by the Member for Araluen of 2030 is achievable if the population and the medical needs of the community dictate the need for the significant investment.

I thank the Member for Araluen for bringing this matter before the parliament, and with those words I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Ms WAKEFIELD (Territory Families): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Araluen for her motion. Alice Springs Hospital is one of our shared passions. I worked there for several years as a social worker. I was also on the hospital board for a period of time. This conversation about the hospital site is not a new one in Alice Springs. It was an issue when the Member for Araluen was the Health minister. There may have been some missed opportunities, but I am really happy to be having this conversation today.

Last night my son was in the emergency department at Alice Springs Hospital. As a mother who was a very long way from her sick child, it was reassuring to know he was at a quality hospital and would receive good care. I was absolutely reassured in that moment. It is an important part of the community. It is a very important hospital and I am a passionate advocate for it as a community service and an ongoing service.

Throughout my life I have worked in several hospitals. I have worked in hospitals in Melbourne, major public and private hospitals, and Alice Springs Hospital punches above its weight in every way. It is a small hospital but it serves a wide range of needs.

I am glad the Deputy Leader of the Opposition will visit it on Friday. I think she will see we have a very modern emergency department that is state of the art. As someone who worked in the old emergency department which was not state of the art—we are very proud of the new one. I remember the Member for Araluen speaking about her son having a marble up his nose, or I think that was the anecdote she told. We are all very invested in Alice Springs, our health services and our hospital because we all have that attachment to it.

I was privileged to go—again, the Member for Araluen was a great advocate for this—to the new palliative care unit. It is a really important part of the hospital. It has been called for by the community for a long time, so I was very proud to help deliver that unit to Centralians. I noticed when I was there the other day, picking up another friend up from the emergency department, that there is a crane there, so construction has started.

When the Member for Araluen was the Minister for Health she had a lot to do with the planning of that facility. As you said, there are constraints, and I know that. There is a master plan which you would have had input on. I hope there were not missed opportunities while you were the minister, Member for Araluen. One thing that I will tell the people of Alice Springs is that I will always be a passionate advocate for this hospital.

Over the last week I have been reflecting on my good fortune to be on this team. I do not have to be a strong advocate for Alice Springs in this Cabinet. I know you must have faced more struggles in that area, Member for Araluen, but I do not have to advocate very hard for Alice Springs, because so many people on this side of the Chamber are committed to Alice Springs; they either live there or love the place. I reassure the people of Alice Springs that we are committed to Central Australia.

Hospital planning is complex and I agree with the Member for Araluen that this takes time. I am pleased the Minister for Health is passionate about making sure we have a good strong infrastructure plan. I am surprised the Health department did not have one in place, particularly after having such a passionate Health minister in the Member for Araluen. It is something we need to do. Planning for health infrastructure is incredibly complex. We need to acknowledge that infrastructure is not just buildings.

I am very proud, as a member of this parliament, to be part of replacing the ageing IT infrastructure at the hospital. I am probably one of the few people in this building that has used that IT system and experienced its limitations. It is really important that we are replacing that infrastructure, but we know infrastructure is expensive. We need to make sure we are doing the right thing and putting the money in the right place.

It is important that the hospital site is in town. A lot of people who use the hospital walk to it. I agree with the member that car parking is an issue at every hospital. It is something we need to constantly be reviewing. I was pleased to hear that the Health minister will investigate the concerns you raised.

We do need to plan for this work. It is a big investment. Alice Springs is a vibrant town. The best thing we can do for Alice Springs Hospital is to invest early. This does feel like typical CLP thinking about investing in the crisis end all the time. We need to be reducing demand on that hospital. One of the things I was proud to do when I was a social worker there was to write the first domestic violence policy in the hospital. We need to reduce the presentations.

Through our DV policy, one of the goals is to reduce hospital presentations. I was on the street the other day and an emergency physician came up to me and said, 'Dale, we have got to get this BDR in as quick as we can because that will be what reduces the demand in our emergency department'. They cannot wait for it to get up and running because they know it made a difference when it was last in place, much more so than police outside bottle shops.

We need to be doing those things for long-term health, long-term planning and making sure we are reducing demand because, as the Member for Araluen rightly pointed out, the population of Alice Springs has not grown that much, yet demand for health services continues to grow. Those are the issues we need to be addressing and investing in: reducing demand and looking at the long-term planning.

We need to be doing more work like investing in the first 1000 days of a child's life, which has a huge impact on children's long-term health. We need to be making sure we are reducing domestic violence presentations and continuing to act to reduce long-term chronic disease such as renal disease, diabetes and a range of things that will not only impact on our health budget, but the health of the whole community and the economy.

I support the intent of this motion. We need to start planning for the future of the whole Territory's health system. We need to invest in making sure the future has fewer people using our health system and fewer people with chronic disease who are reliant on ongoing healthcare. We need to think about what we can do to reduce our reliance on spending in the health budget at the crisis end.

I thank the Health minister for her support of the intent of this motion, and I thank the Member for Araluen for the opportunity to talk about an area I am passionate about.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Speaker, I thank the members who have chosen to speak to this important motion this evening: the Health minister; the Deputy Opposition Leader; and the Minister for Territory Families.

I am heartened to hear a general agreement within the Chamber to start planning and investing early in health services across the Northern Territory. I feel very passionately about this issue. We need a new contemporary hospital in Alice Springs. There is no room at the current site. Anyone who claims to be familiar with the Alice Springs Hospital knows that.

The next development will have to move onto the tennis court. They have held out on developing the tennis court for many years. From my perception that is probably the only space left, or go up, which is not always desirable.

In a small town it is better to have the hospital based in the centre of town, but it is not necessarily a bad thing that a hospital be placed a bit out of town. One of the ongoing problems for many decades has been that people use the ambulance as a taxi service to get into town. People who want to get into town will ring the ambulance, say they are not feeling well, get to the hospital and run off into town. Given that that is a common occurrence in Alice Springs, to have the hospital a bit away from the town centre would have its advantages.

This government does not have an appetite to consider this. I hear conflict in what people have said tonight. We need to plan and start investing early, but this proposal needs to start planning for a hospital to be built in 13 years' time. It is not tomorrow; it is beyond the term of this government.

To start planning now would be positive for the community of Alice Springs and the broader Northern Territory. You should start planning for a new hospital for Katherine as well. The Member for Katherine should run a motion for her community along the same lines. The former member for Katherine wanted the hospital moved out of the flood area because it is a huge issue for the community. That should be put on the agenda by this government and the current Member for Katherine.

The Tennant Creek Hospital has had challenges over the years. It has not grown out of its facility, but it does not provide birthing facilities. That has been on the agenda for your hospital, Member for Barkly, for many years. That is something that needs to be revisited.

I am pleased to hear this government has committed to a master plan for health infrastructure throughout the Northern Territory. I will revisit this over the next year or two. I am not put off. It is an essential idea.

I want to put on the public record, now that I know this motion will not be supported, we need a multistorey car park at the current site of the Alice Springs Hospital. This is not my opinion; it is a fact. There is insufficient car parking at the Alice Springs Hospital. This is a problem for everyone. I ask you to prioritise this as an issue for the safety and wellbeing of all those people associated with the hospital.

You have provided a multistorey car park for the Royal Darwin Hospital, possibly at the expense of the Alice Springs Hospital, having taken away \$11m of storm rectification works in November and returned \$3m in replacement. You have taken money away from our hospital in Alice Springs to pay for your car park at Royal Darwin Hospital.

It is time you put that money back into Central Australia. This is when you will be accused of recreating the Berrimah line. When you do this, people like me, who are paid to represent the constituents in Central Australia, will call you out.

Put that high on your agenda. It is very important that we have good car parking facilities. It is also very important that you meet the requirements as stipulated by the Alice Springs Town Council. You are not meeting those legal requirements for car parking for the Alice Springs Hospital. It has been swept under the

carpet. The fact that the Mayor of Alice Springs is also the Chair of the Central Australian Health Services Board is an interesting scenario. We will see how it plays out.

Putting that aside, we need a multistorey car park, and if this motion tonight achieves anything it will be putting that well and truly on the agenda.

Madam Speaker, I move that the government commences planning for a new Alice Springs Hospital to be built on a new site by 2030.

Motion not agreed to.

MOTION

Importance of Local Government Across the Northern Territory

Mr HIGGINS (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly acknowledges the significant role the local government sector plays in communities across the Northern Territory.

Local government is recognised as the third level of government in Australia. The sector is recognised in many state constitutions as a ministerial portfolio in all other states regardless of their political persuasion.

The Turnbull Coalition government in Canberra also recognises the importance of local government to communities across Australia by having Senator Fiona Nash sit at the Cabinet table as minister for local government and Territories. Yet this government and its Chief Minister think a sector that controls over \$900m of assets, employs over 1400 Territorians and contributes over \$200m to the Territory economy is not deserving of its own ministerial portfolio. Frankly, this is a disgrace.

The Country Liberal opposition recognises the important role local government plays in the every day life of Territorians. It keeps our streets clean, our local roads safe, and our community facilities open. My colleague, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, recently attended the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory's general meeting in Palmerston. The overwhelming message from this meeting was that the local government sector feels this government does not recognise or appreciate the significant work councils do, and the sector wants their own champion within government, a person who would be their voice in Cabinet, namely a minister of their own.

This is a call that the Country Liberals wholeheartedly support; however, whilst this logical request seems an easy fix for the government, the Chief Minister on the day of the LGANT meeting, responded to a tweet from Her Worship Lord Mayor of Darwin, Katrina Fong Lim, which stated:

#RestoreTheMinisterforLG @damienjryan advocates strongly for the need for a NT Minister for LG.

With a slap in the face to local government by stating, 'We agree with Damien Ryan; that is why we have Gerry McCarthy as our Local Government minister in the NT.'

To see what this Labor government thinks of the work of the local government sector, let us go through the ministerial titles the Member for Barkly holds.

Firstly, there is Minister for Housing and Community Development, then there is Minister for Essential Services and, finally, there is Minister for Public Employment. Correct me if I am wrong, but none of these titles sound like local government to me.

According to the Chief Minister, Territorians are meant to accept that contained within the massive Housing and Community Development portfolio, local government is receiving the recognition it deserves. The opposition has been advised that the area responsible for local government within the department does not have its own Executive Director. This means that at the top levels of the ministry and the public service, local government has no stand alone voice.

If we were to take the Chief Minister at his word and believe this Labor government truly believes in the importance of local government, then surely the minister responsible, namely the Member for Barkly, would have attended the LGANT general meeting. Well, to his credit, he was scheduled to; however, shortly before the meeting he advised LGANT that he would have to renege on his acceptance as he had a more pressing commitment.

These actions alone indicate how seriously this Labor government is taking local government's contribution to the Territory. The position of the Country Liberals on this matter could not be more starkly contrasted. It seems to have become the practice of the Chief Minister to appoint those who were not lucky enough to get a coveted seat at the Cabinet table—like the infamous Member for Fong Lim, for example—to a no authority, no responsibility, assistant ministry. Even in his 'everyone gets a prize' approach to the executive, local government has missed out.

There are assistant ministers for portfolios that are important but seem somewhat obscure, such as bringing back the Arafura Games, a vibrant Darwin CBD, buy local, arts trails, the iconic national Indigenous art gallery—which has been postponed—and the museum master plan, but not a mention of local government. The hypocrisy of this Chief Minister, who can look members of this local government in the eye and tell them that he and his government value their contribution to the Territory whilst treating the sector with contempt is, frankly, galling.

If the Chief Minister will not see sense in the recognition given to local government by his colleagues from the Commonwealth and interstate governments—if he will not listen to the sector itself, maybe he will listen to a former Labor luminary. On 13 November 1972 in his 'It's Time' election policy speech at the Blacktown Civic Centre, the soon to be 21st Prime Minister of Australia, the Honourable E G Whitlam AC QC, said:

Let there be no mistake about Labor's determination to make local government a genuine partner in the federal system.

While the Chief Minister's Labor hero saw the undeniable value of having local government at the table, his government is satisfied to have the responsibility banished to the nether regions of a government department and buried under a mountain of other ministerial responsibilities. The local government sector deserves better and so do Territorians.

In the lead-up to the last election the then Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Fannie Bay, wrote a letter to LGANT President, Mayor Damien Ryan, in response to a submission LGANT made to the Labor Party regarding its election policies. The now Chief Minister made some very interesting statements in this letter which, given the current actions of his government, I believe he should be reminded of.

He starts the letter by saying: 'At the LGANT conference in Jabiru earlier this year I emphasised my support for strong and effective local government across the Territory and recognition of its important role in local decision-making. I look forward in government to working to continue to supporting strong local government in the Northern Territory.'

The letter goes on to say: 'Territory Labor supports constitutional recognition for local government. We will also of course work to ensure appropriate recognition of local government as the third sphere of government.'

Finally, the letter states: 'Territory Labor supports the notion of partnership agreements with LGANT and we will be pleased to commence formal discussions to progress that in government.'

These were hollow words. The government, now feigning blissful ignorance to the wishes and importance of the local government sector, shows what kind of Chief Minister and government this is. This conduct is just another example of the long list of Labor lies.

In response to the government's clear lack of respect for this important sphere of government and the Chief minister's own dismissal of the issue, it was agreed at the last LGANT general meeting to compile a letter on behalf of all those in attendance to send to the Chief Minister to demand the reinstatement of the Minister for local government to recognise the sector's importance to the Territory.

Each of the councils in attendance also committed to taking the issue back to their own local councils so they could pass resolutions to the same effect. From this meeting it was apparent that the sector is united in this one simple demand. Perhaps, as a surprise to the sector, if and when the Chief Minister responds to this request he could give more to the sector's concerns than mere platitudes.

He could join the Country Liberals in acknowledging the role of local government in communities across the Territory by appointing a minister to take on a stand alone local government portfolio.

Better yet, the Chief Minister could show he meant what he said before the last election and bring the responsibilities of local government to the forefront of a government department rather than have it buried

under layer after layer of bureaucracy. Alas, I suspect this will not happen, and the hopes and calls of the sector to this government will fall on still hearts and deaf ears.

If the current government will not listen and act, the Country Liberal opposition will. I commit today to the local government sector and to Territorians that under a future Country Liberals government we will have a stand alone portfolio of local government appointed to a responsible minister within Cabinet. They will take charge of local government policy and support and will be a voice for the sector at the Cabinet table of a future Country Liberals government.

Unlike the Gunner Labor government we acknowledge that local government is a unique form in the Northern Territory. It is not a sphere of government contained within our founding document, the Self-Government Act, like in other jurisdictions where it is afforded a level of status within state constitutions. Rather, local government was established in this place through the *Local Government Act*, and its status and significance to the Territory has long been acknowledged by the sector having a seat at the Cabinet table.

This is something we, the Country Liberals, will reinstate if elected. The Country Liberals have a proud history of including the sector at the Cabinet table. Section 11 of the *Local Government Act* states that the principle role of a council is:

- a) *to act as a representative, informed and responsible decision-maker in the interests of its constituency; and*
- b) *to develop a strong and cohesive social life for its residents and allocate resources in a fair, socially inclusive, and substantial way; and*
- c) *to provide and coordinate public facilities and services; and*
- d) *to encourage and develop initiatives for improving quality of life; and*
- e) *to represent the interests of its area to the wider community; and*
- f) *to exercise and perform the powers and functions of local government assigned to the council under this Act and other Acts.*

The previous Country Liberals government took the responsibilities conferred on local government seriously and had an appointed minister for local government sitting at the Cabinet table through its entire term. The previous Country Liberals government even had local government as the lead responsibility of a government department to ensure local government was supported across the Territory.

This approach to the local government sector has happened before and will happen again under a future Country Liberals government; however, the best this sector has received from this Labor government has been a \$5m strategic local government infrastructure fund which sounds a lot like the existing special purpose grants, a downgrade in public sector support, and a minister in the form of the Member for Barkly but with no actual title. The 16 local government bodies across the Northern Territory deserve better.

I take this opportunity to commend the work of the president of LGANT, his Worship the Mayor of Alice Springs, Damien Ryan, and the work of his entire executive not just on this issue, but on all issues facing local government across the Territory and around the country. Mayor Ryan is a sound and sensible advocate for his sector.

I also acknowledge the forthright words and input of her Worship the Mayor of Katherine, Fay Miller, who was a former member of this place. Mayor Miller was particularly influential in the wording of the letter that those in attendance at the LGANT general meeting have sent to the Chief Minister, demanding the reinstatement of the ministry of local government. Just as she was a passionate advocate for her community in this place some years ago she has continued this as Mayor. I am sure she will, like many others in the sector, not rest until this slight against the sector has been rectified.

I invite all members to join me in demanding that the Chief Minister restore the portfolio of local government to the Cabinet table, that a minister be appointed with a stand alone portfolio and that services provided to local government be brought back to the forefront of a government department.

Chief Minister, it is within your power to do all these things. You made a commitment to the local government sector before your election and I demand you stick to it. Those of us on this side of the House acknowledge the tireless work of the local government sector in communities across the Northern Territory. It is time those opposite do the same.

With those words, I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Mr McCARTHY (Housing and Community Development): Madam Speaker, you may call me the minister for local government. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Leader of the Opposition's motion. It is a pity the speech writers did not put the gusto into the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply as they put into the speech we have just heard.

The Leader of the Opposition raised the great Australian Gough Whitlam. I have listened to many maiden speeches in this place, including my own, that acknowledge Gough Whitlam as a true inspiration, not just for Labor people. It was Gough Whitlam who initiated that level of government for Australia, to address those in the suburbs, working class people, and the citizens of Australia that needed and wanted that level of government representation. It is great the Leader of the Opposition brought Gough Whitlam into the debate.

Let me share a brief story. I was privileged to be selected and appointed to a special project implementing the learning lessons review. It was a major review into Indigenous education by the CLP government. It was the end of the 27-year tyrannical domination of the CLP in the Northern Territory. The economy was bust and the place was in ruins. Labor won government for the first time the following year.

I came to Darwin for six months on a contract and we put together an innovative plan to address the recommendations in that review and address Indigenous education in an innovative way. We would have had a real head start on changing Indigenous education outcomes under a Labor government in 2001 if that had gone forward and had been supported by the CLP at the time.

Cabinet submission after Cabinet submission was rejected, flicked out and destroyed by the CLP government, which refused to accept anything but 'cost neutral initiatives' when we were dealing with some of the biggest disadvantage of children's early learning and school education. I was learning lessons. I had never experienced anything like this before. I was working with senior public servants.

I remember a senior public servant who took an interest in me and gave me advice. The advice was, 'Do not be disheartened. Keep trying and working through those amendments to what you want to achieve because the Cabinet will accept it.' The example he gave was when the CLP government continually rejected the establishment of community government councils in the Northern Territory. They utterly rejected the formation which, essentially, was creating equality for the people who lived in regional and remote areas. That Cabinet submission was bounced out the door. This senior public servant had direct involvement in that process.

I will not go into the story of how it finally landed, how the government finally accepted it, but it was an interesting trail of semantics. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about Gough Whitlam in his analogy of Labor and our failings, and that story resonated with me as a person who, at that time, was trying to do something about Indigenous education despite the struggles and rejection of the CLP to provide equality for the people who lived in regional and remote areas across the Northern Territory.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, it got through. That was because of the good work of senior public servants. It got through because public servants were able to place reality in front of those politicians of the day.

I digress, so let me get back on track with a speech. I acknowledge the ministerial staff who have supported me in the development of this speech. We have workshopped this speech a number of times and it has great input from the team in the ministerial office, so thank you.

I also thank the Executive Director of the division of Local Government and Community Services, David Alexander, for his great work in the Department of Housing and Community Development. For the information of the Leader of the Opposition, if you do not know that person, you should get to know him because this gentleman is very important in leading our local government initiatives and policy in the Northern Territory.

I also thank the Department of Housing and Community Development division of local government and community development for its input into this speech, the work it has provided me with to be able to debate the Leader of the Opposition in parliament and to debate in good faith. I hope I do you justice.

Let us talk about this motion which relates to the importance of local government. As the minister for local government, I am extremely proud of this office I hold within the Northern Territory Government. In over 35 years of working throughout the Territory I have developed a profound understanding of the challenges faced by local councils, particularly regional councils, in delivering services in some of the most challenging environments in the country.

I am thankful for the work of Lynne Walker, the former Member for Nhulunbuy, who took a great interest in local government. As an effective opposition, a hard-working and dynamic opposition in the last term of this Assembly, we were given varied portfolio responsibilities and were told to work hard, study, research and create policy. Guess what? It worked. We took it to an election and we gained government because Territorians put their trust in us.

Lynne Walker did a lot of work in the local government sector. I remember learning from Lynne time after time in Caucus meetings. I hope to be of the same calibre as Lynne Walker when she was the shadow minister for local government. I undertook that portfolio late in the term, and it was great to follow in Lynne's footsteps and receive the important contacts she provided of people to meet with in the development of our policy.

I am very proud to say that some of those great ideas that have come through good consultation with Territorians in the local government sector are now enshrined in Labor's policy, and the Treasurer has stood in this House and delivered those outcomes in real fiscal terms for the local government sector in Budget 2017–18.

Local governments play a vital role in delivering municipal services and, in remote parts of the Territory, providing agency services on behalf of the Commonwealth and Territory governments. In many locations and for the delivery of many services, regional councils provide the only platform for workforce development. They provide the only stable, long-term platform for economic and social development and are an essential partner to the Territory government. Local government services are front and centre in people's lives every day.

Local government is the level of government that people in the Territory are most able to participate in, especially in regional and remote areas where councils are central to so many services being delivered.

Many councils deliver Northern Territory and Commonwealth Government contracted services, such as managing a central services program and maintaining other critical infrastructure, like airstrips, maintenance to homelands and outstations, running community social programs and maintaining facilities such as sport and recreation, night patrol, aged care and childcare. They also provide a reliable service to Centrelink and Australia Post offices, often employing local language speakers to assist those with lower English literacy.

If we are to successfully close the gap for Aboriginal Territorians, to give them the same opportunities in education and employment, the same expectations for a safe and healthy life and the same chance for a long and happy life, then local government will be, and will remain, that important partner. The Territory government acknowledges that we all have to work together with mutual respect. Local government is important to all Territorians, urban and remote, from the tens of thousands who receive direct services from councils every week to the estimated 3500 people employed by the local government sector across the Northern Territory.

The quality of services in local government is dependant on how well councils are functioning and funded for the wide range of services that are provided. The local government directorate in a department works closely with councils initially to ensure they are operating and complying with the *Local Government Act*, but also to provide the support they need to meet the highest possible standard of service to their constituents.

In your electorate, Leader of the Opposition, where the Victoria Daly Regional Council was divided against advice at the time, we are taking a collaborative and supportive approach to stabilising and refocusing the two councils leading up to the local government elections in August this year. A well-known international consulting firm had estimated that dividing Victoria Daly and creating the West Daly Regional Council could initially cost \$5m to \$10m in the establishment phase, and then require an additional \$2m to \$3m annually

to support. This is all additional cost for no additional services and, unfortunately, Leader of the Opposition, it is the situation we must now deal with.

Through no fault of the residents of that area this short-sighted CLP decision for political purposes has not resolved and improved services for the communities in this region. I turn your attention, Leader of the Opposition, to bringing that to this House for debate to try to work through that with us in a bipartisan sense. To compound this situation, the de-amalgamation had added to the financial stress on both these councils and, dare I say, Leader of the Opposition, some of your own constituents.

It is my intention to continue to work closely and in good faith with both councils to find a better way forward. I am encouraging them, and all other councils, to explore more opportunities for finding more collaborative and cost-effective shared service arrangements.

On the topic of funding, the new Territory government has demonstrated its confidence in and partnership with the local government sector very strongly and clearly. In the first six months of government we have committed an additional \$5m each year for the new strategic local government infrastructure fund. We have provided an additional \$1.5m per annum for Northern Territory operation of subsidy payments, which was a pre-election request by the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, and an additional \$500 000 per annum for special purpose grants.

I was particularly interested to hear to Leader of the Opposition criticise the new Michael Gunner Labor government strategic local government infrastructure fund—\$5m ongoing. Leader of the Opposition, that concept and policy development came directly from good consultation with LGANT. It is offensive that you spin that through semantics in a speech written for you with no understanding of the benefits that program will generate or of how proud, as Labor members, we are to once again enhance the opportunities of the local government sector in the Northern Territory.

This additional funding will assist local government councils with critical infrastructure needs, the management of aging assets and, of course, the delivery of important services. This could include resealing internal community roads, improving storm water management, upgrades and repairs to parks, playgrounds, swimming pools and enhancing waste management facilities, as well as other projects.

This is in addition to \$5.1m to local authority projects; the \$7m Indigenous jobs development program that supports jobs for Aboriginal people in local government; the \$3.5m special purpose grants; and the \$27.5m for operational subsidy, which was increased this year for the first time since 2014.

I mention the Indigenous jobs development program created by the Martin Labor government, which is provided to regional councils and the Belyuen Community Government council. This program supports the employment of around 600 Aboriginal people in local government. The grant provides financial assistance for salaries and approved on-costs for Aboriginal employees delivering council services.

The overall 2016-17 grants budget available for distribution under the local government grant program is approximately \$87m. Additional support of over \$4m is provided to reimburse relevant councils for street light operational maintenance and repair charges incurred up to 31 December 2017.

Leader of the Opposition, as the Cabinet minister responsible for local government, I take this opportunity to give representatives here today a reassurance. While my title for Minister of Housing and Community Development does not include the words 'local government', I am the champion for all our municipal shire and regional councils interests at the Michael Gunner Labor government Cabinet table.

I am passionate about the local government sector, and I take these portfolio responsibilities very seriously. Local government is independent and autonomous of the Territory government. Local government representatives are elected by Territorians, just as we are in this Chamber. The fact that no minister or department carries the name 'local government' does not, in any way, diminish the importance of our relationship with the Territory's municipal regional and shire councils.

The local government general elections are due to be held on 26 August 2017. It would be beneficial to turn our attention to supporting that process, Leader of the Opposition, as opposed to cheap semantic shots in this House.

Territorians, both remote and urban, have the opportunity to have their say in the makeup of their local council, and I am sure many will want to get involved in that process. I have been encouraging people around the Territory to get involved. I encourage other members to do the same. We know the problems of

low enrolment and low turnouts for local government elections and each of us, as an elected community representative, can do our bit to encourage Territorians to fully participate.

I also take this opportunity to highlight three Territory Labor government pre-election policies of significant importance to the local government sector:

- Infrastructure to enable growth: Labor's plan for building a stronger Territory
- Tackling the housing deficit in remote communities: Territory Labor's remote housing policy
- Respect Partnership and Opportunity: A Michael Gunner Labor government in partnership with Indigenous Territorians.

Our infrastructure to enable growth policy is critical to building a stronger Territory. Government must invest in infrastructure to grow jobs and our economy, as our 2017 Northern Territory budget demonstrates. We are ensuring the infrastructure program is spread across the Territory and that it is implemented in a way that supports local jobs.

In addition to the specific, strategic local government infrastructure fund, the Michael Gunner Labor government is also funding local government infrastructure and jobs, commencing in Budget 2017–18. I will give an example as the president of LGANT, Damien Ryan, noted in the recent LGANT newsletter:

The government surprised us all by announcing \$100 million for transforming the Darwin CBD and \$20 million for revitalising CBD. These projects are welcome news. The Lord Mayor of Darwin, Katrina Fong Lim, and I will be meeting with government ministers to ascertain more of the detail about the proposals and their potential impacts on the master plans developed by both councils.

While I was disappointed to miss the LGANT meeting at Palmerston last month, it was a great opportunity for LGANT members, the mayor, presidents and chief executives to have time with the Northern Territory Treasurer, Hon Nicole Manison, who addressed the meeting and took questions from the floor. I was very proud to have our Treasurer represent the Northern Territory Government at LGANT, and what a great turnout that was.

The Leader of the Opposition did not provide last minute advice of my absence. Once again, a little careless with the truth, and I regreted not being to attend that LGANT meeting. Representing an electorate of 488 000 square kilometres, with the majority covered by local governments, it is important for me to get back home and do important electorate work, as well as ministerial duties.

The Michael Gunner Labor government has provided substantial investment into our cities and towns in Budget 2017–18 and will work closely with out municipal councils to ensure their infrastructure needs are well reflected in the government's development priorities.

Turning to housing; no doubt this House is well aware of the government's commitment to a 10-year, \$1.1bn remote housing program to lift the amount of housing, living space and rooms available to Territorians living in remote communities.

This represents the largest investment in housing and remote communities by any Territory government, and its importance was highlighted in LGANT's pre-election submission. Good roads and transport, well-managed housing and appropriate community infrastructure are essential for economic development, employment growth and the quality of life for all Territorians. We will be partnering with all stakeholders, including the Australian Government, the local government sector, peak bodies and community organisations, to deliver on these important housing plans.

On that note, and notwithstanding well-publicised budget pressures as a result of the Australian Government cuts to the Territory's GST revenue, we on this side reject the calls from the Leader of the Opposition, from the CLP, to scrap local job-creating infrastructure projects that support economic development. I am especially proud to see a number of regional government councils that are now developing capacity to engage with Labor's record housing investment in the bush. This will not only generate new jobs, but it will also create new economic opportunities for regional and remote communities.

Some of these regional councils have had experience in this area, and some have capacity in this area, but all of them have endorsed this policy and are very keen to see where they can participate at higher levels. They are totally focused on creating jobs and economies in the communities they represent.

We have a clear commitment to strengthening local decision-making, working together and engaging with stakeholders across local government housing, education, health and justice. No community or region is the same, and government's engagement with all stakeholders will be ramping up over the coming months to discuss local decision-making. The Northern Territory Government's policy paper *Respect, Partnership and Opportunity: A Gunner Labor Government and Indigenous Territorians* outlines our commitment to remote communities, including to strengthen local decision-making in local government.

The strengthen local authorities program for local decision-making focuses on greater powers and control for local authorities in partnership with regional councils. It is proposed that implementation of this program will progress in three separate streams, implemented in parallel and prioritised on a community-by-community basis. These are engagement, capacity building, and community development and, finally, where appropriate, legislation. This work will be closely aligned with other local decision-making initiatives across government, and further announcements will be made in this regard in coming months.

We want to ensure councils across the Territory are responsive to their constituents' needs, and the strength of local government in our cities and towns is reflected in the operation of regional and municipal councils and shires. Government will seek ongoing input from the local government sector and continue to collaborate in delivering better outcomes for all Territorians. The department in consultation with local government stakeholders is currently reviewing the *Local Government Act* and I expect to bring this to the parliament in October of this year.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for putting this motion before the House because it has given me the opportunity to outline how valuable the local government sector is in the Northern Territory and how strongly the Michael Gunner Labor government values the contribution of and collaboration with the councils, councillors and their staff in developing the Northern Territory. I look forward to working with councils across the Territory to build our communities and support a strong, professional and effective local government sector.

I conclude with a note handed to me by the Member for Port Darwin. He made a special point to remind me about a high-level, collaborative committee he participates in between the Chief Minister, Lord Mayor and himself. It is the Capital City Committee. It brought back good memories, which I will reiterate to the Leader of the Opposition.

The previous Chief Minister, Paul Henderson, used to attend these Capital City Committee meetings with the City of Darwin and the Palmerston City Council. He encouraged me to be part of it upon taking certain portfolios regarding lands and planning. I embarked on a learning campaign and acknowledge the opportunities I had as a minister to learn, which is great for political enhancement, professional development and career.

Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Port Darwin reminded me that when the CLP took power it scrapped that committee. It got rid of that high-level consultative committee with important capital cities of northern Australia. It is good to see the Michael Gunner Labor government has reinstated that initiative and continued that high level of negotiation with the capital cities of northern Australia. It has re-engaged with that important local government sector, showing real leadership, not that train wreck of a CLP government we had to endure for the last four years.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the minister for his statement, and I thank the Opposition Leader for the motion it put forward. It is a broad motion and a good opportunity to talk about local government. The motion was: this Assembly acknowledges the significant role local the government sector plays in communities across the Northern Territory.

I have a contribution; there may be criticisms but there will also be support because I was in local government for a long period of time in Litchfield and on the Tiwi Islands. Local government is the third tier of government and is extremely important.

I will read from the president's message, Damien Ryan, a good friend of mine. I beat him every time in the Masters Mile walk in Alice Springs, even though he is younger than me. Because he is in a different age bracket he always gets a medal, but I am in an older age bracket and do not get a medal.

Members interjecting.

Mr WOOD: I know it is a sad story, and he does not have any sympathy for me either.

His opening message in the LGANT directory says:

Local government is crucial to the efficient delivery of services across the Northern Territory. In partnership with the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments, local government has a hands-on role in ensuring that the wellbeing of our communities is maintained.

Local government is all things to all people. It is waste management, employment and training, swimming pools, public libraries, road maintenance, animal management, infrastructure and facilities, child care and aged care to name just a few. But most importantly local government is about people and the human-to-human contact that allows all of us to maximise the benefits of the communities in which we live.

LGANT provides a collective voice for the diverse group of city councils, town councils, regional and shire councils that populate the Territory's local government landscape. LGANT maintains 2118km of roads (of which only 7.49km are sealed), hosts two general meetings and two conferences a year, has representation on the Australian Local Government Association to lobby the federal government on issues such as Roads to Recovery and Financial Assistance Grants ...

That says, to me, that the government has missed the seriousness of the criticism of not having a minister for local government. As far as I can always remember we have had a minister for local government. Sometimes it was attached to another department, but the words 'local government' always came into the name because it is important. As Damien Ryan said, it covers the entire Northern Territory except for a few spots, which I will come to later.

It is the third tier of government. This government is the controller of local government through the *Local Government Act*. Therefore, as LGANT has said, the government has made a mistake in not recognising it. You might say it is not a big deal. The minister said he still supports it passionately, and I honestly believe he will as I have known the minister for a long time. But sometimes there is a lot to gain from symbolism. It is important that there is a minister for local government.

I say that in all seriousness; I could not work out why it was not done. There have been many arguments about local government being recognised under the Commonwealth Constitution. That debate went round and round and nearly got to referendum, but then it got pulled back. I am not sure where it is at the moment but the government could give us a report on it from a federal perspective.

It is important that local government gets recognised under the Constitution, but there are people who fear that would be giving local government more power than it should have. It is important to keep trying. Trying to get funding for local government in the Northern Territory is like bashing your head against a brick wall; I do not know if people realise how difficult it is. I will give you a few examples of funding for different communities in other parts of Australia.

My council has a population of around 22 000 people. Its general purpose grants for 2016-17 were \$482 011. Golden Plains, a council in Victoria, has 20 809 people, and its general purpose grants are \$3.2m. They have roughly the same amount of people, but there is four times the amount of money for general purpose grants because the Territory gets its share of local government funding based on population.

It is extremely hard to change that formula, but we have to keep trying. The minister has complained about the drop in GST, but we have to continue to hammer governments to say that a provision of services for an area this huge with a small population requires federal government assistance more than what we get at present. I have been to many conferences in Canberra where local government, especially in the Northern Territory, tried to change this but got nowhere.

Latrobe is another municipality in Victoria. It has a population the same as Darwin and gets \$8.9m. Darwin does not get anywhere near that amount of money. Again, we lose out simply because of the formula.

It is important that LGANT and the Northern Territory Government continue to try to increase those payments. The municipalities only have rates, general purpose grants and roads. The minister mentioned extra funding, but that is generally for councils outside those municipalities.

The minister mentioned the \$5m strategic infrastructure fund, but if it goes to all 19 councils it works out to \$263 000 a year per council. When you are dealing with bitumen on the road or something similar it is not a great amount.

It is important that local government is the local voice. I have never supported super shires. They were far too big. Jack Ah Kit, who was the Minister for Local Government, had the better model of about 24 local shires. That was better because the word 'local' is really important. We now call them regional councils, but that has not made a difference. It was just window dressing by the previous government to look like it had done something.

Local authorities were no different to what was there before except we paid them money. We lost that localness, but picked it up again when the previous government called it 'local boards'. That helped to some extent. We went off the deep end, and Labor admitted later that they did not give that enough thought.

I take up the point the minister said about the Victoria and Daly Shire split. I was opposed to that; it was not something the population had a chance to have a say in and understand—a bit like Brexit. Did you understand the complications and ramifications of breaking away? The Member for Daly is right, but there was a lot of politics involved. It was just before an election and there were promises made, but I do not think promises were made based on good economic reasoning. They were based on trying to win the next election.

I would like to get a statement about where those two councils are financially and how they are running. Once you open a new council there are issues about new members and the costs of running an administration. It would be good, at some stage, to have a report on that.

Local councils should be the main employment agents for all people in those shires. Councils have the ability to find work for people; there is always work in those communities. I keep harping back to my time; if I could employ 117 men in our workforce—we gave people meaningful work. It gave them a reason to get up in the morning and have pride in themselves and their communities. That is an important thing.

I am sick of training groups. The federal government decides we will set up a training program; I come back in two years and that training organisation is gone and people have certificates, but they are still unemployed. We have an opportunity to use local government as the key centre for employment, and we should not call it Work for the Dole or CDEP. We should say we are giving people jobs.

We should give them a payment above the CDEP rates so they have enough money to live, bearing in mind the cost of living in those communities is high, so they can have a reasonable chance of keeping their house in good order, feeding their family, being able to play footy on Saturday and have pride in their community.

This also gets people work-ready for other opportunities that may arise. If we do not do this we will end up with a disgruntled population, especially our youth. Youth unemployment is something we have to be on the ball about. We have to reduce unemployment and give people work.

It may not be the most perfect work. We might not be sitting in air conditioned offices with a computer, but work means you clean up houses, paint houses, mow the lawns or fix the oval. If it is something happening to make your community look better then it is worthwhile. Local government can be the key to that.

Minister, you mentioned unincorporated areas today. I am concerned because the Litchfield Council is not in those discussions. If you amalgamate councils you need commonsense; do not do it just because somebody wants a big piece of country. It has to be geographically attached. The two areas attached to Litchfield geographically are Dundee and Marrakai.

The roads come straight to Litchfield. I do not know why Litchfield was not involved. It could have gone back some time when they said, 'We can't afford to take over those areas'. Litchfield has been through some up-and-down times with a CEO who was sacked. A manager took over the council. I do not know what happened in those discussions.

It is difficult to convince people who do not have to pay rates that they should take on local government. I have been through a number of meetings at Marrakai. They have been fierce meetings because some people are absolutely opposed to local government; others think it is not a bad idea. If you go into one of these communities the government has to be the lead agency to some extent.

You ask, 'What do you want if we amalgamate you with one of the other councils?' It could simply be a football oval and a community hall. That is something the community can hang their hat on and say, 'That

is ours. That is where we meet. That is part of our community. In return we will be part of another council. We will pay rates to maintain our roads.'

What is happening is non-rate payers of those areas are paying for roads to be graded and looked after. There has been a fortune spent on Dundee. Minister, you know the Labor Party spent millions on Dundee. They put a power line there which must have cost millions. Most of the bitumen road was built by Labor for blocks of land where some people live permanently and some go for holidays. Where is the return?

Those parcels of land have to be sorted out. This has been going on a long time. I stood out the front of the Corroboree Hotel when I was on the council and asked Marrakai people if they would amalgamate with Litchfield. That was my baptism of fire. My skin is much thicker because of that. It was the first time I realised how difficult it is to be a politician. I got well and truly howled down. People appreciated me coming there but they did not want anything to do with it. Times have changed. There have been meetings since then. The government needs to bite the bullet and use the carrot-and-stick approach. Do not just say, 'You will belong to this council'. You need to involve Litchfield.

It does not make sense if a council has to go to another council to maintain an area. I do not know what Litchfield Council's opinion is at the moment, but if you say to them, 'We will have an establishment package', I would expect them to get a private company or their own engineers to say how much it would cost them to bring that area to a reasonable standard. If the government want us to take it over they will pay us this much and we will take it over.

That is exactly what happened when the Litchfield Shire Council first started. The government said, 'Local government? Okay, we will give you this much money.' And a lot of that money was spent on roads, but there was an establishment package.

It has to be worked through sensibly. It should not be forced. You need to do it in a way that says, 'We will give you some benefits, and you will pay us rates'. A lot of people think it is unfair that areas in the Northern Territory do not pay rates when everybody else does.

It is good to hear about the review of the *Local Government Act*. I do not know when that will be out for public submissions. I also want to know if there will be a review of the effectiveness of the local authorities because they are paid money now. The Territory government pays three or four people to turn up at local authority meetings. I am interested to see if that is effective compared to when their attendance was voluntary, because obviously that adds cost.

There are a couple of things that concern me. I got a piece of paper sent to me from Belyuen; it was a bill from the Northern Land Council for Belyuen to pay \$426 000 for rent. My concern is that Belyuen Council could not afford to pay \$426 000 in rent. What the land councils are saying, and I have raised this with other bodies, is that they are now being charged rent on Aboriginal land.

Well, the very reason Belyuen Council happens to be there is because it is a council totally run by Aboriginal people. The land is all theirs. The council is there to provide services for the people who live there. All of a sudden the Land Council comes in and says, 'Here is a bill. Pay that to the trust account.' Who is responsible for the trust? Councils are now burdened with an unjust charge.

I am happy for councils to have a lease. I am happy for councils to pay a peppercorn rental. But if you charge councils money and those councils are there for the benefit of the people who live there, that means they cannot provide many of the services they should provide simply because they have a debt. I will say the same thing about a \$23m police station at Wadeye; we will pay rent on it. I cannot believe it. There are not many towns in Australia that would have a police station worth \$23m for about four thousand people.

It is there because people want it there; they want the police to safeguard their lifestyle. But they will pay rent and that money will go to the Land Council. I have had this argument before, but I think we have started off on the wrong foot. Kentucky Fried Chicken? No problem. Police station, school, hospital—they are primarily for those people. They should have a lease, but ...

Mr McCARTHY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! I request an extension of time for the member, pursuant to Standing Order 43.

Motion agreed to.

Mr WOOD: It is important. Local government will have a continually increasing debt for every yard it has. Someone thinks it is a good idea for people to earn money by charging their own local government, reducing the amount of money the council has to spend. It seems to have gone haywire and it seems like a bad philosophy to teach people.

I do not have a problem with KFC or things like that having to pay lease arrangements, but when it comes to government services that are there for the people—I will give you an example; we have the \$23m police station. You have to pay the costs of maintaining the building and the cost of the police. That costs a lot of money. The community will not do that. The taxpayer will pay to keep the community safe. Then someone says, 'Well, thank you for all that. Here is the bill.' I am sorry but I do not agree with that.

That is bad policy and it has come from the federal government. It has been supported by the CLP, which I could not believe it. They did not support it the time they were in government, but they supported it another time.

The Treasurer mentioned today, after a question from the Member for Nhulunbuy, about funding for a road from Ramingining to Central Arnhem. If you give road money to a council, surely the council can only spend that money on public roads. You cannot spend money on my driveway. That money is for public facilities.

If a road has not been gazetted, where is the right to spend public money on that road? We might need that road. It is important to have roads, but why have we not worked this out before spending money? There is money on Tiwi Islands. I have nothing against Tiwi islands, but on Melville Island they want to spend millions of dollars on a road from Pirlangimpi to Taracumbi. Is that gazetted? Is it a public road? I am not sure. I keep asking the question but do not get an answer.

I have travelled on the Central Arnhem Road. You go along here: permit. Then here: nothing. Further here: permit. If it says 'permit' then it is not a public road. How do you spend money on a road that is not public? It is a fundamental question; it is not saying these roads should not be sealed. The Member for Nhulunbuy's people should be allowed to travel where they can. If you develop it should be under a set of rules that is consistent across the Northern Territory.

We need those roads. If we want to develop industries or businesses without having to rely on the mining industry in Nhulunbuy then we need other ways of doing it. One way is to get people to Nhulunbuy to spend money, maybe on fishing or tourism. But, you are getting them there on a road that is private.

Where does local government fit when it is building roads within a shire that is all Aboriginal land? Should those roads be gazetted, made public? Should they be leased with a peppercorn rental so you have the right to spend public money on that road? It might sound like a philosophical question, but it is a real, legal question.

A long time ago governments used to grade the roads on cattle stations. That was an issue in itself and has been scrapped for this very reason. They wanted to use public funds to maintain roads on cattle stations that were not public.

That issue relates to how TOs and local governments work together. The TOs say, 'That is our boat ramp. We will charge you for it,' but who is responsible for the boat ramp? Is it TOs or local governments that should maintain that boat ramp? Should there be a charge or not? If it only comes to one island and people are charging for the use of that boat ramp, then there is a charge added to the goods going to that community. Are there discussions in the department or LGANT of what that relationship should be?

An area I should have brought up quickly—I was talking to the CEO of Litchfield at the opening of Kmart this morning. She hoped the government would fund a regional waste facility. It has probably been raised before. It has been on the cards for many years. We have had many debates in the days of Mr Chris Burns over waste in the rural area.

It is something that needs to be looked at. Taking rubbish from places like Dundee all the way to Darwin does not make sense. Maybe Darwin City Council makes the money, but it should be servicing communities further away from Darwin.

I support you, minister, about the local government elections. We have to tell people local government is an important part of our community. It is the part that tells us when there is a pothole in the road. They say,

'The street sign has been knocked over', 'There is a dog chewing my chickens. Could you come over and take the dog away and find the owner?'

It is an important part of our community. We need people who have a passion for local government. You need to have a bit of dirt under your fingernails; you have to know what a road looks like and when to say, 'Shire engineer, please come look at this road. It is falling apart.' It is a grassroots jobs, but it is also higher than that at times. For many people it is about the pothole being fixed or the playground being mowed. They are the important things. People may say that is not important, but it is for the people who live there. It is very much a thing we should promote as something that is worthwhile.

I regret the introduction of political parties into local government. I believe the Greens were the first to do it. We can do without political parties in local government. Why do you need a political party's policy to patch a pothole? If anyone has ever seen *Rats in the Ranks*, it is a classic video about how politics really stuffs up a local government. They are all fighting to be mayor; it is all about the party and not so much about the people. We need people to look at issues on their merit without political interference because that is what local government is about.

We cannot ban parties from being in local councils because that would be against our Constitution, but I encourage people to resign from their political party whilst serving on a council. They should act as a free person so they are not tied to anything.

We are all passionate about local government. I loved my time on Bathurst Island when I was the Town Clerk there, but the symbolism was not important to me. If LGANT has asked for it, then I ask the Chief Minister for it as well. Even if you just attach it to one of your other portfolios, a minister for local government, I believe it sends the right signal. It tells all people in the Northern Territory that this government really values local government as part of closing the gap, creating employment and bringing people together. It is something the government could do with a tick of the pen and it would not be too hard.

Mrs WORDEN (Sanderson): Mr Deputy Speaker, from my experience, the most important reason to create a regional waste facility, because there are adequate facilities within the Darwin municipality, is in the case of an emergency. If we had an emergency somewhere we could use that facility. It is important to find a location. There were some agreements not long ago about where that could sit, so some of that work has been done.

There are a couple of constituents who speak to me every week. I find them at the newsagency constantly speaking about potholes and roads. A couple of weeks ago I asked one of them if he had started paying rates yet. He looked at me and his mouth opened and said, 'No'. I said, 'We will have this conversation when you are'. I agree wholeheartedly that you cannot expect the taxpayers of Darwin to be paying for roads; they have had an extraordinary ride over the last few years from successive governments.

This government values local government. We have shown that time and again over the past eight months. We have a minister for local government; it is clear. The whole sector knows who speaks for them in parliament, who is working to implement and support their aspirations, and whose shoes are sitting under the Cabinet table. It is clear; that is the minister for local government. He is not talking to the sector in order to create mischief. He is talking to the sector to support their aspirations. I can speak on this subject with some authority, having spent the last four years on the City of Darwin Council before being elected here last August.

I will reserve my comments to my recent experience with the largest municipality. For those four years there was a Liberal government, and I learned a great deal, such as responsible budgeting and listening to community feedback, particularly about the important role that local government plays in our political landscape.

I would like everybody to imagine for a moment what the Northern Territory would look like with this level of government providing services like roads, rates, rubbish, upkeep of libraries, providing seniors programs, maintaining parks and local roads, administering animal bylaws, operating the local animal pound, maintaining public pools and things like the Fun Bus. Imagine getting down in the weeds with those things. I could go on. It is just ridiculous.

Local government is naturally the closest tier of government to the people. My colleagues and I understand the importance of that tier of government. In our remote areas, cities and towns, they are the eyes and ears of all levels of government, feeding information to the appropriate level of government so it can respond.

As an alderman I would speak to the Member for Johnston, who was our local member for the Chan Ward, and represent the needs of my local constituents then. We got things done together or shared information to get things fixed. That is the way it should work because that is how we solve problems.

I struggle to believe the Leader for the Opposition has any credibility. As a previous alderman, I did not feel that the previous Liberal government gave any value to the City of Darwin Council. Actually, it treated them with complete contempt. It is a two-way relationship, and one the previous government did not understand. For example, updating the velodrome in Millner—there was no consultation whatsoever with the council, just a phone call to the mayor saying, 'We will give you \$4m'.

It put the mayor in a compromised position. Do you take the money because you have an asset that really needs upgrading? Or do you say no because there has been no thought in the process? Of course you take the money. It caused quite a storm. I was accused of calling the Lord Mayor a dictator; it is not exactly what I called her. But she was in a compromising position, which was awful. There was no consultation. I was thrown under the bus for daring to say the \$4m was without consultation, with no information to support the project or need, and the money wildly insufficient.

It was a clear mistake. I am very certain the Labor government is not doing those sorts of activities. It is a ridiculous way to operate.

By far the worst scenario was when the previous Member for Fong Lim decided against the City of Darwin master plan, which was formulated and paid for by all three levels of government and consulted across sectors of the community. An incredibly huge amount of work and consultation went into that plan, but he decided it was simply not good enough. He decided not to place it in the *Planning Act* because he knew better. He decided it should simply be a guide. What is a point in creating a master plan if developers can continue to do anything they like?

That master plan includes a beautiful city park, but there needs to be some give and take around land; that will never be created if someone puts a great big skyscraper in the middle of it. That is just crazy, but that was his cavalier style and complete disregard for local government's solid planning objectives to steer our capital city forward.

To add insult to injury, without any consultation they simply plucked one single project, an esplanade walkway, out of the air and decided to fund it immediately. There was no consultation on the priority of the plan. It was a long-term project, but they decided to fund it immediately. Why pick a project that duplicated the clifftop walk to be an immediate need? Why not fund a link from the esplanade to the waterfront, something new and innovative, not duplication?

They went very quiet when they realised they could not simply chuck money at the government, dust their hands and walk away while another body, i.e. local government, struggled to deliver something unrealistic and underfunded from the beginning, with massive ongoing costs to our ocean.

In addition, I lost count of the times that spot rezoning was allowed despite strong opposition from council. If you want to see the results of that cavalier style of planning you can check out Duke Street. What a disgraceful outcome for successive decision-making by Liberal governments. There is no credibility in that space.

In my time on council we only saw the local government minister once. We may as well have not had one. As a Labor Party member I was generally ignored at key events and not acknowledged at any public events, even when I was Acting Lord Mayor or in the role of Deputy Lord Mayor—completely disregarded.

Proudly, our government does not trade in such petty politics. We are getting on with the job at hand and continue to build our relationship with the local government entities across the Territory. I have faith that our minister for local government is doing this and doing it well. I congratulate the minister, in contrast, of the recent announcement of \$5m to establish and operate the strategic local government infrastructure fund for projects that will improve key infrastructure in remote communities. Why do I do that? Because it is a smart way to enable local government and local decision-making.

It clearly states, 'We value you and we want to contribute but you need to tell us how we can help to achieve your goals.' I agree with the motion on the floor because we value local government; I agree with it, but just not his twisted perspective. We highly value local government. This government has in its ranks two former elected members of local government, the Member for Namatjira and me. Our insights, strong

connections and experiences are highly valued. We know how these things work and we are not overlooked in discussions.

I consider this motion to be a stunt. The message to local government members and rate payers is that a Gunner Labor government will not be eroded in its resolve to work hand in hand with local government for the benefit of Territorians. We will continue to listen and continue to act. I support the very words of this motion, but I reject the motivations for bringing the motion to the House.

As a last note, I also join the minister and the Member for Nelson in encouraging people to stand for the local government elections in August this year. I am regularly speaking to people standing in the area I represent, which has a good alderman. We are trying to find good candidates in our local areas, people who are passionate and already doing things around the community.

I urge everyone in the House to think about people who are passionate community members and have the energy to do the job well and put their hand up in August.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I stand to add a few comments to this interesting debate about local government. I believe in small government. In the Northern Territory we are well and truly over-represented. I think three layers of government and so many elected members is ridiculous.

Having said that, I accept the system we have in place. I was an elected member of local government; I was the Deputy Mayor for a period and I loved it. It was a great opportunity to represent my community at the grassroots. I value that experience, and I truly respect the contribution local government elected members make to their communities.

I respect the minister responsible for local government, but I feel it is necessary to put on the public record that I found the changes this government made to its portfolios as being unnecessary and confusing. I am still confused. I love to laminate things, for those of you who do not know me very well, so I laminate everything. I have a list of Cabinet members and the new portfolio names, and I refer to it all the time because I still find it confusing.

My comments tonight are about the fact that if I, as an elected member who deals with this every day, find this confusing then I understand why local government officials and elected members also find it unnecessary and confusing. I do not understand why the minister responsible for local government, an important part of the Northern Territory Government's responsibility that involves a lot of money, would not want to be called the minister for local government and have that portfolio very clearly stated. I do not understand why, so I will not spend a lot of time speculating as to why that has changed.

It has not done you any favours; I think it has done you a great disservice. People within the local government sector have become suspicious of why you have taken away local government from your title and portfolio. It has been perceived as a blow. I have enormous respect for the mayor of Alice Springs, Damien Ryan. He is an excellent mayor and the head of LGANT. He has struggled with this. He has spoken publicly about the confusion of this change, and that dropping the name 'local government' from the minister's title is a slight on the whole local government sector. I understand that.

The whole sector feels that the beginning of this term of government has been confusing; they have been chasing their tail trying to work out what the implications of these changes mean. You did not turn up to the LGANT conference in Palmerston. That, too, was perceived as a blow to the local government sector.

My point in standing up tonight is not necessarily to criticise the government but to say that I understand how the people involved in local government have been feeling for the last eight months since these changes were brought in. They are unnecessary.

I urge you, as a government, to revert back. What does it mean for you to make these changes and say you got it wrong? You would get a lot of support to change back to these clearer titles. Doing this would acknowledge the importance of local government.

Having no minister for local government and no local government portfolio reflects badly on this government. I do not think that is your intent. I think you were meaning to be clever. You changed child protection and Territory families and brought in these new modern titles. I do not think it has done you any favours though.

When the select committee, which I have recently been involved in, went to visit the Queensland parliament a few months ago this topic came up. It was not in the context of our experience, but the officials we met at the Queensland parliament spoke about how difficult changing the titles makes the operation of government. It is unnecessary and creates confusion so, ultimately, things go back to the way they were. That rang a bell with me instantly. It was interesting to hear those unsolicited comments about this issue.

That is all I wanted to say. If you are feeling attacked or in some way under fire—there is a case that what you have done has not done anyone any favours.

Mr PAECH (Namatjira): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I take this opportunity to speak about the incredible importance of local government.

I come from local government. I am a product of a good local government, that being the municipal council in Alice Springs. Having an extensive history of family members who have been elected members on regional and remote councils, I believe I am well-grounded to speak on the matter tonight.

I acknowledge Mayor Damien Ryan and presidents Roxanne Kenny, Barb Shaw and Adrian Dixon, whose regional councils fall in the great electorate of Namatjira. I thank them for their outstanding job in representing their jurisdictions and regional council boundaries.

As a former member of the Alice Springs Town Council, I reiterate in this Chamber the importance and understanding of local government and its democratically elected officials.

I pick up on the Member for Araluen's speech tonight. I am committed to local government, and my colleague, the Member for Sanderson, is also committed. We will continue to fight to make sure the voice of local government is represented.

We work closely with our minister who is responsible for local government, Hon Gerry McCarthy, to make sure local government remains a strong focus of a Territory Labor government. Councils look after a range of things, and I have always dismissed the mantra that local government looks after the three Rs which are roads, rates and rubbish.

That has never been adequate or accurately represented by any local government that I am aware of. Rather, the three Rs are a limited representation of local government. The fundamental role of local government is to increase and create attractive, prosperous, healthy and safe communities where people want to live and work. That is what the regional councils and municipal councils in Central Australia do every single day.

Local governments in my electorate are innovators in developing practical and targeted solutions to overcome problems. This is evidenced in the regional and remote areas by Alice Springs Town Council's, MacDonnell Shire's and Central Desert Shire's waste management practices. They have some of the best waste management practices in the Northern Territory. The Alice Springs Town Council has a wonderful waste management facility, which is available to the other regional councils.

Further initiatives—MacDonnell Regional Council is often the recipient of the Tidy Town Award, a program delivered by regional councils. There are also regional approaches taken by the Central Desert Regional Council and MacDonnell Council for working with community on housing repairs, community infrastructure and those types of programs. It is very refreshing to see; often they will be working on local sports ovals in preparation for the carnival. I believe that resonates with a number of people.

The Member for Nelson spoke about regional authorities. As a bush member in this Assembly I can certainly say that I am a strong supporter of regional authorities. I have been to a regional authority in every one of my communities, and it is wonderful and refreshing to see local people participating in those regional authorities to ensure they participate in shaping the future of their community.

They have a budget to look at a range of small initiatives or projects. They determine what money is spent on in their community. That is a clear measure to make sure people in those remote and regional councils have self-determination and autonomy in making decisions.

I speak from experience. During my time serving on the Alice Springs Town Council, we covered a wide range of activities, anything to secure the wellbeing and local amenity of our region. It means different things in different areas, based on the uniqueness of our local communities, their histories, needs and

character. Our regional councils are a great example of local government best serving its community. They understand the unique challenges people in regional and remote areas are faced with.

From my experience as a former councillor, and now a member of parliament, one of the most effective ways to engage with our communities, understand their challenges, and develop strong visions for the future is by working together with local councils to make sure we understand their challenges and needs. Local councils in bush electorates are often the best place to go to meet everyone and bring community together. They are a central focus of a lot of our regional and remote communities.

As the minister responsible for local government mentioned, in many locations across the Northern Territory a lot of our councils are responsible for the delivery of many services. They are tasked with looking at workforce development and providing long-term, sustainable economic and social development platforms.

The MacDonell and Central Desert Regional Councils, which I share with the Member for Stuart, are very innovative in looking at economic drivers to relieve the request from council for funding. I congratulate them on their innovative approaches. They continue to strive for success. I hope to work with them in the future to make sure we continue to deliver in those spaces.

A lot of regional councils look at programs for sport and rec, aged care, childcare, Centrelink and Australia Post. Many of them roll out important programs on behalf of the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments. It is a way of engaging people in the workforce. I pick up on the Member for Nelson speaking about how to work with our regional councils to make sure we develop and grow our local communities.

I was a proud member of LGANT and attended numerous conferences over my four-and-a-half year term with the Alice Springs Town Council. I reiterate to the Opposition Leader, and other members of this Chamber, that we are committed to local government. We understand the challenges local governments face. We will continue to work with and for local government. This is a government that will deliver for regional and remote communities to build the capacity of local governments to succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. It is something I look forward to working with Minister McCarthy on to make sure we deliver in this space.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I rise in support of the opposition's motion this evening.

It was a pleasure to attend LGANT's general meeting last month at Rydges Palmerston. Meetings are rotated around the Territory, but it was lovely to welcome all the delegates from LGANT to beautiful Palmerston and one of our newest community assets and facilities. It was lovely to have everybody from right across the furthest stretches of the Territory in Palmerston.

It was a wonderful experience to have attended that meeting as an observer, and to listen to the business of LGANT and its concerns and motions, which were very informative, as a large sector of our community and important contributor to the Northern Territory economy and social fabric.

There are nine regional councils, three shire councils and five municipal councils. It was great that almost everyone was represented at the meeting last month. I met several new people over lunch and had a chat with familiar faces.

This is a really important motion because LGANT, which represents all the various incarnations of councils across the Northern Territory, is very concerned about the steps this government has taken. For whatever reason, Minister McCarthy, the designated minister to attend the meeting, could not be there. It sent a strong message to LGANT that this government is closed to local government business.

There was a message from the federal minister, who was unable to attend the meeting, but we did not receive anything from Minister McCarthy. That did not go unnoticed. It is very important for this government to forge strong relationships with that body because it represents significant stakeholders in the Territory. LGANT represents its regions, just as we represent our electorates, and they have a role to play, just as we do.

Whilst many municipal councils have an ability to collect rates—it may be 60% of total revenue from rates for municipal councils—a lot of regional councils and shires rely on the Northern Territory Government to

fund projects and ongoing operations. Each council across the Territory has a varying role to play. Municipal councils have different roles than some of the more expansive responsibilities of regional councils.

This issue of not having a responsible minister for local government continues to play on the minds of LGANT and all local government bodies. This was raised with the minister in the meeting last December and still has not been addressed. As my colleague, the Leader of the Opposition, has very extensively set out in his contribution, the body felt that a letter should be written. It was signed by everyone present. There have been further deliberations by councils in their respective regions. This issue has been continuously raised with the government and, unfortunately, is falling on deaf ears.

I ask why the government is deciding to dig its heels in on this issue. We have a significant body in the Northern Territory with a cohesive position, yet we are seeing resistance and reluctance by the new government to give credit where credit is due and relook at how its portfolio system has been allocated. This government needs to relook at how those lines of communication have been set out.

As the Member for Araluen said, if members of parliament are confused about who is responsible for what, then it is not hard to understand why Territorians and stakeholders are finding it hard to navigate within this government. Having local government tucked away somewhere deep in the belly of a super department is clearly not good enough. It is not something LGANT expected and they would like to have it addressed.

Local governments are important in the Territory for a number of reasons. They are very large employers, which can be a good or bad thing, but when we speak about the workforce of the local government—approximately 60 to 80% of the workforce in those regional councils is Indigenous. They are significant employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorians, and that cannot be underestimated. Valuing the role they play is a very important part of continuing what these regional councils do for people in remote Northern Territory. The Territory is vast, and the roles and responsibilities of various councils cannot be understated. They contribute to much more than roads, rates and rubbish, as we colloquially say in the municipalities.

It is important to have this debate, and a lot of members have contributed today. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the backbenchers of the Gunner Labor government who have finally found their voice. It is lovely to see you contributing during General Business day. There has been an absence of contribution from the government, and I do not know if that is because all your ministers are tired from a big budget, but it is wonderful to hear your contributions to a very important discussion. Congratulations to the backbenchers for speaking about their personal experiences and their electorates.

I reiterate that the absence of Minister McCarthy at that meeting was not taken lightly. The government has not responded to local government bodies on why it has made changes. A clear pathway to the Cabinet room has been disbanded by this government.

These are questions being asked, which is why we are raising them. We call on this government to meet with LGANT, understand their concerns, swallow its pride on this issue and reinstate a portfolio so the local government community feels they have a clear process to engage with to have their voices heard.

I commend the motion to the House.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank everyone for their contribution. I did not think that many people would speak on it, so that was great. The ministry on the other side has eight members; why is there not a ninth member? Maybe this position was being kept for someone else, but it also enticed a couple of people sitting on the backbench who have experience in that area to stick up their hand and say, 'We have these credentials'.

The Member for Barkly is making sure no one comes and tramps on his ground by identifying himself as the minister for local government. I am glad he agrees with the motion. We need to get the administrative orders changed so he picks up that portfolio.

A couple of things that were mentioned during the debate that I would like to touch on because it was not just about the minister and the title of the minister for local government; it was about the importance of local government and how it seems to be getting neglected. This issue was raised when we were talking to Territorians. People brought this subject up with us.

I am not sure who mentioned it, but it was the dump. It might have been the Member for Sanderson talking about dumps in ...

Mrs Worden: Regional waste facilities.

Mr HIGGINS: Regional waste facilities. It reminded me of a discussion I had with the mayor of Darwin. She said one of her concerns is—this has been raised by the Coomalie council and possibly Litchfield—if we have a disaster in Darwin, where are we going to dump all the material? It is something the minister should look into. It is an important issue. We know the problems we have with asbestos left from Cyclone Tracy.

The Member for Nelson raised the issue of political parties at the local government level. I completely agree with him; the local government should stay away from the political party setup. Local government is for local issues and that is it. I do not completely agree with him that if you are a member of a political party you should resign. I do not think political parties should involve themselves in running campaigns for local government elections.

The Member for Namatjira spoke about local authorities. That was a CLP initiative and I am glad he agrees with it.

I must have gotten under the minister's skin because when he stood up today he immediately got away from the speech he had workshopped in his office. The hypocrisy of then picking on me for having a speech while he is reading off his speech—I wonder if him picking on my speech was written in his speech. I would have asked him to table the notes but I thought better of it. I thought, let the minister get upset about those sorts of things but, obviously, we really got to him.

I was worried he was reading the wrong speech when he was talking about education. I could not see the relevance of that, so he needs to go back to his speech writers and tell them this is about local government, not education. He got around to it in the end.

It was interesting when he implied that the CLP did something wrong with local government, shires and community government councils. I remind the minister of a speech I gave as a member of government when I said what a dog's breakfast the Daly electorate was left with by the previous Labor government. I will reiterate some of that. The shires were bought in by the Labor government. While in theory it might have been a good thing to do, the minister at the time, who had the seat of Daly, decided it would not happen in Daly because he might lose the election. He lost it anyway.

I will remind a few people of what is in the electorate of Daly. As the Member for Nelson said, we have Litchfield Council, which has been left out of the consultations about the issue the minister raised earlier in Question Time. He was talking about Coomalie, Beluyen, Wagait and the residents of Dundee. Litchfield seems to be left out of that.

Wagait Council is one of the old councils. It was supposed to be part of the Top End Shire. Do you remember the Top End Shire? There is also Coomalie, which has expanded its boundaries. They are a good council. I have a lot of time for them, and they try really hard.

We have a stack of people at Dundee, and they do not pay rates, as the Member for Sanderson mentioned. This is an issue that needed to be addressed almost eight years ago, when Labor was in power and brought in the shires. This problem has been around since then. We then had the unincorporated area at Marrakai. What discussions have taken place with the people there?

I congratulate the minister for bringing up the working group I set up. It was great that I got the people from Dundee Progress Association a seat at the table, and it is something that needs to be addressed.

Beluyen has also been in administration for 10 years. Now all of those are in the seat of Daly, which a previous member of the Labor Party had. He was a minister who pulled the plug on the Top End Shire just before an election because he thought he would lose that election. Well, he lost anyway, and today we heard that nothing is going to be done until we have another committee report or another four years before something is decided on.

People come into my office nearly every week asking what we are doing about it and how long they will talk about this. It is something that needs to be done.

A Member: You should have done something in the last four years.

Mr HIGGINS: We were in government the last four years, although we were not the ones who pulled the Top End Shire. Get your facts right.

The other thing the Member for Nelson raised is the issue of leasing on Indigenous land. It is a very critical issue, and it has caused problems in a lot of areas. One example is the roads in Nauiyu. It gets even more complicated there because the community of Nauiyu is freehold land. It is owned by the Catholic Church, so there is an even greater problem in trying to address repairing or building new roads with the council, which is the Victoria Daly.

What needs to happen is something I pushed in the last term of government, when I was not the local government minister. I would have loved to have been, but I did not get it; however, some of those issues were to try to clean some of this up. To give you some idea of what I mean, the people of Dundee once said to me, 'Gary, if you introduce rates out here we will not vote for you'. There were 250 to 300 people there that vote, and there were about 700 people in Litchfield who said to me, 'Gary, if you do not introduce rates out there we will not vote for you'. So, with simple mathematics, I went with Litchfield, which had the greater number of people.

I think the whole issue of local government is important and I am glad the government will support this motion. It is obvious from this discussion that it knows local government is important. I wish the Chief Minister would give that title properly to the Minister for Housing and Community Development. When the minister stood up and said he is the minister for local government, I think that was recognition by him that it is his responsibility; however, it is very important to a lot of people that they have a specific minister.

We do not even have an assistant minister, and that was the point I was making in the speech. We have assistant ministers for beautifying the CBD and the Arafura Games, but not local government. I understand that possibly the Chief Minister put himself into a corner; he had to hold that ninth Cabinet position for someone who may have ended up being a good local government minister.

He then made a commitment that would not change his ministry, but I am willing to accept that it adds to his ministry. A couple of backbenchers stuck their hands up today and said, 'Look, Chief Minister, I want that job. I think I can do it. I can show you how good I am as minister, so can I please fill that ninth office?' I really commend that. Anyone who aspires to that should be patted on the back and told, 'Give it a go'.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION **Assessment of the Northern Territory Onshore Gas Industry**

Mr MILLS (Blain): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that this Assembly call upon the Northern Territory Government to conduct a comprehensive economic assessment of how a carefully managed onshore gas industry would affect the Northern Territory. This assessment should include, but not be restricted to, an assessment of royalty scheme options for the Northern Territory and the effect of regional economic development, including employment and training, as well as an assessment of the economic impact of onshore gas exploration of small- to medium-sized Northern Territory enterprises.

This motion is very timely, as anyone watching these matters of energy and economic development of our nation would well recognise. Recently the Prime Minister moved into this space quite dramatically. We have a national problem with the supply of energy allowing our national economy to move forward. We are in danger of slipping behind the dramatic growth that is occurring in our region. I am referring to ASEAN and, more broadly, about when gas is exported it is purchased at a price which is not competitive for local purchasers. It also limits the economic growth and investment within our nation.

There is a solution, fortunately, and in many ways Australia has become lazy when we are so rich with resources. Countries like Japan have no natural resources but have managed to progress quite well on the strength of investment and resources being imported. We are rich with many resources, but have put ourselves into positions where we are largely exporting and not adding the value that we could. This comes back to the Northern Territory where we have the opportunity to carefully consider how we can play our part in the Commonwealth.

The motion refers to an independent and comprehensive economic assessment of the impact of making our resources available to increase the national supply of gas and help the east coast. How would it stimulate the economic activity in our regions and remote areas? I always think of Ampilatwatja. I visited

there as Chief Minister and they told me I was the first Chief Minister to visit them. It was a place with little opportunity on the face of it, but exploration uncovered that beneath the land there was gas and oil. It is in the pathway of a gas pipeline.

While there are resources across these arid and remote areas where we are seeking economic activity, what a difference it would make if there was a capacity for the stranded reserves to come to surface and generate economic activity. All of these questions need to be considered. When I put this motion forward I had been observing and increasingly noticing the economic opportunities and challenges that face the Northern Territory, as well the part we can play in supplying the international market.

There is a position adopted by this government, in which it has chosen to impose a moratorium. I respect that position of government, but there is a need to balance the dialogue with some very serious and carefully considered economic assessments of the decisions we are faced with as a community.

There are some political calibrations; it is easier to say no to something that people do not understand or are fearful of than to take a stronger leadership position and balance the risks against the opportunities to make a decision.

It is in that context that I thought it was necessary to have this information come into play so that the community can engage. We already knew there were going to be challenging times. We saw it coming a long way off. The previous Labor government, which was there for 12 years, knew there was going to be an end to the economic activities. We knew we were put in a position of preparing for a time such as this, but there are other opportunities that we need to carefully consider. I suspect this government is going to find itself in a position where it will have to make some difficult decisions.

I note that those difficult decisions, with respect, have not been made in this budget. I suspect they will be coming when you make a decision to allow onshore gas exploration. It will be required. I believe you are saving your political capital for that time because it does not make sense otherwise. I cannot see how you could be in such a position economically and make such modest decisions in revenue. The failure to develop a comprehensive narrative to take us beyond the four years—we can be optimistic but we have to be realistic. There are real challenges.

I grew up farming and I know that you cannot be optimistic about investing everything into the ground, hoping that it will rain. You have to balance your risks and be careful about the decisions you make. You need to be realistic. That is why I have put this motion forward.

It is a conversation that has not been strongly debated. We are speaking about environmental calibrations of onshore gas exploration and bringing those trapped reserves to the surface; however, I have noticed in looking at the inquiry into hydraulic fracturing that four weeks after I put this motion on the Notice Paper there was an announcement that such an investigation was to be called. That was on 18 April, a month after the motion had been put on the table, and it closes tomorrow. The tender for the economic assessment of fracking is under way, but it happened after the motion was put on the table.

Maybe I will take that as a compliment; maybe government will say it was going to do it anyway and I am irrelevant. If that is the case, I will accept that. But let us make sure we have included questions about what kind of royalty schemes could operate. It is necessary for governments to hold on to the possibility of gas reservation. When we were negotiating the gas pipeline to Gove it was necessary to hold that position in order to provide leverage to our discussions with those who would argue against such a position because it is an interference with the free market.

Government should not give that card away too easily. It is a time for us to consider how we could responsibly maximise the benefits we have. I hope the economic assessment will include sensible consideration of those options to advance ourselves economically.

At no time would I be arguing that we would recklessly go into hydraulic fracturing. We must be very careful when we approach such matters, taking great care of how we embark on such technology and its effect in the Northern Territory, making sure we have every safeguard in place.

There are those who, to use a term that is unfamiliar in a debate such as this, are fundamentalists. There are those who, no matter what argument you put to them, oppose hydraulic fracturing. There are those on the other side who equally adopt a fundamentalist position and would not care. They think, 'Just go ahead and frack the heck out of the Territory'.

Both positions are unreasonable. You cannot reason with such people. As an example, I often speak to people at the markets who adopt an anti-fracking position. It is almost a religious position, an emotionally-driven position. If you were to say to them, 'If we found that it would have no detrimental effect on the environment of the Northern Territory', and you could prove there may be some modest risks but those risks are completely outweighed by the significant benefits, 'would you support hydraulic fracturing?' Invariably, that person would say, 'Absolutely not'. Therefore they are unreasonable. Their position is locked in. There is nothing that can happen to change that position. There are those on the other side who will frack with no care for the environment.

I have always been agnostic and open-minded. I need to be persuaded. The majority of our community needs to be persuaded. It is easy to be afraid and adopt the hard positions left or right, but there is a great group in the middle who need to be persuaded. At times such as this we need that strong economic consideration to be brought into this discussion so we can have a balanced and careful decision made. May there be courage for a government to take that necessary step.

There is an opportunity. We can do it. The benefits significantly outweigh the risks. We can put measures in place to reduce that risk. That is my view. Out of respect for the parliament and the position government has adopted—and I can understand the politics of it—we need to know how we, as a community, make progress beyond the fear and entrenched positions to a new place, so we can develop a pathway that will take us forward.

The economic situation we have presented to us right now, with the plight of those who are in remote places with no economic prospects, except receiving handouts and looking over the horizon—there is no narrative to take us forward. How can we lock ourselves into such a position saying, 'No onshore gas'? It is irresponsible not to progress towards that.

This is my view. I will hold that view and maintain that position. That is why I will now be looking forward to this economic assessment being produced. What I have put on the table is now, perhaps, redundant. Let us see what the results of this tender produce, who they choose, whether they look at royalty schemes or not, whether they do a serious assessment of what this could mean to bringing stranded reserves to the surface and what that could mean for regional development. I hope we see that in there.

What it could mean for the long-term prospects of the country, whether it is the extended pipelines or the onshore gas facilities in Queensland and other places like that—the Territory is in a unique position to play a significant role in national development. I hope honourable members will understand the spirit in which this is presented. I acknowledge there is already some action towards this, so I hope members will now support the motion.

Mr VOWLES (Primary Industry and Resources): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Blain for raising such an important motion.

There has been some movement on this, but we made a promise to Territorians to have a moratorium on fracking and to conduct an independent inquiry. Nothing has changed. We are part way through the process of an independent scientific inquiry on hydraulic fracking and unconventional gas reserves in the Northern Territory. We have been open and transparent from the start. That is what Territorians are screaming out for, so we are doing that.

I think you have influenced that panel, Member for Blain, because you have done more than we can. The inquiry is independent of government. There are no predetermined outcomes and no influence from us. We just want to get it right. That is why we have allocated funds and started the scientific inquiry into hydraulic fracking. We must get it right.

As the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources, I meet with many people: mining companies; constituents; concerned Territorians and organisations. I have listened to their opinions on this very emotive topics. You would have seen in the media today that I have signed off, as the minister responsible under the *Energy Pipelines Act*, pipeline licence 34 to Jemena for the Northern Gas Pipeline. I also announced today that I have given approval to construct the Phillip Creek Compressor Station.

The way I operate inside and outside this Chamber in support of my portfolio responsibilities—I want to get on with the job. I am not about the headlines; I just want to get on with the job and responsibilities as the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources. People have raised concerns immediately regarding this, and that is fine as it is their right as Territorians. But we must always get it right, and that is what the scientific inquiry is doing.

Are we about jobs in this budget? You mentioned the budget and economic situation. The Treasurer has delivered a budget that is challenging, but we realise we have to invest in Territorians, and that means jobs. I mention jobs because that is what keeps people here and brings people to the Territory.

You mentioned the Northern Gas Pipeline—we are getting through the process. There will be no shortcuts with this. The pipeline licence has a rigorous process, as does the consent to the Phillip Creek Compressor Station. It is a really thorough process, which includes an independent validator for that process.

But what does it mean if this gas pipeline is approved? It means 900 jobs for Territorians during the construction phase. We do not want to see FIFOs come in; we want to see Territorians winning those jobs. Our focus is to make Tennant Creek the mining services hub of the Northern Territory. By approving the licence and consent to construct, we have seen contracts awarded to local Tennant Creek businesses, and that will continue.

Once the hydraulic fracture inquiry is completed—Justice Pepper said this will be at the end of December—we will make a decision, as a government, to either ban fracking completely in the Northern Territory or allow it under highly regulated circumstances in entirely prescribed areas.

We will put the Territory first and make the best decision for the Territory. We will not put existing fishing, farming, tourism and cattle jobs at risk for the possibility of jobs from fracking. We are not pre-empting the findings of the inquiry, and we will not compromise its integrity or independence in any way by interfering in it.

In regard to your motion around the gas reservation policy, the government's policy is to keep it that way. We do not want or need to have a gas reservation policy. It creates more red tape for the offshore oil and gas industry and is a barrier to further investment in the Northern Territory. One of the reasons the Territory originally got the INPEX project from WA is that Western Australia has a gas reservation policy and we do not.

The Northern Territory has guaranteed gas until at least 2034, which has been secured through the Blacktip Project in the Bonaparte Gulf, and has been secured for that period of time. We have excess gas. We have paid for it through the Blacktip Project. It is what the gas pipeline is being built for, with the previous government securing a 10-year contract with Power and Water over to Gladstone for that extra gas.

We will not be supporting this motion, Member for Blain. In the interest of the debate let us wait until the inquiry recommendations are put down and government has made a decision. Let us maybe come back next year with a similar motion and see where we go from there.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, it is a motion, to some extent, that is out of date. As the Member for Blain said, the hydraulic fracturing inquiry through Justice Pepper has already decided there was comprehensive economic assessment, and I welcome that.

I think the process is long winded. Having seen Justice Pepper in action at the hydraulic fracturing meetings with the public and at places like AFANT, she is an excellent person to be doing this inquiry. She is used to this type of inquiry where people have particular opinions while others have a completely opposite opinion. She is the right person because she has the experience behind her to filter some of that fundamentalism out.

I agree with the Member for Blain. I have seen this debate in my area. I tried to put out information to the public about coal seam gas. I have had people in my office talk about the problems in Queensland. So I said I would go to Queensland and have a look. I went to Queensland, interviewed a number of people and gave those interviews back in a form of a small booklet that went out to everyone, about 3500 households, in my community. I did not get one complaint about that.

People are dying for information that is not someone's philosophy about this issue. They want to know what it is about. Coal seam gas is not the same, generally speaking, as hydraulic fracturing but it has some issues we can compare with what could possibly or not possibly happen in the Northern Territory.

The economic assessment is really important. It can make a big difference and then it can have a completely inverse difference. I went to Roma, which is part of the Maranoa Regional Council. Their big problem was that the mining companies simply came onto properties; they just walked on. This caused

problems such as a farmer does not want weeds on his property, but machines and four-wheel drives come onto his property that have not been cleaned. If you want to upset a farmer in a hurry, that is one way to do it. All of a sudden you are driving on someone's property and you have not told them you are coming.

AgForce, which is similar the Cattlemen's Association, told me that from the beginning it was poorly started. I do not know whether that is the case in the Territory so far; hopefully companies like Origin and Santos have learned some lessons from the Queensland experience, but there certainly were issues. That is where Lock the Gate came from. My problem with Lock the Gate is not about locking the gate; it is that it has gone to an environmental body. It says no gas, but it was created because some brothers got sick of people driving on their property. They did not mean to say they were anti-gas, but they said, 'Where are the manners? This is our land you drive on.'

AgForce said it took about four years to recover from that situation, for farmers and the mining companies to speak to and respect one another. The economic benefits are one of the most important parts of this debate. One, because the GST cut is a wake up call for the Northern Territory. We simply do not produce enough of our own income through our own hard work. Nearly everything we do is an offshoot of Commonwealth funding.

We raise some of our own taxes, have mining and agriculture, but the majority of our money does not come from us. There are opportunities here, but you have to be careful of those opportunities. What happened in Roma—all of a sudden thousands of workers came into the town. People bought industrial blocks and the town boomed. All of a sudden a huge amount of people were coming in, about 4000 to 5000 people. The facilities at Roma airport were probably about a quarter of this building, with two toilets out the back and that was it.

Councils and the communities said, 'We need to improve'. They built a brand new airport facility at Roma. It is a beautiful facility and a great assistance to people in that area. Councils also said, 'You are going to use our roads'. This is not as straightforward as it might sound. There is about 40 or 50 kilometres of road in that Roma area that are now all bituminised, which is great for that community as a whole.

Local businesses and the service industry were also helped, except that sometimes the camp was out of the town and there was an issue of isolation. Some people who lived in town were required to live away from their family on those camps, which did not do any good for that particular person's marriage.

There were issues. If we go down this path we need to make sure this is all well and truly looked at and will not be detrimental to the Northern Territory. The National Party leader of Western Australia lost his seat over something similar, but I like the idea of royalties for regions. If you develop the gas at one area, you need benefits that directly help people in those communities. One thing we need to develop in the Northern Territory is improved roads.

If we can also spread electrical connections to the communities—if you get infrastructure you get development. If you have all-weather roads you will improve tourism for more than six months of the year, be able to move cattle, move people into remote communities and, hopefully, stimulate economies in those areas. If you get spinoffs—again, this is up to the government if it goes down this path. If the government can set the agenda for companies which want to operate in the Northern Territory, these are the things that need to happen.

It is developing a small town, not just having a temporary work camp stuck somewhere. You develop a town to be used for those purposes. Jabiru is one example; it is not used for mining as much as it used to be. What is the future of Jabiru? That is a million-dollar question. It is now used for tourism, is a base for Aboriginal people to come to and has a good footy oval. You can have some more permanent facilities that come from the exploration and sale of gas.

The issue about the safety of gas—having looked at the issue in Maranoa, there are a huge number of wells in that area. The economic benefit for farmers is that they get paid, similar to a royalty, per borewell on their property, per year, earning an income. One of the farmers I spoke to said the money they were getting has meant they have all-weather roads, shade over the cattle yards and tanks instead of turkey nests.

The company over there extracts water; hydraulic fracturing is putting water in the ground, so you cannot compare this totally. But they got benefits of using the water which goes through a reverse osmosis process, and they were irrigating on their property courtesy of the company who installed the irrigation.

If we go down this path we have to make sure there are long-term benefits for the people in that region. If the gas lasts 50 years, that is it—but if we can use some of that revenue to develop the Territory in a good way.

FIFOs coming in is a big issue. But, if you were to develop the Beetaloo Basin, how many people live there? The number of FIFOs that were brought into Roma would be about four times the number of people that lived in Borroloola. Where would you get your skilled labour force? If you are bringing them in, then you make a permanent facility, and when they leave there is something of benefit to that community for the future.

The minister for mines said he does not support reservation policy. I have emails from a certain union that says it supports a reservation policy. I believe in a slightly different version. I believe, for example, if there is an area where we know there is gas, why can we not say that area is not open for exploration at the moment? The worst thing would be that we sell all our gas and then have to buy it back because we have run out. We need to ensure some of the gas in the Northern Territory is retained for Northern Territory industry. We will not have to go elsewhere to buy it because we already have it here.

I am not sure that is a reservation policy, but I would be concerned if we end up buying gas from some other state or overseas simply because we sold everything in the Northern Territory. The reservation is not simply to stick it in a tank somewhere; it is to say, for the time being, that area will not be used or developed because there are plenty of other areas.

There are arguments for and against this. A lot of the arguments are economic arguments, but I try to look at it from a commonsense point of view. If we need gas to develop the Northern Territory I would hate to say, 'We sold it all and now we have to find a place to buy it back'. This is not a debate as such, but I would have liked to have heard more from the minister on that particular point of view.

There is another area that we do not touch on too much. There was a lot of talk when gas first came to the Territory that we could start a manufacturing industry. People used to say that the downfall of the Northern Territory is that we do not have manufacturing. The closest we have to manufacturing is Harry Maschke, who makes air conditioning ducts at Berrimah. Again, if we are to develop more of our own income we have to look at other ways to do it.

If we have cheap gas, can we attract people to the Northern Territory? Can we attract manufacturing? To some extent we are looking at that in relation to the company that will come to Middle Arm next year. They will develop and use some minerals there. They will require energy, and I presume gas will be an important part of that.

One of the biggest phosphate mines is in the Barkly. The question is, can that gas be used to turn it into fertiliser? Gas is important.

I have a problem with people who do not want to know about gas at all. If you live in Alice Springs, what do you heat your house with? What do you cook your barbecue with? People are la di da about having batteries. I guarantee that if you boil a jug and try to cook the leg of lamb, your batteries will be finished in about half an hour. They are good for some things but they do not solve the whole problem of energy.

We need to be sensible about the need for gas. People do not like gas because they do not want to see more carbon emissions in the atmosphere, and that is fair enough. I could get up and say, 'We have a form of energy in the Northern Territory that does not have a carbon emission and it is called uranium'. I did not hear uranium in the economic summits. Since Fukushima we are too scared to mention it, yet the United States is building four more nuclear power plants in the next year or so China is building an enormous number of nuclear power plants because it is the only way they can put a dent in their coal-fired power stations.

That is not to say they are not doing good things with solar, but sometimes we put things under the carpet because it is not politically correct. We have a form of energy in the Territory that, for some reason, seems to be off the agenda. We export to other countries that produce electricity without a carbon emission, yet we do not want to know about it. I understand why, because for most politicians to get up and talk about uranium and nuclear power is to get howled down.

That is the way Australia is at the moment. I understand. I am not shying away from the fact there are issues. We are storing the small amount of waste we got from France at Lucas Heights, which is enough to fill the corner of this building. We had people protesting and jumping up and down about something that is

perfectly safe to store. It has to be stored for a long time, no doubt, but it is perfectly safe as long as it is monitored.

The motion that has been put forward raises some good issues. People are looking for non-political facts about hydraulic fracturing. The hydraulic fracturing committee was excellent in that it tried to explain the science. I could see a lot of people at that meeting struggling to understand it. That is probably part of the problem. When an engineer talks about how you would make sure there is no leakage between an aquifer and the gas area, shows you the casing and how it is developed, people get lost.

Whilst it was terrific for people to listen to someone coming from a perspective of knowing what the industry is, some people found it too hard. That can be a problem when you start to move into technical aspects of science. The minister for mines would understand that mining is a scientific industry that requires people who have skills.

A lot of people cannot always understand the geology, chemistry and physics of what is required when it comes to producing minerals. It is difficult for a lot of people who might sit down and watch Days of Our Lives and live in their own community. But when you have to deal with complex issues, which government has to look at, then there is a responsibility for government to make sure people understand some of those complex issues. It is a difficult issue for some people, but it is really important. I thank Justice Pepper for the work she is doing.

I hope the government makes a decision that will benefit Northern Territory because I do not think we can rely on the GST forever. We need to do something about our economy, and it should be a mixed economy. I do not believe it should be focused on one thing only. We should be focusing on trying to increase those sections for our economy so it relies less on GST. I thank the Member for Blain for bringing forward the motion. I am not sure if it is worth supporting because I think it has been taken over by Justice Pepper and her inquiry.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, up until now we have respected that the Labor Party won the election and had a mandate to do another scientific inquiry on hydraulic fracturing. I would like to emphasise my use of the word 'another'.

The Country Liberals never believed another inquiry was necessary, given that Dr Allan Hawke completed an independent scientific inquiry a couple of years earlier. We have called on the government to reconsider the moratorium when the interim report comes out. That is a position we have held, given the extensive time line of the moratorium and the final report not coming out until December. We have been calling on the government to begin the process of drafting the necessary regulations at the point of receiving the interim report. That process in itself will take a significant body of work and will take time.

Those regulations can then be tweaked once Labor's inquiry comes back with its full recommendations in December. But we have been pressing the importance of beginning the process as soon as possible. That was our position until yesterday, when the Labor Party handed down a budget with a \$1.3m deficit. For the Labor Party that is business as usual. The most disappointing aspect is the Labor Party's nonchalant attitude to the debt. It has shown a lack of urgency to address the debt and deficit that it has placed Territorians in.

The Labor Party needs to recognise what it has done with the budget deficit. We think you need to apologise to Territorians for the mistakes you have made in this budget and rectify this situation. It is in spiral, and we need a government that is bold and ready to take action for the benefit of future generations of Territorians.

One way to create jobs in the Northern Territory and ease that budget pressure is to lift the moratorium on hydraulic fracturing and restart the hard work the Country Liberals were doing in upgrading the Northern Territory environmental regulation regime for properly regulated hydraulic fracturing. The Labor Party's inquiry associated with the moratorium would not report until December 2017.

We have serious concerns, based on this government's past performance, that at the rate this government makes decisions it will not be in a position to respond to the December 2017 report until well and truly into 2018.

Our message to the Chief Minister is that Territorians cannot afford to wait for a December report or however long—it has not been identified by this government—it will take them to assess that report and make a decision, let alone how long it will take them to recommence the regulatory framework process.

If this government is serious about creating real and sustainable jobs then we call on you to take action now. We are not talking about dozens or hundreds of jobs; we are talking about thousands of jobs for Territorians.

The national energy market regulator has warned of looming gas shortages that could lead to widespread blackouts as early as next year. The Australian Energy Market Operator has also warned the power costs will continue to rise even if new gas suppliers are online, putting financial viability of some commercial and industrial customers under threat. With energy demand rising and gas production from existing fields in decline the market needs new sources of gas or the rapid implementation of new non-gas electricity generation to avoid cuts the regulator has said.

Territorians want results, energy security and affordability. The oil and gas industries peak body, the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association, said the shortages were the consequence of many years of policy failure by state governments, particularly in Victoria and New South Wales. The policy failure has led to expenditure on onshore gas exploration falling by 64% last year, its lowest level in three decades.

In the Northern Territory we have estimated gas reserves of approximately 234 trillion cubic feet, which are vast reserves of gas. What does this government do when faced with that resource? What they have not done is tried to work towards a solution for how onshore gas can be produced safely. Instead this government has put up road blocks.

People wanted to invest in the Territory. The Chief Minister has crippled an entire industry overnight, all for his own political advantage. The opportunity cost of the moratorium on that industry is huge. It effects how quickly they can move to production, hire people and pay royalties. It effects our reputation as a Territory which needs to be open to business.

You give credence to people's concerns and stoke their fears by announcing a moratorium, knocking an industry off at the knees. It can be very difficult to change your mind two years later and say, 'Whoops, it is okay. We now have another report and realise it is all safe.'

We urge the government to get on with developing the Territory under best-practice regulatory regime recommended by Dr Allan Hawke. This government talks a lot about jobs, but the only ones you seem to think count are the ones paid for on the Manison Mastercard.

Debate suspended.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms MANISON (Deputy Chief Minister): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

Ms MOSS (Casuarina): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to speak about an important initiative that kicks off later this week. Between 5 May and 19 May the Nappy Collective runs its fourth nappy drive in Darwin, which I am excited about. The members of this House appreciate our crisis organisations that serve our communities around the clock, 365 days a year. They work with Territorians in some of the most difficult and vulnerable times of their lives.

I remember hearing about this initiative from someone in Alice Springs. It was something I wanted to see Darwin participate in. I was pleased to make contact with the Nappy Collective team and let them know we wanted to add Darwin to their list of drives. We are now having our fourth drive in May, which is fantastic.

I am really pleased with the number of local young mums who have joined and taken the lead in this, led by Larnie Batten. This initiative was started by a group of young mums whose babies had become toddlers and outgrown their nappies, so they wondered what they should do with these nappies and began looking at all the different options.

Thankfully they settled on getting in contact with their local crisis organisations to see if they could use them. Many of our women's shelters have women and babies who are in need. Those necessities are really important. It can be hard for people to get ahold of basic necessities at those really difficult times. It is important that we support those organisations to provide those really important things that we all take for granted on a day-to-day basis.

The first drive was held in October 2013, in which they collected 1500 nappies in that one drive over two weeks. They have now collected over 1.7 million nappies around the country, which is incredible. In Darwin over the next couple of weeks we have a number of different organisations which are nappy collective drop points, such as SILK Laser Clinic Casuarina, my office, Little Rompers in Coconut Grove, and the Member for Sanderson's office. You can also see Stevie and her team at Little Lamb in Millner, the YWCA Darwin, D&H agencies and the Member for Spillett's office in Winnellie. I encourage people to please keep giving.

My office at this time of year turns into a place for nappy storage, which is interesting because I do not have babies of my own. We have days of counting, and we have been able to give thousands of nappies to the YWCA, Dawn House and the Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter in Darwin. It was especially important last year at Christmas; it makes a huge difference for women and children at that time. I encourage people to check it out. There is a Facebook page for the Nappy Collective and also for the Nappy Collective Darwin.

I also thank our local media. They have really gotten behind the Nappy Collective and promoted it. We appreciate that work and the difference it makes in women's lives.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise tonight to share with the House my recent travels to Ngukurr community in the Arnhem electorate. I was very fortunate to have Mick Uibo, my father, accompany me on a volunteer trip. This is the retired campaign manager who is still working his way around the electorate with me when I need him as extra support. I give a big thank you to my father, Mick, for coming to Ngukurr with me.

We flew from Katherine airport to Ngukurr community. It is about an hour on a small charter flight over some beautiful country, which was nice and green due to the big Wet Season. I thank my former Numbulwar neighbours and new residents to Ngukurr, Abby and Ashwina Raul, who collected Mick and me from the airstrip. It is always nice to go to a small community and be able to ring someone and say, 'Please come and pick me up at the airport'.

I stayed at Darlala Motel, a very exemplary run business. It is a beautiful facility owned by the Yugal Mangi Aboriginal Corporation. It is a prime example of economic development in a remote community.

My prime purpose was to visit stakeholders and attend meetings in Ngukurr community, and to celebrate Anzac Day in the community and neighbouring region. My first stop was the Anzac assembly held at Ngukurr School. Thank you, Principal Lynda Pascoe, for allowing me to attend the assembly. It was a very beautiful assembly, and each of the students from all of the classes made beautiful flower wreaths.

It was a wonderful ceremony at the school. Some senior students read Anzac poems, which I thought was fantastic, to a very well-behaved audience. The Ngukurr School assembly for Anzac was wonderful.

Next, I was off to the Ngukurr Police Station where I visited Acting Officer in Charge William Caskey to hear about the lay of the land in Ngukurr, touch base and see how things were going for the Ngukurr police.

The next visit was the Ngukurr clinic, which is run by Sunrise Health. I was very grateful to the busy manager, Shelley Back, for making time to meet with Mick and me, and to touch base and see how the Ngukurr clinic is going. The new Ngukurr clinic has been built and, hopefully, in the middle of this year they will be moving in. I have yet to find an exact date but we hope the clinic will be up and running in June/July and the old clinic will be used for a different purpose.

Unfortunately the meeting with Ngukurr shop was cancelled due to a pending funeral that afternoon. It closed out of respect. I am hoping to catch up with the Ngukurr store when I visit this month.

The next visit was the Ngukurr Arts Centre. The manager, Jude Emmett, was fantastic in welcoming us. We had a really good poke around. We looked at some of the beautiful paintings, sculptures and arts and crafts the men and women from the community are producing. It is fantastic artwork, so if you get a chance to go out to Ngukurr you should visit the art centre. They are also visiting the Barunga Festival during the Queen's Birthday weekend, so if you cannot make it all the way to Ngukurr you can visit Ngukurr arts stall at Barunga festival.

I am very privileged to be wearing a beautiful necklace which was carved onto buffalo horn by Karen Rogers. It has a couple of little dragonflies etched into it and is painted, so I am sure the minister for arts would love to see that type of work when she can hopefully get to Barunga or visit Ngukurr with me.

They will hopefully be selling these necklaces at the Barunga Festival. They are very good at experimenting with different types of arts and crafts, and producing really nice profits for their talented artists.

Next, we liaised with Chief Petty Officer Tony Thomas from the Navy Community Engagement Program. He is the Northern Territory Coordinator and joined us on the Ngukurr boat barge over to Tomato Island, about 15 minutes up the river. To my disappointment, Tomato Island is not an island; it is on the mainland. I was mentally preparing myself for this disappointment. It was slightly disappointing to see that Tomato Island was not an island.

It is a beautiful spot. Parks and Wildlife are doing a fantastic job at maintaining the site. It has a wonderful campground. I encourage everyone to visit in the Dry Season. It is right on the Roper River. Flick a line, Member for Brennan, and you might get a barra.

We were hosted very kindly by officer Dave Perry from the Royal Australian Air Force, who is based at Tindal, near Katherine. We felt very welcomed by him and his crew. We were very lucky to get a fresh barra barbecue, much better than the tinned stew we had planned for dinner that night. It was a beautiful barra dinner, fresh from the Roper River.

We camped overnight so we could attend the dawn service at Tomato Island. It was great to see some residents from Ngukurr go across. It was a 5.30 am service, very early for someone who does not like waking up early all the time. It was a privilege to go there and attend this ceremony. It was very well organised, respectful and reflective. One of the veterans who helped to build the monument for the flagpole said at the very first service they had 15 people. At the service last week they had over 50 people. The service is growing in popularity, and I encourage people camping on Anzac weekend to attend that. It was very special.

It was followed by a morning barbecue, complete with Anzac biscuits, a cup of tea and a cup of coffee. We started to pack up our campsite and then, very foolishly, I went to take a camp shower. I heard a huge rumbling and saw fighter jets from Tindal flying overhead. I was covered in soap and very tempted to run out in my towel but I did not. I was very disappointed because I was the only person in the whole campsite who missed out on seeing the fighter jets, which were flying very low.

Just to rub it in, they turned around and came back a second time. I missed out on them twice, but I can assure you it was an extremely exciting show. Everyone at the campsite got to enjoy that. I was slightly devastated to miss seeing the fighter jets, but it was really wonderful that they were supporting their comrades who had been at the Tindal service.

Dave and his wife, Sue, kindly took Mick and me back to Ngukurr via their own personal boat. We headed up the mighty Roper River, and they were off for a day of fishing on the water. It was a very nice way to spend the Anzac Day public holiday.

Another big thanks to teacher Abby Raul, who picked Mick and me up from the boat ramp, so we could go to the arts centre and have a look at the stunning artwork from the local Ngukurr and Numbulwar artists. Thanks also to Jude, the Arts Centre Manager, who allowed us to cruise through on the public holiday. We rocked up at the right time for tea, biscuits, coffee and some blueberry pancakes, so we were pretty lucky that day.

My father and I walked up the hill to the council office and attended the 10 am Anzac Day ceremony at Ngukurr. It was a lovely service organised by Janine Ballsey, the area manager for Roper Gulf Council, and Mr Paul Emmerett, who did a great job of cooking sausages. A special mention must go to the two flag bearers, two Ngukurr students, who I saw the day before do the special practice of pulling the flags up and down. Well done to Ngukurr School for working with its students to provide assistance with flag raising for their assembly and also at the community service.

Abby transported Mick and me to the Ngukurr airstrip so we could travel back to Katherine. Once we were home there was a quick unpack and repack of bags before driving three hours to Darwin to attend the CPA opening dinner at Parliament House, hosted by Madam Speaker.

It was a lovely couple of days at Ngukurr and Tomato Island. I acknowledge Electorate Officer Brooke Brenner and her three-year-old son, Cash, who represented the Arnhem Office at the Mataranka Anzac service. I thank the Mataranka residents for their warm welcome of Brooke and her son.

I also acknowledge Councillor Anna Egerton from the Jabiru ward of the East Arnhem Council for her MC role at the Anzac Day ceremony held in Jabiru, and for allowing young Bridie, Emilina, Sarah, and her daughter Gabby to lay the Arnhem electorate wreath for the Jabiru Anzac Day service. Thank you, Anna, for your support. I hope I will be able to travel to the Anzac Day ceremonies in the Arnhem electorate. We have some really great photos from all three services.

Mr HIGGINS (Daly): Mr Deputy Speaker, my adjournment will be very short and sweet. Today is a very proud day in the Higgins household because today is the 21st birthday of my granddaughter, Shay Marie Higgins. Shay represents the third generation of Higgins in the Territory. She is very special to her grandmother and grandfather.

Being the parents of four sons, it was with a lot of excitement that our first grandchild was a girl. Since then, we have had seven grandsons, so it is great that we have a girl who is the oldest of the bunch and can look after all the others.

Shay, you are a terrific granddaughter. You are the best granddaughter. You are the only one, but you are one of the best around. Your parents are proud of you, and your grandmother and I are both very proud of you. We do not want to be great-grandparents just yet. Thank you very much and have a great day, Shay.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, some people in the Darwin region might remember this person with fondness. His name was Merv Meyer. There was a notice in the paper that he passed away. This comes from the *NT News* in 2006:

Bargain hunters searching for treasure among other people's trash generally do not have to go far. The Tip Shop at Leanyer dump attracts people from all walks of life, from those wanting cheap building materials to serious trash collectors on the lookout for a lifetime bargain.

For owners Rick Geater and Merv Meyer such an eclectic mix of customers makes for an interesting day at the office.

'We are like Mitre 11', Merv said, 'What you cannot find at Mitre 10 is probably out here somewhere; there are all sorts of odds and sods.'

The Tip Shop sources most of its stock from the dump next door, ensuring a constant supply of materials.

'We've got a fair amount of regulars who turn up every day,' Rick said. 'Some even come twice a day in case they have missed something.'

Then a little further on things changed:

Darwin's Steptoe is being put out of business. Merv Meyer, who runs the tip shop next to the Shoal Bay rubbish dump has been given one month to close by Darwin council. He was told of the decision by fax. The council have said the Tip Shop is an eyesore. Mr Meyer, who has operated the shop for more than 10 years, said it is very disheartening.

He said he stood to lose thousands of dollars in public liability payments and prepaid leased equipment as a result. '

This year we got flowerpots, about 200 pushbikes and hundreds of whitegoods. We have also got a lot of trampolines and mattresses. We take everything except kids, mother-in-laws and dogs.'

Mr Meyer said the recycled metal would be exported and he encouraged people to use the centre regularly.

'People need to know we are here and they can use us,' he said, 'using this facility keeps landfill costs.'

In 2010 there was the closing down sale of Shoal Bay recycling tip shop, and it closed on 30 September. Many Darwin people would remember Merv. I remember him because he also was the chief scavenger at Howard Springs tip and Humpty Doo tip. He would go through all the materials there.

Yes, he was a Steptoe and Son person, but he was a great believer in recycling. A lot of people say they are environmentalists, but sometimes people like Merv are the true environmentalists because they made

the effort; they got their hands dirty and, probably, a few diseases when they crawled over tips and recycled material that would otherwise get buried.

I especially remember him because—he was born in South Australia and died in South Australia. He was a key supporter and backer of mine, and I loved him for his passion in wanting container deposit legislation in the Northern Territory. He knew how good it was in South Australia and he pushed it as best he could in the Northern Territory. Some of us, because there was a group of us who worked tirelessly to convince governments to bring in container deposit legislation, know how passionate Merv was.

Yes, I suppose he will not be someone who has his picture in the walls of some great museum, but he was a person you would call salt of the earth; he would tell you it straight. If you were a dickhead he would tell you, but you did not mind because it came from a bloke who worked his butt off all his life. He worked hard, and he was a person that you admired and always enjoyed his company. We have lost a little part of the Top End, Darwin and the rural area's history.

Many pub owners in the Northern Territory would remember Merv pulling up with his skip bin and loading up all the bottles, because this was before the container deposits came in, and he would take them to the recycling depot. Unfortunately the recycling depot decided to charge more than it was worthwhile, and he had to give that business away. He was supported by the hoteliers because he did a service for them by taking all those bottles and cans away.

It is worth remembering people like that because they have their heart and soul in this part of the world. Unfortunately Merv, as is my understanding, got quite sick and he had to go back to South Australia. But he was a Territorian and he was a true environmentalist. Rest in peace, Merv.

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, tonight I will speak about a very special place in my electorate and some very special people associated with that special place. This special place is tucked away in the bush a little way past the Corroboree tavern. If you have the opportunity to visit the sculptures on the granite boulders you will be blown away by the sheer size of the sculptures engraved or chipped into the rocks, by hand I must add.

They are simply stunning and mind-boggling given the level of work, sweat and, probably, blood and dedication given by one special man called Mitsuaki Tanabe from Yokohama in Japan. The key sculpture of the collection is an 82 metre sculpture of a grain of wild rice. Other sculpture in the area include green ants, lizards, style grubs, flowers, small rice grains and words with special meanings. By far the most amazing piece is the 82-metre-long sculpture carved into the granite rocks.

Sadly, Mitsuaki passed away a couple of years ago, but his life legacy and extraordinary talents as an artist, teacher, father and senior Japanese cultural man will live forever.

Mitsuaki was a man with exceptional talent, an environmentalist, teacher and master. He was a stubborn man and tough man with drive, passion and vision. For the past 20 years of his life Mitsuaki created sculptures themed on a single motif: a grain of rice. But the rice selected was not the common sort that people eat at home and in restaurants. It was the mother of all rice, the wild variety that is the ancestor of today's cultivated rice, which is believed to have been sprouting on this planet for no less than 10 000 years.

The Territory has had this wild rice on the Adelaide River flood plains. Some experts say our wild rice has travelled from the top part of Australia, across Asia, across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas and down into South America. This is from the experts, who must have an interesting job to track the movement of wild rice.

Mitsuaki was inspired by the wild rice. He wanted to showcase the visual impact of the rice and lead people to understand the importance of biodiversity. His work has been housed in important places all around the globe, such as the Global Crop Diversity Trust at its headquarters, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations in Rome, which has a strong link with the Svalbard Global Seed Vault and is involved with the Norwegian government and the Nordic gene bank.

I digress from Mitsuaki for a moment, but it is related to his story.

The seed vault, which opened around 2008, has the capacity to house 4.5 million samples, amounting to about two billion seeds, in caverns dug into the arctic permafrost slopes of Spitsbergen Island in Norway's Svalbard island chain. The ground is permanently frozen and is the modern day Noah's Ark. These types of

facilities house threatened plant life. The vault is also a resource from which agricultural production at regional or global levels could be restarted in the event of a massive disaster.

Mitsuabe's stainless steel sculpture of an unhulled rice piece is nine metres long, including a spear like whisker extending from its tip, a feature peculiar to wild rice. Weighing about 250 kilograms, the completed work was shipped to Rome to be housed in the facility. Mitsuake never did anything by half; big and bold was his trademark linked to preserving biodiversity.

So back to the Mount Bundy sculptures and story. How did Mitsuaki come to the outback of the Territory over 10 years ago? He travelled the world in search of the origins of the wild rice and it brought him to our flood plains in the Northern Territory. Sometime in the early 2000s there was a biodiversity initiative featuring the wild rice fields and it caught his attention. A request came from the Australian Embassy in Japan to inquire the possibility of carving into our granite rocks. Murray Hire, who was a former director of the department of industry and development, was the contact at the time.

Two years later Mitsuaki travelled to Darwin and then to Mount Bundy to explore the rocks and determine what he could do. For the next 10 years the dedicated man travelled to the Territory for a month each year and worked every day in the heat with handheld chisels, a diamond cutter and a small generator powered grinder, to carve out what is now a masterpiece and a legacy for his family, as well as a tribute to wild rice.

I have been to the site a few times and can reliably report that granite rocks store much heat, and working on granite rocks would have been hotter than the hubs of hell. It is clear that Mitsuaki saw that wild rice was one of the main foods of mankind. He understood that for breeding good species of rice for commercial harvest, sometimes you need to go back to the wild species to look at the wild gene pool and see why it has been so successful.

Mitsuaki understood the need for preserving the wild species and its habitat. During his time in the Territory, Mitsuaki stayed at the Corroboree tavern and became good friends with owners Peter and Lynda Francis and the locals who frequented the pub. At the end of a hard day carving in the heat. Mitsuaki was known to enjoy a coldie with friends and talk of many things. During his visits Greg Leach, former Chief Botanist, visited the site and shared many enjoyable times with Mitsuaki.

When Mitsuaki died unexpectedly in 2014 there was great sadness experienced by all who knew him, especially his family. The 82-metre wild rice carving was unfinished and many thought that was how it would remain. When his son Taka came to understand the importance of the sculpture to his father, he travelled to Australia with an artist, who had worked with his father on the piece, to complete his father's work.

There were only sketches of the balance of the sculpture; however, with persistence and dedication, the three-man team finished the job within a couple of months. The two artists who travelled with Taka were Jun Yamazoe and Aleta Kazuhisa, and I met both of them during one of my visits to the site. They are very nice fellows and they did their carvings with handheld chisels, which are amazing tools if you know how hard granite is. They enjoyed a coldie at the end of a hard day's work.

The work is complete. Taka has ensured that his father's vision and dedication to the preservation of wild rice is with us forever. It was not just about the art; it was about the conservation of wild rice and the conservation of wild animals and insects as they collectively are important to the whole environment and the survival of human beings.

In closing, given the uniqueness of this work and the international acclaim of the artist, I will be seeking support from the government, most likely through tourism, to have the site recognised as an important part of our landscape and put measures in place to protect the integrity of the sculptures, make sure there is no graffiti or rubbish spread around and to have appropriate signage. Some of the sculptures are on the McKinlay Station and the owners of the land are supportive of protecting the work and ensuring that everyone can enjoy the work of a remarkable man, Mitsuaki Tanabe.

I seek leave to table an article, *Sculpture by Mitsuaki Tanabe in Far International Seed Vault*.

Leave granted.

Mr PAECH (Namatjira): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I take the opportunity tonight to speak about some recent events which have occurred in the electorate of Namatjira. On 3 and 4 April this year I was fortunate to host a community Caucus in the Utopia and Arlparra region. Many members of the Territory

Labor team joined me in Alice Springs where we set out on our journey in four-wheel drives across some vast desert country.

I was very happy to take this opportunity to show my colleagues the wonderful region of Utopia. I had meetings with some organisations there, and I take this opportunity to place on the record some of the outcomes of those meetings.

The Chief Minister, the Minister for Housing and I were very fortunate to meet with the Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation to speak about a range of municipal and essential service provisions, and the need for greater housing services in the electorate, particularly in that region. We met with Mr Michael Grabner who is the Chief Executive of the Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation.

We were joined by 50 traditional owners from the region to talk about the significance of our commitment to delivering outstation housing in that particular community. We had some very robust discussions about the work that needs to be done, and I was able to get an undertaking from the Minister for Housing and Community Development about some roads and housing delivery there.

The Minister for Territory Families and the Members for Karama and Arnhem were able to meet with some of our other female colleagues to host a women's meeting with the women from the Utopia region, which was a very successful meeting about a range of services and the work we intend to do with women in the region to overcome the level of disadvantage.

I extend my gratitude and thanks to Stephen Nimmo from Arlparra School and the staff there. We were fortunate to be hosted there and attend an outstanding community barbecue with members from the Utopia region, which is 16 outstations. The school was very accommodating to host that meeting where all members were able to engage with the local community on a range of issues, and to know them and the beautiful location of Utopia and what makes that region so special.

It was special for the Families as First Teachers and our student support staff to talk with our Education minister and other Cabinet ministers about how we can deliver quality education in regional and remote parts in the Northern Territory, as well as discussing the challenges people are faced with living out that far. I am thankful for that opportunity.

The Members for Braitling and Arnhem joined me on a tour to some of the 16 outstations to look at the outstanding work delivered by the Arid Edge Environmental Services, an organisation which does a range of projects in Central Australia. It does an outstanding job at making sure it delivers services to the 16 outstations in the form of having community plots on those outstations, growing a range of fresh produce with the outstation members to make sure they are able to live healthy lifestyles.

It is hard to get fresh fruit and vegetables to some parts of the Northern Territory. Arid Edge does an outstanding job working with the community. It engages with members and is able to get them on CDP to make sure they are looked after and can build infrastructure in their own communities to deliver outcomes. They do a range of cooking programs, looking at four main ingredients from their local community plots.

It was refreshing to be out there and see fresh oranges and tomatoes. I had to resist; the Member for Braitling pulled me up a few times when I wanted to pick an orange myself. Thankfully she was there making sure I did not steal the fruit.

Arid Edge does a great job. Alex and Blair do fantastic work in that community in those outstations. They do a huge volume of work, whether it is dealing with the irrigation on the communities or growing new plants. I have committed to a few extra fruit trees on my next trip out there. I will be sure to take some photos of that.

I take the opportunity to speak about the Urapunga health service, which was very hospitable in allowing members of the Northern Territory government to sleep there. The Member for Arnhem and I were very brave and swagged it that night. Thank you for joining me amongst the stars.

The Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation is one of if not the oldest Aboriginal community controlled Aboriginal health service. It has been running since 1979 and delivers a huge range of projects to 16 regional and remote outstations where it is very challenging to get to those services. The population of residents they service is about 1000 permanent residents of those 16 outstations, and it fluctuates depending on the time of year.

It provides a range of outstanding services and programs, from basic level hygiene to medical appointments and visitations. It goes out to the 16 outstations and delivers medical appointments. You are able to see a doctor on your country. There is a men's and women's shed with a range of beneficial projects. It also runs an op shop and a tyre shop on top of all those comprehensive healthcare services.

We were very fortunate to stay there that night and had the wonderful opportunity to speak to them firsthand. They put on a very good spread for us; we enjoyed a lovely barbecue. I was fortunate to have ladies from an outstation called Rocket Range go out that week, find an abandoned car, take the bonnet off and spend a few days doing some wonderful artwork on the bonnet which reads 'Chansey Paech MLA Namatjira'. I proudly have it hanging in the reception of my office. I am not sure how the wall will cope in the long haul, but I am very proud of that. It was very special to receive that, and I extend the greatest thanks to the Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation.

There is still a lot of work to be done. I am very much looking forward to working with the Urapuntja Health Clinic, the Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation, Arid Edge, the school and My Pathway, which is the job service provider in that region. I look forward to continue to work with them to deliver quality services for these people, some of which are the most disadvantaged people in the country. We were fortunate enough to have SBS there as well. They were doing a television series on the special area that Utopia is and its deep connection to law, love and culture.

I am very much looking forward to seeing how that looks on the big screen. It will be a very exciting time. I promised the Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation and the people of Utopia that I would get back out there and show them if they were not fortunate enough to see it. They were very happy to have some positive stories being covered in the media about that region because it is quite often portrayed negatively and that is certainly not the fact. I love that region; it is one of my favourite places.

Ms AH KIT (Karama): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, there was a suicide prevention round table held in Darwin yesterday. Unfortunately, due to parliamentary sittings I was not able to attend, but from all accounts I hear that it went well.

Hon Ken Wyatt MP, federal Minister for Indigenous Health, hosted the round table in Darwin on behalf of the federal government. I received an email invitation from Minister Wyatt a few weeks ago to attend, and I would like to thank him for that as well.

The purpose of the Darwin roundtable was to bring together key stakeholders from across the region to discuss what strategies are needed to support communities in suicide prevention. This round table is a follow on from the announcement made by Hon Greg Hunt MP, federal Minister for Health, in February when he announced that a Darwin trial site would be included as part of the national suicide prevention trial currently being undertaken.

The Darwin site will focus on the development of a suicide prevention model that can support the unique and, more importantly, culturally sensitive requirements of Indigenous communities. Darwin has been included as a trial site because, unfortunately, we have a higher than average suicide rate. Each year in the Territory we lose around 40 Territorians through suicide. In my experience from working and volunteering in the area, when we lose somebody through suicide it reverberates fully throughout community because we have such a small population. We find, especially in remote Indigenous communities, there is a large amount of loss, so we need to do everything we can to work together to overcome those obstacles.

There are many great suicide prevention government agencies, service providers, community groups, volunteers, advocates and champions already working in this space in the Territory. I want to say thank you to all of them as well.

As the assistant minister for suicide prevention, it has been an honour to work alongside the Minister for Health to improve the current situation. In order to make sustainable change in suicide prevention we need both a concerted and coordinated effort and investment from all sectors.

I look forward to working with the federal Minister for Indigenous Health, our own Minister for Health and all stakeholders of the Darwin trial site to help prevent suicide in the Northern Territory.

Mr KIRBY (Port Darwin): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I stand tonight to say thanks to the wonderful people who run the Deckchair Cinema for inviting me to open the 2017 Deckchair Cinema two weeks ago, on Wednesday 19 April.

General Manager Alice Body, James Parker, Jeff Coulter, John Schier and the rest of the board and volunteers are to be commended for bringing the entire space up to a fantastic standard. I have been involved with a number of those people for many years through different circles in Darwin and jumped at the opportunity last year to lock in behind the Deckchair Cinema when the CLP threatened its very existence with a reckless announcement on the use of nearby land.

I was proud to announce on that night a few weeks ago the thousands of dollars in grants the Deckchair has been successful in receiving. The money will go towards significant upgrades of the lighting and sounds systems to make everybody's experience there more pleasurable.

I was also able to reiterate our government's support of the screen industry to the tune of \$9m over the coming years, which was extremely well received by the board as well.

The film shown on opening night was very insightful but quite challenging to watch. It was a documentary filmed over the last few years about four African women who escaped a brutal upbringing in Africa and are now settled in Australia. The director of the documentary, Ros Horin, and two ladies of the troupe, Yordanos Haile-Michael and Rosemary Kariuki, were present for the film viewing at the Deckchair and also for post-film Q&A sessions.

The Deckchair was close to capacity so there were a few hundred people there. Around 100 of them also stayed for the Q&A sessions afterwards.

The *Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* was the name of the documentary. It was a celebration of the remarkable spirit of these four African women who survived horrific sexual and domestic violence and abuse, and the triumph of their improbable theatre troupe.

The four women fled from different parts of Africa in order to escape the appalling violence and abuse they were subject to in their countries. They still hold their pain very silently within themselves; however, they decided to join the theatre group and speak out. Under the guidance of the theatre director, Ros Horin, they collaborate to let their life stories be transformed into an extraordinarily uplifting theatrical experience. The film follows their personal journeys from the trauma to the healing and the public triumphs.

Through this documentary the women share their message of hope and support to women and children all over the world who have suffered through any type of violence. The *Baulkham Hill African Ladies Troupe* had its world premiere at the Sydney Film Festival in June and was named one of the top five Australian documentaries in the audience awards. Following two sell-out screenings at the Melbourne International Film Festival, it came third in the audience awards for the documentary.

In the days following the screening in Darwin I was fortunate enough to meet with Ros. She was both the director of the theatre performances and the subsequent documentary. It was amazing to hear some of the stories from Ros about what it was like for someone who had no counselling experience to work with these women for many years on this project. At times she wondered if the project would be completed at all. I am sure none of us in the House can fully comprehend the atrocities these women lived through, and although Ros would have a much better appreciation than most of us, it was still a very daunting situation for her.

She was able to work with these women, support them and guide them when needed. I congratulate her for her efforts. Since the documentary has been put together it has given Ros the ability to champion the cause of the movie and hopefully help people in similar situations.

What Ros went through pales into insignificance when you try to comprehend what these four women lived through and then had to relive while rehearsing and performing live in front of audiences. The film clearly showed the conflicting effects this process had on the different women. Some were able to embrace the opportunity to speak about what they lived through, while others clearly struggled and will continue to work through very physical and emotional scars each and every day.

The Deckchair is a beautiful place and I have watched many movies there. I guarantee the feeling across the crowd at the end of this documentary was very emotional and something I have rarely experienced at the end of any movie. People sat for a few minutes in silence, some were crying and some hugged; it was a reflective moment of the trauma these women lived through. For me, it was a reflective moment on how lucky my family is, having never known such a world.

In the following days I had the opportunity to introduce Ros and Yordie to the Chief Minister at his electorate office. They had a few minutes to chat and for Ros to explain her passion of trying to help other women—anything she could do through the Territory, she was more than willing to help.

We discussed that she already had a phone conversation with Charlie King and some of the work his No More campaign has done throughout the Territory. It will be fantastic to see if we can get them working together to benefit Northern Territory women.

We were also fortunate to introduce these women to Colleen Gwynne, the Territory's Children's Commissioner at the time, and also Bishop Hurley, who walked by the office while we were there. It was quite a meeting of minds while we were at the Parap office.

I also took the opportunity to bring the women to the Chamber, and with the kind approval of Madam Speaker got some lovely photos of Yordie in the Speaker's Chair and on the balcony with our gorgeous harbour in the background. Yordie was one of the stars of the documentary and will forever be dealing with her horrible upbringing. To see her progressing through her life, enjoying Darwin over that weekend and smiling from some of the basic hospitality that I was able to afford them in and around here was an extremely warming experience.

I reiterate my gratitude to the Deckchair team for bestowing me the honour of opening the 2017 season and wish them all the best for the year ahead. Most importantly, I thank the four women involved in the Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe for having the fortitude to not only live through the atrocious upbringing that they had, but then to live through it all again every day for years while training and delivering these performances in the hope that they might inspire some others.

We can all be glad we will never have to live through upbringings like that, and I wholeheartedly wish them the absolute best for their new lives in Australia.

Mr SIEVERS (Brennan): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I have two adjournments tonight.

Firstly, I congratulate our whip, the Member for Port Darwin, Mr Paul Kirby, and his beautiful partner, Bek, on the arrival of baby Layla Louise Kirby. All our colleagues and Labor friends and family will join me in congratulating Paul and Bek, and a big welcome to the world for baby Layla.

Now I will speak about Anzac Day. On Tuesday 25 April, like millions around this great country and across the world, we commemorated Anzac Day 2017. We paid our respects to the brave men and women who have fought for our country. On this day we honoured those who returned from war and those who paid the ultimate sacrifice defending their country.

I was very pleased to attend the Palmerston early dawn service as the assistant minister for veteran affairs with the Deputy Chief Minister and the Member for Drysdale at the Palmerston cenotaph. The Anzac early morning service was truly an emotional service, and I was pleased to see the Palmerston community come out in such large numbers to support this year's service.

We spent the morning at the Anzac Day breakfast at the Hub before returning to the Anzac Day march and then the cenotaph service later that morning. The Palmerston Anzac Day march was well supported, and it was pleasing to see students from Bakewell and Rosebery schools marching and wearing their families' medals and memorabilia. Well done to these students, families and schools, as we must never forget.

Prior to the Anzac Day services I was also very lucky to be able to attend the Legacy War Widows luncheon at the Palmerston Hub with the wonderful women of the NT. It was a privilege and pleasure to listen to their stories and spend time with them. They continue to be the backbone of the volunteer services which support our veterans and their families.

The Rosebery school also held an Anzac assembly, and I was very impressed by the number of students, staff and teachers attending, the speeches given and the respect shown for the Defence personnel and services on this important day. Well done to those who helped make this such a great event.

I will also read out an important song, *Saluting You*, which was written and presented at the Rosebery service by Mr Stephen Nicol, who is one of our great Australian Defence Force servicemen and returned veteran. I quote:

For my country I will fight.

*For my country I will die.
I am just a simple man
Who did not stand aside.*

*These medals on my heart
I wear with pride,
A pride that's deeply strong,
A pride that's well alive.
I signed my life on to protect
Our shores and our Crown.
A signature in blood
Until I'm six feet down.*

*For my country I will fight.
For my country I will die.
I am just a simple man
Who will not stand aside.*

*To all the women and the men
Who sacrificed to defend,
You are my brothers and sisters until the end.*

*I served in Afghanistan
Back in 2000-09
In the Campaign against Terror.
My life it did redefine.
So here I stand today
With PTSD and pain.
I often think of being back there,
Joe Public thinks I'm insane.*

*For my country I will fight.
For my country I will die.
I am just a simple man
Who will not stand aside.
To all the women and the men
Who will not stand aside
To all the women and the men
Who sacrificed to defend
You're my brothers and sisters until the end*

*For my country I did fight
Now part of me is lost or died
I am just a simple man
Who did not stand aside.
To all the women and the men
Who sacrificed to defend
You're my brothers and sisters until the end.*

Saluting You!

The events leading up to Anzac Day and during Anzac Day in Palmerston have left me with a deeper appreciation of our community and our Defence personnel, both past and present. The history of the Anzacs and the Anzac spirit is a story to be retold by each generation, never to be forgotten.

During these Anzac events my own thoughts were with my two great-grandfathers who fought at Gallipoli, Mr George Allen and Mr George Johnston; one returned home and one did not. I recall my family's stories of war and loss.

I sincerely thank the Palmerston RSL; Bill, Colin, Peter, Nicole and John, the Palmerston City Council; the Australian Defence Force; the Legacy War Widows and Rosebery Middle School for the great efforts and hard work in organising so many important Anzac Day 2017 events.

Lest we forget.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.