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Health System Measures

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to MINISTER for HEALTH

Reports of misdiagnosis and wrongful mastectomies being carried out in Northern Territory hospitals are shocking and tragic, and I extend my sympathies and those of the Leader of the Opposition to the women involved. I note the statement made last night by the Health minister and very much support those sentiments. I ask if she can outline measures that have been introduced since those terrible events to ensure tragedies such as these are never repeated and, importantly, for Territorians to retain faith in the health system.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Spillett for her question. As the Minister for Health, on behalf of the Northern Territory Government I send our sincere apologies and thoughts to those women caught up in this tragic set of circumstances, and to their families and friends.

It is something no woman should ever go through but, sadly, it did happen in 2013. Those women involved with services at Royal Darwin Hospital were given a misdiagnosis from pathology reports. Since those incidents took place, and as we saw on ABC's 7.30 last night, a number of measures have been put in place.

On last night's show they talked about an incident that took place at a hospital in another state. It is something that, as Health ministers and Health departments, we must strive to ensure does not happen again.

Since those incidents that took place in 2013 there have been independent reviews of the situations. The Health complaints commissioner has been involved, as has the Australian pathology body. They undertook independent reviews and made six recommendations, and all six of those recommendations have been implemented in the Northern Territory.

What happened in 2013 was human error. A pathologist interpreted the results and there was a misdiagnosis. One of the key recommendations is that we have two pathologists look at results so we can, hopefully, avoid other families going through what those people went through. Those recommendations have all been implemented across Territory Health.

In regard to the specific cases, the department and government have been involved in working through those issues with those women to provide them with support, acknowledging the pain and suffering they went through, which was unnecessary.

As the Minister for Health I strive to make sure we are constantly reviewing, looking at how we can do things better. We have a number of processes in place that both staff and patients can be involved with. I encourage any patient or staff member, if they feel that something can be done better, to come forward. There are staff surveys within the Department of Health; there are mechanisms with the Patient Advocate and the Health complaints commissioner for patients to be involved.

We, as a government, acknowledge these incidents that took place and pass on our sincere thoughts to the people involved. I can assure the community we have put in place measures, particularly in relation to pathology—the six independent recommendations have been put in place across the Territory and all results are now reviewed by a second pathologist.

Economy – Future Plans

Mrs WORDEN to TREASURER

The Territory economy will face tough challenges in the next 18 months. Can you please detail the government's plan to address those issues?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question because, yes, a talking point right across the Northern Territory is the economy. There is no doubt that in coming to government we inherited some challenging figures going forward, and some challenges in the next 12 to 18 months. We came from four

years of a very chaotic and dysfunctional government, the CLP, that was handed a growing economy as it came into government in 2012, and what did we see? Chaos, dysfunction and mismanagement. It sold the farm—TIO and the port—and left us with a \$900m deficit and a \$2.7bn debt. We have some challenging figures there and a slowing economy; that is a fact, but I assure the House that the future of the Territory is very bright.

There is a good future ahead for the Northern Territory, but it is important that as a government we do everything we can to make sure we manage the challenges ahead in the next 12 to 18 months, particularly with the INPEX project going from the construction phase to operation phase. We have had challenges with GST revenues falling and we have seen some significant changes to the mining sector; but these are challenges we are ready for, and we have hit the ground running, as a government, to address those issues.

In our first week of government, we made significant changes to the Buy Local policy to ensure more Territory businesses benefit from government spending, particularly on infrastructure. We changed our first home buyers stamp duty concession to help more Territorians get into the housing market. We now have 87 Territorians who will be calling the Territory home for a much longer time as they have been able to get into the housing market because of our first home owner changes.

We are continuing the \$1.7bn infrastructure investment. Yesterday we made sure we showed our commitment and how we have been listening to business and the key sectors in the community to respond to those challenges by fast-tracking \$120m worth of infrastructure work across the Northern Territory. This will support jobs, business and the economy. We are holding our economic summits. We are working with key sectors and the regions to make sure we are supporting growth throughout the Northern Territory. We are continuing to encourage private investment in major projects.

Our Chief Minister has been building and strengthening trade ties—rebuilding in some cases—with our neighbours to the north, in China, Japan and South Korea.

It has been a busy period of a new government. We have some challenges ahead but we are putting the plans in place to deal with them so we can continue to grow the Northern Territory economy.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

Lynne Walker

Madam SPEAKER: Members, I welcome in the gallery the past Member for Nhulunbuy and a Deputy Speaker of this parliament, Lynne Walker. Welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

Home Improvement Scheme – Reopening

Mr HIGGINS to TREASURER

Yesterday you announced an adjustment to the forward works program. It was an announcement that did not get a single extra dollar flowing into the economy this year. By contrast, the Country Liberals' Home Improvement Scheme generated over \$9m worth of works in three months, going directly to small businesses. The Master Builders Association, along with 547 small business owners and other concerned Territorians, have called on the government to reinstate this scheme. As you just said, we need to do everything we can. When will you swallow your pride and reopen the Home Improvement Scheme?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his very important question. As he stated, and I have before, there are some concerns about the economy. We have a slowing economy and, as a government, that is why we have responded and fast-tracked projects in our infrastructure program to make sure we are supporting jobs, business and the economy.

The Leader of the Opposition failed to point out that projects have been brought forward to this financial year. We have brought forward works around the PET scanner at RDH, valued at \$5m.

We have brought forward \$10m worth of works into this financial year for the Room to Breathe program so we can start alleviating overcrowding in houses and give people in the bush the support they need. We know housing is one of the biggest issues for people living in the bush in the Northern Territory. We have fast-tracked another \$5m for repairs and maintenance. Let us not forget the state of housing out there and the fact that some communities had legal cases before the government because of the state of the houses. We are responding.

We have brought money forward for cattle yards and so forth to support the critical live export trade in the Northern Territory.

As part of our first home bonus changes, to get more people to stay in the Territory and call this place home, we have put forward a \$10 000 renovation package as an extra incentive for people to make the commitment to buy their own home and stay here, while supporting local business.

Part of the strategy of bringing forward some of these important projects is to make sure the design, consultation and tendering work is done this financial year so come 1 July 2017 shovels will be going into the ground, projects will be kicking off and works will be undertaken.

There is a massive infrastructure program—\$1.7bn across the Northern Territory. There is significant work happening. On roads alone we are talking about a \$670m program in this financial year. There is huge investment in infrastructure happening across the Northern Territory, but it is critical that we keep it going. It is also critical that we make sure the tenders support jobs, local business and Territorians. That is exactly what the changes we announced yesterday aim to do, make sure we support the economy going forward.

Infrastructure Program – Economy and Job Creation

Mr KIRBY to TREASURER

Can we please get an update on how the infrastructure program is strengthening the economy and creating jobs.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Infrastructure is critical. When there are concerns about jobs and growth, that is when government infrastructure kicks in and plays a very important role in supporting jobs and the economy.

We are continuing the \$1.7bn infrastructure program across the Northern Territory. We are making sure the tenders get out the door. October was a record month with about \$80m of tenders getting out the door to support jobs and local business.

Yesterday we announced a range of infrastructure commitments and fast-tracked projects to support jobs and the economy; we fast tracked \$120m worth of work right across the Northern Territory. We have fast-tracked projects like the Palmerston police station, the Katherine police station, a PET scanner and the Royal Darwin Hospital car parking.

We are very proud of our \$1.1bn remote housing program over 10 years and we are starting to get that money out the door to support people and improve the overcrowded situations they live in. We are seeing changes with Warren Park and a new indoor netball centre in the Top End. The Tennant Creek Preschool—a very important program. We have work in Alice Springs around the youth facility. We have the women's shelter, and Don Dale up north—very important works we are bringing forward.

Let us not forget the massive roads program in the Northern Territory. Remote roads are critical to the future of the Northern Territory. We have, in 2016-17, a program of \$673m for remote roads, things like the Mereenie Inner loop, \$28m; Outback Way, \$28m; Tanami Road upgrades, \$9m; Arnhem Link Road, \$10m; Port Keats Road, \$25m for the Yellow Creek upgrade; the Litchfield Park Road, \$30m; Ramingining, the Central Arnhem Road, lift and seal, \$5m; the Roper and Wilton bridges, \$38m; the Victoria Highway, Little Horse and Big Horse Creek bridges, \$44.5m.

Mr Wood: What happened to the Australian beef roads?

Ms MANISON: I heard the interjection about Australian beef roads; we have a very bright future there with \$234m worth of work—\$25m for the Plenty Highway; \$10m for Docker River Road; \$80m for the Keep

River Plains Road; \$78m for the Arnhem Highway; \$25m for the Tablelands Highway; \$12.5m for the Barkly Stock Route. There is a significant roads program to support Territorians right across the Territory. There is a comprehensive infrastructure program going out the door.

Public Holidays – Christmas and New Year's Eve

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to CHIEF MINISTER

When you turned off the tap to small business by scrapping the Home Improvement Scheme you cost the Territory jobs. When your union mates turned up to collect on their debts you rolled over and announced two new public holidays; you cost the Territory jobs. Instead of increasing wages, businesses will close their doors. Restaurant workers and others are now down a shift at the most expensive time of the year, leading up to Christmas. Chief Minister, please table the modelling on how much this will cost Territory businesses and the public service, and how many new workers it will supposedly attract to the Northern Territory.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Deputy Opposition Leader for her question. It touches upon a couple of very important points for the Northern Territory. One is jobs, which the Deputy Opposition Leader led with. One of the first things we did after being elected was to sit with the Chamber of Commerce and the Manufacturing Council and implement our Buy Local plan, which give a greater crack to local business for Territory work.

For example, on Friday the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources announced a \$4.1m capital grant to the NT Livestock Export Association for the cattle yards. For the first time ever, that capital grant has to comply with the Buy Local plans of government; that never happened in the past. We are guaranteeing that capital grants from government will comply with the Buy Local plan and create jobs.

We also made a commitment to keeping Territorians here and we made changes to the first home buyers scheme ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110: relevance. The Chief Minister is talking about Buy Local; we are talking about businesses suffering as a result of your kowtowing to the unions.

Madam SPEAKER: No, it is not a point of order.

Mr GUNNER: We are making sure jobs are flying from the decisions the government makes for Territorians, and we are creating an even better chance for Territory businesses to win that work.

When it comes to part days—first of all, I need to correct the Deputy Opposition Leader. She said a whole day, which is not the case, it is five hours, from 7 pm to midnight. It is five hours on Christmas Eve and five hours on New Year's Eve.

We released advice during the last sittings around the hourly rate when it comes to how much a worker would be paid. It is about \$130 extra if they work the whole five-hour shift. Obviously it will vary from business to business as to what the cost will be, but it is very easy to work out based on those staff rates.

For government, it is important to recognise that police work on Christmas Eve. I, for one—and the opposition clearly disagrees with this—consider 7 pm to midnight on Christmas Eve, 24 December, to be different to 7 pm to midnight on, say, 18 December. We think this is a very fair position. It is a very straightforward change to the act. We made it clear that there is a period of consultation between the bill being introduced and passed when people can come forward with their comments, but it is a very straightforward matter. This is not a complicated change to legislation at all. It is a question of what is fair. As a government, we believe it is fair to recognise that 7 pm to midnight Christmas Eve and 7 pm to midnight on New Year's Eve is different to other nights of the year.

We are a government that is supporting fairness for workers, which is true for the private sector and the public sector. It is fair that I, as the Police minister, recognise, the work police officers do on Christmas Eve, 7 pm to midnight, and other essential services. This is a question of fairness. We are a fair government and we are recognising the sacrifice those workers are making on Christmas Eve.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION
Public Holidays – Christmas and New Year's Eve

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to CHIEF MINISTER

You have clearly shown Territorians that you have no idea what your public holidays will cost businesses or the public service. You have not consulted with stakeholders affected by this decision, not even the Chamber of Commerce or the Australian Hotels Association. Will you commit to referring this bill to a committee and allow proper examination of its effects, or is that something you need to check with your union masters first?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, there is an error in the question. I rang the Australian Hotels Association and the Chamber of Commerce personally prior to the announcement.

Mrs Finocchiaro: A point of order, Madam Speaker! The Chief Minister is trying to say ...

Madam SPEAKER: It is not a point of order; sit down. Chief Minister, you have the call.

Mr GUNNER: The bill was introduced and sat on the Notice Paper for 28 days, and we provided the statement of fact again around what the cost would be on an hourly rate; that has been provided.

There was an error of fact in the Deputy Opposition Leader's question, and it was a grievous error. I do not know if she has noticed the date. It is the last sittings before 24 December, and what she is proposing is to push it to a committee and deny workers that recognition on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

Clearly we disagree about what is fair and what is not. The proposition from the CLP is to delay this until after Christmas Eve, which is a disgrace.

Madam SPEAKER: Chief Minister, your time has expired.

Infrastructure and Planning

Mr SIEVERS to CHIEF MINISTER

How is the government's infrastructure plan supporting jobs, and how will it help to create a safer community for the people of Palmerston?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question. We spent lunchtime in Palmerston discussing the plans for a police station for the people in the suburbs of Palmerston. I thank the Members for Brennan and Drysdale for being there, and the Member for Fong Lim, who is my assistant minister in that portfolio.

We have fast-tracked the police station for the people of Palmerston forward two years to the 2017–18 financial year. I have spoken to the Police Commissioner. We will do the work to make sure the tender goes out on time and the cash can flow from 1 July. We made a very strong commitment ...

Mr MILLS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! We have been tolerant, but Standing Order 36 relates to the anticipation of a matter that is listed on the Notice Paper. We are prepared to have this discussion about infrastructure, but it being pre-empted.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Blain. A ministerial statement has been circulated as a matter of courtesy, but it does not appear on the Notice Paper as yet.

Mr GUNNER: We have been very clear that, as a government, we will make sure there is a return for stimulus activity. It is not just about stimulating the economy; it is about getting a long-term return for Territorians too. In investing this money in a police station for the people of Palmerston we will not just create jobs; we will create a return for them. We recognise and respect the growth of Palmerston and that it needs services in its own right. As Darwin has a police station in Casuarina, the people of Palmerston should have the same level of services as it grows.

It was fantastic that in opposition, when we made this announcement, we saw the then government follow in our footsteps, recognising that the promise we made was very important. It picked up on our promise and followed it. There was an important echo because it meant a bipartisan agreement on the importance of a police station in Palmerston.

Police will be looking for a location. We will take police advice on the best location for the police station. It is a promise we made in opposition and we will follow through in government, recognising and respecting the expertise of police and knowing that when it comes to the operational groundwork police will do—measuring things in seconds and response times—we will get the right location in the suburbs of Palmerston.

It is a very important announcement that fits our philosophy that we should be stimulating the economy and creating jobs, but doing so in a smart way that delivers a return to the people of Palmerston. I acknowledge our Palmerston members, Tony Sievers and Eva Lawler, and thank them for their hard work. They passed this message on, when we were in opposition, about what they were hearing about the services the people of Palmerston needed. It is pleasing to be able to, as Chief Minister, deliver on those promises. We have listened and acted, and we are making sure the police station happens sooner and it creates work as well as delivering social return to the people of Palmerston. Thank you, Tony and Eva, for the work you did listening to the people of Palmerston and making sure we deliver, as a government, creating work for Territorians as well as delivering a social outcome.

Berrimah Farm Development

Mr WOOD to CHIEF MINISTER

You released a press release on 10 November which stated that, in relation to the Berrimah Farm development, the Halikos Group would return an estimated \$60m worth of headworks and infrastructure. In the interests of transparency, could you please say what the value and scope of the headworks were, and what the independent value of the land was. Would you release any independent assessment which supports the land swap for headworks.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Nelson for the question. That detailed work was done by the department. I do not have it in front of me but I am happy to provide it. I do not have any problems with being open and transparent about it. We released those figure on the day, based on that advice. I am happy to provide you with that advice.

We believe it is important to plan for the future population demands of the Territory. I am confident about the future of the Northern Territory. I know we will have some challenging budget and economic times in 2017, but I am confident that the Territory will grow again. We should never again go through the housing crunch we had under the last Labor government when we did not get land release quite right.

It is important, and I recognise the value Berrimah Farm provides to the answer. There was an independent probity order involved through the CLP's process last time—which is important—which came to this decision and investment. Halikos was the winning tenderer. I am happy to take your question on notice to get that paperwork and be open and transparent about the valuation of the headworks and the land, and the total effect of that, and provide it to you.

Royal Darwin Hospital Car Parking

Ms AH KIT to MINISTER for HEALTH

What is the government's plan to fix the mess the CLP made of parking at the Royal Darwin Hospital, and how will this create jobs and support the economy?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Karama for her question. Some measures were introduced by the CLP government in an attempt to manage car parking and traffic flow at Royal Darwin Hospital which were a nightmare. I think every one of us in this Chamber, as local members, heard stories. Many of us had personal experiences. It is something this government is committed to addressing.

The CLP government introduced paid parking without taking into consideration the needs of individuals and the circumstances of those attending Royal Darwin Hospital. We are talking about people who are ill or injured, needing urgent medical care, attending specialist appointments or visiting people in hospital. Often, in their urgency, people simply forgot to get a ticket, or they got a ticket but were not able to put further funds on it and extend their time, unless their time had run out.

It was of the most unusual parking measures in a hospital. Nobody knows how long they will be at a hospital for. As much as we have wonderful staff at Royal Darwin Hospital, who do their best to keep to time, sometimes you go in for one appointment and you end up needing to see other specialists; things do not quite go to plan. Predicting how long you will be at a hospital is a very unfair measure. You had to wait for the two hours to expire if you had chosen two hours free, or if you had chosen a time period and paid some money you had to wait for that to expire before you could top your ticket up. It was very frustrating. In those few minutes from when a ticket expired to getting to the machine to buy a top up, many people got tickets. We heard many stories and it was spoken about in this Chamber and the local media covered it with intensity.

We should remember that the focus of paid parking at the hospital should not be about collecting from the vulnerable people visiting the hospital in unfortunate circumstances; we need a system that is friendly to users and those who need to visit Royal Darwin Hospital. Adding further insult to injury was the former government giving Wilson permission to access personal data.

Our government believes strongly in patients and staff accessing safe and secure parking, and that is why we had a strong election commitment—the Member for Casuarina was very passionate about this in her electorate—that we would address the mess of car parking at RDH. We will be building a free, multistorey car park. I am very pleased that we announced this week that we will fast-track the development of that car park by three years, bringing it forward to not only to solve the car parking issues for staff, patients and visitors at Royal Darwin Hospital, but to stimulate the local economy.

It is a \$12m project that our government has committed to. It is something we have worked hard on and that I am proud that we will be able to deliver. It will not only help our local economy but also those visiting Royal Darwin Hospital. Our commitment to fast-track this project shows we are committed to improving services at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Alice Springs – Infrastructure Spending

Mrs LAMBLEY to CHIEF MINISTER

Yesterday your government announced scrapping \$40m in infrastructure projects for Central Australia over the forward estimates, leaving a net loss to the Alice Springs and Central Australian community of \$30m of infrastructure spending, which includes \$25m worth of projects in the electorate of Namatjira. You have just won three seats in Central Australia; I cannot understand where your commitment is to our town and our region. What is your plan and vision for the economy of Alice Springs, Chief Minister? Do you have one?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I think a trend has been set. I think each sittings the Member for Araluen will say, 'Chief Minister, you do not love Alice', and every sittings I will say, 'I do love Alice'. We have a clear plan and vision for Alice Springs. We see Alice Springs as the capital of Central Australia, and it very much has a strong services focus. We very much want to make it a destination in its own right. At the end of this sittings period I am going to Alice Springs, on Friday 2 December, and will be having those conversations with Premier Jay Weatherill about the importance we place on Alice Springs and how the NT and SA can work together to deliver for Alice Springs.

We made some decisions through the infrastructure program about the forward works. It is essentially a four-year program that puts some stuff into the fifth year.

It is important—and we were very public about this before the election—to get your priorities right. We said that the \$6m for the women's shelter in Alice Springs and \$7m for youth detention in Owen Springs and the facilities there are priorities. But, for example, \$11m in storm rectification works, which were identified as non-essential, are not a priority. There is \$4m in storm rectification works that are a priority, and they remain on the list. It is about recognising your priorities and adjusting for them. The women's shelter and the Owen Springs youth centre are priorities, and they are occurring.

We were very open and transparent about reprioritising before the election, and have been since. That must be breathtaking. That did not happen last term. We are giving you an opportunity to look at the decisions we have made and provide commentary, because we believe in being open and transparent.

We did not outsource these decisions to the Renewal Management Board; we made them ourselves. We did not delegate. We did not spend a fortune paying for other people to come back to us. We did the hard work of making these tough decisions about what is in that four-year envelope and pushing it into a fifth year.

We were clear about what our priorities were. Another one is Ross Park, where there were two choices, extension or a new building. The choice was made to extend. That is just the financial difference. The priorities are still being met.

We are very clear about how we rate Alice Springs and its priorities. It very much, for me, is the capital of inland Australia. It has a presence well beyond the Territory borders, and we have to recognise and respect that. It is a service capital.

I look forward to the meetings with Premier Weatherill about having a shared vision for Alice Springs beyond its borders and boundaries, and respecting the importance of Alice.

I will always be a strong advocate for Alice Springs, as are our local members, Gerry McCarthy, Chansey Paech, Scott McConnell and Dale Wakefield.

Mrs LAMBLEY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I am wondering how taking \$30m out of our infrastructure fund for Central Australia forms a ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Araluen, it is not a point of order; please sit down.

Mr GUNNER: That figure does not stack up. You are more than welcome to get a briefing from the Treasurer, but that is not a figure I have anywhere; I think some creative maths has been applied. We value and rate Alice Springs.

Madam SPEAKER: Chief Minister, your time has expired.

First Home Buyer Renovation Scheme

Mr HIGGINS to TREASURER

When you scrapped the Country Liberals' Home Improvement Scheme you turned off the tap to over 1000 registered small businesses. In its place you created the first home buyer renovation scheme, a poor imitation. Look at the numbers between the successful economy-boosting, job-creating scheme of the Country Liberals compared with Labor's broken imitation: 5392 successful applications versus 29; \$9.3m versus \$290 000. Why does Labor hate success? How can you justify the embarrassment of 29 successful applications to a handful of first home buyers versus 5392 Territory families?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Again it brings us to the point of the hard decisions you have to make in government when you look at the different choices you have to support jobs and the economy. We felt that to get the best value for money out of the program it needs to go beyond an instant stimulus. Yes, we want some of that, but we also want a long-term outcome.

We have focused funds into first home owner incentives to get people through the door. The businesses which were registered for the Home Improvement Scheme have automatically transferred over to the home renovation scheme. Businesses do not have to redo the paperwork. They do not have time to deal with the red tape, as we well know.

We have targeted that stimulus in a different way. We have made sure we are making a long-term benefit to the Territory, as well as the short-term stimulus of supporting businesses. Eighty-seven approved first home buyers have purchased homes across the Northern Territory. That is 87 who are entitled to \$10 000 for a renovation grant, some of which will go—and we have made sure we have conditions around that so they can spend more than \$10 000. If they want to put in their own money so they can do a bit more around their house and maximise the use of that grant, they can do that.

We decided to make those changes on where we focus because we felt it was well targeted. It will help to address a big problem we have in the Northern Territory, which is our population. It is a significant issue which flows on to affect GST revenues and so forth. The only way the Territory population is growing at the moment is by natural growth through birth rates. We have some challenges, and that is why we are targeting better long-term outcomes.

I come back to the infrastructure program and the fast-tracking of many projects we have brought forward into this financial year while continuing the massive investment of \$1.7bn of infrastructure across the Northern Territory and the importance that plays in keeping people here.

We are listening to the people on the ground. They want infrastructure to be a priority, but we heard loud and clear prior to the election that people need more help to get into the established housing market. That is what we have targeted the stimulus to do. As well as getting an instant return, it is also about the long-term return to the Territory.

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, your time has expired.

Education – Tennant Creek Early Childhood Integrated Learning Centre

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for EDUCATION

Our Labor government has a strong commitment to support the development of children in the early learning years of zero to five years old. What is the government's plan to improve opportunities for children in Tennant Creek, and to meet the growing needs of preschool aged children? How will this support jobs in Central Australia?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Arnhem for the question. Early childhood is a critical time in a person's life as it provides the foundations for the success of the future for a child's wellbeing, health and successes in the long term.

As Minister for Education, but also as a mother, grandmother and educator, I believe that all young people should get the best start in life, and this government is strongly committed to that.

The Australian Early Development Census, AEDC, provides us with information about children and how they are developing before they start school. Unfortunately, the 2015 data shows that young children in Tennant Creek have higher levels of vulnerability, at 58.6%, compared to the Northern Territory average of 37.3%, when they commence school, meaning over half the children in Tennant Creek are vulnerable.

This means these children do not have the foundation skills they need to succeed in school. That is why this government is investing \$6.5m to develop the early childhood integrated learning centre in Tennant Creek. The aim of this new centre is to improve children's lifelong outcomes through a physical environment which supports the delivery of quality early childhood education and care, and the integration of the Families as First Teachers program, special education, family support and allied health and wellbeing services.

I was in Gunbalanya last week and I saw the child and family centre and just how successful it is and the important work it is doing. We need to have that work happening in Tennant Creek as well when there are figures like that about the vulnerability of our children.

This is an exciting development for Tennant Creek. It is good for local jobs and the economy as well because we are providing opportunities for the construction industry during its development, and the ongoing employment of early childhood educators in the region. It will also provide wonderful services to the local children and their families.

The new integrated early childhood centre will be located in the grounds of Tennant Creek Primary School and in close proximity to the childcare centre, promoting developmental coordinated service delivery. We will have seamlessness between Families as First Teachers, the preschool, childcare and the primary school.

The early childhood integrated learning centre will replace the old Tennant Creek preschool, which opened in 1958 after funding was raised by Mrs Ellen Gunner, the Chief Minister's grandmother. That is an

important point and something nice to note in this House. We are doing better this time; we do not have to fundraise for that childcare centre.

Community consultation has commenced and design meetings are under way ...

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, your time has expired.

Juvenile Crime in Palmerston

Mr MILLS to CHIEF MINISTER

Yesterday three juveniles were arrested in Palmerston after a dangerous rampage in a stolen vehicle that endangered lives, damaged property and deeply angered the community, both children and adults. The community wants assurance that problems like these are both understood and responded to effectively by this government. Apart from a promised police station to be built on a site yet to be identified, I invite you to respond to the community's concerns about juvenile crime by providing us with an understanding of your plans of how your government intends to deal with this problem today.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it obviously was not a good incident yesterday. Ideally, a child will not be tasered or allegedly steal a car and drive recklessly through school zones. It is not a very good set of circumstances. We articulated very clearly, going into the last election, acute and long-term plans when it comes to dealing with youth.

We made promises about CCTV cameras, honouring the CLP's broken promise on police numbers, the police station in the suburbs of Palmerston and after-hours investments, where you get more in the medium term in the delivery of services. Without doubt our biggest promise was to have, for the first time, a long-term plan around investment in children, led by the Minister for Children, with a Cabinet subcommittee, driving, in full partnership with the non-government sector, an investment in our children, trying to make sure we break this cycle. We have seen it generation after generation, from youth crime to incarceration rates and chronic illness. We have to make a long-term difference to the Northern Territory, and this government that will do that. This is an investment that will take years to come through; we recognise that, which is why we must keep doing that work at the acute, pointy end.

Enough time has gone by for us to see the cycle repeat, and the time has come for a government to draw a line in the sand—make an investment at this end of it, the long-term end, from 22 weeks of pregnancy onwards. There are significant bodies of evidence that show this is how you make your biggest impact and gains. If all you ever do is keep messing around in the acute end you will never make any change. You have to invest in the early years to make this generational change for the Northern Territory.

We have good Territory evidence, not just global evidence, that these programs work. Congress has done great work around the Nurse-Family Partnerships. They have seen improvements in family violence and mortality rates, which is huge, and baby health and weight, which has massive flow-on effects to make sure they are school ready one day one, year one, term one. Then they get the most out of their school years, and we see a healthy family setup by getting it right from the very beginning before the baby is even born.

We have plans at the acute end, but, most importantly, we are the first government to say we will take this long-term plan seriously. We recognise that the political benefit of that will come well after us. It is time for a government to invest in the early years and make this generational, long-term difference to the kids of the Northern Territory. Time is up on this; we cannot keep talking about the acute end.

Room to Breathe Program

Mr COSTA to MINISTER for HOUSING and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

How is the government's Room to Breathe program addressing overcrowding while keeping families together? How is bringing works forwards onto this program supporting jobs in the bush?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Arafura for his question. I would like to start this story with the long-term planning of the Labor government, that \$1.1bn over 10 years. We are looking at an historical

occasion of a record investment in housing by a Northern Territory Government. That will position us very well to negotiation the next national partnership agreement on housing with the Commonwealth. I look forward to bipartisan support from the members of the CLP opposition, who have travelled to Canberra and are able to support Territorians in our bid.

There is \$500m for new housing in remote areas; \$200m for Room to Breathe; \$200m to expand government employee housing, including housing for local government employees; and \$200m for additional repairs and maintenance funding. Chief Minister and members of the House, this is resonating as a very important policy, and Territorians are so keen to get this work started that we have been inundated with inquiries.

There are two phases. The department is making many assessments. It is assessing the capacity—this is about Territory businesses, business suppliers, regional councils and Aboriginal organisations. That work is going on to make sure we can hit the ground running and get the early place-based projects moving.

The Chief Minister and the Treasurer wanted to bring money forward—\$10m for the Room to Breathe program and \$5m extra for R&M, brought forward as an economic stimulus and to address Territorians who are asking for this program to commence.

I thank the Member for Arafura, who hosted the Member for Stuart and me at Milikapiti on the weekend so we could test this policy and talk to people on the ground. I was interested in Milikapiti as a remote town. I was interested to learn of the local capacity to deliver the work. I was, most importantly, interested in talking to the constituents of the Member for Arafura, who gave us great ideas and very pragmatic advice on storage facilities when you live in remote areas.

Member for Arafura, I will never forget the story where your constituent mentioned steps and showed us an outdoor living area that could be enhanced with something as simple as access, making it good supporting infrastructure.

I do not have enough time to continue with this story, but we are really looking forward to bringing this forward. It is right across the Territory. It is for our regional and remote areas. It is a record policy. Labor is being congratulated and Labor will deliver. I am privileged, with my colleagues, to be part of this. It is long-term delivery.

GST Revenue

Mr HIGGINS to TREASURER

I am glad the minister mentioned our visit to Canberra, because it is disappointing that so early into your government you have taken your eyes off the ball on jobs and our GST. With the looming jobs cliff, the Territory cannot afford to lose one red cent. The Gunner just government does not get the economy—87 days and not one mention of our share of the GST in this parliament, not one meeting with the federal Treasurer. You are costing the Territory jobs—no action, no care, no leadership. When will the government follow the opposition's lead and lobby the federal government to protect our GST?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. As I highlighted earlier, there is no doubt GST revenues have a huge impact on the Northern Territory. The GST accounts for 50% of the revenue of the Northern Territory. It is a massive, high-risk issue. It is important that we get our fair share of the GST. Changes to the methodology, our population and so forth hit us hard, especially when you look at our current budgetary position.

We have upped you one. The Chief Minister met with the Prime Minister to discuss a range of issues, and he said the GST is very important. I am also glad to see there is clearly bipartisan support in this Chamber for horizontal fiscal equalisation. It is an important principle of the Commonwealth and the federation of this nation to make sure we get a fair share, and recognition that it costs more to deliver services such as a school or health clinic in Wadeye than it does in Sydney or Melbourne. That is a fact. It is an important principle which this country stands by to make sure all Australians can access important services.

I am looking forward to attending CFFR, the Treasurers' meeting—flying out late on Thursday after Question Time—to sit down with the federal, state and territory Treasurers. We will continue to advocate for—just as the Chief Minister and everyone else has been doing, as we have always held a firm position

on it—the importance of getting our fair share of the GST, and the important principles of horizontal fiscal equalisation. I am glad the Chamber is clapping; everybody agrees it is critical.

WA wants to change things, and that could have a huge impact right across the Territory. We would stand to lose significantly if a state like WA got its way in changing the carve-up of the GST. We have to be on the attack and on defence. We have to put our case forward. I thank you for the work you have done to contribute to that important case.

We will ensure that we continue to fight for our fair share of the GST. It is vital to the Territory, especially given we are reliant on 70% of Commonwealth funding. Every cent counts.

Livestock Export Association

Ms NELSON to MINISTER for PRIMARY INDUSTRY and RESOURCES

It has been an incredibly busy 87 days. I was just wondering if you could tell us how the government is supporting the NT Livestock Export Association to strengthen this important industry, and how is this creating jobs more broadly in the economy?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Katherine for her question. She not only represents Katherine, but the surrounding region, which is a vital cog in the chain of cattle and the NT live export industry.

It was a pleasure to join Stuart Kemp from the NT Livestock Export Association last Friday to fast-track the announcement of a \$4.1m to upgrade the Berrimah export yards. This was a commitment that shared bipartisan support with the previous government.

What will this \$4.1m do? We are fast-tracking it out to stimulate the economy as part of the \$1.7bn infrastructure spending that is needed to stimulate the economy. We all know our economy is stagnant, and that is why we are fast-tracking this \$4.1m commitment. It will provide a roof over the whole Berrimah export yards complex. At the moment, during the Wet Season we have a maximum of 2000 head of cattle or buffalo in that complex. By putting a massive roof over the whole complex we will be able to have 4000 to 5000 cattle and buffalo in that facility all year round, keeping the animals calm, dry and out of the mud. That is important for the welfare of the animals. It is an exciting announcement. It also includes 10 new yards in the facility, plus feed and water troughs.

We are in the Wet Season. We were there on Friday and it had rained the night before, and the yards were looking terrible. They had 16 head of cattle and buffalo go out that night and it was quite dangerous. It is obviously needed, and that is why we are supporting this.

We have a Buy Local campaign to stimulate the economy and get locals in jobs. It will generate the engineers, steel producers, steel workers, general construction—local people doing local work for an industry that is vital to the Territory economy. Between primary industry and resources there is \$5bn into the Territory economy every year.

Last year, 487 000 cattle and buffalo were exported out of our port. It is an important industry and we must support it. Of those cattle and buffalo 287 000 were from the Territory. That is worth \$360m alone, just out of the cattle yards. This is why this government has listened to business. We are fast-tracking our election commitments and building infrastructure, with \$4.1m for the NT export live stock yards. This is what is needed and this is what we are doing.

Street Light Pole Cost to Local Government

Mr WOOD to MINISTER for ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Recently Power and Water has been trying to cost shift by passing responsibility for maintaining street light poles to local government, a cost that will be passed on to ratepayers. In this year's budget, on page 120 under Central Holding Authority, there is a line item identified by the very innocuous word 'other'. 'Other' is a secret Treasury word for money that Power and Water pays the Central Holding Authority in lieu of paying rates to local government, an amount of \$462 000. Will the government hand back this rates money to local government where it belongs so local government can use it to offset Power and Water charges for

the light poles? If you will not give the money back, will you allow local government to apply rates to all Power and Water, Territory Generation and Jacana facilities?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Nelson for his question. It is important to note that the funding of \$5.5m was provided to commence this transition, and that nine out of the 10 councils have accepted the conditions of this ownership.

Member for Nelson, you went to a Treasury issue. I will provide you with some information from the local government perspective on the payment of rates. Rates are charged for the delivery of a service from a local government organisation. These services may include rubbish pickup or maintenance of streets. Street lights and associated infrastructure do not benefit from council services. Street lights and associated infrastructure provide a service.

In lieu of rates or taxation, Power and Water pays the Treasury Central Holding Authority the equivalent rate, as you mentioned. These payments are for infrastructure installations that would normally pay taxes or rates. This is by legislative exemption.

Due to the complexities of distributing the operational subsidy to regional councils, a practical solution has not been identified to removing the legislative exemption. Power and Water does not pay rates to local government councils; Power and Water pays a subsidy to Alice Springs and some remote communities for waste charges only.

In terms of the payments, Member for Nelson, the Central Holding Authority receives that revenue, as you said, and it is in my interest, as the minister, to make sure I can negotiate, through the normal budgetary processes, the best return to local government.

I am very proud to say the government has a \$5.1m infrastructure project spend into local government and, as part of the new election commitment, a program of an additional \$5m into the local government area for an infrastructure spend. That was a great policy development position; it was recognised by the electorate and, consequently, it was voted on. In terms of the current processes, Member for Nelson, it is through the Treasury and the Central Holding Authority, and I accept the challenge, as the Minister, to do my best for local government in budget cycles coming forward.

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