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Madam Speaker Purick took the Chair at 10 am.

CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENT (MENTAL IMPAIRMENT AND UNFITNESS TO BE TRIED)
(Serial 11)

Continued from 30 November 2016.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, during their term in government the Country Liberals made valuable improvements to mental health interventions and the streamlining of the court system in the Northern Territory.

In 2016, following extensive consultation with the legal community, the Country Liberal government completed a comprehensive reformation of the court system in the Territory. This included a consolidation of the Local Court with the Court of Summary Jurisdiction and the creation of the NTCAT. The jurisdictional limits for the Supreme Court were altered to allow the institution to focus on more serious matters by shifting jurisdiction over additional minor matters to the Local Court. Chief among the objects of these changes was to increase the efficiency of the Territory's court system by streamlining its various functions.

The Country Liberal government implemented a number of important changes aimed at streamlining the interactions of persons with mental illness and the justice system. For example, in 2015 millions of dollars were allocated to hire a number of mental health court liaison officers as part of the mental health clinicians in courts initiative. Among other things, these professionals are responsible for:

1. identifying individuals appearing before the court and determining whether they are suffering from mental illness or cognitive impairment
2. intervening where immediate danger of self-harm or harm to another exists
3. providing the court with advice, conducting assessments and developing treatment plans under the *Mental Health and Related Services Act*
4. monitoring a person's progress where a treatment plan has been implemented.

A mental health diversion list was also created in the Local Court to provide specialised attention and services to alleged offenders suffering from impairment. All of these changes have added to the efficiency of the courts, improved outcomes for mentally ill persons and ensured persons in need of real help are provided with services they require.

This bill adds to the reforms already implemented to encourage the official functioning of the courts.

At base, the bill grants additional discretionary power to a judge or justice to accept a plea of not guilty by reason of mental impairment where the accused has been found unfit to stand trial. Under the current procedure a special hearing, which for all intents and purposes is a full trial, is required even where both the prosecution and defence agree that such a plea is appropriate. In other words, where an accused is found unfit to stand trial, a full trial is required even though both sides to the dispute, and the presiding judge, agree the defendant should be found not guilty by reason of mental impairment.

The current procedure is unnecessarily convoluted when viewed in the context of other provisions of the Criminal Code. For example, a Supreme Court judge currently has discretion to accept a plea of not guilty by reason of mental impairment at trial under section 43H of the act, which states:

If the parties to a prosecution of an offence agree, the court may, at any time during the trial of the offence, accept a plea and record a finding of not guilty of the offence because of mental impairment.

However, where a trial cannot proceed because the accused is found unfit to stand trial under section 43J a judge has no discretion to accept a plea and must move ahead with a special hearing.

A special hearing is a costly and time-consuming exercise for the parties and the judicial system. As section 43W provides:

A special hearing is to be conducted as nearly as possible as if it were a criminal trial.

This includes empaneling a jury and observing essentially all the formalities of a trial. Among other things, at a special hearing:

- (a) *the accused person is taken to plead not guilty;*
- (b) *the accused person's legal representative (if any) may exercise the accused person's right of challenge;*
- (c) *the accused person may raise any defence (including the defence of mental impairment) that he or she could raise at a criminal trial;*
- (d) *the rules of evidence apply;*
- (e) *the accused person may give evidence; and*
- (f) *any alternative finding of guilt that would be available for a jury at a criminal trial is available to the jury at the special hearing.*

In addition, an extra level of complexity is added with the judge being required to explain to the jury the significance of the accused's unfitness to be tried, the purpose of a special hearing and the differing findings that may be available at law and otherwise.

Perhaps the most incongruous aspect of requiring a special hearing under circumstances where both the prosecution and the defence agree that mental impairment exists is that there will be no fact in dispute for a jury to determine. The role of jury is to hear and determine whether the burden of proof in a criminal matter has been met. Where both sides to a dispute and the judge agree that the burden cannot be discharged due to mental impairment the jury is left without a role to fulfil. Accordingly, dispensing with the necessity for a special hearing is entirely appropriate.

Under the new procedure proposed by this bill the judge is not required to accept the agreed plea put forward by the parties. New section 43XA grants the trial judge discretion to reject a plea of not guilty by reason of mental impairment, which is similar to the discretion provided by section 43H.

This would be important under circumstances where despite the view of the parties that mental impairment has been established by the evidence the judge disagrees. Under those extraordinary conditions a special hearing would still be conducted and the jury would be called upon to decide for itself whether the evidence put forward by the parties satisfy the elements of such a mental impairment defence under section 43C.

As the Attorney-General stated in her second reading speech, this helpful change to the law addresses an issue identified by both the current and former Chief Justices of the Northern Territory Supreme Court. I thank their Honours for their valuable contribution to this legislation.

It is a bit disappointing, however, that this opportunity was not taken up by the government to introduce some other important and necessary changes involving the interaction of persons with mental health issues and our judicial system. For example, other learned experts have recently suggested changes to the manner in which mental health issues are dealt with in the courts.

In May 2016 the Northern Territory Law Reform Commission, headed by the Honourable Austin Asche AC QC, made some 22 recommendations in its report on the interaction between people with mental health issues and the criminal justice system.

The terms of reference for that report ask the committee to examine and report on law reform in relation to the interaction between people with mental health issues and the justice system and ways that this interaction, as well as outcomes for both the individual and society, might be improved. The Law Reform Commission's recommendations, some of which were implemented by the Country Liberals before the change of government, range from changes in the definitions included in section 43A of the Criminal Code to the establishment of a specialised mental health court.

Specifically, Recommendations 1 and 2 provide that section 43A of the Criminal Code should be amended to bring it more closely in line with the *Mental Health and Related Services Act*. Specifically, the Law Reform Commission recommends that:

1. the term 'mental disturbance' should be added as one of the inclusions under the definition of 'mental impairment'
2. the definition of 'mental illness' under section 43A of the Criminal Code should be replaced with reference to section 6 of the *Mental Health and Related Services Act*.

The rationale given for these suggested changes is that the definition of a comprehensive definition of mental impairment, which includes mental disturbance and mental illness under the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* is much more detailed and closely aligned with the tenets of modern psychiatry.

The Law Reform Commission also recommended the creation of a dedicated mental health court constituted by an appropriately qualified Local Court judge to which persons with possible mental health issues, including cognitive impairment, who have been charged with the commission of a criminal offence in the local court, would be referred and thereby diverted from the regular criminal justice system and into a forum better equipped to deal with defendants who may have mental health issues or a cognitive impairment.

Matters would be referred to the mental health court by the Local Court and jurisdiction would exist over all relevant matters including:

- (a) assessment of a defendant's bail application
- (b) assessment and an admission of a defendant under Part 10, Division 1 of the *Mental Health and Related Services Act*
- (c) consideration of applications for dismissal of a charge on the basis of mental illness or mental disturbance under section 77 of the *Mental Health and Related Services Act*
- (d) making voluntary treatment plans under section 78 of the *Mental Health and Related Services Act*
- (e) making orders for and consideration of presentence reports requiring psychiatric or psychological examinations
- (f) making mental health orders under Part 4 of the *Sentencing Act*.

According to the recommendations, the aim of creating a dedicated mental health code would be to:

... prevent further offending by adopting a more therapeutic response to the offending behaviour of persons with mental health problems, and diverting them away from the regular criminal justice system by providing access to early assessment and interventions that address their mental health needs and their offending behaviour, as well as providing them with appropriate treatment in order to reduce their likelihood of re-offending.

Given the efficiencies that a dedicated mental health court would produce, as well as improved outcomes for defendants suffering from mental illness or disturbance, the Law Reform Commission's recommendations seem eminently reasonable and desirable. It would go a long way towards standardising the practises in regard to dealing with mentally ill persons in the justice system and free up the Local Court to refer matters which might otherwise be time-consuming and out of the ordinary.

This seems like a win-win for the courts, defendants and the criminal justice system as a whole.

I urge the government to review all the recommendations made by the Law Reform Commission and determine whether they have to date been implemented or not. Any recommendations that have not been acted upon should either be adopted forthwith or an explanation should be provided as to why they have been instituted.

With that said, the opposition supports this legislation and commends its passage to the House.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I also support the Criminal Code Amendment (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Bill. I will not repeat everything the opposition members said. Everything they said makes good sense.

This situation is a legal requirement, which is perhaps unnecessary. If we go down this route, from an economic point of view it is a waste of money. If you can change the legislation to make the law more efficient and save the government money by bringing in a jury when you do not need one, it makes good common sense.

The Leader of Opposition Business spoke about some other matters that were raised in Dr Asche's report. The idea of a mental health court reminded me that we used to have the Alcohol Court. You are also looking at establishing a domestic violence court. I do not know whether the government has given that any thought.

The Banned Drinker Register, in its day, was part of the Alcohol Court. I am interested in comments from the government—the Alcohol Court and mental health court probably work side-by-side, because, in many cases, some people who are affected substantially by alcohol also have a mental health problem. I am interested to hear the government's response to what the opposition has put forward.

I support the bill.

Ms NELSON (Katherine): Madam Speaker, I add my support to the comments already made in this Chamber by the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice about the proposed changes to the *Criminal Code Act* and how they will have a twofold effect on the betterment of criminal justice in the Northern Territory.

Reading through the aforementioned legislation is a journey in legalese that, as a layperson, would make even the most seasoned legal practitioner cringe. It is a highly complex area of law. In its simplest form the Criminal Code Amendment (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Bill seeks to remove a redundant burden on the Northern Territory's already strained judicial resources and make the justice system fairer for those who are not fit to stand trial and plead not guilty because of mental impairment.

As someone who has campaigned tirelessly against inequality and discrimination her entire adult life, it is the fairness of the amendments I would like to speak about in detail today.

The fundamental value of the right of equality is that every single one of us is afforded an equal level of dignity. It is a globally accepted fact that human dignity is harmed by the unfair or differing treatment of people because of their disabilities rather than treatment relating to the needs and capacities of individuals, and taking into account the underlying context of their differences and what impact those differences have on their actions.

It is an easy enough concept for most people to comprehend and accept in terms of everyday life, be it in a social, professional or educational environment, but one of the key foundations of an equitable justice system is that the same concept applies. For someone accused of a crime to be fully accountable for their transgressions there should be comprehensive consideration of their cognitive impairment and what role it will play in court proceedings, especially relating to areas such as advice, assistance, representation and what reasonable adjustments are required for that person to effectively participate in proceedings.

The reality of the society in which we live is that some individuals who offend vicious, terrifying crimes do not have the cognitive capacity to answer the charges against them in a manner that could be described as equitable, non-discriminatory and a true carriage of justice.

This is not a statement unique to the NT. It is a challenge for criminal justice systems across Australia. The Criminal Code Amendment Bill will help reform the criminal justice system of the NT so that persons who are charged with the crime but are unfit to stand trial are treated better when they have their day in court. If someone is unfit to pay for their crimes because they are mentally unfit to do so, they should not be dragged unnecessarily through the justice system while that discrimination is occurring.

If the Northern Territory is to pride itself on administering a legal system that offers equality and a timely delivery of justice then it must recognise that delaying a verdict because of the requirement to hold a special hearing represents inequitable treatment tantamount to discrimination in the case of a person with a mental impairment.

Doing so not only ties up our judges, jury members and legal practitioners for both the prosecution and defence, but it creates a situation in which the accused person is stripped of any iota of privacy and dignity, as their psychiatric records are assessed by a jury as part of the process.

It must be noted that prior to a special hearing being called, the court will already have recorded a finding that the accused is unfit for trial.

Clause 6 of the bill stipulates an addition to the legislation that would allow a court to dispense with a special hearing if the parties involved with the prosecution of the offence agree that the evidence establishes a defence of mental impairment. The addition, which will be known as section 43XA of the *Criminal Code Act*, would create a pathway for the court to then accept a plea and record a finding of not guilty because of mental impairment.

It will be a giant leap forward for the NT's criminal justice system that I believe will provide fairness for accused persons found to be suffering a genuine cognitive impairment at the time the offence occurred.

Additionally, it will avoid the need to hold a special hearing to reach a legal conclusion that a judge is perfectly capable of reaching independently, thus lessening the strain on those who administer the system and the members of our community called upon to serve on a jury.

A jury trial is an incredibly expensive exercise, the cost of which is ultimately borne by taxpayers. As the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice succinctly put it during the second reading of the bill in November, special hearings often proceed on the basis that they, the jury, are provided with a document containing agreed facts, possibly together with psychiatric reports, and after a brief address from counsel and instructions from the judge a verdict is always returned as not guilty because of mental impairment.

Our criminal justice system already costs many millions to run each year, and the current requirements surrounding mental impairment and special hearings does nothing more than add an unnecessary burden to the Northern Territory's bottom line. The bill we are debating today has the capacity to not only remove this economic and legal albatross, but ensure that anyone deemed unfit to stand trial and plead not guilty because of mental impairment will not have their dignity stolen in the extremely public forum that is a jury trial.

Any changes to legislation that protect and promote the basic human rights of Territorians suffering a mental impairment, and which also improves the bottom line of our criminal justice system, are changes that we have an obligation, as Members of the Legislative Assembly, to support wholeheartedly.

In closing, I believe passing this bill will allow us to achieve these ambitions and leave the NT a better place through strong leadership which recognises that an equitable, expedient carriage of justice is something every one of us is entitled to.

I commend this bill to the Assembly.

Ms AH KIT (Karama): Madam Speaker, I speak in favour of the bill being brought before the House by the Attorney-General. The bill proposes to address an anomaly in Part IIA of the Criminal Code. The proposed amendment allows the court to forego the need for special hearing to allow for a jury to determine mental impairment where mental impairment is not in dispute.

Therefore this proposed amendment can add value to our justice system by reducing the time spent in courts, reducing the work for the prosecution and defence, and more importantly, reducing stress upon a defendant who is unfit to stand trial due to their mental impairment.

Mental impairment is a serious matter that affects many Territorians and their families, and our government understands this. There are many Territorians living with mental impairment, who are some of our most vulnerable community members and we need to treat them as such. I believe this legislative amendment will do just that to make their experience in our legal system user friendly.

I am happy to support this legislative amendment, and I thank the Attorney-General for bringing it before the House.

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Madam Speaker, I thank the opposition and the Members for Nelson, Katherine and Karama for their contributions to this debate.

I think it is important to note that this is an issue which affects us across society, and it has an impact within the justice system. I thank those members for taking the time to seek briefings from my office and for the time they have taken to contribute to the debate today.

I also thank the agency staff who have provided me with support in preparing this legislation to bring it forward. I also acknowledge the Chief Magistrate as well as the Chief Justice, Michael Grant, having met with him since forming government and taking on the position of Attorney-General. He is deeply passionate about this topic. I also acknowledge that he has implemented many of the changes recommended in the report.

I thank the opposition for their support with this bill and I note the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's comments that the changes are appropriate. I also noted the comments concerning the NT Law Reform Commission's mental health report. And having met with the Chief Justice I know we are aware of the concerns in this space. It is something that you, Madam Speaker, have raised with me as well, so it is something that concerns every one of us in this Chamber and across the community.

From the government's perspective I note that Budget 2017–18 provides \$1m more for court support services and infrastructure repairs and upgrades across Territory courts. Part of that is providing a more streamlined service that provides better support to those in our justice system and working within it. These actions by our government ensure that the Local Courts are getting the resources they need to deliver a timely and efficient justice process.

I thank everyone for their contribution to this debate. As outlined in my second reading speech, currently under Part IIA of the Criminal Code, when an accused is fit to stand trial a plea of not guilty due to mental impairment can be accepted if the prosecution and defence agree, but when an accused is not fit to stand trial the issue of mental impairment needs to be determined by a jury at a special hearing.

The purpose of the bill is to correct that anomaly. Under this bill the prosecution and defence agree that mental impairment has been established before or during a special hearing and the court may accept a plea and a finding of not guilty because of mental impairment, thus dispensing with the need for a special hearing.

The Criminal Code Amendment (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Bill 2016 therefore amends Part IIA of the Criminal Code by:

- (a) inserting a new section 43XA to permit a court to forego the need for a special hearing, removing the need for a jury to determine mental impairment where mental impairment is not in dispute
- (b) inserting a new section 43B to require a court that has found an accused not guilty because of mental impairment under the new section to either declare that the accused person is liable to supervision or an order that the accused is released unconditionally
- (c) amending section 43E to clarify that the need for a jury to determine whether an accused is not guilty because of mental impairment at a special hearing is subject to section 43H, which permits the court to accept a plea and record a finding of not guilty because of mental impairment at any time during a trial; and a new section, 43A, which allows the court to accept a plea and record a finding of not guilty because of mental impairment at any time before or during a special hearing where the accused is unfit to stand trial
- (d) amending section 43R to remove the requirement for a special hearing to be heard where the court has accepted a plea and recorded a finding of not guilty because of mental impairment under section 43XA
- (e) amending section 43Y to allow the court to make interim orders where it has dispensed with the need for a special hearing, found the accused not guilty because of mental impairment under new section 43XA, and declared an accused liable to supervision under section 43XBA
- (f) amending section 43Z to require a court to make a supervision order where the accused is declared liable for supervision under section 43XBA.

A safeguard exists in a new section 43XA, which is phrased as:

... a discretionary provision ... so that the court may still require the matter to progress by special hearing, where the judge elects not to accept a plea under section 43XA.

The reform implemented by this bill, which will apply only in cases where there is no contest, removes an unnecessary strain on our court system, government resources and members of the public selected to

serve on juries. We need to make sure we support our courts and those in our judicial system. They are there to provide process and we need to make sure we streamline that process and make it efficient.

It is important to note the members of the public who serve on juries. We have friends, family and members of our electorate who, we find after the fact, have served on juries—the time it takes away from their families and jobs. It is important as part of our judicial processes, but we need to acknowledge it is a considerable effort for them. Streamlining this process, dispensing with it when it is not required, helps makes our court system more efficient.

The Member for Nelson raised a question regarding the Alcohol Court. In relation to his comments, the government is bringing back the Banned Drinker Register. Legislation will be introduced next week. This government said we would be tough on alcohol-related harm and the impact it causes in our community, the antisocial behaviour, violence and trauma our frontline emergency services deal with every day. We look forward to bringing that legislation to the House. It was scrapped by the previous government overnight purely because it had an ideological problem with showing identification to purchase alcohol.

We have a huge issue with alcohol in the Northern Territory. It is the single biggest social harm, and takeaway alcohol is responsible for a large part of that. The small inconvenience of showing identification to purchase alcohol goes a long way in stopping that harm. Police call it one of the best tools they have for tackling antisocial behaviour and alcohol-related harm. St John Ambulance noticed a difference when it was scrapped.

We will put in place measures that help protect our community. Territorians deserve the right to access alcohol and have a drink responsibly. I do not believe showing identification to purchase alcohol is such a big inconvenience when you consider the harm it causes in our community.

Anyone who looks under 25 currently has to show identification. It is not that big a deal to show ID. The former government scrapped the initiative overnight and stopped the supply of alcohol to about 2500 people, who were then able to purchase alcohol straight away. We have had a patchwork approach to some measures in some areas of the Northern Territory, but we will have a Territory-wide measure with the Banned Drinker Register, stopping the supply of alcohol to those who cause harm in our community.

I am pleased to be working with my colleagues and government agencies, such as Health and Justice, on the reintroduction of that program. It will extend beyond the Banned Drinker Register and showing identification. It will have clinical supports in place to provide pathways for those who wish to rehabilitate their lives.

I think it is important that we continue to follow up our policies and initiatives to have an evidence-based approach; that did not happen under the previous government. The alcohol mandatory treatment program was hugely costly and there were very low numbers. There was no way of tracking people once they had participated. There was no follow-up around if it had any benefit to them.

I am very pleased the government has supported me, the Minister for Health, in driving a review into alcohol policy. That is being led by former Chief Justice Trevor Riley.

The review into alcohol policy in the Northern Territory is an exciting opportunity for the Territory. We will have experts such as Trevor Riley leading that group, along with representatives from Health, the Indigenous health community, industry and business. We need to make sure we put in place policies and programs that provide for Territorians who drink responsibly, but also protect our community. We all need to be at the table working together to come up with solutions.

There may be decisions that are relatively easy to implement. If we understand businesses' and retailers' point of view we can work with them. Some measures will take time and we will need to consult, but we need to start to tackle the issue of alcohol, which causes so much harm in our community. The last research figures came up as \$640m and climbing, and that figure is a few years old. When you consider the harm that alcohol causes our community, we need to be tough on that, and we are.

We will introduce the legislation regarding the Banned Drinker Register next week. We have implemented the alcohol policy review that will report back by the end of September, and government will respond to that report. It is a unique opportunity for the Northern Territory.

In leading the alcohol review, former Chief Justice Trevor Riley said it would involve looking at the interaction between alcohol-fuelled crime and the courts. We do not have any strong evidence, but when

we hear that an estimated 60% of court related cases relate to alcohol; when you speak to people who are incarcerated in the Northern Territory; when you go to our hospitals and speak to our frontline emergency department staff; when you visit the ICU in Alice Springs and they tell you 70% of the beds are filled with alcohol-related trauma, such as road trauma, domestic and family violence—60 to 70% of incarcerations, hospitalisations and court cases is a high enough figure for us to acknowledge that alcohol plays a large role in our courts. We know that from pulling together information from various reports.

We are taking a holistic government approach in tackling alcohol, working with Health, Justice and experts to have an evidence-based approach. I very much look forward to updating the House on that review and introducing legislation next week. We will put that measure in place by 1 September.

The Member for Nelson raised the issue of the Alcohol Court, and I felt it was timely to provide the House with some information on that.

I am pleased that we have unanimous support in the House for this bill. I very much appreciate the members who have taken the time to receive briefings from the agency staff. I again thank the agency staff for their hard work in this space.

Madam Speaker, I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice) (by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

APPROPRIATION (2017–2018) BILL (Serial 20)

Continued from 3 May 2017.

Ms WAKEFIELD (Territory Families): Madam Speaker, I am proud to respond to the debate on Budget 2017–18. I thank the Treasurer for her hard work, commitment, vision and belief in all of us that, as Territorians, we have a bright and shared future, with the ability to work through these difficult times. There is no doubt this has been a challenging budget.

There has been a lot of talk about optimism verses realism, and within the budget allocation to Territory Families this government shows a healthy dose of realism in the challenges we face as a community, and investing in the outcomes and making a difference in those challenging areas.

The difference between our side of government and the other is that we have the optimism to make changes in this area. We have the belief in Territorians that if they are going down the wrong path they can turn their life around and that families can work through their problems. That is what we have invested in throughout this budget. It shows our belief in investing in the future by investing in our most vulnerable.

In stark contrast to the chaos left by the previous government, we are now on track for delivering for the future of young people and families in the Territory. In doing this we are creating jobs and supporting businesses. This government is committed to improving the lives of children to deliver long-term benefits to our society. We are committed to tackling the causes of crime and social disadvantage through a plan to invest in supporting families and breaking the cycle of crime.

We are committed to supporting seniors to remain in the Territory and provide a better and fairer concession scheme. In this budget we continue to deliver for Territorians.

The formation of Territory Families brings together family-focused services to develop and deliver a cohesive and consistent approach to family support services. Bringing them together achieves economies of scale in service delivery. We are working smarter as well as better. Child protection, family support, women's policy, men's policy, youth justice, multicultural affairs, seniors, domestic and family violence, and sexual violence reduction all fall under this agency.

It is a diverse agency and one I am very proud to lead. It is one with the right scope to support Northern Territory families through the provision of quality, frontline service delivery and overarching government

advocacy. Budget 2017–18 will progress this focus through new money and reinvestment into critical areas.

The total operating budget for Territory Families in 2017–18 is \$287m. This is an increase of \$33.5m from \$253.5m in 2016–17 for the same portfolio areas. This includes \$25.4m for new initiatives funded in the areas of youth justice, family support, seniors and carers. It also includes \$11.8m to address legacy underfunding in domestic and family violence and out-of-home care.

When we came to government it became clear there was a significant cost to the chaos. There was no further funding of \$6m for domestic violence services. There was a serious legacy of underfunding out-of-home care, along with machinery of government changes where efficiency dividends were not fairly spread across agencies. We have sorted out those mistakes in this budget and left the agency with a strong structural basis to move forward with recurrent funding.

These new initiatives will see at least 54 new staff employed by Territory Families, working in the area of youth diversion. That is 54 new specialist jobs for Territorians, long-term secure jobs where staff are properly supported and trained, because the money we have put into youth justice is recurrent money. It is not bubble money and it is not just for three years; this is about long-term investment in the future of our young people.

I turn now to child protection, a core service in Territory Families. With the focus on youth justice I have not had as many opportunities in this House as I would like to talk about child protection, so I appreciate the opportunity to update the House on the work we will do on child protection issues.

Community concerns over the safety of children continue to increase. This is a step forward in our maturity as a community when we see our children as our whole community's responsibility, not just within the private realm of the family. We are committed, as are Territorians, to making sure this is a community where children are safe. This is a positive thing, but it also means the demand for child protection services has gone up, particularly in notifications of concerns about children's welfare.

Based on the current numbers, Territory Families is projected to receive up to 22 000 child protection reports this financial year, and up to 25 000 in the next financial year. It is estimated that 2400 children will be found to have been harmed or placed at risk of harm by the act or admission of their parents. This is an anticipated increase of 100 in 2016–17.

Harm to a child is an issue of great concern, particularly where the statistics and modelling are telling us that this may continue to increase. Rather than waiting for harm to occur and then react, this government will be investing earlier in families to reduce harm to them. In Budget 2017–18 an additional \$4.5m has been provided in the family support area. This is new funding, not a redirection from child protection services or youth services as has happened in the past. I will provide further details on these new initiatives shortly.

I also want to note, reflecting on the child protection figures in the budget, that the published reduction of funding relates to one-off funding that was put in to child protection for the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory. I take this opportunity to publicly thank all the workers in Territory Families, who have been providing information to the Royal Commission. It has been extremely hard work.

The CEO had to order them to have Easter off because they had been working every other weekend to provide information to the Royal Commission, so I thank that unit for their work. It has put additional pressure on all levels of management in Territory Families. We are committed to being transparent and cooperating fully with the Royal Commission, but we need to acknowledge that it has put significant stress on the agency I lead.

In relation to out-of-home care, this government has been committed to investing in children to deliver long-term generational social benefits. As part of this, children need a supportive and nurturing environment to reach their fullest potential. For some children, however, home is not a safe place. In the most unsafe of circumstances, and as a last resort, Territory Families will take action to place these children into out-of-home care to protect them from harm and neglect.

The purpose of out-of-home care is to provide children with stable, nurturing, home-based care that enables them to heal, and positions them for a safer and supported future while efforts to achieve effective and healthy family reunification are progressed.

There are currently 1046 children in out-of-home care. I find that distressing. In a jurisdiction of our population, that is too many kids in out-of-home care. Eighty-nine percent of these kids are Aboriginal, and 636 of them will be in care until they reach the age of 18.

Each of those children has an individual story with individual circumstances that needs an individual plan. Ensuring each of these children in out-of-home care receives the placement and case management support required to achieve a positive life outcome is an incredible responsibility for government, one we take seriously and seek to continually improve. This system needs ongoing work to improve.

Budget 2017–18 positions Territory Families to achieve a number of improved outcomes for children in care. One key focus is to ensure children receive tailored, effective and trauma-informed support and services through prioritised health and mental health needs assessment and services.

This budget invests \$109.4m to support children in out-of-home care. This is an increase of \$8.9m on last year. Additional funding of \$15m in 2016–17 and \$5.6m ongoing has been provided to meet the rising costs of out-of-home care. This is where we need to do work over this term of government as costs of out-of-home care continue to rise. We need to make sure we have as few children going into out-of-home care as we can. Early intervention is the key, but we need to make sure our out-of-home care system is working in a way that is most effective and efficient for children.

This government is committed to partnering and working in a meaningful way—not just lip service to partnership, but true partnership with a non-government sector to improve the quality and affordability of out-of-home care services. This is a difficult thing for government to do. We need to work on how we get to the true partnership level. The NGO sector has been very supportive of that approach. I thank them for their willingness to work with us on this issue. It is a significant issue we need to continue to work on.

The planning has commenced in this area to transition out-of-home care services to the non-government sector, and invests in Aboriginal-controlled organisations that can work with children in care in culturally supportive and sustainable ways. This is the best way forward. A huge proportion of our kids in care are Aboriginal. We need to make sure they are accessing services where they feel safe and secure, and continue to have their connection to country, culture and language. This will support them to have a strong and positive identity moving forward. Therefore they are much more likely to have a strong and positive future—if you feel good about your identity and who you are.

I thank the Member for Nhulunbuy for his continued advocacy in this area. Many Aboriginal children in out-of-home care are living away from their communities of origin because there are no local placements available. We need to work on this. We have committed \$150 000 to explore opportunities to extend Aboriginal family care in Aboriginal communities, keeping kids on country wherever possible.

Children in out-of-home care worry about what will happen when they leave care. I had a discussion with a young woman around this issue last week in Alice Springs. There are a large number of children reaching this pivotal point in their life. We have committed \$380 000 for three dedicated positions to plan for and support children leaving care to transition into appropriate independent living arrangements.

When you have lived in out-of-home care and suddenly your proxy parent, which is the CEO when you are in care, no longer has responsibility for you it must be a terrifying prospect, because the reason kids are in care is that they do not have family support. In order to make sure young people are making strides and reaching their full potential that is a very important addition to the budget.

Giving every child the best start in life is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. That is why this government is committed to investing in vulnerable families before they enter the child protection system. Budget 2017–18 will invest \$30.1m to provide support to families, parents and children. This is an increase of \$4.5m on the previous year. This is a strategic investment; this is an investment in our future. It will provide support to vulnerable families to stop them entering the child protection system in the first place, to help put them on reunification pathways and give them the support they need to be successful.

A total of \$3m ongoing will be invested to establish a new referral system, providing an alternative pathway to child protection notifications. This is an initiative designed to connect families to available family and parenting support services without direct involvement in the child protection system. This is a key strategy which delivers true partnerships with the non-government sector and the community to empower Territorians to share the responsibility for the safety of children.

This acknowledges that government is not able to deliver all levels of service delivery. As a long-term social worker you may ring up and make a notification because you have a mandatory reporting situation—you know it is unlikely that the issue is serious enough for the child to be removed, but a family needs a level of support. Quite rightly, when you make those notifications the department makes a decision not to intervene, which they should when the status has not been reached to take a drastic and serious step. The department takes such things very seriously; however, everybody involved in that situation knows that without support things will get worse, and this is where we get multiple notifications for the same family.

The beauty of this system is that there is an ability to refer straight to the NGO sector, which can then provide wraparound support to that family. This is vital work and has been shown to work in other jurisdictions. I am very pleased to be part of a government that will be delivering this new system, which I think will have great outcomes for some of our most vulnerable families.

A total of \$1.75m of new money has also been invested for expanding after-hours youth activities in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. Just to be clear, this is separate to our \$18.3m investment in the youth justice system. This is about keeping kids engaged positively throughout the year, not just at the high-risk times of Christmas and school holidays, and making sure there are meaningful ways we can engage children and have them feel part of our community as well as having positive things to do rather than all that energy going into negative activities.

I think this will be a game changer, particularly for Tennant Creek, where there are significant issues. The Member for Barkly is a strong advocate for making sure we get the right youth services in Tennant Creek.

Every Territorian has the right to feel safe and to expect their homes, businesses and properties to be secure. They are also entitled to enjoy safe and vibrant cities, towns and communities. That is why this government is tackling the causes of crime through a plan to invest in youth diversion and detention systems that work to break the cycle of crime.

I felt eternally grateful to be in the team I am in after watching some of the news programs and testimonies last week. As minister responsible for youth justice I have the backing of my Chief Minister, the Treasurer and the Attorney-General. The whole Cabinet has a strong vision for youth justice and the future of young people. It is a positive vision for young people.

As a Labor government, my Caucus colleagues have been incredibly supportive of the reforms we are making in youth justice. Each of them has talked to me about the circumstances in their electorates. We are committed. After watching the chaos of last week I feel very grateful that I am a minister in a government that truly works as a team with a shared vision for the Territory.

However, we need to be clear; the responsibility for the current state of our youth justice system is shared between both sides of government. There are well-documented issues in our youth justice system. The data highlights that the Northern Territory has the highest rate of children and young people in detention in Australia, and the government and wider community hold legitimate concerns about the frequency and impact of youth crime. It is clear we need to approach this issue differently to what has been done in the past.

A key commitment of this government is to design a youth justice system that is focused on diversion and rehabilitation. We need a justice system that rehabilitates and breaks the cycle of reoffending and keeps our communities safe. It is not enough to simply detain a young offender. We must focus on early intervention, rehabilitation and diversionary programs. We must break the cycle before it happens. We must stop crime before it happens. We must ensure that youth justice is not a bridge into the adult justice system.

Budget 2017–18 invests \$43.2m into youth justice, which is an increase of \$17.6m. This is record funding and will provide targeted youth programs and services that improve community safety and reduce offending and reoffending by young people. New funding will provide 54 youth outreach and re-engagement positions, and I will attend the graduation of those workers next week. I look forward to that because two weeks ago, on a Friday afternoon, was the graduation of the new youth justice officers, which was a great experience. The entire front row of people were in tears at some of the speeches that were made about those new youth justice officers' commitment to making a difference and turning the system around. It was inspirational. I thank them for those speeches.

The new funding will expand youth diversion and boot camp programs run by our non-government sector and establish a new bail support program. It is important to note that despite the fact we are the jurisdiction

with the highest number of young people in detention, we are the only jurisdiction that has never had a bail support system for young people. That is something we need to change, and that is why we have acted on this urgently and early in our first term of government.

This funding will also establish a legislative framework for the development of a contemporary youth justice and rehabilitation system, including an independent oversight mechanism. Recommendations from the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory will contribute to the design of our reform; however, we are committed to making much-needed improvements without delay, and that is why we are taking action now to introduce new initiatives to divert youth from a life of crime.

In the interim report handed down in March, the Royal Commission commended us for the work we were doing. It said the reforms we had in place were on the right track. We look forward to the next report, but we need to continue to take action whilst we await that report and work alongside the Royal Commission, whilst also making sure we work with our federal partners in this issue as it is a co-funded Royal Commission. Once we get those recommendations I will sit down with my federal colleagues and look at how we can jointly put those recommendations into operation. I look forward to that process in August. It is urgent work that we have started already.

When I came to government I was horrified to learn that there was no forward provision for continuing key domestic and family violence services in the Northern Territory, including the Family Safety Framework and the Alice Springs integrated response. It was a piece of work the CLP extended from the previous Labor government, but whilst they talked about it publicly they did not value it enough to put it into the ongoing forward estimates.

We have found that money, \$6m, to keep those services going because we need to tackle domestic and family violence, as it is one of the biggest issues facing our community. Domestic violence is so often the trigger that puts children into child protection systems and young people into youth justice systems. There are reasons those young kids cannot go home, why they are on the streets in the middle of the night.

As someone who was a practitioner in Alice Springs for a long time, it is interesting to see some of the names that come across my desk. The link is clear in a small jurisdiction and in a town of that size. We need to act on domestic and family violence if we want to meaningfully deal with youth justice and child protection issues.

We also need to realise the demand that domestic and family violence places on our justice system. I am very proud to be part of a government that will finally deliver a specialist domestic and family violence court in Alice Springs. It is the main body of work they do every day in that courthouse. We need to provide safety for victims so they feel comfortable in that space. It is intimidating having to testify against your partner, who has hurt you in such a difficult way. We need to make sure we are supporting mainly women in that position.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to talk about Alice Springs hospital and when I was in the emergency department as a social worker. The demand on that department due to women presenting with assault-related injuries is extraordinary. I did some research at the time and it is the highest ...

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

Motion agreed to.

Ms WAKEFIELD: So this budget invests \$29.1m into domestic violence services, which is an increase of \$4.9m, but we are investing in the Attorney-General's area, so overall we have a much higher spend on that area of funding.

We have also made a very important investment into gender equity, which we know is the driver of domestic and family violence. We need to go to the root causes of the social issues we are facing. We have \$3.96m for gender equity and social inclusion. Our focus is on investing in informed strategic economic and social policy decisions and programs that encourage social harmony, equity inclusion and diversity.

One of the great pleasures of this job is getting to know our multicultural community better. We have some amazing people in our community who were born overseas and who contribute so much and add to the social inclusiveness of our community. We are fortunate in the Territory.

We have led the way with our government, with so many female elected members of parliament. We need to make sure we are encouraging equality and participation of women at all levels of our community in the Territory, particularly women from Indigenous and multicultural communities, and young and senior women, who have so much to offer of their wisdom and shared experience.

I will touch on our seniors and carers package. We have been clear that, as a Territory, we all benefit when seniors remain here during retirement. They contribute to strong and stable families, the economy, cultural life and resilient communities. We need to acknowledge how much volunteering senior Territorians do. When you go to any club there are retired people contributing to our community. For that reason we have increased our spending to support seniors and carers to \$33.9m. This comprises \$32.3m to assist pensioners, carers and other eligible Territorians through the NT Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme with cost-of-living expenses, providing an incentive for senior Territorians living in the Territory. Within this amount we have committed an additional \$2.1m to support senior Territorians previously excluded from the scheme when the previous government introduced means testings.

We will work on the seniors scheme because there has been talk of reform in that area. There have been court cases where people have been found guilty of rorting this scheme. There is significant concern within the community regarding the extent of exploitation of the power and water aspect of the concession scheme. We will work with and consult Territorians on making sure this scheme is fair, equitable and spread across as many Territorians as possible. It is important that people access this scheme as fairly as possible. We will keep the House updated on that scheme's progress.

Territory Families was created in September 2016 with a vision of being a capable, contemporary agency that is fulfilling its statutory responsibilities. The agency is required to deliver improved service outcomes at a time of fiscal restraint. We need to grab key opportunities for integration, coordination and making sure we improve services, with economies of scale being realised on a number of fronts, combining functions to create a new, larger agency.

Territory Families staff know that through efficient and effective services they can make a significant difference. They must work closely with their colleagues within the agency and the broader public sector, and truly value the partnership with our NGO sector. They are currently working on their first strategic plan as a whole agency with the NGO sector and other partners and stakeholders.

The role of Territory Families is large, complex and, without doubt, challenging. However, through this budget and with this government's commitment to reform, and with the dedication of Territory Families staff, I am confident we can have a collective impact on the social issues that are confronting families across the Northern Territory.

I thank all the workers at Territory Families; it is a difficult job. They do very difficult frontline jobs in some challenging circumstances. We have also given them a significant workload with our reform agenda and they have stepped up with grace regarding those issues. I look forward to delivering ongoing improvements, but we can only do that with the support of our very hard-working public servants.

Territorians want and deserve a government they can trust. We have seen the destructive behaviours of the CLP destroying trust in government, and we are determined not to make the same mistakes. That is why I immediately began the task of rebuilding trust by delivering on election promises. When one is dealing with vulnerable children, youth and their families there is no room for grandstanding. It is simply wrong not to care about how we treat our young people. It is not enough to punish and have no vision.

Through the excellent work of Territory Families we can plan ahead methodically, with care, and create change that will underpin the future of the Territory. This part of our budget shows that we have a very clear and realistic eye on the challenges faced by our most vulnerable families.

I re-emphasize that there is optimism in this investment; we believe people can turn their lives around. We know there are problems in the systems of Territory government; we believe that we can reform those, that we can support workers on the front line to do a better job but, most importantly, that we keep our focus on the people we serve, the people of the Northern Territory—the children of the Northern Territory.

We do not believe in writing off a generation of people. This side of politics believes in Territorians and our capacity to do this work if we come together as a community. That is why I am on this side of the Chamber, proud to be part of the Gunner Labor government. I will continue to work hard as the Minister for Territory Families.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank the Minister for Territory Families for her contribution. Sometimes we get some fairly boring statements in this parliament, so I ask the minister if she will make a statement in regard to youth crime and the programs in place, so we can see what they are and debate them.

I listened carefully to what the minister said; you do not have to be on that side of the parliament to believe in youth. I have said many times before that this problem has been with us for centuries. The religious order that brought me up was an Italian order that started picking up what they call 'urchins'. They were street kids. They helped them by giving them a reason to live. They had a religious reason, but they gave them a trade, either woodwork or mechanics; taught them musical instruments and had a band and a choir; and took them out walking in the mountains in that part of the world. They kept them active and did things like gymnastics. Italians are famous for gymnastics.

That program was sent all over the place; they are in East Timor—all over the world. They focus especially on youth and giving a trade and an idea of healthy living. That is something we can learn from, regardless of whether it came from a religious group—the fundamental way of treating kids who have, in many cases, had a difficult life. Issues with alcoholism, domestic violence and broken families are not new. As much as we hope that does not happen, it does happen.

I thank the minister for her contribution in relation to the budget, but it would be good to have a statement. I am interested because some of the budget relates to a figure in the millions, but it does not have any teeth and we need to see where it is going.

I will give a plus and a minus to the budget. As I have said on television and radio, there is nothing in it for my area. You are not the first to be criticised for that; the previous government was criticised as well, and the Leader of the Opposition was criticised, well and truly. After the budget had been declared, all of a sudden he found some money for Freds Pass, but it was not a budget allocation. I have the same problem today.

I did an interview with the ABC yesterday and the reporter gave me a sheet of paper that someone on the fifth floor had given her, which said, 'Look at all the things we are giving to the rural area'. The Litchfield loop road is not in Litchfield; it is the road through Coomalie. The Darwin Business Park is in Darwin. The hospital is funded from previous budgets. And every school is getting \$300 000, not just rural ones.

We are getting \$1.1m for the car park at Howard Springs Nature Reserve. Fantastic! We need the government to have some investment in rural facilities for youth. That is why I think it is important to hear what the Minister for Territory Families was talking about. But the government is not investing in that. Look in today's paper at the amount of money being put into Hidden Valley and the \$6.2m to upgrade sporting facilities in Alice Springs. Good on them, but Alice Springs has some pretty good sporting facilities, as someone who uses them when the Masters Games are on.

There is \$5m for remote oval upgrades. Good; they certainly need it. There is \$25m for the rugby league park; \$10m to construct the new indoor netball stadium. That is fantastic, but we have one of the biggest sporting facilities in the Northern Territory and it does not get a razoo in the budget. That is sad.

I mentioned yesterday that the one thing missing from the budget is a contribution from the government to look at an alternative regional waste management facility. The councils have been asking for this for 20 years and it is now getting a higher priority because councils are concerned. The Member for Sanderson raised this last night. A regional waste facility is needed, especially if we have a disaster in the Darwin region, such as a cyclone. We need a place that we can take materials and we do not have one. That needs looking at.

We have been struggling to get a pool for some time. Leanyer residents are happy with their recreational lake, and Palmerston people are happy with their recreational facility, all funded by the government. Come out to the 25 000 who live in the rural area—too hard; you can just swim where the crocodiles are. It is time that we had a change.

There are some good things, though. I understand a lot of this money comes from the Commonwealth, and a lot is being invested in roads in our rural areas. That is important. If we are to develop the Northern Territory we have to develop infrastructure. I have said that many times.

I notice there is \$57m to continue upgrades to Keep River Plains Road, which I presume is the road into Legune Station, which is part of that big prawn farm project. Last time I saw a figure it was \$80m, so I am

interested to see why it dropped down and what the actual contribution from the Northern Territory is, because I thought it was about \$20m.

It is good to see money being put into houses, especially remote houses. There is no doubt that overcrowding is still a problem and will continue to be, but I would like to see a government policy that will say we cannot just rely on government money for housing in Aboriginal communities; we need to find other ways. We need to find self-help ways of providing housing. Perhaps we need to look at cheaper housing because if you try to keep up with the increase in population of these areas, the way we are going at the moment will keep up; it will not advance anything. We need to look at communities building their own houses out of their own materials in those communities and keeping houses to a simple design. Complicated designs cost a lot of money.

There has been much discussion about affordability of houses. The federal government has been speaking about it. I raised the matter with the Henderson government in relation to having land set aside where people do not buy that land, but they rent it and pay for the house. It is done in some parts of the United States—I think there are about 100—and there may be one or two in Australia. You do not buy the land; you rent the land, but you build your house on that land, which reduces the requirement to have a large mortgage.

I wonder if we have red tape that restricts how people can build a house. In Palmerston you have to build a house according to the covenant, so your house looks like every other house. Can you build—I am of the understanding you cannot—a one-bedroom, one-dining room, one-kitchen house on a block of land in Palmerston? I do not think you can. It does not fit within the covenant requirements.

I think young people today think a house needs two bathrooms, a garage for two cars, a study et cetera. Is that adding to the cost of affordable housing? Are we encouraging people to build houses beyond what they can afford simply because that is the sort of house they know about? I remember houses in Rapid Creek which have three bedrooms, a hallway, shower and toilet, kitchen and dining room, all done on one design at an affordable rate.

I think if we are to encourage more people into home ownership—the government has in its budget something about continuing with some home ownership objectives. Whilst I think that is good, we also need to look at reducing the price or cost of housing in the Northern Territory.

I support the government's proposed spending at Myilly Point. I have said that before, when we debated whether there should be a \$56m museum—it might have been cheaper than that. The previous government wanted to use the Chan Building for a museum. I thought that was a waste of time and we should develop that piece of land, which has been sitting there ever since Mike Reed decided to demolish the nursing quarters because of so-called concrete cancer. That block of land has sat idle for so long it is almost forgotten.

I received an email from the Kahlin people asking if there is some kind of museum-type historical precinct there, and saying we needed to make sure they were included. I think they should be included.

We also need to remember the old hospital and how important that was in our community, especially for many Aboriginal people. I still think it was one of the best-designed hospitals we ever had. You could go inside and outside and people could enjoy meeting their relatives out on the lawn. It was a great design, but it is sad that we had people design the hospital from far away in Canberra. We did not get a hospital that was suitable for the Northern Territory.

I am not so sure about a Bali design water park; they have a waterpark. Rural people might prefer a pool before a Bali pool, but I understand the government is trying to spend money to boost the economy. I note one thing in the budget you are speaking about—trying to split contracts. One thing being rammed down my throat by a number of people in the building industry is they want smaller contracts to share it out. You get the big contracts which they sometimes pass out to subcontractors, and then the government loses control of the local content because a local company has the contract, but the subcontractors move somewhere else. It is important to have smaller contracts.

Tiger Brennan Drive was a classic example; it probably should have been cut up into three or four sections, then the money would have been spread out further. But it was given to a Queensland company that turned up in the Northern Territory. Most of the contracts on that site were with Queensland companies that re-established here for the purpose of that contract—not everyone, but a fair number.

I am interested in finding out the details of the youth detention centres. It says here that \$22m will be invested to upgrade youth detention facilities and establish youth bail support accommodation. The minister touched on it but we do not have any detail. What is the government doing about that in relation to the Royal Commission? Will government make a decision before the Royal Commission brings down its findings or after? It seems silly you would make a decision before the findings, especially if the Royal Commission came out with something completely opposite to what you were thinking.

The government says it will introduce the BDR, a \$17.2m investment. Whilst I am happy the government is introducing it, I am not saying it will work. I have never said that. I am happy for it to be a trial. It should be in conjunction with a SMART Court, or Alcohol Court, as it was before.

I say time and again you should not close down the alcohol mandatory treatment facilities. That is a bad move. It might cost a lot of money—Menzies has released a report but that report does not necessarily say to close it down. It points out that other states are now trialling the exact same thing. I think an efficiency review would be better.

My support for AMT was never based on the premise it would be a success. When you are dealing with people who are long-time alcoholics with very little control over their life, the chances of turning those lives around instantly is very low. If people are looking for success rates, like an economist, you will not get that. You have to somehow help these people. They will not go to voluntary rehab. How will you make them go to voluntary rehab if they are past the point of no return, which these people are?

We have had rehab facilities in Darwin for years. There is one in Katherine and there are two in Alice Springs. We still have plenty of people who are affected by alcohol. If we do not have this as the last resort method, we are basically saying, 'Sorry, but you have to stay on the streets'. It was not only about their alcohol problems; it was about getting people off the streets and stopping them being a nuisance, going onto people's properties and causing problems. It had a two-way role which has not been taken up by the Menzies School of Health Research. They looked at a purely medical review. The success rate for turning people off alcohol for good was extremely low. But that is not a reason not to do it. This is not about economics; this is about people's lives.

If it is costing a lot of money, what contribution can federal government make? The federal government takes taxes from liquor. That is where you should be putting some of your effort. You are increasing the amount of money taken from poker machines. I hear the pokie people complaining. Sorry, but I am not sad for them at all. I can guarantee that because of the increase in pokies they will not be losing too much money. Go cry about community groups running out of money—I say bunkum. Look at the profit sheets showing how much money is made out of pokies. That is the money that should go into alcohol mandatory treatment.

Of course it will not make money; it is not meant to make money. It is meant to help people. If the government is to scrap it, please tell me what you will do with those people. I have seen those people and for the first time in their life they have someone to help them. For the first time in their life they have health treatment. They have someone trying to teach them reading and writing. You will not get it from voluntary ...

Mr Gunner: I think you will see what you are looking for in what Natasha is doing.

Mr WOOD: I would love to see the response, because I am really concerned. This issue is close to my heart. I have been to all the alcohol mandatory facilities in the Territory ever since they started. Unfortunately they closed one down in Katherine, then one started in Tennant Creek, then the previous government dissolved it. It might not fit into the economics of the world, but not everything does.

Education is important, but like any other department it has to prove that the \$1bn is changing the lives of people in relation to their skills, level of education and ability to turn up to school. We had a reduction in GST of \$31m under schools. There has been a slow growth in Indigenous enrolments. I am interested in the Treasurer's response to how she sees that issue in relation to the GST.

We have to be careful, just like any other department, if we are to spend a huge amount of money. We have a vast Northern Territory where we have to supply the funds for a range of schools, from remote schools to high schools in Darwin and Alice Springs. It will always be expensive, but it is fair enough to say from a taxpayer point of view that if I do not see changes in NAPLAN or attendance year in year out, I would have to ask if that money is well spent. It is good to see money being spent on schools, although the

\$300 000 is an interesting amount to be offered to all schools. I might be wrong, but that was an election promise, but does it make sense?

Ms Nelson: Yes it makes sense.

Mr WOOD: No, no, no. I am not making sense. If you give the same amount of money to bigger schools as you give to smaller schools—the bigger school may need \$600 000 and the smaller school may only need \$50 000. Another school might not need any money. I would rather see the promise according to the needs.

Ms Lawler: You ask any school and they will tell you they need it.

Mr WOOD: Of course they will, but that is what is nice about political promises; you have a sweetener all the time. If you look at it from a rational point of view, of course every school would say they need it, but whether one school needs it more than another school should be the methodology used for handing out money to a school.

In relation to the debt and the GST, I still do not agree with the government's statement that we will be \$2bn in debt, according to the projections. If I look at it as a layman, how much money we do not have from the Commonwealth compared to last year, it is around \$274m. Although, this page I have from the Grants Commission says \$269m.

If I was to buy a car for \$50 000, projected that I could sell it two years for \$70 000 and actually sold it for \$45 000, I will not tell people I lost \$25 000. What I lost was \$5000. If you are asking the average person in the street from one year to the next, 'What amount of money came in?', I could say we got the same amount of money for the GST that we got last year—no increase.

A member: It is all worked out on projections.

Mr WOOD: I realise that, but the actual is what you have to base your budget on. You might have projected it, but you have to do your budget according to what you will get. We know the budget for the Northern Territory comes out before the federal budget.

I would be interested if the Treasurer would respond to these in her summing up.

Table 27 of the Grants Commission's summary of the GST for this year outlines the main changes for the Northern Territory. It has a table headed 'Reason for change'.

We lost \$77m in the area of population growth, an area I will speak on a little later.

The Northern Territory's share of national population growth was much lower in 2015–16 compared with 2012–13 and this reduced its investment requirement and its GST share.

We lost \$53m in the area of community health:

A decline nationally in remote service use and an increase in non-State service provision in the Northern Territory between 2012–13 and 2015–16 has reduced the Northern Territory's assessed community health spending and its GST share.

We lost \$44m in the area of Commonwealth payments:

The Northern Territory's share of payments was greater in 2015–16 than 2012–13 across a number of payments such as Remote Indigenous Housing and road maintenance under the Infrastructure investment program. This reduced its GST share.

We lost \$31m in relation to schools:

New data show remote schools to be less expensive than in the past, reducing the need for GST by the Northern Territory. In addition to this, growth in Indigenous enrolments has been slower than nationally, and while Northern Territory government enrolments fell between 2012–13 and 2015–16, non-government enrolments grew by 11%. Both these factors reduced its GST share.

We lost \$28m for road length:

Compared with 2012–13, States spent less in 2015–16 on rural roads (particularly on expenses affecting the length disability) and local roads (particularly on council managed local access roads). Because the Northern Territory has higher than average rural and local road lengths, its GST share fell significantly.

When the minister responds it will be good to hear her interpretation of the reasons we lost \$269m and what the government will do to try to turn that around. We lost \$77m in the area of population growth.

People will boo at me, but I have said before that we lose 600 to 1000 people per year through abortion. People will laugh at me. I have raised it before. Why do we not promote help for people going through pregnancy? Why do we not look at adoption? Regardless of your opinion you reduce one-quarter of your population—we have a declining population. It is a fact of life. If you looked at alternatives to helping people, we may have some increase in our population. We do not have those alternatives at the moment and it is a big problem.

There are other countries in the world experiencing a falling population growth and they are trying to encourage more families—as the population decreases there is more responsibility on the younger people to look after the older people and there are fewer young people to do that. That is why we have immigration.

Perhaps that is one of the alternatives we should be looking at. How can we encourage more people from overseas? We might look interstate, but can we encourage more people from overseas in to the Northern Territory?

It is an issue you cannot ignore. If population is decreasing, so will GST. That is the fact. That is what is written here. It is something the government needs to put its mind to. I have not heard a response in regard to how that would happen. There may be a big hoo-ha, but it is a fact of life that we have a reduction in our population.

We need to develop our own economy. We have said that time and time again. The Member for Blain spoke about it last night in relation to gas. I am not saying gas is the be-all and end-all; I am simply interested to know why we have not developed a manufacturing industry in the Northern Territory.

Many years ago when people were talking about bringing gas onshore there was a lot of talk about whether we can start manufacturing in the Northern Territory to give ourselves a more stable industrial base, but none of that ever happened. I do not know if we can attract people to the Northern Territory to set up industries here based on a cheaper gas price. We have surplus gas, which we will send off through the Tennant Creek–Mount Isa pipeline. Are there opportunities for us to develop manufacturing industries? Is there a market for manufacturing in this part of the world that may be beneficial for trade? I do not know.

We have an energy source; we have two big energy companies operating in Darwin Harbour, INPEX and ConocoPhillips, but have we looked at the possibility of trying to develop our own manufacturing industries? I am also interested in the liquor review being conducted by government. I am not sure what it will cost; I do not think I have seen it. Whilst I support it I believe it is flawed to some extent, because it will not cover a range of issues such as the BDR and, as far as I know, lockout laws. The government said it will not support lockout laws. I am not even sure it will cover the 400 square metre limitations.

The review will not cover the alcohol mandatory treatment facilities. I think it should. If you are to spend money on setting up a liquor review you need to make sure you cover all bases, regardless of what your opinion is and what promises you have made to the AHA. You need to make sure you cover everything.

It is good to hear the Minister for Territory Families say the pensioner concession is back on the cards. I think many people have been waiting for August because that is when the pensioner concession is coming back. A number of people have contacted me asking where it is, so they will be looking forward to it.

All in all, there are some good things in here, but there are also some concerning things. There is no doubt the government had to find a way of trying to stimulate the economy. Whether that going up to \$1.3bn in deficit is the way to do it, I am not so sure—which drives our total debt up to \$5.5bn. That is a lot of money. I have not heard how you will bring that deficit down. You talk about bringing the deficit down next year from \$1.3bn, and you want to bring it down to \$470m or \$500m. How will you achieve that to bring it to surplus?

The figures are in the documents; that is for sure. You will find those figures there, but they are only figures. We need to know how those figures will be achieved. I hope the Treasurer addresses that when she gives her response.

There are some good things in the budget, no doubt, but from a rural point of view there is zip.

Ms NELSON (Katherine): Madam Speaker, today I speak in support of Treasurer Nicole Manison and the 2017–18 budget, and why I believe it will pave a long-term path of prosperity and sustainability for the people of the Northern Territory, particularly in my electorate of Katherine.

I pick up on the Member for Braitling's comment earlier about optimism and realism; they are not mutually exclusive. You can be both optimistic and realistic; I do not know why people are criticising that.

For too long, Territorians living in rural and remote communities, including Katherine, have walked away from consecutive budgets feeling like the title character from that much-loved Charles Dickens novel, *Oliver Twist*. They have always been left wanting more and forever feeling as if they have been relegated to the back seat in favour of those residing in the population hubs of Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs.

This budget makes inroads into that disparity and provides hope to people, like my constituents, that they are now being represented by a member and led by a government committed to them, their region and dismantling the infamous Berrimah line.

As the Treasurer previously suggested, this budget was not created without having to overcome major financial hurdles. The most seemingly insurmountable of which was the revelation that the NT would lose about \$2bn in GST revenue over the next four years. I am not sure what calculator the opposition has been using, but our calculations show it is \$2bn over the next four years.

Circumventing that economic blow required strong leadership, difficult choices and a plan to invest in infrastructure that would stimulate local spending and jobs, and deliver on Territory Labor's promise to be a government held accountable by the people it represents.

This is a budget not only for now, but for the future, jobs, children, communities and the Northern Territory. Investing in the future is close to the hearts of every Katherinite. They are incredibly passionate about their town and want to see it afforded every opportunity to grow and be in an economic position to support their families and businesses now and for generations to come.

Katherine is a fantastically diverse regional hub built on the back of numerous sectors, including agriculture, tourism, arts and culture. That diversity is reflected in the projects that share almost \$30m in direct funding as part of an overall commitment to the region in this budget.

In partnership with the Arnhem electorate, Katherine will benefit directly from the \$10m for Nitmiluk National Park to upgrade and create new infrastructure that showcases its natural beauty and will attract more tourists than the 250 000 who already visit the Katherine region every year.

Four immediate priority projects have been identified by the Jawoyn Association and will be fast-tracked with a \$2.45m investment in the 2018 financial year.

As part of the projects in the Katherine township there is \$8m for the construction of a new fire station in Katherine East, which will ensure the town's emergency services personnel have access to some of the most modern facilities in the NT as they protect Katherinites. The new fire station will be built adjacent to the recently completed St John Ambulance station. The scope of the project includes the option of an additional \$1.6m heavy vehicle crossover of the Stuart Highway.

There is \$900 000 for three schools in Katherine. This funding will allow for identified infrastructure projects to be transformed from bold visions into usable assets that provide a foundation for an enviable educational future for the town. The Building Better Schools projects vary depending on the individual needs of the school community. I note that the Member for Nelson commented on needs-based funding, and this is a great example. It sounded like he was talking about a Gonski deal.

Casuarina Street Primary School will use its \$300 000 allocation on playground equipment and an upgrade to its ablution block.

Katherine South Primary School will upgrade its drop and drive carpark to provide improved safety and comfort for students, parents and staff.

Kintore Street School will be celebrating its 30-year anniversary at the end of this financial year. It is fitting that its \$300 000 funding injection will be used on a master plan to determine and drive its future direction and growth.

This budget includes funding to establish the very first Families as First Teachers Program in Katherine to be located at MacFarlane Primary School. This is fantastic news for the mums and dads of the young children who attend that school. I have a soft spot for that school.

Work is under way on initial plans this year to get ourselves ready for the \$10m investment for the promotion of Katherine's vibrant artistic scene. This is part of the government's overall \$100m focus on the creation of an arts trail that shares the incredible talent of the NT's Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.

The majority of Katherine's \$10m allocation will be invested in improvement and expansion of infrastructure at the Godinymayin Yijard Rivers Arts and Culture Centre, which is affectionately known as GYRACC to avoid the tying of too many tongues—I cannot get my tongue around it sometimes—and Mimi Arts and Crafts. This will have position flow-on effects to other local businesses, including retail operators and tourism and accommodation providers, by offering value-added experiences that make visitors want to extend their stay in Katherine.

These projects will not only improve the infrastructure and amenity of Katherine, but they will also create a much-needed platform from which to boost employment, small business and overall economic growth, three keys to locking in the future for Northern Territory towns.

This government is also investing \$17m into the reintroduction of the BDR, along with evidence-based and health centre alcohol-related harm reduction initiatives. Alcohol mandatory treatment was an incredibly expensive, punitive program which the Territory cannot afford to keep, and a thorough review conducted by PwC's Indigenous Consulting and Menzies School of Health Research demonstrated that it did not work.

By reintroducing the BDR and electronic point of sale intervention we will free up our valuable police resources stationed full-time at bottle shops. This will enable police to have more time to be engaged in proactive community policing in Katherine and following up with the important work of catching the people who break the law. The option to utilise police members at local takeaway liquor outlets will continue where the police see fit to use it. It is a tool to assist reducing alcohol-related harm, as is the BDR. Currently, we have police in front of the bottle shops and no other means of intervention.

In delivering our commitment to building safer, fairer and stronger communities we will see the following investment, one that I have been passionately lobbying for. It took a Labor government and a minister with experience, compassion and care, such as we have in Minister Wakefield, to deliver. As part of an \$18m Territory-wide overhaul of the youth justice system, which is the most comprehensive in Northern Territory history, we will fund seven youth diversion workers in Katherine to provide outreach and re-engagement management to young people at risk.

We are in the process of securing a facility in Katherine in an area that is centrally located for several schools. This team will co-locate with other relevant agencies, such as the Department of Education and the Northern Territory Police, who have shown a keen interest in partnering in this project.

The seven youth diversion workers have gone through three weeks of specialised training, which will be completed by the end of next week. They will be on the ground on 15 May. This team will cooperate with police and NGOs to manage focused and integrated early interventions.

I was proud to stand alongside Chief Minister Michael Gunner as part of the Territory Labor government in Katherine last month on 20 April when he outlined his vision for the town and the greater region during the Katherine futures dinner at GYRACC. More than 100 Katherine residents attended the event and heard the long-overdue message that the region must be, and will be, front and centre of the Northern Territory's economic revival.

Some of the guests that night were Territory Labor Party members; others were dyed-in-the-wool Country Liberal Party supporters. Some were not politically aligned, but it was apparent they all shared the commonality of a burning desire to see Katherine flourish by receiving what it is owed in government

interest and investment. It was a genuine display of unified community, and it reminded me of why I so badly wanted to represent my fellow Katherinites in this Legislative Assembly.

I have outlined Katherine's big-ticket budget windfalls so far, the ones destined to generate the most headlines and social media commentary, but providing a foundation for economic accomplishment cannot be done on the back of big announcements alone. That is why I want to highlight some smaller budget inclusions for Katherine that have the potential to have a more direct impact on the day-to-day lives of community members.

Sport is almost a way of life for many Katherine residents, including me. I announced a month ago that I am now the patron of the Katherine South Sports Club, which has been absent for about 14 years but is coming back nice and strong, so you had better be ready, Member for Brennan.

Following the closure of the Katherine Sport and Rec club in 2015 the community turned to the former government to step in and find an alternative venue that had the capacity to honour the town's rich sporting pedigree. I am really pleased to announce that this budget includes \$250 000 to establish an all-purpose community centre. This was an election commitment. I was hoping to be able to use the Katherine Sport and Rec land, but that has gone out to expressions of interests because it was deemed not economically viable to keep and refurbish.

The \$250 000 will now go towards the refurbishment of the Don Dale building at the ever-evolving Katherine Sports Precinct, which will increase the usability of the facility and provide sporting clubs with the space to store their equipment. Additionally, the upgrade will facilitate the hosting of community events and essentially transform it into a space that is open to each and every Katherine resident.

Having a place to call home is a vital part of any community, which is why the Territory Labor government has offered a first home owner discount on stamp duty of \$24 000, and a \$10 000 renovation grant to transform the purchase from simply bricks and mortar into the realisation of a dream. Ten Katherine families and individuals have bought their first home since last year's election because of the stamp duty relief on established property, and six of those families have turned them into homes via the renovation scheme.

The numbers themselves may not be huge, but the impact on the growth and sustainability of Katherine cannot be underestimated. In economic terms it is a small investment in a big part of the town's future and its most valuable resource.

The popular Home Improvement Scheme has also delivered significant financial benefits to Katherine, which is set to continue as part of Budget 2017–18. To date, 122 home owners have applied to the scheme and 63 businesses have signed on as approved trades and service providers. The total economic impact of the approved projects is already close to \$500 000. Small businesses are the backbone of Katherine's economy, which I believe the government must focus on if it is to deliver on its ambition to be responsible for the economic kick-start that puts the NT back on track. I feel that this Labor government, led by Chief Minister Michael Gunner, will definitely be doing that.

It is difficult to deny that the economic situation in Katherine, as it is across most of the NT, is strained at the moment, with many existing businesses fighting for their survival while other entrepreneurs with a plan struggle to convince financial providers that their passion is worth supporting. We have already seen several examples of small businesses that have developed in Katherine after receiving start-up or expansion funding from the government. It demonstrates the basic principle of social enterprise that I will be encouraging the Chief Minister and my government colleagues to pursue as we guide the NT economy forward over the next three-and-a-half years.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE Member for Arafura

Ms FYLES (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that leave of absence be granted for the Member for Arafura, Mr Costa, for today.

Motion agreed to.

VISITORS
Bek Garrett and Layla Kirby

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I welcome to the gallery Bek and baby Layla, the Member for Port Darwin's lovely, brand-new hatchling. Welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear! Hear!

APPROPRIATION (2017–2018) BILL
(Serial 20)

Continued from earlier this day.

Ms NELSON (Katherine): Madam Speaker, with the thriving agricultural sector in its back yard and incredible mineral deposits at its doorstep, Katherine is the best-positioned town in the NT to benefit from the future expansion of various industries, including transport, tourism and mining.

The Territory Labor government has committed to this potential and what it means for Katherine's future by committing to working with the private sector to develop a logistics and agribusiness hub, infrastructure that will be a turning point in the town's history and, in the words of the Chief Minister, will realign, reset and expand its purpose and economy.

Such a hub would be a massive job creation and economic stimulator during the construction phase. But it would also thrust Katherine into the national and international spotlight as an inland port that utilises road, rail and aviation loading and unloading facilities; warehousing and cold storage infrastructure; and the capacity to provide a one-stop service centre for the NT's agricultural wealth, whether it be cattle, buffalo, horticulture or cropping.

Put simply, Katherine's potential as a major contributor to the long-term economic success of the Northern Territory is endless, which is part of the reason there is such a buzz and sense of anticipation around the community with those looking beyond the current state of play. Katherine will become whatever we make it, and that transformation begins with Budget 2017–18.

The Opposition Leader and other members across the floor have spoken of the Labor government's optimism—granted it was laden with a bit of sarcasm, but I will take it anyway. It is great that they acknowledge our optimism, because we are optimistic. While there is a projected deficit of \$5.5bn, this budget is wholly focused on creating jobs and improving health and education outcomes.

Although I mentioned earlier that Katherine, much like the rest of the Northern Territory, has faced some challenges within the local economy, we are doing well in Katherine. But, with the support of this government, the shared optimism of the Cabinet members, especially the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources, Ken Vowles, and the Chief Minister, Michael Gunner, we will continue doing well.

I congratulate the Treasurer on delivering her maiden budget, which not only recognises the economic challenges the Northern Territory is facing and apportions available funding in a fiscally responsible manner, but also represents the most positive outcome for my electorate in recent memory.

Madam Speaker, I commend Budget 2017–18 to the House.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Speaker, I wish to convey my thoughts and perceptions of this first budget of the Gunner government.

The question which budget raises for me is, what is really in the budget for Alice Springs? It takes some fleshing out—the Independents do not have any parliamentary assistance so it takes a bit longer than most other members in this Chamber to work through the documents necessary to come to an accurate analysis.

I start by reflecting on what has happened in this parliament with some of the decisions that pertain to Alice Springs over the last eight months this government has been in office. The first set of decisions made was in November 2016, when the government decided to undertake a process of reprioritising infrastructure projects. That was probably the first sign that things would be a lot more difficult under this government for Central Australia and Alice Springs.

In that process \$27m was cut out of infrastructure spending on projects for Central Australia. That is a lot of money for Central Australia, so that was bad news delivered by this new government in November 2016. Amongst the projects that were reprioritised and deferred, some of them have re-emerged in this budget.

I asked a question yesterday in parliament about some of the projects that were deferred in November and have come back onto the agenda for this new budget. That included the Alcoota fossil collection. That development project was originally put on the table by the CLP at a cost of \$4m; this has been reduced to \$1.5m.

The Alice Springs Hospital storm rectification works was originally put down as a project costing \$11m and that has been reduced to \$2.8m, down to less than one-fifth of the original costing for that project.

The Maryvale Road was a big Central Australian project at \$11.5m. It has been reduced to less than \$5m.

These are disappointing changes to infrastructure expenditure for Central Australia and are the sign of tougher times in Central Australia than what we have experienced over the last four years.

I heard one of the members across the Chamber yesterday try to allude that now this Gunner government is in power things are better for Central Australia. This budget does not indicate better. It indicates tougher economic times, a tighter fiscal environment, and if you added up every dollar you would come up with slightly less than what we have experienced in Central Australia over the last four years.

A new government has different priorities, different agendas, and will spin its story in a way which sounds favourable. I do not accept the comments that were made in the Chamber yesterday.

The budget decisions made for Central Australia that were delivered in full on Tuesday do not paint a picture favouring Central Australia at all. I would say that we have been slightly disadvantaged through this process.

There are some good news stories. I will not shy away from those. I was pleased to see the \$6m Women's Shelter very clearly in the budget. An interesting new piece of information that came through this week was upgrades to sporting facilities in Alice Springs worth \$6.2m. The only detail on that suggests new lights for Albrecht Oval. There does not appear to be too much information about what the rest of the money will be spent on. I have heard Mayor Damien Ryan allude to the establishment of another sporting oval, which will take the pressure off Traeger Park and other ovals in town. We are probably one sporting oval short of what the demand requires. That is good news. It is yet to be determined what the exact nature of that funding will be.

The other good news story from this budget is the commitment the Gunner government made under pressure in Question Time on 25 October last year. This government did not intend to revitalise the Alice Springs CBD until I put the Chief Minister under pressure and said, 'Let's have an assistant minister for the revitalisation of the Alice Springs CBD'. Mr Gunner bumbled and conceded that it was probably a good idea, and so now we have a revitalisation project for the Alice Springs CBD. I take a lot of credit for that. Had I not questioned him, had I not asked that question in October, we would not be where we are now—\$20m allocated to that project.

Members interjecting.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The people across the Chamber think it hilarious. The Member for Katherine is laughing hysterically, but she does not have a revitalisation project for her CBD. Maybe you need to ask the question yourself, Member for Katherine. It is a sad state of affairs in Katherine, but we are the winners in Alice Springs and I am very proud to be standing here today taking some of that credit.

I did not expect \$20m to be spent on that project. I am on the public record several times as saying that I think it is probably more than generous. It is \$10m more than I expected, but it is great. It shows a real commitment of this government, under duress, to come up with some money for Alice Springs.

Mr McConnell: We love Alice Springs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, we have heard many times now how much this government loves Alice Springs. As we know, in politics actions speak far louder than words. We have heard many words but not seen too much action. The former government spoke a lot of words and acted, so you have a hard act to follow when it comes to Central Australia.

Not being a member of the CLP anymore, I can be reasonably neutral and say there is some hot competition here to see what comes of the rhetoric we have heard from this government and if it can put its money where its mouth is in terms of Central Australia.

Mr Paech: We will build a Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I hear the interjections from the Member for Namatjira. It is good to hear you will be putting pressure on your government to make sure it delivers. Not so much for the Maryvale Road, though, Member for Namatjira. You have lost out there big time. You have a bit of work to do. You do not have half the original money allocated for the Maryvale Road. If I were you I would not be very impressed, but that is some internal work you obviously need to do with your colleagues. The Member for Braitling is our local member in Cabinet and she is an important person you need to lobby in this process.

There have been no new major projects for Alice Springs announced in this budget. The former CLP government put \$70m on the table for the iconic national Indigenous art gallery and cultural centre.

Mr Paech: That one is ours. We will build that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I hate to break it to you, Member for Namatjira, but check your facts. It is a fact.

I am glad to see it is still there, despite the fact it projects three years into the future. There is no money on the table—unless some changes were made at the last minute—to bring any of that money forward to do some preliminary work on getting that project up and running. That is a disappointment. Your government has pushed this out further. That decision was made in November 2016 when infrastructure projects were deferred and reprioritised. I am pleased to see it is still there, but I am a bit dubious about the future of the Indigenous iconic cultural centre.

I have heard whispers loud and clear in Alice Springs that the art gallery will happen, but the cultural centre will probably be taken off the table because it is too hard. I heard that from a senior government bureaucrat. I hope they are wrong. I hope there is just a bit of mischief going on and the cultural centre remains part of the package.

I am not sure why you decided to separate that package; it makes sense for both those things to go together—a national Indigenous art gallery and a cultural centre. One beautiful big precinct in Alice Springs would be fantastic. It was a great vision of the CLP government, and it is good to see this government is following up and honouring that important commitment, possibly even doing it better than the CLP ever envisaged.

Let us see if your rhetoric comes to fruition and we see great things on the ground. You are a new government. You are full of enthusiasm, and it is great to hear you are all pumped up and ready to deliver on all these promises.

We did not get a mini-budget, which I thought was a big mistake. We got a list of deferred and scrapped projects in November instead, and now we have the full budget, which is interesting to say the least.

We have a youth detention centre coming to Alice Springs. No one will get too excited about that. It is a necessity and it will change the lives of kids who, unfortunately, end up in youth detention.

We have an accommodation complex for kids on bail, which is allocated about \$11m. Those things are necessary and will help get us out of this mire we are in with juvenile justice in the Northern Territory. Money has to be spent in this area, so that is good to see.

How many additional houses will we get in Central Australia and Alice Springs under the however many billion-dollar housing project over the next 10 years? I may have missed something but there does not appear to be any detail of that for Central Australia. That is the sort of thing people need to know. We need detail as there is a lot missing from the allocation of funds and the promises made in this budget. There is no new infrastructure expenditure for Police, Fire and Emergency Services for Central Australia, and there is none for the Central Australian Health Service Board.

There is a lot of revoted work coming through. About 40% of what is on the list is revoted and the rest is new. It is not as exciting as what Darwin is getting. Darwin is getting a new water park. How many water parks do we need in Darwin? What is the population, 110 000 people? This will be the fourth water park. It is fabulous for the people of Darwin, but do you really need it?

Will there be an admission fee? Leanyer is free. The wave park obviously costs a bit to get into, but this is the sort of stuff that gets up people's noses in Central Australia. How many water parks does Darwin need? Labor governments love waterparks. The last Labor government built what has turned out to be a white elephant in Palmerston. The Palmerston Water Park, without putting too much emphasis on it, was a flop. Here we have another water park being investigated and explored as to whether it is a viable economic investment.

Another museum—we know museums do not make money in the Northern Territory. Name one museum in the Northern Territory that comes close to breaking even. Silence. There are none. We love museums. We all take pride in our history and heritage, particularly in the Northern Territory. We love our Aboriginal heritage; it is very unique and special to all Territorians. To hear about the new museum for Darwin, located in possibly the most prestigious location in Darwin, is exciting for those who have a special interest in it. I question how this decision has come about so quickly.

It is a very precious piece of real estate in Darwin. When I was a member of the former Cabinet we spent a lot of time contemplating, planning and exploring options for that site because it is incredibly special, then bang! A couple of months in, this government came up with a museum which will not directly generate any income. It might be part of a broader appeal for people coming to Darwin on holidays, as a tourism venue, and it will have extremely special significance to the Aboriginal people who are a part of the process and will be represented in the museum.

My knowledge of museums, as a former Treasurer and Cabinet minister, is that they cost bundles forever. They are an eternal cost to the taxpayer. We have heard the rhetoric regarding this budget being about stimulating the economy. It will stimulate the economy whilst it is being built, but probably not much after that.

This is what you are on about; the last government had a bent for certain things. Interestingly, the last Chief Minister loved motorsport and lots of money was spent on that, and we all sucked it up and accepted that that was his personal preference. It seems that this government has a bent on museums, arts and culture. Many people have a special interest in that sort of thing, and that is who you are appealing to instead of the motorsport people.

Each government has its own character and set of interests, and this government is presenting to the public, through this budget, what its interest is and what it is looking at developing. As an Independent member of parliament it is interesting to sit back and watch. The politics is always there, but when you are an Independent it does not seem to dominate your thinking as much as when you are part of a political party.

I cannot get past the fact this budget will take us into the greatest level of debt ever seen in the Northern Territory. I cannot accept that it is necessary for this government to put such a burden on us all into the future. In a couple of years' time we will be paying over a million dollars in interest repayments every day. One million dollars per day is such a burden to place on the 245 000 people who live in the Northern Territory.

In 11 days, member for Namatjira, you could have your Maryvale Road, but under this government you are getting a fraction of it. You are not getting the rest. The rest, in a couple of years' time, will be spent paying back the debt this government has decided is a good thing for the Northern Territory. I do not accept that. I am a very conservative politician. I am a conservative manager of money. I have been in business for many years in the Northern Territory. I am very careful with how I spend every cent. To me, balancing the budget is part of being a responsible, prudent government. It is part of being the honoured custodian of the Northern Territory's money. It is part of looking after the best interests of taxpayers.

I hear what the government says; I listen to the words and I understand the words that have been spoken. Yes, Darwin is going through an economic downturn. We know that; it has been coming for years, but spending like there is no tomorrow—is that really the solution? Spending more money than the Territory can afford, in an unrestrained way? I do not think it is. I cannot accept that. I think it has been an irresponsible exercise on the government's part to put us in this situation.

I do not accept for a minute that the GST revenue for the Northern Territory will be cut by \$2bn over four years. I think it is absolute nonsense. It is an intentional fabrication of this government. There is no proof that GST revenue will be cut by \$2bn over the next four years. It has become part of the government's

narrative to justify how bad things are. Therefore it has to keep spending beyond our means. It is not the government's money they are playing with; it is our money, the people of the Northern Territory's money.

I heard Rolf Gerritsen, the economist from Charles Darwin University, on radio a couple of days ago talking about this very point. I almost stopped the car to listen. I thought, 'This is exactly what is happening'. He basically said, 'I applaud the government for its political genius. It has fabricated this story about GST revenue being reduced to the extent of \$2bn over four years to feed in to the narrative.' Lo and behold, two or three times when GST revenue is not cut by \$2bn, possibly half that, government can then say, 'Look at the incredible savings we have made. Instead of a \$5.5bn debt it is \$3.5bn, which is significantly less.'

I think people are on to you and your narrative, the story that you have created over the last month based on a fabrication. It is not true. I could call it a lie, but everyone will jump up and down and say, 'A point of order, Madam Speaker!', so I will not call it a lie. What you have been telling the people of the Northern Territory about the reduction of GST revenue coming to the Northern Territory over the next two years is an intentional fabrication. There will be a reduction, but it will not be \$2bn. It will be more like half, which is significant; I am not minimising it. One billion dollars over four years is not good, but it is nowhere near as bad as \$2bn over four years.

There we have it, a flawed premise to the whole budget that this new Gunner government has just delivered. I hope Territorians take the time to think about this. When I was Treasurer one thing I learned quickly, because I was not there very long, was that most people do not turn their minds to the debt and deficit. They do not think about it. Most people are so busy and consumed with their day-to-day life, which is completely understandable, they do not think about what the debt and deficit means to them.

You can spend like there is no tomorrow. As long as it does not affect the average punter, or if it does in a positive way, people do not put their mind to it. They do not worry about it, but they should be gravely concerned about what has transpired in this Chamber this week. I feel very worried.

Putting an individual into debt on the same scale as what this government has done to the Northern Territory, whereby they are paying huge amounts of interest repayments on a daily basis, is crippling. It leads to people going bankrupt, becoming miserable and making unhealthy decisions because of the financial stress and burden. This is stress on individuals, families and the community.

They have blown out the credit card. The front page of the *NT News* yesterday or the day before exemplified exactly what is going on. The drawing of the credit cards cascading downwards, which the Treasurer and Chief Minister have blown out. There is nothing left on the credit card.

It is fascinating that a government, in its first year, would make these decisions. There is a formula government's use when managing the budget. The first year is about making the really difficult decisions, the heavy lifting. If you want to increase electricity and water tariffs, God forbid, that happens in the first year because you hope that by the fourth year people will have forgotten about it.

As you progress through your four-year term, then you start to spend money. You build it up again and generously give out money. This government has not followed that roadmap. It has decided to spend every cent in the coffer this year, the first year of its government. It is all gone well into the future. Government will go through its second, third and fourth year with no money to spend because it is all gone. How does that work for you as a government?

There will be no surprises left to give the people of the Northern Territory unless you take us into more debt in the forward estimates, which is possible. Why not bring it on a bit further? Labor governments do not do the heavy lifting; they put their jurisdictions into debt to the point where people say 'We cannot bear this any longer', and they throw them out. Then the conservative governments come in and, at their own peril, do the heavy lifting and bring things back into a more sensible, reasonable economic situation. Then they are out on their ear because they have probably been too stingy and made too many difficult decisions.

That is the cycle of politics. I am no expert on politics, but anyone who gets to my age can see that cycle clearly. I am seeing an interesting cycle this week in the Chamber—a government that has come in like a bunch of kids in a lolly shop. 'What will we spend our money on, mum? Let's go hard, spend the lot and put everything in our bag and race out the shop and hope no one notices.'

It does not work like that. People will notice there is no money left, and in a couple of years' time we will have \$1m paid to interest repayments per day. So in 245 days of paying \$1m a day, we could have given everyone in the Territory \$1m each. Imagine that!

I do not know if you have heard of something called opportunity cost, economic cost. It is a choice you make. Do I spend my \$10 on that, or do I spend my \$10 on this? You make these decisions because you cannot have everything. If you spend your money on this you cannot spend your money on that. The economic cost of every decision you make, as an individual and as a government—you have made some economic choices in this budget which will stick to you forever.

You are laughing. You will be in for eight years. The opposition is in shreds. The former Chief Minister rolled out at the Royal Commission. It is happy days for Labor, but people will not forget these bad decisions. People will not be impressed by these bad decisions in the long term. Stimulating the economy is necessary, but you have shown no restraint whatsoever, and for that you will be remembered.

As for my beloved Alice Springs, I expected more. I think this budget is underwhelming for Central Australia.

There are some things that you ticked off and there are some things I was looking for, as were the people of Alice Springs. Night-time youth services—thank you very much; we are getting those. You promised that to us in the lead-up to the election and during the election campaign. I thank the Minister for Territory Families for making sure we have those. There was some delay and there were no night-time youth services over summer, which I thought could have happened with a bit more planning and enthusiasm from the government, but they are on their way.

There are some good things in this budget, but overall it is underwhelming and concerning. I am worried for the future of the Northern Territory.

Mr KIRBY (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, I speak in support of the budget. A number of things happen through election and budget cycles, but what you will not see from this government is renewal management boards paid millions of dollars in salaries to tell Territorians how much they need to tighten their belts.

You will see spending on education, infrastructure and youth services. You will not see each Territorian pocketing \$1m to do what they want with, because that is not the way Labor governments think. This has not been an easy budget, and the Treasurer has done a fantastic job under trying economic conditions.

Our Treasurer and our Chief Minister have been open and honest with Territorians since coming to government, particularly since finding out the state of affairs of our finances. The 2017 budget has been challenging in circumstances where post-INPEX construction, private sector buoyancy and investment have all been at low levels.

More recently, the federal GST funding has been slashed like never before, leaving the Territory government holding sway to ensure the economy functions until private sector and other investments kick back in. There were some difficult decisions made by the Treasurer and this government to ensure we get the right mix of prudent spending and proactive funding, especially with infrastructure. This will ensure the economy functions well and we keep people in jobs over the next few years.

Difficult decisions have seen a very tight budget, and it is important to always budget for the economic circumstances you are faced with.

There are four pillars in which this government won substantial support from Territorians at the last election: investing in children; growing jobs; safer and more vibrant communities; and investing in the bush. Budget 2017–18 invests in the Territory's future, kids and jobs, and the projects we have announced to follow through on our election commitments.

Budget 2017–18 is a budget for all Territorians. We are investing in children with the early childhood plan, which includes \$6m to continue the early childhood services subsidy for long daycare, three-year-old kindergarten and family day care services to offset the cost of childcare support for parents and families. We all know how difficult it is for Territory families. Often both mum and dad need to work to keep their heads above water, so childcare is extremely important in the Northern Territory.

I have spoken in the House recently about my daughter Alana and her commitment to early learning as a career. I am also blessed to now have another daughter, who will also avail herself of early learning in the years to come. It is lovely to welcome little Layla Louise for her first visit into the gallery today. I am sure there will be many more visits.

We are investing in more teachers and school support staff with \$18m for the redevelopment of the Bullocky Point Education Precinct. I had the luxury to go around the site with the Chief Minister and the architects before the election, and they were extremely excited about the investment that was coming to fruition at that site and what it would mean for Territorians, Darwin based and regional, who would further their education there.

The expansion of the new central library and central fabrication laboratory at Darwin High School will both be fantastic institutions well into the future. With \$1m for repairs and maintenance to homeland learning centres, the investment in education spreads right across the Territory. The \$7.1m to continue the Back to School Payment Scheme which provides \$150 per student to assist parents with back-to-school expenses is a welcome relief to families and something everybody makes good use of.

The first year of the government's four-year, \$56.4m Building Better Schools commitment will provide \$300 000 to every school in the Territory for very important upgrades. Most members in the House have reiterated the \$300 000 for Building Better Schools minor new works programs; it is a wonderful initiative that has provided education and infrastructure benefits, as it will for the schools in my electorate of Port Darwin.

Growing more jobs throughout the Territory has been one of the driving forces behind this government from our very first meetings. With Territory projects continually leaking across the border to interstate competitors, it is critical to the Territory's future to make sure we get this right. We brought forward some Immediate Works Grants to ensure instantaneous relief for local contractors. There has been an additional \$20m for the Immediate Works Grants programs for repairs, maintenance and improvements to community facilities.

I will touch on one of the issues the Member for Nelson raised earlier today around breaking up larger contracts to make sure Territory contractors can get access to smaller portions of work. Whilst I agree with the sentiment and I can see that the member is aiming in the right direction, it is a very complex problem. We have contractors at the moment that win the overarching contracts, but we need to be able to regulate this through our tender assessment processes. We have far too many projects leaking significant dollars interstate, and this government has been working on that to improve it right from the start.

The changes to local content contributing to a significant portion of the tender process is designed not just to aim at value for money, but value for Territory to make sure we keep as much of that work in the Territory as we can. Too many projects currently operating around the Territory have work being broken down, as the member suggested; however, it is being broken down into smaller parts of projects that are being subcontracted out to other companies that still are not based in the Territory, or they are hiring people under temporary employment on labour hire programs. That makes it extremely difficult for workers; there is no security of employment or surety about being able to live long term in the Northern Territory. We will drive that to make sure this government works very hard to rectify it.

The Home Improvement Scheme has been revamped and extended to make sure tradies and families continue to enjoy the benefits of it.

Improved lighting at community ovals will also improve the way Territorians can train, exercise and play their favourite sports.

The \$12m for the multistorey car park at the Royal Darwin Hospital will be welcomed by the hard-working staff at the hospital, as well as by the patients and visitors.

I have had the good fortune over the last few months of spending many hours at the RDH for the very best of reasons, but parking at the site was a constant topic of discussion. There were times we were late to appointments because we could not get parks anywhere near the facilities we needed to access. At times I had to drop Bek off and park about a kilometre away before walking back to the appointment. The staff there spoke at length about their fears of having to park a long way away some nights.

None of this is connected with the financial implications of what we went through over the last few years with people having to repeatedly pay for parking tickets. That is a separate matter altogether. The staff, at times, feared for their safety because the areas they could get a park for their night shifts were nowhere near where they were working, which made for a very harrowing time for them. The \$12m investment in the car park will be very welcomed. We discussed this matter with many people, so I know it will be well supported.

I acknowledge and sincerely thank all the dedicated professionals and staff at RDH and all other health institutions around the Territory. They do a fantastic job.

Investing in infrastructure in a 10-year plan with targeted government spending designed to expedite private investment has also been a key focus of this government, but it is not the only focus.

Boosting tourism is a key economic driver into 2018 and well beyond, with \$10m to get the Darwin luxury hotel development project kicked off, and \$5m over two years for targeted tourism initiatives aimed at attracting more tourists from China and India. I note with interest that the Chinese Premier has very recently been presented with a Port Adelaide Power jumper from ex-Power champion Gavin Wanganeen to commemorate the upcoming game between Port Power and the Gold Coast in Shanghai next weekend.

The most remarkable point about this jumper he was presented with was that on the front it has an ancient boat and a serpent as the decorative commemoration. The ancient boat is actually a replica of rock art painting near Mount Borradaile that depicts what is believed to be a Chinese boat from the silk trade days. Many believe that this shows the Chinese moved through the Arnhem region many years before history currently acknowledges.

This will be the subject of a documentary that is to be filmed at Mount Borradaile as soon as weather permits. They were hoping to film a few weeks ago, but the late season did not allow for that. Given that one of China's most celebrated up-and-coming young actresses, Lily Ji, will be attending Darwin and the Mount Borradaile site to celebrate the documentary, I am sure this will be the start of much closer ties and burgeoning Chinese tourism for many years ahead.

Tourism through the Territory will be boosted by \$8m to attract visitors under Budget 2017–18. Tourism and business through the Territory will also benefit from the significant investment into Territory roads by this government.

There is \$11.5m for grants to support sports in the Territory, including the Sport Voucher Scheme, \$25m to develop a new home for rugby league at Warren Park, and \$10m to construct a new indoor netball stadium in Darwin for young and old netball players. The sports Territorians thrive in will be well and truly catered for.

By progressing the shiplift project and developing a master plan for a marine business park we will combine a much-needed facility that the Territory can prosper from while placing ourselves in the prime position to take advantage of Defence spends well into the future.

Bringing back the BDR was by far one of the most common things I was questioned on through the campaign and even now in my time as the Member for Port Darwin. With \$17.2m to re-establish the Banned Drinker Register and other best-practise, health-based alcohol harm reduction initiatives, we will be tackling one of the Northern Territory's biggest problems head on. I look forward to that starting straight up in September.

Combine that with the government's commitment to provide 120 extra frontline police with \$5m in 2017–18, increasing to \$15.75m in the 2019–20 time frame for police resourcing and recruitment. There is \$8.6m of the \$45m being invested into replacing the Northern Territory's Force's core policing system, and it will assist to improve public safety and security for all Territorians.

The Police Real-time Online Management Information System will be replaced with a new system which will improve the delivery of law enforcement and emergency services throughout the community. Whilst these upgrades can be expensive, it is far more costly to do nothing. I believe it is imperative in this day and age that we have state-of-the-art online management systems for our frontline staff to work with.

Once implemented properly, they will improve efficiency, help ensure the most efficient use of staff time and help keep Territorians safer.

The \$3m to establish an independent commission against corruption, or ICAC, as it is more commonly referred to, ensures open and transparent government and has been an upfront commitment by this Michael Gunner-led government to ensure that Territorians can once again have faith in their elected members. That has been sadly lacking over the last few years.

Reforming youth justice has been a priority for this government since before the election results were completed. I commend the work of Minister Wakefield and her staff under the Territory Families portfolio.

The Member for Braiting has quickly stepped up and has proven herself to be peerless in this industry across the Northern Territory. Congratulations to her and her entire team.

The Michael Gunner government has also identified that domestic and family violence demands significant investment and has committed \$6.2m to continue to implement the Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy, and \$700 000 over two years to expand the No More violence prevention campaign led by Charlie King that we are all so supportive of.

The investment into NTCOSS to build the capacity of the domestic and family violence support sector, and to Charles Darwin University and Menzies School of Health Research to review the key family violence reduction programs in the Northern Territory will be paramount to helping out across the Territory.

The new \$26m Palmerston police station will be built, and it will give a stronger presence through Palmerston and the surrounding areas.

Many in this House have been touched by cancer, as have I, as has been mentioned. To have the PET scanner and cyclotron at RDH, with the commitment secured within months of this government coming to power, is a credit to the Health minister and many others who worked tirelessly to make sure this critical announcement went ahead.

The Housing minister has announced the most substantial investment into remote housing with \$1.1bn over 10 years being dedicated to remote housing investment to improve housing in the bush. I look forward to watching these initiatives develop over the coming months and years.

As soon as the first home owner discount on stamp duty of up to \$24 000 and the \$10 000 renovation grant were announced, the key players in the industry rightly acknowledged it was a step in the right direction. The housing market had been suffering for a long time. It was a smart thing to do and the right thing to do. It has resulted in a number of Territorians taking advantage of it and getting their first home in the Northern Territory, which means they are invested here and they will stay here as long as they can.

This is also a key strategy in keeping people in the Territory much longer term. We must tackle the population drift. Initiatives like this mean we will see more locals invest in the Territory.

As our Treasurer has stated, this budget is one of the most challenging in the Territory's history. A \$2bn GST cut by the federal government will have a deep impact on the Territory's fiscal position and we are currently faced with a slowing economy. The Territory needs investment right now and it needs vision.

Budget 2017–18 delivers both. It is interesting to listen to people on the other side saying it goes too far. I am sure we will see over coming years, as business confidence grows through the Northern Territory, our financial position, economy and population will increase.

I congratulate the Chief Minister and the government for having the foresight to realise the Darwin CBD must be the capital of northern Australia. It has been sadly lacking in investment and vision for many years.

Budget 2017–18 sets the way for the development of five major projects to begin in this term of government. Over the next four years the government will invest in significant projects to ensure Darwin rightly holds the position as the capital of the north of Australia.

From feedback through the community over the last 12 months it became clear that the majority of Territorians wanted the old hospital site at Myilly Point retained for specific purposes. I was excited and proud to stand with the Chief Minister and the Member for Casuarina, along with representatives of the Stolen Generation Eileen Cummings and Maisie Austin last month to announce plans to build an outstanding museum on Myilly Point.

The museum will help tie together the many fabrics that help make up the long and rich history of the Northern Territory. The investments include:

- \$100m to begin revisiting Darwin's CBD, commencing with State Square, the Chan Building and the old hospital site at Myilly Point
- \$39.5m for the long-awaited Barneson Boulevard link

- the facilitation of \$500 000 towards a feasibility study and market testing into a private sector-led CBD water park.

I was surprised and disappointed yesterday to hear the Leader of the Opposition criticise the government's investment in enhancing and developing the Territory's arts and museum infrastructure, given he was the arts minister as recently as last year.

In May last year, 2016, he released the CLP's vision for the future of arts, which included such quotes as:

A 5-10 year infrastructure plan for arts and cultural facilities ...

This government is committing to that. It also states:

A whole-of-government approach to recognising and valuing arts.

It also includes things such as highlighting the many untold stories of the Territory through art, positioning the Territory as a world leader in Indigenous art and committing to infrastructure projects for arts in the Northern Territory.

These are things this government is committing to in this budget. For the Opposition Leader to ridicule those decisions yesterday is the height of hypocrisy.

Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition criticised the government for taking leads on arts and museums across the Territory. We will not apologise for that. He has often criticised us backbenchers for not taking a stand. As assistant minister for the museum master plan I am happy to take a stand now.

I have been fortunate enough to work closely with the minister for the arts, the Member for Casuarina, and see the relief and tears of joy on peoples face when they find out this government is investing in the arts and in Territorians. The only difference is the CLP merely talked about it, but we are actually delivering it. We are stumping up the investment. It is a stark contrast.

I am proud this project will pay respect to the Stolen Generation and the history of the site—the previous home of the Kahlin Compound. As I mentioned, the emotion in people's eyes at that announcement spoke volumes in regard to their respect for the opportunity to have a space to share in and call their own. They said it will be a place they can go to share their stories and get some of the burden off their chest. They have lived with those burdens long enough. Anything we can do as a government, they mentioned on the day—it is clear the federal government does not want to help them at all. This is where they think the focus should be. They realise they will not get help from the federal government, but the relief, pleasure and tears of joy they showed on that day are something I will remember forever.

Tenders for the design of the new museum, including consultation with the community, will go out in June. We will push ahead with this project so the long-standing question of what happens at Myilly Point is finally settled.

The Member for Araluen said it seemed this came together in a short time. I remind her that the previous Labor government consulted about this site and what people wanted to see there. This government did not follow that plan exactly, but we will talk with people about what they want there. There was already a base of information which we used to head in this direction and we have heard positive comments about it so far. We look forward to getting that project off the ground.

This will be done as part of the broader 10-year museum master plan for our tropical city, which I am proud to be part of. The collaborative approach of the City of Darwin and the NT Government has been sadly lacking for many years, and I am proud to be part of turning this around.

We spoke at length yesterday afternoon about the different levels of government and the necessity for those different levels to work closely together. Over the last few years we have seen some examples of what goes wrong when every level of government cannot work with each other. Territorians suffer. I am proud to say that is not the case anymore. Some of the CBD meetings that we sit in with key stakeholders from all levels of government augur for an exciting time for the next 10 years for Darwin city.

Our collaborative approach will result in initiatives like running events through Darwin city. Any time someone wants to bring a major event—the V8s have been good over the last few years. Different events

attract people to the Territory, but do not necessarily attract them to the city. There will be events put on in the heart of the city to draw people in to the city.

The recent new markets have been successful in livening up the laneways and filling empty shops. Getting more local live music into the city centre will complement the significant financial investment this government has entered into to ensure we have a capital city we can all be proud of.

I have been excited to work with Lawrence Nield, the Government Architect, and can see great things happening throughout the city with him and his team on board. They have some exciting projects. If you have never had the opportunity to catch up with Lawrence, have a chat with him; he has such passion and drive. He has been involved with some of the major projects around our nation and other nations. He is proud, excited and confident about some of the projects we can get under way through the city. We can cool the city to make it easier for people to get around, and we can make it an attractive and iconic space for people to want to come to.

The removal of the Chan Building has often been on the too-hard list, but not for this government. We will take it on and get it done. We will not put some half-baked museum in there. We will pull it down, get rid of it, move the IT infrastructure and build a proper museum to recognise Indigenous art from around the Territory.

Once car parks have been built underground, it will contribute to the greening and cooling down of the entire area, with water features that will make the space around the city much more attractive and user friendly.

From my discussions with Territorians, even as recently as the Politics in the Pub debate on budget night, there was a clear message being sent. Whilst new and long-term Territorians understand that significant government investment is needed at times when private investment has waned, as it has, the major concern is not just about the buildings, projects, infrastructure or jobs. One of the major concerns Territorians regularly speak to me about is that Darwin and the Northern Territory has lost its soul over the last few years.

From the list of disgraces that we do not need to go through any more, people are now thankful for at least having been given the opportunity to stay in the Territory through some of these initiatives. To start with, people can now afford to stay here and hopefully be involved as the Territory is shaped into the future. These are some of the key messages that I hear repeatedly.

This is an excellent budget under these very trying economic conditions. It is a very well-framed and well-thought-through budget, and I congratulate the Treasurer for her tireless hard work and strong decision-making.

Madam Speaker, I am very happy to commend Budget 2017–18 to the House.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, before I begin my speech I acknowledge Bek, baby Layla and grandmother Deb to the gallery. It is very nice to see them supporting the Member for Port Darwin.

Tuesday was a big day. It was the first budget delivered by our Labor government and a day that will interest many communities across the Territory. I congratulate the Treasurer on her delivery of the budget, an extra special feat considering she stood during her 42-minute-long speech and is eight months pregnant. I am not sure how many other Treasurers across the country are delivering a budget and a baby in the same month, so for that combined fact I give the Treasurer my utmost admiration.

The Treasurer has clearly articulated that the 2017–18 budget is about investing in our future. Our Labor government is investing in jobs, children and the community. The Treasurer acknowledged that we are facing a challenging economic environment. The \$2bn cut from the federal government over the next four years will hurt Territorians. If it had not been for this cut, the government would have been on the pathway to return to surplus during this term. Still, the federal Treasurer, Scott Morrison MP, has not visited the Territory. I guess it is easy to disregard around 245 000 people if you cannot be bothered to visit any Territorians in our cities, towns, communities or outstations.

I believe the Treasurer is doing the hard yards in order to stimulate the NT economy and ensure that Territory workers and businesses are not disregarded and maintain productivity and growth under the current financial environment. One of the most significant commitments is the Labor government's \$1.1bn investment in remote housing over the next 10 years to improve housing in the bush. This speaks to all

three of our focus areas—jobs, children and the community—in the sense that jobs will be created through a 10-year plan, children and families will benefit from the upgraded new housing, and the many communities from across the Top End and all the way down to the Central Desert region will all receive significant benefits with improvement to housing in their local contexts.

I was comforted to know that our Labor government is keeping strong to our word with the major election commitment I just spoke about. For too long people in our remote NT communities have suffered from neglect with housing being just a quick-fix election promise from governments past. Our 10-year commitment goes beyond the election cycle and sends a strong message to remote Territorians that they matter.

To emphasise some of the key points for remote housing which will resonate with many remote Territorians, some of our budget investments are:

- \$233.2m for bush housing and infrastructure under the national partnership agreement
- \$106m to commence our \$1.1bn, 10-year package to improve remote housing, create jobs and restore local decision-making
- \$50m for the Homebuild NT program, which are new builds, in communities
- \$26m for the Room to Breathe program
- \$20m for repairs and maintenance
- \$10m for the locally-recruited government employee housing.

Our government will also provide \$44.5m over the next two years to prepare land plots and establish electrical, water and sewerage infrastructure to support the Remote Housing Investment Package. There will also be \$22.3m to provide municipal and essential services to homelands and outstations, which will make a huge difference to Territorians living on country.

With all the substantial investments into Housing across the NT, it is clear our government is supporting and creating jobs in a time when employment is desperately sought.

People in the bush want jobs and local projects such as housing, maintenance, repairs and construction, which will provide avenues for local people to do the work locally and keep internal community economies flowing. Many generations of remote Territorians have seen money spent in their communities and have then seen it quickly disappear, with external contractors taking the profits out of the communities and leaving them with limited local employment options as local residents.

Our government wants to create and keep jobs in remote communities so we can invest locally into our future. I am also pleased to see \$1m has been allocated to employ the additional Aboriginal interpreters to help deliver the Remote Housing Investment Package.

The Territory has many diverse Aboriginal languages, and I am proud to be part of a government that recognises the importance of language in the consultation process to allow people to have a say in their community. Jobs are a major issue in remote communities within the electorate of Arnhem.

I am extremely supportive of our government's focus on jobs in Budget 2017–18, and I want to highlight some of the key points which will impact the Arnhem electorate positively: \$7.9m to include the Indigenous Jobs Development Fund for regional councils to support core local government service delivery; \$3.6m for Aboriginal employment programs; and \$2m of additional funding for the remote Aboriginal economic development fund.

I move on to speak about children. The first year of the government's four-year plan involves \$56.4m of the Building Better Schools commitment, which will provide \$300 000 to every school in the Territory for important upgrades. I am excited that schools within the electorate of Arnhem have been successful in the first round of these upgrades.

Ngukurr School, which I had the pleasure of attending for the Anzac assembly last Monday, has been successful in securing funding to upgrade the transition kitchen and ablutions. Ngukurr School is a bubbling pot of activity and has some diverse programs that see the school boast approximately 80% to 85%

attendance rates. I look forward to visiting Ngukurr School whilst it finalises its upgrades. I know the students will enjoy the finished product and it will enhance their learning.

Another school in the Arnhem electorate that will benefit from the \$56.4m Building Better Schools commitment is Urapunga School, which is a beautiful little school located along the Roper Highway, situated alongside the Wilton River. The school will use its \$300 000 to build a solid cover over the basketball half-court, which it will be resurfaced, and to replace the hoops with new ones. This school would not typically have the capacity to spend on outside infrastructure. With this \$300 000 the transformation to the school will benefit the physical and mental health of the happy kids at Urapunga.

Angurugu School on beautiful Groote Eylandt is working hard to build strong student attendance. Angurugu is undergoing a rather large transition by building a preschool on the school campus site. Angurugu School will use the \$300 000 Building Better Schools funding to replace playground equipment.

Having a school environment that is welcoming and encourages play-based learning will contribute positively to encourage school attendance and enrich the school's overall environment. I am also grateful to see that the combined \$5.7m from the Commonwealth and the Territory government will continue to fund the construction of this brand-new preschool at Angurugu School and build a replacement kitchen and canteen building, the originals of which were shockingly destroyed in a fire on Anzac Day in 2016.

The new Angurugu preschool is to be built on the main school site, as the old preschool was located down the street on a different site within the community. In the wake of the construction period the preschool has now joined with the Families as First Teachers, or FaFT, program and has temporarily combined to share the FaFT building and play area. I saw this when I visited in March and I look forward to seeing the completed preschool at Angurugu School, which will continue to support early childhood learning as well as the students and their families, who will enjoy a new, purpose-built preschool.

In her speech, the Treasurer mentioned closing the gap for Indigenous disadvantage as a key focus for our government. In the recent Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2017 it was noted that six of the seven targets are not on track to be met. The target on track is to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020.

Our Labor government is committed to investing in children, which is not only the smart thing to do, but the right thing to do. As stated by the Minister for Education in her budget reply, \$1.1bn will be delivered for education in the Territory.

I am comforted by the exemplary work that the Minister for Education is leading the way in to developing a five-year interagency strategic framework to support a holistic service delivery model for our students with additional needs to improve student outcomes.

I know from my own experience as a school teacher for four years in a remote community, sometimes, through no fault of our own, we were not always linking in with other community agencies and vice versa. We acknowledge that small communities can be busy places, that everyone is focused on their own agency work and is very time poor. This long-term strategic planning is under way and will improve student access to allied health professionals and expand multidisciplinary specialist support teams to grow school capacity to appropriately support teachers to meet the needs of their students. This type of long-term strategy and future planning will make a significant difference for students, their families, teachers and staff in all schools across the Territory.

There is \$8m to provide support for the expansion of the Territory-wide social and emotional learning program and a systematic approach to positive behaviour.

Other highlights for education include:

- \$7.1m to continue the Back to School Payment Scheme, which provides \$150 per student to assist parents and families with back-to-school expenses, which is much needed in most homes
- \$6m to continue the early childhood services subsidy for long daycare, three-year-old kindergarten and family daycare services to offset the cost of childcare for parents and families who are working
- \$1m for the repairs and maintenance to homeland learning centres, which I am very happy our government is supporting.

This is all money that is well-spent on children, families, teachers, schools and communities, and it is a stark contrast to the previous CLP government. Unlike the previous government, our Labor government believes in long-term investment in education to give our children, teenagers, young adults and mature-age learners the best opportunities for learning in the Northern Territory.

I move on to community safety. Law and order is a consistent focus for communities and, consequently, for governments. Our government has committed \$5m in this budget, increasing to \$15.75m by 2019–20 for police resourcing and recruitment to work towards the government's commitment for 120 additional police officers. Communities across the Territory deserve to be safe, and those who work hard to keep us safe should be provided with the adequate and proper resources they need to do the tough job they face every day.

This brings me to the Banned Drinker Register, or BDR. Our Labor government is committed to the return of the BDR and is ensuring it is better than before. A total of \$17.2m will be used to re-establish the BDR, which will be coming in September, and other best-practice, health-based alcohol harm reduction initiatives. We know that alcohol-related harm in the Northern Territory costs taxpayers millions of dollars each year. I support the reduction of alcohol-related harm, and the targeted assistance to people who need help to keep themselves, their families, their friends and the community safe.

Our Labor government will use \$6.2m to continue to implement the Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy. Unfortunately this is a much-needed service across the Territory. Family violence knows no geographic boundaries; it does not discriminate against colour, beliefs, religion, age or economic status. Family violence is a problem which requires sensitivity, care, attention and support for victims and offenders in order to work towards solutions.

I congratulate the Treasurer and the Minister for Territory Families on the \$1m to establish a remote women's safe house at Galiwinku on Elcho Island, which is in the Nhulunbuy electorate. Galiwinku is a strong community of men and women who have worked hard through challenges to establish this much-needed support service.

I will be interested in the infrastructure and support program at Galiwinku and the model it may provide for future women's safe houses across the NT.

I must mention the \$700 000 over two years to expand the No More violence prevention campaign, and the Territory government's commitment to further invest in youth justice, which is an ongoing commitment. They are two more examples of how our NT Labor government has the wellbeing of Territorians and community safety as a priority in this budget.

Also in line with the theme of community safety is road safety. I am pleased with the announcement of \$1.5m for the DriveSafe NT Remote Driver Education and Licensing program. According to the Police, Fire and Emergency Services Annual Report 2015–16, there were 3366 driving without a licence offences recorded in the NT. There were a further 686 driving while licence was disqualified or suspended offences recorded in the same year. I am confident that with more driver licensing programs and education in remote parts of the NT, there will be a reduction in the statistics of police-related matters to unlicensed drivers.

As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, getting around the Territory can be difficult at times. I am pleased to see \$760 000 in the budget to improve the regional bus program and to trial new passenger services in priority regional and remote areas. This is particularly important to many communities in the Arnhem electorate, which covers a large part of the NT and contains many remote communities.

I look forward to working with the Treasurer in her capacity as the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics and providing my experience in the remote travel planning process.

Lastly, as part of community safety, an especially large commitment in Budget 2017–18 is the facilitation of the \$9.5m in Commonwealth funding to upgrade police facilities at Alyangula and Angurugu police stations, which are both located on Groote Eylandt. Those works will start very soon.

I now turn to infrastructure. I am pleased to announce that \$2m has been set aside through the transport assets capital works program for the Gapuwiyak barge landing upgrade. Currently there are land tenure issues to be resolved. I sincerely hope for the sake of the many people in the community of Gapuwiyak that these land tenure issues are resolved quickly to develop and construct a much-needed barge landing loading area which will provide safe access and delivery of supplies for the Gapuwiyak community and surrounding homelands.

I am pleased to talk about telecommunications and what it means for the Arnhem electorate. Telstra is now in the design and build phase for Barunga, Bulman/Weemol, Manyallaluk and Umbakumba to receive improved telecommunications infrastructure under the Telstra/NT Government co-investment program, a three-year, \$30m joint investment program to expand access to telecommunications services in remote NT communities. I pledge that I will continue working with Milyakburra on Bickerton Island to ensure it is included on the list for mobile reception.

The Centre for Appropriate Technology will install mobile phone hotspots at Kakadu Billabong Safari Camp, Kakadu National Park and at Werenbun outstation, which is located three kilometres east of Edith Falls. Each hotspot creates mobile coverage at the location, which improves telecommunication access in the bush and creates a safer environment for locals and tourists.

I have written to Northern Territory Senator Nigel Scullion in his capacity as the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, seeking his assistance to extend mobile, voice and data services in the Gapuwiyak homelands, specifically Balma, Mirrinatja and Donydji outstations. In the vastness of the Territory's size, adequate telecommunication services are crucial for access to health services, education, family and friends. In times of emergency it can literally be a matter of life or death for Territorians in remote locations.

I now turn to tourism and environment. There are some important wins for the diverse natural beauty of the Territory in Budget 2017–18, and I am very pleased to emphasise the \$10m over four years for infrastructure development within Nitmiluk National Park, which lies in the Arnhem electorate just outside of Katherine. This is an existing investment, as Nitmiluk attracted over 250 000 visitors last year, and the tourism benefits for the region and the town of Katherine will be warmly welcomed.

A total of \$8m will be spent in tourism across the Territory to attract visitors to enjoy the wonderful people, places and spaces in the Northern Territory. We have some of the most pristine country in Australia and the world, and having more people come to enjoy and appreciate the stunning Northern Territory will assist in the protection and maintenance of our parks and wildlife.

I acknowledge the important work of our Indigenous rangers across the Territory. We will invest \$4.1m over two years for grants to assist Indigenous ranger groups to purchase essential equipment. I am very excited about this commitment as I have some fantastic ranger groups who work hard in the Arnhem electorate. Some examples of these ranger groups are the Kakadu Park Rangers, based in the Kakadu and Jabiru region; and the Jawoyn Rangers, who work in Nitmiluk National Park and across the communities of Manyallaluk, Barunga and Beswick.

The Arnhem electorate also boasts beautiful country which is cared and protected by the Yugul Mangi Rangers from Ngukurr; the Numburindi Rangers from Numbulwar; the Anindilyakwa Land and Sea Rangers on Groote Eyland; the Yirralka Rangers, who work in Gapuwiyak community and surrounding homelands; and, lastly, the Mimal Rangers, who are from Bulman and Weemol communities. I look forward to supporting each of these ranger groups in the Arnhem electorate and will be encouraging many of them to apply for extra support so they can continue the important work of caring for and protecting country.

Our government has invested in important health services. I will concentrate on renal dialysis care as it affects many constituents and families in the Arnhem electorate, as well as my immediate family. There will be \$9.7m to establish a purpose-built Darwin renal centre. My mother and many of my relatives rely on dialysis care in Darwin and access the Nightcliff Renal Centre. I am glad to see this investment will benefit those who live in the Darwin area and those from out bush who come in and, unfortunately, have to spend long hours of treatment away from their family, friends and jobs.

There is also \$1.4m allocated for two renal-ready rooms for remote communities. Unfortunately the number of remote patients requiring renal dialysis is increasing in numbers, so renal-ready rooms are a desperately-needed service in remote communities. I hope this will be the start of our government's journey and commitment to continue to support renal patients across the Territory from the Top End to the Central Desert Region. I will be advocating strongly for renal services to be expanded in the Arnhem electorate.

I also want to highlight \$12m for a multistorey car park at Royal Darwin Hospital. My family and I have had long visits at RDH, often under very distressing circumstances. My family, who live in remote parts of the Territory, have also had to stay at RDH, and the last thing people want to think about is trying to find a parking space and paying for it. I thank the Treasurer and the Minister for Health for their continued support of this project.

The importance of local government is recognised by our Territory Labor government. I commend the Treasurer and the minister for Community Development for investing \$5m to establish and operate the strategic local government infrastructure fund to invest in projects that will improve key infrastructure in remote communities. I must admit, my appreciation for local government came only a few years ago when I spent several years living and teaching in Numbulwar community.

In 2015 I learnt a lot, as I was the Chair for the Numbulwar Local Authority. I learned a lot about the procedures and processes through the Roper Gulf Regional Council. My respect grew as I understood more of what local government did and appreciated its roles and responsibilities. I enjoyed being a member of the local authority and working alongside other members of the community, often my relatives, in making important decisions for our community and being part of the local government decision-making process.

Our government is committed to driving initiatives which encourage and support local decision-making. Some examples include:

- \$1.3m to commence government's local decision-making agenda
- \$1m to develop and support strong governance capability and capacity in Aboriginal organisations wanting to participate in the local decision-making agenda
- \$7.9m to continue the Indigenous jobs development fund for regional councils to support core local government service delivery
- continued support for the First Circles Engagement program with \$800 000 to support future Indigenous leaders from across the Territory.

Our Labor team spent many months during the campaign period last year, in the lead-up to the NT election in August, listening to what remote Territorians want. One of the most consistent messages was that people in remote communities want more power and involvement in their local decision-making processes. It makes sense that people want to be involved in the decisions that affect them directly.

We have listened and we are actioning this feedback, which is extremely evident throughout dedicated parts of Budget 2017–18 in shaping stronger opportunities for involvement in local decision-making for remote Territorians.

Our Labor government believes the future of the Territory is bright. It is important that people stay here for the long run. It is a place many people love and call home. We have to balance the needs and wants of Territorians with responsible and accountable government decisions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend the Treasurer for delivering Budget 2017–18. I thank her for her efforts in managing this very tough responsibility and for keeping Territorians at the forefront of Budget 2017–18.

Mr GUYULA (Nhulunbuy): Mr Deputy Speaker, I come from the region of East Arnhem Land. This region has contributed millions to the Northern Territory economy for many decades. Many in my region wonder if we will get any equal return for the input. We wonder if we would be better off separate from Darwin-based governance.

This is a question worth asking and awaiting an answer for. We have already waited more than 35 years. This budget does not answer my question. There is nothing in it that sticks out and says there is an advantage. There is nothing in it that immediately says achievement. However, in a situation that is reported as a difficult economic time we can see ongoing basic service provision. This I support. We do not want panicked reactions. I am glad the government has not reacted like the opposition.

The answer to economic difficulty is not to throw away caution and run from one problem to another. Yesterday the opposition members made it clear that they want to improve cash flow by fast-tracking fracking. I do not support this. I support Labor's moderate approach to economic development. It needs to be wise so it does not cost our children, but the opposition talks about money debts and forgets that environmental damage is a debt.

Having said this, the budget lacks sense when it claims that infrastructure spending will improve jobs for Territorians. The proposed type of infrastructure spending has always led to serving fly-in fly-out Territorians—the 'make your money and leave' types. The proposed building agenda may improve cash flow, but will it create jobs for 'live and die here' Territorians, especially for long-term work? Local

Territorians are the backbone of sustainable economic development in the Northern Territory. They must be supported.

I am also concerned that while Darwin receives money for things like improvements to the mall, a new museum and development of Barneson Boulevard, basic infrastructure in our region will be neglected. I would be happy to be proven wrong, but our regions are grossly underdevelopment. In East Arnhem Land we need basic infrastructure like good, reliable roads that will service the basic connections between our regions, towns and villages. This is infrastructure that will directly lower the cost of living and almost automatically improve enterprise opportunities.

Our region has a stable population and is growing. Small business outcomes and a few big business outcomes will count enormously. Roads are an asset that supports big and little businesses. Yesterday, in reply to my question about the Central Arnhem Highway, the minister for Infrastructure invoked a 10-year infrastructure plan that would include the Central Arnhem Highway. I am worried that the supplied \$500 000 for maintenance on this road will not be enough for the coming financial year. I am adamant that this road is not forgotten so the major improvements are continued year-in and year-out until it is sealed from at least Gove to Ramingimbi so that our region has a basic connection.

I note that the government has offered money to improve renal services. The way this money is used will provide success considering we need more facilities, not the same facilities. The destruction of one renal facility in Darwin only to replace it may not be the best use of money. I also prefer that services are decentralised so people are not forced to live in Darwin; we need full renal services in regional hospitals.

Once people are sucked into Darwin they will soon be followed by family attempting to stay close. The destabilisation of family life causes many challenges and problems. The Darwin centralisation of health is a bad policy; it is a high cost for patients to travel back and forth from Darwin. It certainly disadvantages patients and family by loss of income.

I encourage the government to go forward with the Banned Drinker Register. It has social and economic benefits for the whole NT. Like the case with the Banned Drinker Register, economic measurement should be holistic.

Education is like that. Education spending in our region is required, but it is not effective without the right educational program. Without bilingual education the government is basically throwing away—it is internationally recognised that in our circumstances, where children speak an Indigenous language at home, bilingual education will produce not only the best learning outcomes, but the best budgetary and economic returns. It is not only racist to deny bilingual education; it is economically dull-minded.

Another example of welcome spending in this budget, but with policy questions, is in the remote housing project. Housing spending is required, and with proper management these houses will be an ongoing asset to the Northern Territory Government. However, while homelands offer better health, education and more likelihood of enterprise, it is not good to encourage more and more people to live in towns.

Policing is also like this. Policing is a major expenditure in our region, but does it offer returns socially and economically? It costs millions to place police in our region and it costs more for those arrests to go through court. It then costs more to imprison the people, and that does not save one cent because when people get out of gaol they just do it again. Imprisonment also breaks up families and leaves them uncared for.

This just makes a new generation of people ready for gaol. We need to stop policing by outsiders and return conflict resolution and law enforcement to our authorities. I want this to be clear; none of the programs budgeted to reduce crime, imprisonment or family violence will have strong outcomes if they are run by the Northern Territory Government agencies. They must be run by Yolngu authorities.

The same applies to the support of families and children. Local authority is essential, which is why I am glad the government is putting some money towards the development of the local authority policy.

I note that money has been cut from family support services in our region, reduced from \$4.3m this year to \$2.5m in the coming year. This is a problem considering the child removal issues I have previously raised in this parliament.

Finally, I commend the special expenditure of the Milingimbi airstrip and the safe house in Galiwinku.

Overall the budget does not provide advancement for my region; it is a budget of basic services. While the government is talking about economic stimulus, this is all pointed towards Darwin. The budget shows no belief in locals to advance the economy. It certainly does not show belief in our region.

While the government is talking about lowering the cost of living and improving job opportunities in Darwin, East Arnhem Land makes up more than 5% of the NT population and has some of the highest living costs in the Northern Territory. Why is no attention being given to our stronger need?

If one thing was done for our advancement, it is the ongoing improvement of the Central Arnhem Highway between Nhulunbuy and Ramingining. This will lower living costs automatically due to travel expenses. Thousands of dollars per family can be saved here, but it will also stimulate the network between Nhulunbuy, Yirrkala, Gapuwiyak, Galiwinku, Ramingining, Milingimbi and all the homelands in between.

It will also better connect us to Maningrida. Improving the Central Arnhem Highway will connect the technical skills of Nhulunbuy with the primary industries potential of homelands. It will improve the viability of the developing tourism industry and small businesses and will create a market base for the sale and resale of consumer goods.

I agree with the government's agenda to maintain basic services, despite the federal government's cut to our GST revenue. I challenge some of the policy directions of those allocations, which will require more dialogue, but I want to strongly put to the government our region's needs for economic-related stimulus and benefits for locals.

This cannot be ignored for the long-term viability of the Northern Territory. This is especially the case in consideration of our region's decades of input into the Northern Territory economy. We must see advantage to our relationship with Darwin and the Northern Territory Government. Thank you.

Ms AH KIT (Karama): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Treasurer for bringing the Michael Gunner Labor government's first budget before the House. In the lead-up to the 2016 NT election, the Territory Labor team spoke of our intention to deliver for all Territorians. We spoke about our focus on children and families and our need to invest in the future of our Territory.

I feel proud to be able to stand here today and talk about the wonderful benefits this budget will deliver not only for my electorate of Karama, but for all Territorians. I acknowledge my colleagues who are members of Cabinet for their efforts in determining the budget, and the Treasurer for all her hard work to ensure that the best outcomes for Territorians could be delivered.

There are so many initiatives included in our budget and it would be impossible for me to talk about the benefit of each. Instead, I will talk about a select few that will directly impact those who live in my electorate of Karama, as well as a few others that I am quite excited about.

The first measure I will talk about focuses on our government's investment in education and children. We have allocated \$141.7m under the Building Better Schools program to invest in school infrastructure. This program ensures all Territory schools will receive \$300 000 to improve their facilities. I am pleased that Manunda Terrace Primary School has been included in the first round of schools to receive \$300 000 next financial year. The school has chosen to use this grant to enclose the open-aired areas of the library to support early years and playgroup by fitting it out to make it a suitable and inviting space for all users.

I visit Manunda Terrace Primary School on a regular basis and I have seen the open-aired area of the library; it is a great space. I have also seen the plans for the enclosure of the space and spoken with council about the positive impact and opportunities that will result from this project.

Our government has also allocated \$426m for education. This includes additional funding of \$20m directly into school budgets for school resourcing. I am excited that Malak Primary School was allocated \$26 700, Karama Primary School was allocated \$49 800, and Manunda Terrace Primary School was allocated \$65 400. The electorate of Karama is a great place to raise a family, and I am fortunate enough to work with four primary schools that educate and nurture the growing minds of our children, our future leaders.

Many of these young children and their families, and our community as a whole, will benefit from this investment, and I thank the Minister for Education for this wonderful grants program. In addition to this direct investment in the three public schools in my electorate of Karama, I am looking forward to a direct benefit for our school students and families with an annual investment of \$8m for early intervention to tackle challenging behaviour in the classroom and to support students with additional needs. This

investment will add greater value to the work being undertaken by the Sanderson Alliance through its collective impact model, and I look forward to this.

I am also looking forward to the benefits that will flow on from our annual investment of \$2m to create a program of school sport, arts, music and health to provide engaging pathways for students. Like many other electorates there are many talented young sports stars in the Karama electorate, with regular participation in sporting endeavours being coordinated by School Sport NT and other local sporting competitions. The Karama electorate is also quite privileged to be represented by local sporting superstars on the bigger stages outside of the Territory. I look forward to this year's investment in school sport, helping to nurture the next generation of sport stars like Abby Cubillo, and Jasmine and Jed Anderson.

There are a number of amazingly talented art students in the Karama electorate who are kicking goals both inside and outside of their schools. These students do what they can with what they have, but I am sure our investment in arts will support them in their future endeavours.

I acknowledge and thank those at the NT Music School, based at Sanderson Middle School, for the wonderful job they do teaching music skills to school students. I have had the chance to witness the outcomes of this training firsthand from students at Karama Primary School, with their drumming group, and Manunda Terrace Primary School, with the drumming group that has the amazing name Manunda Thunda.

I am fortunate, as the local Member for Karama, to have Manunda Thunda perform at my regular community barbecues, and they do a wonderful job. The students' excitement and preparation for their performances always brightens my day. The pride they take in their work and the atmosphere they create through their drumming leaves you with a nice feeling, and you cannot help but smile when you are in their presence. I thank Principal Lisa Hirschausen and the Manunda Thunda drummers for this partnership. I congratulate the NT Music School for its wonderful work in supporting these students.

The final of 2017 Battle of the School Bands competition was held recently with heavy metal band Fat Pigeon taking out top spot for the best band. As the competition winners they will get to perform in front of thousands as part of this year's line-up for Bass in the Grass on Saturday 20 May 2017, which is sold out. I congratulate Fat Pigeon on their win, and I am pleased to highlight that two of the four band members live in the Karama electorate.

Our children need more role models like the four exemplary young men who make up Fat Pigeon. I am happy to see our government investing in our next generation of talented musicians.

I have four primary schools in my electorate of Karama so am always excited to find out about new ways to help enhance the lives of local children and their families. This is why I am hopeful the wonderful Families as First Teachers, or FaFT, program can be introduced to one of these schools in the near future. The aim of FaFT is to improve developmental outcomes for remote and Indigenous children by working with families and children prior to school entry. This has since been tweaked, with the program now being run in Ludmilla Primary School, which is the first urban school to host the program. I thank the Minister for Education for this move. The FaFT program team works with families and children prior to school entry to ensure Indigenous children are ready for school as at day one, term one, year one.

There are a number of Indigenous students attending primary school in my electorate. The FaFT program can help to enhance their educational experience. The program has been a huge success in remote Aboriginal communities and I am sure it will be just as successful in Ludmilla Primary School.

This budget makes clear Labor's total commitment to education. I am proud to be part of a team which recognises that investment in this area will yield outcomes now and well into the future.

I will turn my attention to budget measures that focus on safety, law and order, which are big issues in my electorate. Community members residing in Malak and Karama are impacted by crime like other communities. That is not okay. We know our police are doing a fantastic job in keeping our communities safe, but they deserve to be and will be supported by our government.

I am grateful to see action has been taken to deliver on our election commitment to employ 120 more police officers, a promise the former CLP government failed to keep. These additional police officers will serve on the front line to engage with community members, support community safety initiatives and respond to incidents. Our investment of a \$2m rolling program to expand and maintain the CCTV network

will add another layer of safety and security for Territorians. We are all aware of the hotspots in our own electorates and I, like others, will be advocating to have these included in this roll-out.

I was grateful to meet with the interim CEO of Victims of Crime NT earlier this year to hear about the wonderful work they are undertaking, including the Safe at Home program. We spoke about a number of issues facing those in the Karama electorate, and about the potential to do more for the benefit of all Territorians. I am happy to see an investment of \$0.5m to increase the victims of crime fund.

We constantly hear about the detrimental impact alcohol has on our society, and rightly so. In order to invest in the future of our Territory and focus on our children and the future we want for them, we must support vulnerable Territorians and invest in their future as well.

Our government has allocated \$17.2m for alcohol harm reduction in the 2017 budget. It will focus on demand reduction and harm minimisation. I, along with many other Territorians, look forward to the return of the Banned Drinker Register. The BDR represents some of the toughest alcohol legislation in the country. It is specifically designed to turn off the tap for problem drinkers across the entire Northern Territory.

The experts tell us if you are not tackling alcohol abuse you are not tackling alcohol-fuelled violence and crime. The Banned Drinker Register will be a useful tool for our local community and police, who stated the register was the best tool they had in tackling alcohol-related crime. Our approach will place the individual at the centre of our investment. We will work with the individual to assess their immediate needs, provide support through withdrawal services and ensure treatment options include therapeutic programs.

This approach brings much-needed humanness back into this sensitive issue. It helps to remind us that alcoholism is a disease and needs to be treated as such.

One of my favourite sayings is:

We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.

In keeping with this line of thinking the government is investing in all our children. Our youth justice system continues to attract attention, as it should, but I am pleased to see our government is committed to reforming a system that does not work as effectively as it should.

A total of \$18.28m has been set aside for youth justice reform. I am looking forward to the \$8.05m investment in youth outreach and re-engagement programs, and the \$4.95m investment for youth diversion camps, including boot camps.

The slashing of the youth services budget by the previous CLP government was unforgivable. Its tough on crime approach resulted in a reduction of proactive and preventative measures and an increase in youth incarceration.

We came to government with a commitment to help restore integrity and trust to government. Territorians deserve no less and I am pleased to see that \$3m has been allocated to establish and operate an independent commission against corruption, or an ICAC, as it is most commonly known.

In the lead-up to the Territory election in August last year, and the months following, many Territorians have been forthcoming with their support of the Territory having an ICAC. Unfortunately the general consensus has been that we need one. The ICAC is needed to hold the current parliament to account and to review questionable decisions that were made by the previous government. I will not retell these stories today, but I am sure we all remember those questionable decisions. As you can tell, I cannot wait for the ICAC to be established.

I will now take the opportunity to speak about a few stimulus initiatives included in our budget that will benefit a number of my constituents in Karama. The first is the Home Improvement Scheme, which was a popular measure used by the previous CLP government to stimulate the economy. I was proud to see our government not only reinstate the scheme, but add \$15m in funding to improve it.

I acknowledge and thank the Chief Minister for his leadership in reinstating this popular scheme, and I am pleased to see the scheme has been backed by a further \$16.3m in the 2017 budget. During my regular doorknocks I have heard wonderful stories of the value that has been added from refurbishments undertaken through this scheme. I have also received feedback about the scheme from local tradies and

small business owners and employees, which has been overwhelmingly positive as they have benefited from this scheme.

Our government inherited a slowing economy. Territorians told us prior to the election that we needed to boost our economy, help to secure jobs and keep Territorians right here in the Territory. As such, we have committed to a record spend on infrastructure. Now is not the time to take our foot off the pedal. Instead we must invest in the future of our Territory.

We established the \$10m Immediate Work Grants to support our community and not-for-profit groups to engage local business to upgrade their property and facilities. I am pleased to say that along with the many dozens of local organisations across the Territory, the Karama electorate has also benefited from this grants program with more than \$29 000 being awarded to Faith Centre Darwin, and more than \$134 000 being awarded to the Hindu Society of the Northern Territory. I congratulate both organisations for the important service they provide to our community, and I am sure all their members and visitors will enjoy the upgrades once completed.

Growing up as a true-blue Territorian tomboy, my first love was rugby league. On a side note, I apologise to Dennis Bree that it was not rugby union. I first played as a seven-year-old on the South Darwin Rugby League Club fields, which are now more commonly known as Warren Park. For years Darwin Rugby League has advocated for a new sporting facility that is easily accessible for families, large enough to accommodate construction and a suitable home for rugby league in Darwin. I am grateful to be part of a team where our Treasurer and sports minister communicate clearly regarding sporting projects, and I thank them for finding a suitable home for rugby league in Darwin.

The 2017 budget provides a much-needed investment in health services. I am delighted to see that a PET scanner and cyclotron have been included in our budget. Many Territorians will benefit from accessing this service locally instead of having to travel interstate for it. Public feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and I cannot wait to see the PET scanner and cyclotron serving Territorians.

Parking issues at Royal Darwin Hospital have robbed Territorians of their patience, goodwill and positivity over the years. When we need to access RDH the last thing we want to do is circle like vultures around the car park whilst being ready to swoop on our target, that is, a close to being vacated carpark.

Cynicism aside, I am proud of this government's leadership in building a much-needed, free, multistorey carpark at Royal Darwin Hospital with the \$12m we have allocated in this budget. When locals visit the hospital it is often under duress or in less than happy circumstances, and this government recognises that access to the hospital must be made as hassle-free as possible. That is why our car park will be free. I also thank the Member for Casuarina for her tireless campaigning on this issue.

I, like many others, including the Member for Arnhem, have lost family members and friends to kidney failure and have current family members who are seeking dialysis. This is why I am pleased to see that the 2017 budget includes an investment in renal services. A total of \$9.7m has been allocated to establish a purpose-built Darwin renal centre to replace the current Nightcliff Renal Unit, and an additional \$1.4m has been allocated to establish two renal-ready rooms to increase access to dialysis in remote communities, which is greatly needed.

Our government understands that we need to invest in preventative measures in order to influence sustainable change in our Territory. I look forward to the finalisation of the Territory government's 10-year renal services strategy, which will focus on early intervention and renal care closer to home for remote Territorians.

I want to highlight the initiatives we have budgeted for to improve housing and related issues in the Northern Territory.

The first initiative is the first home owner discount. My parents taught me at a young age that one of the best things I could do in my life was to purchase my own home. These were words of wisdom and I took their wise advice and invested in my own piece of the Territory. Being a homeowner is the best feeling, and I am glad to see that our government is supporting more Territorians to purchase their own piece of paradise here in the Northern Territory. It was fantastic to learn this week that more than 420 homes have been purchased since the scheme commenced, and I send huge congratulations to all new home owners.

My office is contacted regularly by constituents seeking to be included in the community support work program. The program is a popular one that is operated by Corrections and sees prisoners provide support

to eligible pensioners who need a hand with lawn mowing and yard maintenance. Despite its popularity, the previous CLP government decided to cut funds to this program in the 2015–16 financial year. The program is so popular that Corrections stopped taking new referrals as of late last year, as there was already an 18-month waiting list to be included.

I was pleased to hear the Treasurer mention in her speech that there is \$500 000 allocated to the program in the next financial year budget. This is welcome news for the Karama electorate, as I have a high number of public housing tenants and senior citizens who are on a waiting list to access this wonderful program. I hope this \$500 000 investment might see that waiting list reduced and eligible Karama residents able to receive its services. I note that this is a great activity for low-level offenders to be engaged in productive community work. Many pensioners are grateful for the assistance. It is a win-win.

It is no secret that Territorians like to go fishing, and that is especially true for the people in my electorate of Karama. I am pleased to see our government investing \$50m to support recreational and commercial fishing in the Northern Territory. This large investment includes \$5m for infrastructure upgrades and \$1m to continue to enable community access to Territory coastal waters.

I acknowledge the great work of the Amateur Fishermen's Association of the Northern Territory, which is situated in my electorate, and I look forward to benefits members will gain from our investment. I am still waiting for them to tell me about the secret fishing spots, but unfortunately their lips are sealed.

There are 5017 public housing dwellings across the Territory, with 614 located in the Karama electorate. This being the case, every day I work to support community members with public housing matters. I am pleased to give public acknowledgment to my colleague Gerry McCarthy, the minister for Housing, and his staff, who work tirelessly to support people of Malak and Karama.

Budget 2017–18 provides \$32.6m to maintain these assets, including \$5m in economic stimulus funding to provide work for local tradespeople. Many public housing dwellings will benefit from much-needed upgrades to roofs, kitchens, bathrooms and fences, accessibility modifications and security upgrades. I am excited for the lucky Territorians who get to enjoy these refurbished homes.

During my time in office I have heard many stories about public housing dwellings being in need of repair. One of the most memorable stories was helping a single mum of three children have built-in cupboards installed in her home so her children's clothing could be stored appropriately. The same mum contacted me again, seeking help to have her driveway sealed, as she finds it difficult to push her pram up the uneven driveway. This task becomes even more difficult for her when it is raining or the driveway is muddy. I am pleased to report that that mum and her children will receive the sealed driveway they desperately need.

Again, I thank the minister for Housing and his wonderful staff for making this mum's life a little easier.

Our government has set aside \$1.2m for the NT home ownership program to provide home loan products and services to help eligible Territorians own their home. It is important we do what we can to help Territorians purchase a home, and the NT home ownership program lends to low and middle income earners to help them get their foot in the door.

Public Housing Safety Officers work hard to improve community safety. I thank them for the positive impact they have in the Karama electorate. I was fortunate to accompany some Public Housing Safety Officers on a late Friday night patrol to experience firsthand the operations and challenges they face during their patrols.

Public Housing Safety Officers are critical to managing relationships with public housing tenants and maintaining the safety of our community. They are part of the broader public housing safety strategy that includes the red card and visitor management policies, acceptable behaviour agreements and cross-agency collaboration with NT Police.

Public Housing Safety Officers are deployed as a first line of response to investigate and respond to antisocial behaviour in and around public housing premises. Officers exercise their legislated powers to intervene and reduce antisocial behaviour occurring on public housing premises. They also have the ability to respond to inappropriate behaviour caused by visitors, which impacts on tenants and the broader community.

What impressed me during my time with them was the professionalism and care in which our Public Housing Safety Officers went about their business.

The Public Housing Safety Officers who took me on patrol knew most of the people we spoke with in the housing complexes. Not only did they know them by sight, they had developed strong working relationships with them and were on a first name basis. They calmed situations through their positive relationships rather than using a big-stick approach.

I was also impressed to hear of the ongoing collaborative arrangements between NT Police and the Public Housing Safety Officers. They do a great job and I am grateful to have been able to witness this firsthand.

The biggest financial investment we have made as a government is the \$1.1bn Remote Housing Investment Package, which we intend to deliver over a 10-year period. This represents the largest investment in remote housing by any Territory government by far, and underpins this government's commitment to the bush. I am glad to see such a significant investment for my government because in 2017 we have Territorians living in third-world conditions in our remote communities, and we need to fix this.

The 2017 budget sets aside \$233m as part of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing to construct new homes, upgrade existing homes and provide associated infrastructure in remote communities. An additional \$44.5m has been allocated to prepare land to support the Remote Housing Investment Package.

Our \$1.1bn investment in remote housing is a game changer. It is a significant investment that addresses a critical housing shortage for Territorians, and there are massive benefits for Territorians, communities and the Territory as a whole. I look forward to following the progress of this important program.

Finally, I will spend a few moments talking about investment in areas I am fortunate to be the assistant minister for: youth and seniors; suicide prevention; mental health; and disability.

I have mentioned the benefits for youth in our budget, which includes measures that focus on our education system and youth justice reform, so I will turn my attention to seniors. Like many others, I have a high number of seniors in my electorate, who will benefit from our \$33.9m investment in Budget 2017–18. Our investment in seniors includes free public transport for those over the age of 65 from 1 July, and a stamp duty discount of up to \$10 000 for the purchase of a home valued up to \$750 000 or vacant land valued up to \$385 000.

We are also looking at how we can retain aging workers in the public sector through flexible working arrangements. We have allocated \$500 000 towards facilitating the release of land to build retirement villages in Alice Springs, Darwin and the rural area to keep families together. We will work hard to attract and retain seniors, who provide so much value to our community.

Our government is committed to addressing the mental health needs of Territorians to encourage and support Territorians to live happy and productive lives. We have allocated \$3m over four years to support up to 200 people with a mental illness who live in public housing in Darwin and Palmerston. We are also setting aside \$0.8m over four years to offer postgraduate scholarships each year to grow the number of mental health clinicians. We will offer 10 postgraduate scholarships per year for registered nurses to specialise in mental health nursing. We will offer 10 scholarships per year for enrolled mental health nursing students, and we will provide opportunities for Aboriginal health practitioners to specialise in mental health and for Aboriginal community workers to improve cultural competency.

The final budget item I would like to talk about focuses on Territorians who live with a disability. The Territory has already commenced the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme in the Barkly region and the East Arnhem region, and to those who reside in supported accommodation in Darwin. The transition to the NDIS will take time as it is expected that up to 6500 eligible Territorians will transition to the scheme.

I thank the Minister for Health and her department for working to ensure this transition is as seamless as possible for Territorians.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints I am unable to talk about the entire suite of fantastic investments our government has committed to, such as our investment in the Darwin CBD to help revitalise the city centre, investing in the amazing Nitmiluk National Park or our Indigenous arts trail initiative.

I am excited for the future of the Territory and I thank the Treasurer and my colleagues for all of their hard work to deliver a budget that invests in Territorians.

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, there is no doubt the Territory is going through tough times economically. All the indicators are present that demonstrate this very clearly. It is clear in economic reports, such as the Commsec *State of the States* report; it is clear to businesses that are experiencing the worst trade in about 10 years, as some of them have told me; and it is clear to removalists in Darwin, who are busier than a lizard running on glass.

The Territory economy is losing momentum; population growth is weak, affecting consumer spending and housing demand; and business spending is down. New car sales are okay, but not brilliant. Repairers of vehicles and equipment are reasonably busy and, from my talks around the business, I know that community people are repairing, not replacing.

The real estate market is of mixed fortunes with high vacancy rates, a low level of sales and many properties taking a long time to turn over. Some would say it is a buyer's market, not a seller's market. I do not see the market changing for a positive move any time soon, and when the INPEX project concludes its construction phase in March next year more properties and vacancies will result, placing more pressure on an already tight market.

Having said all this, I remain optimistic, as a person who has lived in the Territory through good times and poor fortunes. I have seen projects being built and mines close. I have seen good developments and bad developments. There have been times when there was upwards of eight cranes on the horizon in Darwin city, and now there are none. The Territory, like many of the states, namely Western Australia, is doing it tough as the minerals' good times have gone and we must resort to other sectors to pick up the slack. However, we in the Territory are not blessed with multiple sectors that can pick up the slack.

Own-source revenue is tough for a jurisdiction like the Territory. Payroll tax, stamp duty and mineral royalties are the three big ones. I see in this year's budget papers that mineral royalties are about a 16% contribution to gross state product. Not so long ago, maybe eight years ago, it was around 24% gross state product. I have said this in this House before and will state it again: if you want a revival in growth in the economy it must be led by mineral production exploration growth. Tall buildings are good and employ many people in the construction phase, but when they are built that is pretty much it.

However, a major mine of 15-plus years keeps giving to the economy, and that is what we need. Tourism initiatives are fine and museums are very lovely, but it is hard rock and industrial developments that will build our economy. It is these developments that generate real wealth, provide employment in the regions and contribute substantially to the economy in Darwin and the regional centres.

The Territory has not had a world-class discovery in decades, that is, a long-term project with substantial quality ore reserves. Gemco and the McArthur River projects are considered to be world-class projects. Governments like world-class mines, and why not? They generate strong revenues and loads of taxes, which would benefit the government in their revenue streams and budgeting.

Additionally, long-term mines contribute enormously to regional development and often provide services that are usually the responsibility of government. They also underwrite infrastructure that is required to develop an area. Just look at the roads, airports, jetties, ports and railway infrastructure around the Territory related to mining projects, all associated with minerals and mineral production.

This brings me to the section in the department's minerals and energy budget papers and the commitment by the government to fund the ongoing program, creating opportunities for resource exploration. This is a good move and should be in each and every budget. The department and all departments around the country fund similar programs, as they provide quality, pre-competitive data, such that the industry can get excited about a prospect, take up ground and then spend money on the ground.

Industry no longer does base line studies; it works with government to bring about the best future for the minerals industry. The AGES conference held in Alice Springs each year is a strong program and generates considerable interest around the country. It is well attended by hundreds of delegates. This is where the geological division showcases the work of government. Well done for continuing to support this work and the program of the geological and minerals divisions.

Whilst I am on the minerals sector, in the budget I see funding for legacy mines and such matters. That is appropriate, as many of these sites are from the 1950s, when the government and industry beat a different drum. That does not happen anymore, thankfully. What I do not see, however, is the government's vision of how it will work with industry to maximise opportunities. We all know commodity prices are low and there is

pressure across the country, but what will the government do to stand us apart from the states, so that the companies come to the Territory to explore and not go elsewhere.

If you check the well-known Fraser Institute report, put out each year by a company based in Canada, you will see the Territory is ranked pretty well compared to other Australian states and other countries. This report surveys about 2700 companies around the world and the Territory is ranked in the top 20 for investment attractiveness, but it is a bit down in the policy perception and in lower best practice. We rank well in the world scene, but we are definitely not as well placed overall as we have been in past years. I have read these reports over many years. This needs to change, and I want to hear from the Treasurer what plans are afoot to revitalise the minerals industry and once again make us the most attractive place to invest. No, I am not including fracking; that is a separate discussion.

I turn my comments to some specifics as they relate to the Top End rural area. The Member for Katherine mentioned in her speech the Katherine township being like a young *Oliver Twist*, wanting more. At least you received a bowl of food; the rural area does not even have one bowl of food. I concur with the Member for Nelson; it is almost as if the rural area does not exist in the minds of town people, unless you want to fish, shoot, play, and shop at the new Kmart.

You cannot have it both ways—a playground at your disposal, but no money to build the playground and improve the lives of everyone, which includes rural people. The budget seems to focus on urban development and improvements for remote people, and I have no problem with that, but there is bugger all for the 25 000-plus people who live in between, in the greater rural area.

I am at a loss to understand why governments are hesitant to improve the community of the rural area. I have tried over the years, as have the Members for Nelson and Daly, in government and not in government, to have proper and decent attention paid to a community that is almost the size of Palmerston. The schools are good; the roads need improving, as do the recreation and sporting facilities—and where is the future of Weddell? I did not see one thing in the papers about the future of Weddell.

Freds Pass Reserve has upwards of 4000 people, young and old, per week using that facility. I know the Litchfield Council owns the ground, but where is the partnership with the council for the future of this reserve? Where is the future of Fred's Pass Reserve? The reserve is almost at capacity.

I said in my maiden speech that the greatest pressure in the future would be on the rural area, and I still believe this to be true. Over the last eight years we have experienced ad hoc planning decisions, water management issues, traffic management issues, conflicts between extractive and domestic residents, goose hunting problems, no vision for new areas of hunting and, sadly, the urban creep of illegal activity, which we have not previously had in the rural area.

Work by the Planning Commission may well be appropriate; however, it does not get to the fundamentals of rural living. Sometimes I think they are just going through the motions.

In the infrastructure planning area the budget makes mention of road upgrades, including the Arnhem Highway floodplain upgrade worth \$78m. That is very good and very welcome. Even this year, with the Wet Season we had, it impacted on tourism and the business community's extractive industries. I want more details on that and to know if some of that upgrade improves the metering of the depth of the road. I have had to travel that road and rely on BOM, the Bureau of Meteorology, and anecdotal evidence. I am interested to know if the water level measuring there is included in the floodplain upgrades.

Linked to the Arnhem Highway is the Marrakai Track. From the Arnhem Highway, turning onto the Marrakai Track, it is a dirt road and is in desperate need of an upgrade. There is a wonderful business a couple kilometres in, the Purple Mango Cafe, which many of you would know. It is severely impacting on their business and the residents who live off the Marrakai Track, close to the Arnhem Highway. I want to talk with government about any plans to at least upgrade the first five to 10 kilometres of the Marrakai Track.

Much work has been done recently on what I call the Coolalinga strip, which the media places a lot of attention and focus on. The government is upgrading that section, but a lot of work needs to be done once the development on the east side is finished. I am interested to know of any future plans for that.

The government has recently upgraded the intersection at Virginia Road and the Arnhem Highway. The government needs to look at the intersection at Bees Creek Road and the Arnhem Highway because it is equally as busy, or if there are any plans to improve any of those major arterial roads that come onto the Stuart Highway.

I think the Member for Nelson mentioned that there was no reference to any collaborative association or joint ventures with the Litchfield Council to develop a water park for the 25 000 to 28 000 people in the greater rural area. Two-point-one million dollars has been allocated to the upgrade, or maintenance, of the Palmerston Water Park. Water parks are not used to teach people to swim; swimming pools are to teach people to swim.

We know from the Royal Life Saving people that we have the highest drowning rate in Australia. A lot of the rural schools cannot afford the buses to take children to swimming pools to learn to swim or do lifesaving. I am disappointed there is no reference, dialogue or discussion in regard to how we can improve a water recreational facility for the rural area for the residents and elderly people who do water aerobics, and for the students and young people to learn how to swim.

Buses are free for seniors—great move. It was a sad day when the past government was so stingy and tight that it made seniors pay to hop on a bus. Public transport in the rural area is not flash at the best of times. There is an elderly couple who live in Humpty Doo, in the units behind the tavern. They have to hop on a bus to go to the Royal Darwin Hospital and it takes them all day to get to their appointments. Then they have to fork out money. It means a lot to pensioners to have a free service. Good on you, government, for doing that.

In the building section I saw reference to amendments to the *Building Act* as pathways to building certification. There are probably thousands of properties that are still not certified. I am interested to know exactly what that money is planned for and what the amendments to the *Building Act* are.

That brings me to the tradies scheme, which has been well received. I wrote to the Treasurer then the Chief Minister, because it is under the Chief Minister's department, and I am still waiting for a reply. I think there is a flaw in the tradies scheme; it asks you to supply your driver's licence, a rates notice showing you own the property, a quote and some other documentation.

You can have your trees chopped down, fences replaced or repaired, bitumen services and landscaping, but I have constituents who have applied—they live on a property in a caravan, have bought their land and are working towards getting their house built, but they have been told that because they are not on the database as living in a compliant certified house, they cannot get the tradies allowance. That is not right. There is something wrong there. I know it is not the intention of government to discriminate against those people. You ask for a rates notice that proves someone owns their property—why would they then have registered tradies undertake work that is not associated with that house? I look forward to the reply from the Chief Minister, as the responsible minister, because I do not believe that is the intention of the government.

There are some people who will be working towards building their houses, so why should they not be able to access that scheme? People are building houses legally and legitimately, but are not able to access that scheme, which I do not think is right. Chief Minister, I am interested to hear what your comment is, because that is not right.

There are lots of good things under primary industries, resources and fisheries. A lot of money has been committed to ongoing work in trying to get Panama disease-resistant bananas; it is not all genetically modified stuff, as some people get a bit scared about. It is also good to have money committed to mitigate the cucumber green mottle mosaic virus; they are key crops in the Northern Territory and you have to keep ahead of the diseases. Well done for that.

I have also addressed the business about legacy mines and joint ventures with industry, and that is good too. Under the environment and water section, the government is committed to reforming the *Weeds Management Act*. That is good because we still have a problem in the Territory with invasive weeds—not only in the Top End, but elsewhere—particularly those that take over our waterways. We all must work together to make sure that does not happen.

I see no reference to reforming the *Water Act*. I will not go into great details in this speech, because it is not relevant. The Minister for Environment and Natural Resources is saying, 'Please do not; leave it for another time.' But you cannot reform the *Weeds Management Act* and not reform the *Water Act*.

The Member for Araluen has 0.4 hectares and waters like crazy. She has a swimming pool, water troughs a spa, washing machine, and dishwasher, and has six people in her house. She uses water like crazy and does not have to get a water licence. I have 0.5 hectares of green lawn, no pool, no dishwasher—I do have a washing machine—and no horse troughs, and I have to get a water extraction licence. That is not logical.

Until that is sorted out I will tell people not to apply for the licence. I have said that publicly; you have to review the *Water Act*. It is not logical. I do not know what the resistance is within the department. Minister, you are very open to suggestions on how we can improve the system. Yes, we had a good Wet Season this year and the aquifers are full; the experts have told me that. It is now fill and spill. Bores have been overflowing, but not mine, sadly. I have seen the bores in the rural area and the aquifers are full, but it might only last three years, so we are back to square one.

We have to work together, because as the Territory and the Top End grows we have to make sure there are good water measures in place. I would like the government to think about a tank rebate. The tank rebate was in force about four or five years ago. I know it costs money, but it should be available across the Territory, not just Central Australia, which is desert country, but in the Top End.

The tank rebate was used to install a tank, put guttering in and perhaps purchase a pressure pump. I think it is a good move; it teaches us all to be a bit conscious about our water consumption. The Power and Water Corporation and Water Resources have good initiatives, but I think we need a bit more encouragement—more carrot and not so much stick.

Also in the environment and water section it mentioned the coastal and marine strategy. I am not sure what that is about. When I worked at the Minerals Council they were working on developing a coastal and marine strategy, so I do not know if this is a new one or if the strategy was never developed. I am interested to know what that is all about, including the cost and what is involved, because it is a very important initiative.

I read about what is happening in regard to tourism, and that is all good. That is one of our industries; people love coming to the Territory. As you all know, last week we had the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Executive Committee here, and they loved it. A lot of them had preconceived ideas about what they were coming to and they were very pleasantly surprised. I do not know what they thought they were coming to, but some of them said it is not what they thought it was, particularly the man from Malta and his wife, and some of the people from South Africa, but they liked it. That has exposed 40 people from around the Commonwealth, who now know a lot more about the Northern Territory than they used to.

I see that the document covers museums, art galleries, the screen industry, motorsports, remote stuff, football, rugby and bike trails, but there is no mention of the agricultural shows. Only last sittings I spoke about the agricultural shows. I know there is some allocation in the budget somewhere, but I have not found it yet. I want to see more emphasis on that because it is a major tourist event. It is in the Dry Season and tourists attend. It needs greater attention paid to it, in a policy direction of government sense and a monetary sense.

The Chief Minister's section talks about the ICAC, and that is good. I understand the Attorney-General will be introducing legislation next week, so that is good news. That has support from people I speak to in the rural area who have concerns with some of the activities of the past government. Perception and reality are not the issue; the perception is there, so it is their reality.

There was a commitment to appoint a Chief Scientist for the Northern Territory. We are the only jurisdiction that does not have a Chief Scientist. There is a Chief Scientist for Australia, and every state has one. That is the person who guides scientific research across government. I do not know what is happening. I intend to write a letter, but I will mention it now. I am not sure where it falls, perhaps under the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources or perhaps the Chief Minister, given it is usually a statutory appointment to a specific role. I am interested to hear about that.

I want clarification about school-based constables. My understanding is they have been withdrawn under stealth. There are no school-based constables visiting schools any more. They will come on an ad hoc arrangement to talk about cyber bullying, but they have no presence in the rural schools. Maybe they are in the other schools and you just took them out of the rural schools. I want clarification because I am led to believe they have been withdrawn from schools and will only attend a school if there is an incident or for specific tasks, appropriately so. The Minister for Education may have an answer to that. The presence of a police officer helps the school community with guidance, discipline and advice. I want to know if that is in the budget, and if not, why not?

Ongoing funding for the Litchfield regional hospital is welcomed, given it is in the Litchfield Council boundaries, as well as the hydro pool. That is very important. There was a bumpy start to this hospital, but it is happening and it is important. It will service many communities, not only Palmerston but the rural community and northern suburbs. People will use it and it is good for the Northern Territory. We are

growing; we have a high incidence of all sorts of things, such as road accidents. Rural area people are careless with chainsaws, axes and mattocks.

The government needs to look at the final name of the hospital. It sounds like a small thing, but it has to reflect and be welcomed by the whole community, not just you Palmerston members.

In the mental health section the budget states there is \$3m over four years for people living in public housing. What about the people who do not live in public housing but are in need of assistance? I am not sure why people in public housing have been singled out, and I want some clarity on that. I do not have an issue with it, but how has the government identified that only people in public housing need assistance with mental health and wellbeing? I welcome information on that and how it is being spent over the four-year period.

There are some good things in the budget, but I am disappointed in the attention by the government on the rural area and its future development and growth, given its important role in supporting the Northern Territory economy, and I look forward to the Treasurer's reply to my comments and questions.

Mr MILLS (Blain): Mr Deputy Speaker, I have heard these discussions many times, mostly from opposition. I have heard the speeches on 17 or 18 budgets, if I am not mistaken, and the dialogue is largely the same.

I am reminded of a quote, which I will place at the beginning of my statement. It is from Barbara Tuchman. She wrote a book called *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*. This quote is attributed to her. She says:

Government was rarely more than a choice between the disastrous and the unpalatable.

Much has been said about the previous administration being disastrous, but there has also been much talk of how virtuous, wonderful, good and kind this new government is by contrast with the previous one. We have been told to be optimistic and I think most of us naturally are. That brings into play the word 'realism'.

When we consider the reality of our task here, if we reduce the political paradigm and all the triggers around that mode of operation, you will start to recognise that if the last administration was so disastrous—it was rejected and, by consequence, you became the government. It was not because of your great virtue inherent. I am not suggesting that you were obnoxious or offensive in any respect, but it was largely because of the last administration that you have come to government.

Let us get that settled and put into its place so we can now focus on the real task in front of us. Most of us live with debt, and it keeps many people awake at night and worried constantly. Debt is something we must respond to sensibly because you have an obligation to respond to it. I find it very difficult to be told to put that to one side and focus on this other thing, which is an incoherent narrative about how things will be good—and please do not be pessimistic. I am past that.

I need to see how we will deal with the issue of debt, because the fact of the matter is the numbers are plain. If we take, for example, the 250 000 people in the Northern Territory and we roughly say we project the net debt out to be over \$5bn, simple maths would have that figure being \$20 000 per man, woman and child. That is a large debt burden when you bring it down to individuals, but when you think even further, many of those are young people and children, so the adults would be carrying that. That increases the debt load, if you take the children out of it and those who are not of working age, to around \$40 000 or more per person. If you take out of that those who are unemployed or not seeking work of any form—we know that, sadly, a large proportion of our community does not make any economic contributions—that increases the debt once again.

Those who are working and producing something—there is a small group carrying an enormous debt burden. They can easily become dismayed when they see that they are the ones making the economic contributions. They are compensating for those who cannot make economic contributions. Therefore they look to government to see how we can lighten that load and spread the economic activity so that the burden is moved and spread over a greater number.

All of us sitting in this parliament receive income, but we do not produce much. We assist with governance and so on, and there are not that many who generate wealth and income and employ other people. It is a small group, and I would like to commence by focusing upon that small group.

That small group carries an enormous burden of wealth creation through job creation and marking out a future, and I think the burden is becoming too great. They need their morale lifted. When they see \$50m or \$100m spent on something that may have some legacy value—some people may really appreciate that, and I am not discounting the value of that in any sense, but if \$50m is spent on something like a museum in a time when we are facing difficulties, everyone acknowledges that the core problem is the population, and what holds the population up is employment.

If that \$50m was applied to payroll tax as a reduction to be framed as an incentive for employers to hold on to apprentices and keep young people in employment, you would get much more from that \$50m than you would from a museum by a reduction on the payroll tax that the government receives. You can then entrust it to the employers, those who take the real economic risks, who stay awake at night worrying about debt and how they will manage. If that load was lifted they would reward our economy and the government by holding on to those young people who are being employed. Those young people would have a place and would then be able to expand their enterprises.

There are two schools of thought. Some would say that is a reduction of income for government, but others would say that by doing so you increase the capacity for the economy to generate greater return. That is the position I hold, which I think many hold. I say that because I have met so many people who make tough decisions and are so desperately worried by their own financial situation that they have taken on enormous risks and debts and are employing people. They are the ones who need to have slack cut so they are able to thrive and grow.

Frankly, I was disappointed and deeply offended by the *NT News* in putting on the front page of the paper the word 'bastards' against the photograph of the Prime Minister and the Treasurer. I think that was very low and totally disingenuous. It fed into the position that the government had adopted by blaming Canberra, specifically the Prime Minister and the Treasurer. That was wrong and misleading, and it does not assist anyone in this community to take the government seriously and to respect the *NT News*.

The *NT News* went on to say it was the only true independent voice in this debate about the GST carve-up. I think fools rush in where angels fear to tread when we start to poke too much criticism at the GST. There were two big numbers, and one was slightly bigger than the other. The pre-election financial statement and the mid-year statement were slightly different, but both big. The federal government took one and the Territory government took the other, so there was a dispute about the difference between those two numbers. It was a total distraction.

The Commonwealth Grants Commission has been in place since 1933. It is an independent agency and most reporters would know that, as would government, but it is disappointing when a horrible number comes out. We are trying to scare people with big numbers and saying how hard it will be, and we are dishonest in the way we present that to the Territory community. If we start messing with the calibrations of how the distribution of the GST is granted to the Northern Territory, any slight change to that will not be to our benefit.

Take Western Australia as an example. Saul Eslake has written an excellent piece in *The Conversation*. I commend it to anyone with an interest in how the GST works and what the implications are of an administration that has a windfall period and then changes. The formula remains the same, but the way they have responded to the rivers of gold flowing into Western Australia have changed dramatically with the resources' decline, and now they are left in a very difficult position. That results in a call for a review of the GST.

Note that the Treasurer is responding to this call from Western Australia. If there is a review of the way the GST is divided and distributed, it could very easily be far worse for the Northern Territory. We should count our blessings because we have great difficulty in managing to deliver services across a very vast and remote landscape, and that has been recognised and taken into consideration by an independent body. It is not the Prime Minister or the Treasurer thinking about how we can take something off the Northern Territory.

This is important for us to consider because it is not being said directly, but the same can be applied to the Northern Territory. I am quoting from *The Conversation* on 2 May:

The Grants Commission was established in 1933, this is the body that decides how much GST revenue the states get in our current system. Since its establishment right up until the year 2000, WA has been the main beneficiary of 'horizontal fiscal equalisation'.

That's the principle that GST is assigned by. It assumes each state and territory should be making an equal effort to raise revenue from its own sources and by being equally efficient in its spending ...

This applies to the Northern Territory. That is why there is a concern about the expenditure balanced against the revenue raising and the hard decisions that governments take. I think many in the Commonwealth have some sympathy for the Northern Territory, but that sympathy would become less if we are not seen to be making the effort as it is applied in this case.

The article also states:

However, since the early 2000s, WA has become Australia's richest state. This is the result not of any particular effort on the part of successive WA state governments, but rather of China's almost insatiable appetite for the iron ore with which WA has been uncommonly endowed.

Can you see the parallels? Did Clare Martin create this or Shane Stone do this? There are global economic trends that flow, of which the Territory and Western Australia have been huge beneficiaries. When that occurs we are in a good position, and those calibrations around the GST are designed to respond in part to that. They expect that when you have good times you will be making provision and making those adjustments, and do not get too slack with the machinery.

This is what happened in WA. The revenue has now ceased and they are left in a situation where they have the calibrations set for an earlier period, and they did not adjust their internal rigour to manage that. They spent too much in the good times and now there is less. I have a lot of sympathy for them. These are very difficult adjustments to make now because they did not make the adjustments earlier. In 2012 the good former Treasurer, the Member for Araluen, and I endeavoured to prepare for this difficult time. That is what this article is about; that did not occur. As a consequence, Western Australians receive 30 cents or less for every dollar that is gained in GST revenue. We receive something like \$4-plus for every dollar earned somewhere in this country, we receive that.

We get a good deal. Many look at us and say, 'My goodness; that is a fairly generous carve-up, a good distribution to the Northern Territory.' They understand why because of our jurisdiction, but they expect us to live within our means, practise some discipline and make harder decisions. To stimulate our own economy, that is the expectation. There is no sympathy when they start to see a fondness for making sure you remain popular and not upset people. 'Make the easier decisions now and put off the harder stuff because people will get upset. Let us keep everybody together and it will be sorted out another day.' Tolerance for that position may wane over time and we may find ourselves in a difficult position.

That is the reality of the situation we face as a nation. Revenue has decreased; the population of the Northern Territory has decreased; there is less in the pool; the calibrations have altered as a consequence and we receive a lower amount. We now have to work with that. Fair enough; have a go at Canberra, but the truth is we have to live with that. Any alteration of that could be catastrophic.

Rather than going through the budget line by line, as there are plenty of things in there that could be the subject for conversation, I want to raise a couple of issues that I think might be worthy of consideration regarding how we could provide some stimulation to the local economy.

Anyone who drives from Darwin to Palmerston, or goes down toward Pine Creek—and Pine Creek gets its name from a tree which is an endemic native to the Northern Territory, the Cypress pine, which was planted many years ago with a view to providing quality timber. It was discovered in recent times by the work of a couple of people, but principally Mr Vince Collins, who lives in my electorate, that the oil in those pine trees is of significant value. This is a Territory asset and all that is required for some generation of income and wealth creation for this government is to alter the way it thinks about this asset. At the moment it is not classed as an asset as such. Permits are issued on an ad hoc basis and certain numbers of trees can be accessed. With over 800 hectares of Cypress pine, with about 900 trees per hectare, each tree can yield up to one kilogram of oil with a price of over \$400 per kilogram.

When you do your sums on the plantations in the NT, we are looking at something worth more than \$200m. All that is required is for this to be redefined as a Territory asset, managed as such so it is sustainable and that those who seek to access the valuable oil can make an application and, in return, pay a tax to the Territory government.

At the moment it is not possible to build the strength of an industry that is demonstrated as having significant value because there is no long-term management plan or continuity of supply. There is no

guarantee there will be ongoing access to the pine. There is no management plan to keep it sustainable and there is no revenue of any significant nature going to government.

There is an industry right under your nose that will cost very little, but you could generate some income for government, spread wealth and do something out of left field. We can talk more on that later.

Coming from a farming background I know how hard farmers work, especially mango farmers. Horticulture is significant across the Territory, but it is sometimes hidden. Even the cattle industry has acknowledged this as a sector that could overtake the cattle industry as an income generator for the Northern Territory. The biggest problem they face is the need for a solid labour force. They have stated their position on a number of occasions. It is time to move, with the Prime Minister making his statements regarding the changes to the 457 visa. We need to make sure those seeking work in Australia have work and that people get off welfare and go to work.

While that project is under way we have fruit falling on the ground. We have people who have invested millions of dollars into the expansion of the horticultural industry. They are sweating each night hoping they will get enough backpackers or people coming to the Territory to help pick their fruit. They cannot get enough to do the basics. Imagine if they had a solid supply of seasonal workers on an agriculture visa coming as they require them—paying fair wages to anyone who would want to do that work, giving preference to Australians who want to do it. If an Australian does not want to do it they should not have to worry about this business and should be able to get on with the job so they can expand—not just pick the fruit, but get into production and add value to their crops.

There is a capacity for juicing and canning here, but they are having enough trouble with the basics, such as having enough people to pick fruit. Their greatest risk is a visa to allow access to a reliable labour force. That would not cost the government a lot. I am happy to help with this. I meet with the horticulture sector and we are working on some papers—I have an item on the agenda to this topic—but this is something the government could do that would help with the things that need to be done.

Project Sea Dragon has been spoken about by the Chief Minister. That is good stuff. There will be bumps along the road. There will be push back from environmentalists and that is where it will become challenging. There will always be people who find a cause against an initiative like that, but those initiatives are important and I welcome them.

Foodbank—I declare a conflict of interest, as I am on the board. What I say now is for the value of the Territory. When it comes to the requirement for government to respond to an emergency of some kind, such as flooding in the Daly, the cost is incurred by government to feed those people. I recall in my early days the East Timor crisis, and we had to quickly accommodate and feed many people here. We never know what might happen. There have been earthquakes and volcanos in our immediate region. What could happen in the Kimberley or Queensland? We do not know. But we will always have challenges that arise—the Australia Day flooding of Katherine, for example. A service like Foodbank could provide a strategic response for government in an efficient way. As part of a response, it needs land that is strategically located. I appreciate that there have been discussions on that front, but something like that will not cost government a lot. It would be making sure we have a strategic plan so we are able to efficiently respond to something here in the Territory, the Kimberley, North Queensland or our immediate region.

Rather than just think of the immediate supply of food for those who are needy, it is elevated to a more strategic level. I urge government to seriously consider securing land that is part of a strategic response in a time of larger disaster. The ongoing discussions are important—opportunities for government to respond, which will not be costly but beneficial in the long run.

These few things I have presented would cost government little but could generate income. That is, agriculture visas, lobbying there—I am happy to help with that. The Cypress pine is a small one, but right under our noses is a significant resource.

Yet another resource right under your nose is the Independents. Maybe I am naive; when government said, 'Do not worry, we will resource the independents and you will be fine', I honestly expected something different to what we received.

We did not say a lot, although the media talked about us in the early days because the government was doing nothing and seemed to be in silent mode. There was this unusual situation; we now have a former Chief Minister and a former Deputy Chief Minister who are now Independents; an Independent Speaker; the Member for Nelson, who has been an Independent forever; and the Member for Nhulunbuy. We

became the topic of the conversation. What will we do? We did not really want to talk about it much because we wanted to talk about our contribution to good governance.

As things emerge in Palmerston I try to help build a more cohesive community. I still have a great interest in what is going on in the region, in Indonesia and ASEAN. I still have high-level discussions with people in Japan, and some significant policy work is being done there with limited resources.

I suggest that if you reconsider how you will resource members of your Chamber in a way that we are able to make better contribution to policy, there is plenty of room for movement. At the moment we are limited.

We have a two-member opposition with 11 staff members, and a budget that allows them to do all sorts of things, but you have capacity here. A couple of people can do a bit of research for us, but we have no say over who they are or how they are chosen. So-called Independents have no independence, unlike others in government or opposition.

I do not want this to sound as though we just want more; we want more so we can give more. That is becoming the issue. There is so much more I could do in Palmerston if I just had an extra set of hands to reach further. I am happy to work with government members, but I need a bit extra.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! I seek an extension of time for the member to complete his remarks, pursuant to Standing Order 43.

Motion agreed to.

Mr MILLS (Blain): I am genuinely keen to work with anybody. I am keen to work with the government. There is experience here that could be made use of, but we are restricted.

The Independents will start thinking about this out of our interests in providing better service to the Northern Territory. We will do what we can, but we are asking for the goodwill of government and for you to consider that you have a resource which could be better utilised. What you said you would do—'do not worry, you will be resourced well'—is not the case. It is not that we just want more; we are not those sorts of people.

I thought the Remuneration Tribunal was responsible for the recommendation, so I gave it the benefit of the doubt. I also gave the Chief Minister the benefit of the doubt until I met with the Remuneration Tribunal and found out it is the Chief Minister who is responsible.

The Chief Minister is a nice bloke, but he must have some funny advisors who see all these things through a political prism. It must be to your political advantage to have the two opposition members as the official response to government, with all those great resources, and to reduce the capacity of the Independents to hold government to account. It must be that there are some people on the fifth floor who see this strictly through a political prism.

I do not think the Territory is being well served by that, and if there was a greater generosity of spirit where you recognised good governance the Territory would reward you for it. Nevertheless, we will push on.

Mr COLLINS (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity to speak to the 2017 Appropriation Bill delivered so eloquently by the Treasurer, the Member for Wanguri. The bill, together with the budget crafted around it, is not only testament to the minister's dedication to this House, but to the Territory and Territorians.

It represents the statement of the Gunner government's fundamental commitment to Territorians, a commitment to stick to the promises made in the 2016 election campaign. Given the quality of the Treasurer's presentation, I was thoroughly disappointed to have to listen to the overly political budget reply of the Leader of the Opposition—point-scoring 101. No vision; just carping criticism. No acknowledgement of the surrounding circumstances; just a fall back on the tired old rhetoric of, 'debt, bad; cuts, good'.

The only problem is the rhetoric never really plays out. Also the 'debt, bad; cuts, good' mantra fundamentally fails to take into account the current economic climate, a climate which dictates the government must spend on infrastructure to maintain the economy until private investment and capital returns to the market.

The Leader of the Opposition was highly critical of the government's strategy in this area, saying we were betting on the future without providing any viable alternative. In spite of what the opposition and some of

the Independents suggest, we suggest there is no option. Unless, as the Chief Minister pointed out today, you want the Territory to close up and move on. To rip that amount of funding out of the economy at this point in time would effectively shut us down.

We have heard loud and clear that 2016 was the worst year ever for Territory businesses and that 2017 is shaping up as something similar. What do we get from the opposition at this particular time of need for Territorians and businesses? Slash and burn—as was called out so aptly by the Member for Barkly during his speech following the Leader of the Opposition yesterday.

The Member for Araluen added to the cacophony yesterday, interjecting regularly that the projected interest expenses in 2019–20 would be \$1m a day and asking what the government could do if it had this money to spend. The answer is simple, although I concede it fails the political convenience test; this is the cost of government and it is not easily accounted for in the way put forward during debate.

A slightly more complex answer, or alternative argument, which also fails the political expedience test, is what is the cost of making the savings the Member for Araluen and the opposition seem to think are viable? What was the cost of servicing the debt? What was the rate of interest paid by the government? The answer was that the weighted average cost of funds on the government's entire pool of debt is around 4.7%. It is then a relatively easy process to calculate how much the government would have to cut out of the budget to reduce the interest expenses, which are of so much interest to those on the other side.

If the government were to remove \$1bn from the budget the daily interest expense would be reduced from \$1m to \$871 000, a saving of about \$127 000 per day. That is good, but at what cost? Two billion dollars out and the interest is further reduced \$742 000; \$3bn out and the daily interest would be reduced to \$613 000. To save a little over one-third of the interest expense, the government would have to take a whopping \$3bn out of the economy. I challenge those on the other side to find any reputable economist who would suggest that this would be a good sensible idea at this time. I can almost smell it now; even if we were to make the savings it would still be woefully short for the opposition, and that is the nature of politics.

The Territory economy cannot afford, at this time, for the government to be ripping \$1bn, \$2bn or \$3bn out of economy. The effect would simply be catastrophic. If the government were to do what has been suggested by the Leader of the Opposition we may as well shut up shop, as the Chief Minister has said. It would not matter how far the next economic upturn was; we would be in no position to take advantage of it. The economy would be busted, more than likely irreparably.

Regardless of the arguments and interjections of those opposite, I am thoroughly proud of the manner with which the Treasurer and her staff have undertaken the task of crafting this budget in these particularly trying times.

Thank you, minister, for the work you, your staff and your colleagues have undertaken to produce this bill in the current economic climate. My hat goes off to you.

As we have heard, Budget 2017–18 is about investing for our future jobs, children and community. It is about delivering on the commitments given to the community prior to the election. It is about supporting and creating jobs. It is about investing in kids and investing in our community to make the Territory a better place with opportunities for all.

Whether the recent changes to the GST receipts for the Territory resulted in a reduction of \$2bn or \$1.3bn over the next four years is largely irrelevant. A cut of either size has such a significant impact on the Territory's economy. Unfortunately, had it not been for this cut we would have been well on the path to return the budget to surplus in this term of government, which must have been disturbing for the Leader of the Opposition, as it was the only broken promise he could find to be critical of.

As the Treasurer has said, now is not the time for government to walk away from Territorians. It is the time we need government to invest in job-creating infrastructure for the short- and long-term gain of the Territory. The Treasurer and the government have been fiscally responsible; some tough savings and revenue measures have been made, but they have been made in a way so as to minimise any hurt to Territorians. Territorians are already hurting enough and the last thing they need at this moment is another kick from the government.

The Treasurer has detailed the broader Territory-wide picture; however, I might spend a little time looking at some of the items in the budget that more directly impact my electorate of Fong Lim, the suburbs of Stuart Park, Bayview, Woolner and Ludmilla.

The first home owner discount on stamp duty of up to \$24 000 and the \$10 000 renovation grant being reopened to older homes and not new homes are great initiatives for people in my electorate. In spite of being close to the city, in the current market there are plenty of opportunities in and around Stuart Park for first home buyers. I attended the purchase of an apartment in Stuart Park with the Treasurer, and I welcome any purchasers, as many as possible, to make those purchases in Fong Lim.

The first year of government's four-year, \$56.4m Building Better Schools commitment begins this year, which will provide \$300 000 to every school in the Territory for important upgrades. I am happy to say that Ludmilla Primary School is one of the schools in the first round this year. The funds have been earmarked for urgent upgrades to the front of the school.

There is \$20m for the Immediate Works Grants program for repairs, maintenance and improvement to community facilities. It is available and being taken up by a number of community organisations in my electorate. More importantly, it provides work. It is the kind of work each of us need for our constituents.

The \$11.5m in grants for sports in the Territory includes the Sport Voucher Scheme. Again, in spite of being close to the city, there are an extraordinary number of young children in Fong Lim, and these sport vouchers are a great way to encourage a healthy lifestyle. I originally moved to the Territory to provide my two girls with a bit of an adventure and I am happy to say that dream keeps coming true every day. These sport vouchers are a great way to encourage the lifestyle we aspire to in the Territory.

There is \$17.2m to re-establish the Banned Drinker Register and other best-practice, health-based alcohol harm reduction initiatives. I cannot support this initiative enough. When I moved here from Sydney I was a little amused to have to show my ID at the ripe old age of 50 when purchasing grog, but it soon struck me as a sensible idea and one that was not too obtrusive. I was stunned when the first order of business of the previous CLP government was to remove the BDR. Flabbergasted is the word. Whilst I acknowledge there is opposition to the BDR, nothing I have heard is anything more than whingeing. Furthermore, the police officers and health professionals I have spoken to unequivocally support the BDR.

I recognise that the TBLs, temporary beat locations, have been an effective tool in the regional locations of Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine, but at what cost to the rest of the Territory? We cannot afford to have those temporary beat locations at every bottle shop. As has been stated, the operational decisions on whether to keep a temporary beat location in situ are to be left to the police commands and not dictated by people in this place. That is exactly where the responsibility should lie.

There is \$5m in 2017–18, increasing to \$15m in 2020, for police resourcing and recruitment to work toward the government's commitment of 120 additional police officers. I do not believe that there is a community anywhere in the Territory that will not rejoice at this commitment, and Fong Lim is no different. Promises were made and broken by the last bunch.

There is \$5m as part of the \$50m recreational fishing infrastructure package. Priority projects include the installation of a new toilet block and CCTV cameras at Dinah Beach boat ramp, which I know will be greatly appreciated by the fishos who use the Dinah Beach facility as well as the local residents in the surrounding area.

There is \$7.1m to continue the Back to School Payment Scheme, which provides \$150 per student to assist parents and families with back-to-school expenses. As a parent of two school-age girls I can say that the back-to-school assistance scheme is greatly appreciated every year and I understand how it makes a huge difference for some families.

There is \$18m for the redevelopment of the Bullocky Point Education Precinct and the expansion of the new central library and fabrication laboratory at Darwin High School. Whilst Darwin High School is not in Fong Lim, it is a feeder school for the children in Fong Lim, along with Darwin Middle School. I have a couple of girls who are about to head there as well, so there may be a bit of personal interest.

Darwin High School is a fantastic educational institution. I have toured there with Trevor Read, the principal. It is an impressive high school and the staff there do a fantastic job. Every Territorian should be proud of it. The school is continuing to grow and its future needs must be met.

There is \$6m for stage one of the master plan for Ludmilla Primary School, including the new early learning centre and an integrated area to support a playgroup and other services. This announcement makes me happy. Ludmilla primary has been neglected by governments in recent years and we desperately need to bring it back to its previous position as one of the pre-eminent primary schools in the city region, especially as Stuart Park, Parap and Larrakeyah schools are at or very near capacity.

We have allocated \$5m over two years for targeted tourism initiatives aimed at attracting more tourists from China and India, and \$1.3m to develop and maintain mountain bike trails. I might even be encouraged to pull the mountain bike out again.

To improve public safety and security for all Territorians, \$8.6m of the \$45m is allocated to replace the NT Police Force's core policing system, the Police Real-time Online Management Information System, or PROMIS. When I was appointed assistant minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services I went to the police headquarters and met with the commissioner, and he showed me the system. I could not, for the life of me, believe there was a system that was so old and so out of date. I look forward to our police having a state-of-the-art system, which they deserve.

The budget allocates \$3m to establish an independent commission against corruption, a long-overdue reform that will bring the Territory into line with every other jurisdiction in Australia. Importantly, an ICAC will mean that no longer will an incoming government be able to use the power of its numbers to exact revenge on its predecessors. If someone in public office has acted corruptly, the independent body will deal with the issue. This is how it should be.

There is \$6.2m to continue to implement the Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy; \$700 000 over two years to expand the No More violence prevention campaign; \$150 000 to NTCOSS to build the capacity of the domestic and family violence sector; and \$350 000 to Charles Darwin University and Menzies School of Health Research to review key domestic and family violence reduction programs in the NT, particularly their impact and effectiveness in remote communities. I hope for the day we do not need to have those types of items in a budget, but unfortunately they are needed. It is a great commitment of the government to continue to tackle the scourge of domestic violence.

We allocated \$25m to develop the new home of rugby league at Warren Park. The park is not in Fong Lim, but members might remember the suggestion of redeveloping Richardson Park, which affected my electorate. We still need to work out what is happening there, but it is great to see the home of rugby league will be at Warren Park, where it always should have been.

The government has also finished the economic summits across the NT. Businesspeople, academics and retirees have been consulted across the Territory on the future economic direction and priorities of the Territory, and the final economic framework and 10-year infrastructure plan should be released shortly.

The government has also introduced significant changes to the process of NT Government procurement to support local jobs and businesses through our Buy Local Plan. This is an issue that comes to light every time we talk to local businesses. I do not know why it has not been done before now, but great work to the government for taking the tiger by the tail.

In spite of the economic difficulties we face, this remains an exciting time. The future looks much brighter than the sad picture painted by the Leader of the Opposition.

I made brief mention earlier of Ludmilla Primary School. This year Ludmilla is celebrating its 50th anniversary; 50 years of supporting, nurturing and providing quality education to the children of Darwin. Whilst the current enrolments have, sadly, dropped to around 114 students, over the years Ludmilla has had as many as 650 students. Of the current student enrolments, 66 of those students identify as Indigenous.

One of the main factors affecting numbers at Ludmilla has been the removal of residences at the RAAF Base Darwin, which was done as a result of the discovery of asbestos and was an imperative public health measure. However, families who have previously lived on base and sent their children to the nearby Ludmilla primary were relocated elsewhere, and that saw student numbers drop significantly.

The good news for Ludmilla is that work has begun at Eaton, the new suburb of family homes being built on the RAAF base. These homes are due for completion in December 2017 with families beginning to occupy the homes from July 2018, ready for the new school year. As I said earlier, Ludmilla is celebrating its 50th

anniversary. It is one of the oldest schools in the Darwin region and over the years it has nurtured some of the Territory's best and brightest, including—I am reliably informed—the current Solicitor-General.

Along with the falling numbers from the RAAF base, Ludmilla appears to have been forgotten by successive governments, particularly the last government, with repairs and maintenance being kept to a minimum. Therefore the ageing infrastructure is long overdue for upgrading. Some of the established areas around Ludmilla from where the school population is drawn have experienced an ageing population, therefore fewer children attend the school.

The work on the RAAF base will assist in this area, but I am also hopeful the first home buyer grant together with the renovation grant to existing homes will also have a positive impact on school numbers. Ludmilla primary is located on Bagot Road alongside Ludmilla Creek, and as a result some of the buildings at the school are flood-prone, especially the early childhood areas, which have experienced several flooding events resulting in considerable damage and interruption to the school.

The need to replace outdated infrastructure has been on the mind of the principal, Carol Putica, along with her staff and the school council for some time. They embarked on developing their own master plan for redeveloping the school, moving it towards a future where it is once again a school of choice not only in the local area, but in the broader Darwin area.

The budget included \$6m for stage one of the Ludmilla primary master plan. This means the most urgent works can be undertaken. The flood-prone buildings would be removed and two existing buildings brought up to code and refurbished, which is where the early childhood area will be moved. Currently the buildings do not meet the standards required of preschools, so the works are desperately needed just to stay in line with other schools in the Territory.

The funds will ensure Ludmilla will be well equipped to welcome the new families from the RAAF base. With all other city schools at or near capacity, it is important that we, as a government, ensure we make all the necessary allowances for ongoing growth at our city schools.

Ludmilla is well placed with a large land parcel and the potential to provide and grow to accommodate other city families, therefore it is well assured for the ongoing future. Ludmilla primary is a leader in the implementation of STEM, which is science, technology, engineering and maths, with a robotic program for Years 1 to 6, including a digital technology coach working alongside the teachers twice a week. The school has specialist areas of music, art, Indonesian and science, and all classes participate in weekly circus and dance lessons.

Ludmilla Primary School is also recognised as an exemplary early childhood school, providing up to 15 hours of play groups for zero to five-year-olds each week, and being the first urban FaFT centre in Darwin. Recently the Chief Executive of South Australia's Department for Education and Child Development, Rick Perse, together with the NT Department of Education, spent time in the school to explore whether South Australia could run a similar model in its schools.

I cannot begin to express how proud I am of everyone involved in Ludmilla Primary School, the principal, the staff, the school council and, most importantly, the students. I am honoured to be their local member and will do whatever I can to ensure this government continues to support Ludmilla in every way.

I look forward to the day the Ludmilla Primary School Master Plan is complete and this fantastic little school is educating the next generation of Territory leaders.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend the Treasurer's budget to the Assembly.

Mr McCONNELL (Stuart): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will try to keep this a bit interesting as it is getting late on this Thursday evening.

I congratulate the Treasurer on the delivery of Budget 2017–18 and provide comment with regard to the electorate of Stuart, because it is without doubt one of the most influential places not just in the Territory, but probably Australia.

The communities which make up the electorate of Stuart are often spoken about in the relation to need, lack and gaps, but I am constantly reminded of how rich the electorate of Stuart is. It is rich in natural wonders, natural resources, culture and community spirit. The government can help build bridges to these intrinsic assets through stimulating the remote economy through economic development.

I also believe long-term planning and vision can ensure that remote job growth is in sustainable industries. We can develop community-controlled housing as a local economic driver. Housing is an economic driver; it is new thinking, not just a deficit model.

We can promote the utilisation of Indigenous land and labour in the wider Northern Territory economy. That is one of the biggest assets we have in the Northern Territory, Indigenous-owned and controlled land and Indigenous labour that is not engaged in the labour force. That is the exciting thing about the Territory. That is what the Gunner Labor government will work collaboratively and cooperatively with, harnessing and getting people involved in the participatory economy.

Key to this change will be initiatives and innovative activities. We have to improve educational outcomes as well. This government is committed to a focus on early childhood education. It is so important to get children and their families dedicated to learning as soon as possible. Achieving early developmental milestones is so important to later success in school.

It is good to see \$11.1m being dedicated towards Families as First Teachers. This is an incredible initiative and it is good to see extra resources being put towards it. It is an impressive program. It was interesting to hear my colleague say earlier that other jurisdictions are looking at it as well. That is very good. I support this program and believe it will be a key in helping remote community children prepare for school and lifelong learning.

In addition, funding allocated towards schools to improve their infrastructure through repairs and maintenance is essential. The learning environments in our schools must be safe, healthy, accessible, modern, and most importantly, stimulating for students. It would be nice if they were safe for everyone to work in as well, particularly our dedicated teachers.

Our Territory schools should be a centre to community life, especially in remote communities. The allocation of \$300 000 per school to improve learning environments will help achieve these goals. I have always been an advocate for creating more jobs for local Indigenous people, and two areas in which people always advise that they love to work in are managing country, and culture and language. This is why I am glad to see funding allocations to support Indigenous ranger programs and the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. I know numerous people who work in the Aboriginal Interpreter Service and it is such an important part of their self-esteem. They are so impressed to be involved in it.

This government has made an early commitment to funding of Indigenous ranger programs and has followed through with that commitment. I have a soft spot for rangers, having worked as a ranger for almost 10 years. Ranger jobs develop skills in land management first and foremost, but also in science, research, tourism, feral animal management, and infrastructure maintenance and development. These jobs are essential to maintain vast tracts of Indigenous-held land in the Northern Territory, including precious springs and water holes in Central Australia.

I am glad to see the government has committed \$4.1m for essential capital items for Northern Territory ranger programs, as well as \$2m a year through the land management and conservation fund to support these jobs and to continue to develop best-practice land management on Aboriginal land.

I also note the Territory government will invest an additional \$1m in the budget for the Aboriginal Interpreter Services. It provides invaluable assistance to almost 35 000 Territorians who speak one of 35 Indigenous languages as their first language. Our interpreters help Aboriginal people to engage with government services, participate in local decision-making and understand the courts and justice system. The Aboriginal Interpreter Service currently includes around 300 casual employees, and it is great to hear this funding will create the equivalent of nine full-time jobs for Indigenous Territorians as well as provide upskilling and training opportunities.

There are numerous complex reviews under way as well as local decisions to be made. More than mere translation, interpreters help to clarify ideas which may not directly translate into everyone's first language. It is not an easy job. Our interpreters do amazing work listening, thinking and speaking across multiple languages at one time. I am impressed because sometimes I have a bit of trouble with just one language at a time. I think they are amazing in the work they do. Funding for interpreters is fundamental for social inclusion and I wholeheartedly support it.

Areas which mix remote economic development and the presentation of history and culture are our remote art centres, galleries and museums. In Stuart there are superb art facilities like the Ikuntji Art Centre; the art centre and Men's Museum at Yuendumu; the Hermannsburg Historic Precinct, the Hermannsburg Potters;

and the Karungkarni Art and Culture Centre in Kalkarindji. There are numerous others that I could mention. There is the biggest mob of them. These are places of positive energy, economic activity and cultural practice.

Remote communities are actively seeking economic opportunities, and sustainable tourism with a focus on Indigenous art and culture is an obvious area of growth. It is heartening that this government has not forgotten funding to regional and remote galleries. These organisations that operate such facilities will be able to apply for a pool of \$6m funding over the next three years. This is the first significant contribution to Indigenous art centres on country that a Northern Territory Government has ever made that I am aware of, so it is a particularly good initiative.

We learned about it from consultation during and before the election campaign. It was clearly very important to people on community. I often speak to people about the fact that we have to stop looking at communities in the deficit model context and think about positive things that come out of communities. So many positive things come out of community, not just art and culture. It is really great to see the initiative to support that in the small way the government can.

Regional and remote art centres, galleries, museums and libraries will also be eligible for grants of up to \$10 000 for minor upgrades, and larger grants of up to \$100 000 for bigger infrastructure programs. Overall, \$2m a year will be available over three years for the small funding rounds. These funding rounds are currently open. I look forward to the projects which may be completed with that available funding.

Developing more remote housing with increased community control is another election promise the government is working hard to deliver. I note \$10m has been fast-tracked in this financial year in recognition of the dire crisis across remote communities; that is a dedication of the early works for the Room to Breathe program. That work had to be brought forward not only for economic stimulus, but to overcome the incredible lack of investment in remote Indigenous housing under the previous government. I was going to try really hard not to criticise the previous government, but some things are a bit too hard to overlook. I am sorry.

I am glad to see Hermannsburg being included in the fast-tracked Room to Breathe program, and I look forward to seeing additional works roll out throughout this coming financial year. Remote housing needs are great, and Labor is committed to a record 10-year, \$1.1bn commitment to remote Indigenous housing. A highlight of this is \$20m to expand government employee housing to include accommodation for locally-recruited government employees.

I know a number of long-serving NT government employees from the bush who have been advocating for this for many years. In particular, Jillian Kantawarra from my electorate has served at the Haasts Bluff clinic for more than 20 years, most of that time living in a small overcrowded house whilst health staff houses sit in her community, sometimes vacant.

I also note the commitment of \$44.5m to prepare blocks of land and establish electrical, plumbing, and water and sewerage infrastructure to support the government's Remote Housing Investment Package. Funding is also very important for other essential services.

Service pressures and inadequate services to infrastructure will be an ongoing issue going forward. I know of a number of instances in Stuart where there is no adequate land available with adequate services because the sewers, sewer ponds, water storage and bore fields are not adequate. Servicing communities with headworks and service lots will be really important, and I look forward to the Gunner Labor government having fruitful negotiations with the Commonwealth Government in this area.

We need to also remember that issues with the lack of services can affect some of our other innovative and important housing policies, like Room to Breathe. Once Room to Breathe is rolling out new kitchens, wet areas, extra bedrooms and granny flats there will be a need to look at those critical services to support infrastructure development.

The Northern Territory Government's Remote Housing Investment Package adds to the works that are continuing under the national partnership agreement, referred to as NPARIH. There is still a significant spend on NPARIH to construct new houses and upgrade existing houses in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

Under our new program \$200m has been allocated for additional repairs and maintenance on houses out bush; that is critical. This significant investment into remote housing is a great commitment made by the Labor government. It addresses great need.

We must ensure the benefits of this funding is maximised in remote communities. We need to look at new ways of doing business in this sector, developing housing as an economic driver instead of a funding sinkhole. The minister is keen to work closely with communities and develop their capacity in the community housing sector, and I look forward to assisting the minister in any way I can.

This is the most important thing to me; a key thing we have brought back is the Banned Drinker Register. The government has committed to fulfilling its promise. Not only have we kept the same Chief Minister, we got things done.

I have numerous constituents who do not believe the current policy of stationing police at bottle shops is fair and equitable. I agree with them. A sector of our society believes it is targeted unfairly and this is driving a wedge between police and Aboriginal people. I am concerned about the ongoing ramifications of the policy of placing police outside of bottle shops permanently. I have asked that we consider all policies and legislation carefully, moving forward to ensure we do our best to eliminate racial discrimination. It is well past time we acknowledge people as individuals and treat them as such.

I believe the BDR is more equitable and effective for the management of alcohol abuse. This government has committed \$17.2m to make good on its election promise of bringing back the BDR.

There is some debate about how effective police out the front of bottle shops are. We have to think about the ongoing effects of these things. I spoke with my colleagues last year about the Wave Hill walk-off. We are about to talk about the 1967 referendum. We talk about all these significant things where we brought Indigenous people forward, recognised intrinsic Indigenous rights, such as land rights. We recognised Indigenous rights such as the right to be considered citizens, a basic human right.

All of a sudden we are willing to strip that away when people go to purchase alcohol. Is that fair and equitable? I do not think it is. We are Labor; we believe in things that are fair and equitable. Are there times we need to have police at the front of bottle shops around events and specific issues? Yes, absolutely. It is a legitimate tool that can be used going forward, but the responsibility to use that resource in a responsible manner will sit with the police. We will still be able to do that.

We have to avoid things considered by the community as targeting them. I do not think it is an inconvenience, but for those who do think it is an inconvenience, surely we can all handle the inconvenience of showing our licence? For the damage it has done to our community, children, women and people dying in car accidents et cetera—with the damage done to our community as a result of alcohol, the least we can do is show our ID when we purchase liquor.

The recently announced review into NT alcohol policies and legislation is also welcome. The Honourable Justice Trevor Riley will work towards developing an evidence-based alcohol harm reduction framework for the Territory. This will not be a kneejerk response or an email about facial recognition when you walk into the bottle shop or something like that. It will be a real, duly considered policy. A long-term, best-practice legislative and health policy framework is what we need to effectively address alcohol abuse and reduce alcohol-related harm in the Northern Territory.

What you really need in the Territory in order to get around is quality roads. It would be good to have some two-lane bitumen roads. The single-lane bitumen roads, which we have a number of in the Barkly and in Stuart, have a certain *je ne sais quoi*, but you get sick of it quickly. To have sustainable development in the regions we need good infrastructure, and not much is more important than roads and transport infrastructure.

I am keen to see the \$40m towards strengthening, widening and extending the seal on the Buntine Highway towards Western Australia. This is an important investment for the pastoral industry and for general safety. I am also glad to see new funding of \$2.5m and a revote of \$4.9m towards sealing sections of the road from Lajamanu to Kalkarindji. That road can be quite dangerous in the Wet Season so that investment is good.

I am also encouraged by the potential of the new major aquaculture project in the electorate of Stuart, Project Sea Dragon. My only caveat would be to ensure the partners work hard to employ local people on this project where possible. The government is committed to supporting this project and ongoing

development of the Ord, with up to \$57.4m available to continue to upgrade the Keep River Plains Road. There is more work to do before Project Sea Dragon goes ahead, but it looks very exciting and, in my assessment, it looks environmentally well planned and sustainable, so I am looking forward to it happening.

A couple of other funding arrangements include the revote for renal clinics at Papunya and Mount Liebig, and extra staff housing for clinic staff at Papunya. These communities have long been advocating for renal service facilities, which will improve health services.

It is also good to see funding committed to remote police stations in smaller communities, such as Haasts Bluff, also known as Ikuntji, as well as Nyirripi and Yarralin. Community members often talk to me about serious issues that arise when police are not present, and often remote police resources are spread too thin. I am sure you can understand my constituents' concerns about police standing out the front of bottle shops. Obviously they are doing an important job, but standing out the front of bottle shops whilst remote police stations are under-resourced with staff—that concern is understandable.

We have to understand how people perceive what we are doing. It is good to see that spend on remote police stations. Our police officers deal with stresses on a daily basis and they worry about places they cannot get to.

Everyone in the Territory has a right to live in a safe community. I am happy the government is committed to supporting our remote and urban police services.

I had six years of education with the School of the Air, so I think they are a pretty good mob. Having lived remote as a child and having a variety of non-traditional educational experiences of my own, I know how important the School of the Air is. I like the government's ongoing commitment to isolated children's education through School of the Air in Alice Springs and Katherine. The commitment to distance education is about \$7m.

A couple of final funding items which I would like to highlight include the \$9.9m for the Mapping the Future program, supporting scientific teams to identify potential productive land for future use in regional areas and improve baseline natural resource data information. It is great to see this focus on science and the collection of baseline data in the Territory. I believe this effort will be essential to sustainable development in the Northern Territory.

I applaud the government for delivering on its election promise to restore trust in government by providing \$3m towards the establishment of an ICAC. I do not think one of my Labor colleagues has said it is not important. It is important, because unless our constituents have confidence in this place it is very hard for any of us, regardless of our political allegiances, to be taken seriously. We have a lot of work to do to restore trust in this place. The Gunner Labor government is committed to doing that and I believe there has been some great work done already, but this will be the keystone of that great work.

The Northern Territory is in tough economic times; however, I truly believe the way forward is to bring Indigenous land and labour into the wider Northern Territory economy. Developing our remote economies will benefit the entire Territory. The cost burden of continual social exclusion of remote Aboriginal people is too high for the Territory to continue to bear.

The electorate of Stuart has some of the Territory's best tourism assets, including the West MacDonnell National Park, which has the Larapinta Trail within it; and Palm Valley, which has some extraordinary country and things like fishing in the Victoria River from the boat ramp. It also has a wealth of cultural assets in strong Indigenous culture and languages across the electorate.

One of the most historic moments of this nation took place in the electorate of Stuart. I refer to Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pouring sand into the hands of Vincent Lingiari. That is one of the pivotal moments of the whole of Australian history, and it took place in the electorate of Stuart, the birth of land rights and the birth of equal wages.

Stuart also contains some of the most famous and most productive cattle stations. The Member for Barkly and I will probably have a big, long debate about this—VRD, Wave Hill and Campfield are pretty good country. They are a very important part of economy and are in the electorate of Stuart. We often think there is not a lot coming from out bush, but there is.

Stuart boasts some pretty good mining infrastructure as well, such as the Granites Gold Mine, one of the most productive gold mines in Australian history.

The Mereenie and Palm Valley gas fields—the first light crude overland pipeline in the Northern Territory was from Stuart, west of Hermannsburg to Alice Springs, developed in the 1980s.

The first major pipeline of gas to Alice Springs was from Palm Valley near Hermannsburg, which was also built in the 1980s. A pipeline was then extended all the way from the Palm Valley gas field to the power station in Darwin. The gas that powered Darwin for a great number of years before Blacktip came online came from the electorate of Stuart via that pipeline, one of the longest single, overland pipelines in the world.

Blacktip is also off the coast of the electorate of Stuart in the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf.

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 McCONNELL: I thank the Member for Barkly. He probably likes what I was going to say, which is why he is happy to extend my time for a bit. Bush electorates are key to the productive future of the Northern Territory.

Investment in the bush is a wide investment. I congratulate the Treasurer and the Cabinet on their hard work on Budget 2017–18. I will continue to advocate for effective investment in our remote regions. The constituents of Stuart will be judging this government through our effort and we need to improve the quality of life in the bush electorates.

All speakers before me, including the Independent and opposition benches—I have really appreciated the contributions to our debate thus far about the budget and I am glad to be able to speak about the electorate of Stuart. I commend everything that is being done in this budget.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to contribute to the budget delivered by the Treasurer on Tuesday this week.

Over the last three days since the budget was handed down we have asked question after question of the Chief Minister and the Treasurer on why they have lumbered Territorians with the largest ever deficit since self-government. The only explanation by the Gunner Labor government for this drastic backward step in the Northern Territory's economic position is being pinned on the fictitious \$2bn cut by the federal government to GST.

The government is basing this fictitious \$2bn figure on inflated predictions over the next four years against what the Commonwealth Grants Commission actually allocated for this year only. I contend that to compare estimates with actuals, or to compare what you think you should get with what you got, is disingenuous and irresponsible, but that is exactly what we have seen from this irresponsible Gunner Labor government. A better approach would be to subtract the actual GST allocation from the Commonwealth Grants Commission update report of 2016–17 of \$3190m with the Commonwealth Grants Commission figure for 2017–18 of \$2921m. This produces a reduction of \$269m. This is comparing like with like; it is an honest and factual approach.

The actual \$269m reduction figure is in Budget Paper No 2, page 60. In no way am I saying we should underestimate the impact of a reduction in the GST of \$269m this year compared to last year, but in Budget 2016–17 the previous government had forecast a reduction in GST revenue of \$237m. At \$237m we had a clear and credible path to fiscal surplus.

The additional \$32m since the Budget 2016–17 estimate of the GST reduction is not unmanageable and is not the main contributor to the \$1.3bn deficit delivered by the government this week. Even by the government's own figures, the Country Liberals were expecting a deficit of less than one-third of that which the Labor Party has saddled Territorians with. We can see that the \$1.3bn is not a result of any fabled GST cuts and is not the result of the previous government.

The government has touted its budget to focus on jobs. As we know, the budget's own fact sheets say the \$1.75bn infrastructure spend will sustain 14 000 jobs; however, the government refuses to table any evidence of this. We, on this side of the Chamber, like jobs. Government spending will create jobs and the Territory clearly needs more and better infrastructure. However, the government says all this spending is to create jobs, but refuses to provide information to support its claims.

We have many questions, none of which have been answered, such as how does it prioritise spending on projects? How has it ranked projects without conducting an assessment of how many jobs they will create? How did the government commit such large amounts of money to projects like the Myilly Point museum without a business case? Where is the assessment of its economic viability and impact? For example, how many additional tourists or locals will it attract? How will it sustain jobs at the completion of the construction phase? How will it support private expenditure at cafes and shops in the CBD?

I am glad the Leader of the Opposition talked about the Country Liberals' plan for economic development. I encourage the Chief Minister and the Treasurer to read it. It outlines a plan to diversify the economy around the following key areas: energy resource; minerals; tourism; agribusiness; international education and training; Defence; and supply and service.

It also lists the key economic enablers and steps to be taken in each of the areas which will let the Territory grow, such as land and water, infrastructure, domestic energy, Territorians or human capital, investment, and supportive government.

I encourage all members of this House to read our plan. A lot of what is listed has come up again through the economic summits and some of the tasks have already been done, but I bring it to the Chief Minister's attention because he keeps saying the previous government did not have a plan, and it is important that he understands we did. If he read our plan he might have saved Territorians quite a bit of money in reinventing the wheel.

This budget surprisingly lacks direction, structure and a theme. It appears to be leftovers of the previous government's infrastructure program with a few pet projects of the Chief Minister and Treasurer. I am not sure what the government claims the theme of the budget is. It is debt and jobs, sure, but if there is or was an overall framework for making decisions it has not been made clear to Territorians.

One of the key areas in the Country Liberals' plan earmarked for development was onshore gas. In the Northern Territory we have estimated gas reserves of 234 trillion cubic feet. The former government commissioned Dr Allan Hawke AC to undertake two inquiries, one on the science behind the process and one on the appropriate regulatory framework. This provided certainty to investors and a roadmap to reform the environmental regulatory framework to be produced.

Dr Hawke recommended a best-practice regulatory regime. I remind all honourable members of this House that the inquiry's major recommendations were consistent with other Australian and international reviews, that environmental risks associated with hydraulic fracturing can be managed effectively subject to a robust regulatory regime, and further, the preponderance of weight of agreed expert opinion led the inquiry to find that there is no justification whatsoever for the imposition of a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in the Northern Territory.

We respect the Labor government's mandate to hold a new inquiry, headed by Justice Pepper, but the time line for delivery of the report has stretched from August 2016 to December 2017. This is over a year that the onshore gas moratorium has inhibited the government from doing the hard work and preparing a robust and safe regulatory framework.

The government has continued to make announcements seemingly based more on blind optimism than on any kind of economic case. In fact, we have heard no businesses cases for the projects despite us asking the government to provide them on a number of occasions this week.

The only information we got from the Chief Minister was a \$50m announcement for a museum or cultural institution, and \$100m for an underground car park with no documentation, analysis or modelling.

This budget has once again left Territorians carrying a projected \$5.5bn in debt. That is the same level of debt that saw Labor lose government in 2012. It took the last Labor government 11 years to be in that position, but this time it has taken the Labor government just eight months. It inherited a debt to revenue ratio of 27% and is projecting that this will rise to 87% in the forward estimates. As the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, really great museums of the world are based around private investment.

To claim that spending on art galleries is what the Territory needs to improve the economy is not credible. It might be a worthy project on a worthy site, but is it a jobs-generating, economy or a tourism-boosting project for the now? Without seeing the evidence, that question will remain unanswered by this government.

It is disappointing the government does not have a plan to grow our way out of the debt it has driven us into. We need this government to take a strategic approach to spending to sustain the economy until the Defence spend comes online. Then we need to wind down the stimulus spending as quickly and harmlessly as possible. We need strategic spending to be focused on economy-growing infrastructure that will support the economy and create long-term jobs.

Much has been made of the various levels of deficit. The last Country Liberal budget predicted a deficit of \$413m today, and a plan and pathway for tackling the debt and achieving surplus in 2019–20.

The only way for the Territory to grow is to allow private enterprise to invest, take advantage of our natural geography, climate, people and resources, and do what private industry does best. That is, get on with the job. Surprisingly there is no discernible provision in the current budget for the design or planning of a new youth justice facility, much less concrete funding to begin construction. Instead we have approximately \$11m to upgrade the old Don Dale.

Every right-thinking politician over many years has called for a new purpose-built youth justice facility that will provide skills and job training, work experience and life skills to youth to bring down the almost 97% recidivism rate for youth offenders.

A couple of weeks ago two youths escaped Don Dale, wreaking havoc across the whole of the Territory for a period of three days, resulting in police patrol cars being rammed, a carjacking incident and people ending up in hospital. Even at this point the government failed to take responsibility and instead shifted the blame to the public servants, who were doing their best to cope with the chaos created by the transfer of youth justice from Corrections to Territory Families.

A review of the situation, following the crime spree in April, revealed that perimeter cameras were not functioning and had not been for many months, grass had grown in patches that allowed a person to hide, unseen, and a shirt covering razor wire from a break-out the previous month had not been removed. This essentially rolled out the red carpet for a subsequent escape.

The bottom line is that youth justice is an even bigger mess than it was this time last year. The decisions made by this government have made things worse, not better. At the very least the government could have budgeted for a new youth justice facility when it prioritised its debt-fuelled spending on new museums and arts trails. We need a new facility right now.

One aspect of the budget I welcome is the \$26m for a fully-functioning police station in Palmerston. It was mind boggling to watch this new government promise \$15m for half a new police station, which would not have increased the capability of police to do their job in Palmerston. Police do an amazing job with the resources they have, and \$15m would not have done them justice.

A key feature of a new police station in Palmerston, the anchor of the project, was a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week watch house, which would allow police back on the street more quickly instead of driving arrestees into the Mitchel Centre. It took eight long months of convincing this government Palmerston does not need half a police station. I am pleased to see the money brought forward for the full project to be rolled out at one time.

There are a lot of questions on this project in regard to time lines, and there is still no announcement of a site. We have the budget line item now and I look forward to seeing a site identified. It needs to be in a key location on arterial roads to allow police to respond in the most efficient way possible. It needs to be evidence led. I am interested to see where this government will choose to put the new Palmerston police station. This is the only good news story in this budget relating to policing and crime mitigation in the Palmerston area.

Other projects that are important but did not get a look in in this budget include the much-needed upgrade to the Kirkland Road and Woodlake Boulevard intersection. This is something I have been championing for a long time. To the Treasurer's credit, she wrote to me saying it had made its way into the government's 10-year infrastructure plan and is on the short-term priorities list, but it has not been budgeted this year. I will continue my discussions with the Treasurer, the government and my electorate about securing a budget line for that very important road safety and road efficiency upgrade in the electorate of Spillett.

The Durack Primary School kiss-and-go zone was another project to miss out in this budget, despite several attempts at convincing this government why it is so important and should be allocated in this budget. I will not give up, and I look forward to seeing it in next year's budget. A significant upgrade to the

Durack Primary School kiss-and-go is needed for the entire suburb. Every school to differing degrees have congestion issues with their kiss-and-go, particularly at drop-off and pick-up time, but the situation at Durack is exacerbated by its environment, and the entire Durack community would benefit, not just the school community. I am disappointed to see it did not make it into the budget, but I will continue the good fight on behalf of the people of Durack.

One other project I was disappointed not to see in the budget was any allocation of funds for the rectification of landscaping works on Farrar Boulevard. The community and I have long championed that. Again, I will continue conversations with the Treasurer and with government to bring that change for the people of Johnston. I will continue to take photos and send them on so the government has a clear understanding of what the people in Johnston were left with following that development—which is a suburb from when Labor was last in government.

The Treasurer and the Minister for Education have made a lot of allegations this week. One of them is that \$135m was cut from the education budget by the Country Liberals, but any reading of past budgets will show you the education budget increased by over \$120m between 2012 and 2016, which is over \$30m annually. This week there has also been constant fear mongering by the Treasurer and the Minister for Education about an alleged loss of 300 school-based staff. In fact, the number of school-based staff in 2012 stood at 3843 full-time equivalents, and in 2016 there were 3846 full-time equivalents, which is an increase, not a reduction.

I am also pleased to see an increase in the education budget this year; however, the evidence from the OECD is clear in that simply providing more funding is not a way to improve student outcomes. The OECD has found that for high-income countries like Australia it matters more how we spend our money, and that will be the critical indicator for this government. It is good that there is an increase, but how is it being spent?

Under the previous government NTCET completions were higher than ever in 2016, which is fantastic. We had in the Territory a record-breaking 1399 students, including 221 Indigenous students, completing their NTCET. This is outstanding; congratulations to all of them. There is still a long way to go, but the latest NAPLAN results showed improvements in the Northern Territory. These are encouraging numbers and I genuinely hope the new government can continue to increase our educational outcomes, because our children are our future and they deserve the best opportunities in life so they can continue to lead this great Territory well into the future, well and truly after we are all gone.

It is good to see the continuation of the back-to-school and sports vouchers, which are Country Liberals initiatives, but they squarely address Territorians and ease the pressure from Territory families. The vouchers have been and will continue to be well received, so I attribute credit to the government for continuing that initiative.

Today in Question Time I asked why this government is not committed to building the Zuccoli public primary school. The Country Liberals committed to constructing the Zuccoli primary school in 2018, with students in classrooms in 2020. If we had won government the budget allocation would have appeared in Tuesday's budget, but I am in opposition; we did not win government.

As evidenced by the new Minister for Education's answer to my question in Question Time today, no time line has been set for the Zuccoli public primary school, which is very disappointing for the people in Palmerston East and Palmerston South, but we, as a community, will continue to raise that with the Minister for Education, as we have in the past, and continue to push for a time line to be attributed to that school which. It will be a welcome and wonderful part of the ever-growing Zuccoli community.

I now turn to this government's slow delivery of its alcohol policy in the Northern Territory. Alcohol-fuelled antisocial behaviour is a consistent issue in areas right across the Northern Territory. We can see statistics for alcohol-related crime soaring. Territorians expect solutions to this issue; however, instead of immediate action it has taken this government eight months to announce yet another review, this time into alcohol policy.

It appears disingenuous that this government is not interested in the results of this review, because the Minister for Health has already announced a number of government measures, such as its unjustified plan to deter private investment in the Territory by introducing the 400 square metre floor cap, which is to essentially ban Dan Murphy's from trading in Darwin.

We have seen this government scrap alcohol mandatory treatment. We have also heard the announcement of the reintroduction of the Banned Drinker Register. Even though this government has been in office for eight months we are yet to see much more than media releases and press conferences on this issue. We hear the Minister for Health speaking a lot about having an evidence-based approach, yet there is no evidence proving the Banned Drinker Register was working.

We know it is popular in some quarters of the Northern Territory and you have a mandate to deliver it, but the slow delivery—we have a lot of questions on why, if this is your flagship project, is it taking so long to deliver? And are you attributing too much success to a program that does not show any evidence? We recently saw the head of emergency at RDH acknowledge the shortfalls of the BDR and that it does not have evidence-based support behind it.

I am concerned with the reduction in spending in the area of alcohol and other drug treatments in the budgets of the Top End and Central Australian Health Service Boards. The total spend in this area has gone from \$22.5m to \$18.3m, which is a reduction of \$4.2m in this critical area. I have been advised that this reduction is due to scrapping alcohol mandatory treatment, but only part of the remaining funds have been redistributed to the Banned Drinker Register with the rest of the funding lost from this important area.

We have spoken a number of times about the self-imposed PET scanner and cyclotron debacle that this government created at the beginning of this year. Territorians had long been promised a PET scanner and cyclotron, and the Turnbull Coalition government promised \$15m for the installation of these pieces of equipment at the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre.

In a surprise to all Territorians we saw the Minister for Health decide on the basis of strong clinical advice, which, despite my office trying to access through a freedom of information request, we have been unable to obtain, to change the location of the equipment from the Alan Walker centre to the Royal Darwin Hospital, therefore increasing the cost and causing the Territory to only get a PET scanner with the money given by the federal government.

Territorians were outraged by this; they could not understand the decision. There was months of dilly-dallying. We heard the announcement that we were receiving both, and then there was the issue of the separate locations. What we ended up with was the government having to dip into its own pockets for an extra \$3m because of that bungled situation.

Whilst I welcome the fact we will have access to this fantastic diagnostic device, the government unnecessarily worried Territorians and ultimately cost them an extra \$3m for the same thing. That should have cost them zero dollars because the federal government money would have covered the cost if it was located at the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre.

I turn attention to the deferral of the \$11m for storm rectification works at Alice Springs Hospital. The Member for Araluen has already highlighted this issue, so I will not take up too much time, but it shows how little this government is thinking about the people of Central Australia, despite the high number of local members in Central Australia. Given the amount that has been committed to priority works in the budget, it is disappointing for Centralians.

It is a disappointing budget as a local member, Palmerston resident and Territorian. From a Palmerston perspective, with two Labor government members in Palmerston, we have not seen this government continue to invest in building our city.

The debt and deficit are hugely concerning. The sporadic approach to allocating funding to projects is unsettling. We are in tough times and this government has taken a 'spend at all costs' approach, which is their prerogative, but we are concerned about the long-term impacts of this budget.

I was born here, as were a lot of my family. I am raising my family here and I believe in the Northern Territory. We are resilient people, particularly in the face of adversity. We have shown that time after time, but the strength of character of Territorians should not be exploited by this government. Territorians will push on despite this budget.

I wish this government had carved out a stronger future, outlined a pathway to a better future and not burdened future generations of Territorians with this historic level of debt. But that is the budget we were given, and we will work together to make the Territory a better place into the future.

VISITORS

Madam ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of the Member for Karama's partner, Adam, who has come to view parliament tonight. Please make him feel welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr PAECH (Namatjira): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I take this opportunity tonight to talk about the positive Territory Labor Budget 2017–18. The Member for Spillett, the Deputy Opposition Leader, talked about Territorians being resilient people. I can tell you we were resilient. We were knocked down time and again by the Country Liberal Party, and we got back up for four years.

We now have the opportunity to have our say, and it is evident by the number of elected members in this Chamber from Territory Labor, a party that cares for all Territorians, what has happened as a result.

I support the Treasurer's Appropriation Bill, and congratulate her on her first budget.

The foresight shown by the Treasurer, her Cabinet colleagues and the Chief Minister, Michael Gunner, has resulted in a strong focus on restarting the economic rebuild of our economic position.

Under this government we have already seen and will continue to see injections into resources like police, juvenile diversion, investments in children and a major focus on sound investments to build the economic future for people living in the bush, which I am passionate about.

This budget provides improvements in education and healthcare for the people of the Northern Territory. This government's vision is to directly invest in those areas to promote growth and provide solid foundations for the future. The investments seen in this budget are in education, health, policing, housing and many other areas. It is important that such investments are made, because if we do not see consistency across our population in education and health, we will deny the opportunity for everyone to participate in our economy.

We are delivering a budget which ensures that children living in the electorate of Namatjira will eventually have the same level of support, school infrastructure and staff training and resources to enhance student learning. We have educational strategies to encourage parents and community leaders to ensure our children are encouraged to go to school every day and can put their education to good use.

I support this budget because it builds on the foundation for economic expansion, that is, the family. By supporting families in remote areas we support the future. Budget 2017–18 invests in the foundation areas of housing, infrastructure, health, education and police. People of Namatjira and the greater Northern Territory expect and deserve these essential services, and this government will deliver.

This government is committed to building new housing and maintaining current dwellings to reduce the housing shortfall, a shortfall the CLP did nothing to address. A safe house that is secure and liveable is important for people living in the bush. If a person can live in a safe and secure home with amenities and access to services, they can engage in jobs and educational opportunities for them and their families.

I am excited about the Room to Breathe program and the positive impacts this will have on housing in the bush. Record spending for housing by our government will mean that Territorians living in the bush, in places like Docker River, Mutitjulu, Maningrida, Beswick, Lajamanu and so on, will finally see major improvements in remote housing. This investment is finally giving people in the bush the chance to overcome the shortage of houses and rooms on communities.

This budget builds on the significant work we have already seen delivered by this government in our remote communities, with a series of tenders for the Room to Breathe program already being rolled out and work commencing to address the housing shortages. I am excited to see Indigenous firms, such as Tangentyere Constructions in Alice Springs, winning some of the first contracts with the Room to Breathe program.

In the area of health, we understand a majority of those who access health services are Aboriginal and from the bush. We must continue to support the great regional and remote clinics, like the Urapuntja Health Service and Purple House, which provide outstanding services. There is also the Alice Springs Hospital, where I recently received outstanding service from the emergency department, so I extend my sincere appreciation to the dedicated staff there.

Solid spending in health improves the capacity to tackle primary health issues and deliver health prevention in our communities to ensure we continue to close the gap. I regularly see the trachoma teams in the electorate of Namatjira working tirelessly to overcome trachoma in the Northern Territory.

In the lead-up to Budget 2017–18, I welcomed the Health minister's announcement on this government's commitment to invest in renal dialysis. Many people living in the bush have to travel to large municipal towns for treatment, and the Territory has some of the highest levels of end stage kidney disease in the world. I am determined to see Namatjira residents receive much-needed services under the 10-year renal strategy being developed by this government's Department of Health.

As I visit people in my electorate and talk to many people across our regions, there is a strong sense of optimism and a desire to see change. I am hopeful this budget will do just that.

For the Namatjira electorate, Budget 2017–18 commits a range of measures. People in my electorate are familiar with the urgency of dealing with roads and with the work that needs to continue to deliver in this space. For residents in the pastoral areas, agricultural industries in my electorate and on the Docker River and Harts Range roads, it is fantastic to see the government's injection into infrastructure and fixing roads.

Within the budget \$31.25m for the Plenty Highway was flagged as a commitment date of 2017–18, as well as money coming from the federal and Territory governments for the Northern Australia Roads Programme. I was happy to hear that the Outback Highway Development Council welcomed the investment into these roads, acknowledging these roads as critical arterial roads, east to west across the NT.

Concern still exists about the Ilparpa Road. I have been asked questions by my constituents in the area as well as Alice Springs Town Council elected members, because I committed that that would be done during my term as the local member. It is a campaign promise I made in 2016, so I sincerely request the government and the Treasurer to take that on board for future considerations, because that road is very dangerous for all its users.

It is good to see the government's commitment in this budget of a \$733m investment into Territory roads and transport assets to connect and unlock economic development. I have travelled most of the roads in my electorate and throughout many other bush electorates, and it is pleasing to hear the overall announcements for regional and remote roads. I have been a long-term advocate for strong investment in bush roads, as they allow our bush brothers and sisters to get to town safely. They allow pastoral and agricultural industries to get products to market. They also allow interstate and international visitors to get out and see our great regions.

In Budget 2017–18 there is a \$31.25m commitment to upgrade the Plenty Highway. There is also \$10m to upgrade to the Tjukururu Road to Docker River; \$5m to upgrade to the Sandover Highway from Arlparra to the Utopia health clinic; \$3.5m for pavement and sealing on the Lasseter Highway.

If the Member for Araluen were in the Chamber she would be busting out of her chair at the \$4.9m commitment to the upgrade to Maryvale Road.

Madam ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable member, I remind you not to reflect on people in or out of the Chamber.

Mr PAECH: I welcome the opportunity to speak with the Member for Araluen further about the government's commitment to regional and remote roads in Central Australia.

I hope to see this significant roads investment result in local jobs and business benefits. Communities in Namatjira will also benefit from the \$5m Remote Community Sports Infrastructure Program; \$5m to establish the Strategic Local Government Infrastructure Fund to invest in remote infrastructure; \$22.3m to provide municipal and essential services to homelands and outstations; \$4.1m over two years to support Indigenous ranger groups with the purchase of equipment; \$10m for locally-recruited government

employee housing; and mobile services for the communities of Docker River and Finke, also known as Aputula.

This budget starts the long process for ensuring that community schools right across the Northern Territory will receive \$300 000 for much-needed upgrades to infrastructure. Namatjira takes in the Alice Springs rural area. The town centre is a major service centre for everyone who lives in Namatjira. What is good for the regions is good for Alice Springs, and vice versa.

In Alice Springs \$20m is allocated to revitalise the CBD. I hope this significant investment will see many people re-engaging with the town centre. In my home, the town of Alice Springs, we must have a strong economic focus and plan to ensure the population does not continue to decline as it did under the Country Liberal Party. We lost an electorate thanks to the Country Liberal Party's knee-jerk and matey approach to economic development. These are important infrastructure projects that will improve the quality of life for people living in these areas.

I am happy to finally see much-needed investments in the electorate of Namatjira, as the previous government starved my electorate. I am a strong believer that the key to success and our future is through regional economic development. The bush holds many answers to our economic future. This government will ensure economic development becomes a reality in the bush.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that to meet our social challenges we must provide strong pathways and avenues to engage our mob in economic opportunities to ensure wealth creation. In our regions we are aware our Aboriginal population is increasing. I am proud of this fact and that my government will deliver in its first term to ensure we look after the bush.

I am proud to be part of a government that knows the Northern Territory is more than what is just along the Stuart Highway. We recognise, listen, act and invest in our regional and remote people. If we are to ensure long-term economic prosperity we need to ensure the future for Aboriginal generations is a strong future. They too can participate across our economy. Investing in health and education and helping Aboriginal people to be healthy, educated Territorians, shows that we have hope. In five, 10 or 15 years they will be involved in the economic growth of the Northern Territory.

Domestic violence and youth services are areas I want to talk about. It is good to see a huge injection into this area. Unlike the previous Country Liberal government, which invested more in motorsports than creating safe spaces for Territory families, this government will deliver and look after our most vulnerable.

I thank the Cabinet ministers for the significant investment in the following areas:

- \$6m for the Alice Springs Women's Shelter upgrades and new facilities. I know many women in Central Australia will be appreciative of this commitment.
- \$3m to create the Alice Springs domestic violence court. This will improve safety, experience and outcomes for many people affected by domestic violence.
- \$1.75m to expand the after-hours youth services in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. I am glad my voice and the voices of many other Central Australians have been heard, and our government is investing in our youth services, the service equipped to work with the next generation of up-and-coming leaders of the Northern Territory.
- \$17.2m to establish the Banned Drinker Register as well as best-practice alcohol reforms. A large number of people in the Namatjira electorate are happy to hear this announcement. They are hopeful that racial profiling can become a thing of the past.

We are a government for all Territorians. Budget 2017–18 is full of new initiatives across all portfolio areas. It is designed to ensure a strong foundation is laid for the future of the Northern Territory.

I look forward to working with all members in this House to ensure the best outcomes for our constituencies are achieved. I will make sure the Northern Territory's bush remains a strong and positive agenda of this government. I look forward to the day when we go out bush and see firsthand how this government has delivered a strong economic future for regional and remote parts of the Northern Territory.

I commend the Appropriation Bill to the House and look forward to these very welcome initiatives rolling out across the Northern Territory. I look forward to continuing to hear firsthand from a number of Territorians,

the benefits that our Territory Labor government budget is delivering for them. I had the opportunity to attend the Master Builders breakfast this morning. That is a group of people who were very appreciative that Labor has listened, acted and delivered a budget for all Territorians.

Debate adjourned.

PAPERS TABLED
Travel Report – Member for Barkly

Madam ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table a travel report from the Member for Barkly.

**CONSIDERATION OF COMMITTEE REPORTS, AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS AND
GOVERNMENT RESPONSES**

Auditor-General's Report to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly March 2017—consideration deferred.

Select Committee on Opening Parliament to the People – Report on Opening Parliament to the People and Summary of Recommendations and Associated Minutes of Proceedings March 2017—consideration deferred.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms MANISON (Treasurer): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Ms LAWLER (Drysdale): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I wish to talk about some of the fantastic teachers and educational leaders we have in the Northern Territory.

I was very proud to present awards at the Australian Council for Educational Leaders Northern Territory Awards ceremony on 11 April 2017. The Australian Council of Educational Leaders, otherwise known as ACEL, is a not-for-profit company that actively supports the development of leadership abilities across Australia through conferences and workshops, leadership programs, online learning and resources.

ACEL NT works to inspire, support, recognise and advocate for excellence in educational leadership across government and non-government sectors in the Northern Territory.

The awards recognise the hard work, professionalism and leadership skills of many of our teachers and education leaders. Some are new to the teaching profession and others have contributed to the education of Territory children and young people for more than 25 years.

The ACEL Early Career Awards were presented to Ms Clare Bubb, who is a senior teacher at Nightcliff Primary School, for her leadership potential and organisational and management skills; and Ms Mimi Wooley for her leadership contributions at Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School. She is a leader who demonstrates compassion, empathy and a strong commitment to personal growth.

The ACEL NT Inspiring Educator Awards were presented to four teachers, including Ms Bianca Hyke, a senior teacher at Stuart Park Primary School, for being a strong leader who is always willing to assist and lead teaching strategies to improve student learning. It was lovely to see Bianca receive that award. I worked with Bianca at Anula Primary School many years ago when she first started teaching and I was the assistant principal. She truly is an exceptional and inspiring educator.

An Inspiring Educator Award also went to Mr Joe Cullinan, a classroom teacher at St Paul's Catholic Primary School, for his focus on learning and student growth. He continues to focus on his own development and training.

Another one I was honoured to present was to Ms Marisa Boscato, a senior teacher at Girraween Primary School, for her dedication and passion towards education. I have known her for many years. I was working on the curriculum and was looking for teachers to implement the new NT curriculum framework. I happened to go to Alawa and saw Marisa Boscato and another teacher, Learne Dunne, and they were the two best teachers I had seen teaching upper primary classes in the Territory, so I recruited them to the implementation of the NT curriculum framework. Since then Marisa has done an exceptional job in many

areas of education; in the middle years, curriculum and assessment. It was wonderful. I felt proud to present that award to Marisa Boscato.

An Inspiring Educator Award also went to Ms Sophie Slack-Smith, a classroom teacher from Nightcliff Primary School, for her leadership, which has touched students, motivated colleagues and delighted parents.

The ACEL NT Leadership Award was received by Ms Briseis More, a classroom teacher from Nightcliff Primary School. There were a number of Nightcliff primary teachers who won awards on that night. She demonstrates passion, enthusiasm and is constantly challenging herself.

It was amazing to see so many wonderful Territory educators receive awards.

Another Leadership Award went to Ms Kerry Hudson, the Principal of Anula Primary School, for being a strong, mature and effective leader. Kerry is an exceptional leader in education in the Territory and has been in the Territory for a long time. I worked with Kerry in curriculum in 1998. She is a wonderful principal.

Another went to Ms Susan Kilgour, the Principal of Wulagi Primary School, for actively promoting learning and for her interactions with students, staff, families and the wider community, using every interaction as a learning opportunity. Susan is one of our exceptional principals in the northern suburbs.

Another went to Ms Paula Sellars, the Deputy Principal at Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School, who acts as a great leader and role model to staff and models ethical behaviours and practices.

As well as recognising leaders and principals, the ACEL NT Leadership Award was also jointly awarded to the leadership team of early childhood education and care within the Department of Education. The early childhood area of the Education department has been producing and delivering amazing work, so it was wonderful to see these exceptional educators recognised.

That team includes Ms Agnes McGrath, Director of Quality Education and Care NT; Ms Audrey Billias, Director of Policies and Programs; Susan Edwards, Director of Strategic Policy; and Regina Thompson, Director of Families as First Teachers. It was lovely to see the recognition of exceptional educators working in the area of early childhood, in the corporate area of the department.

Those women have unique skills, knowledge, expertise and talents in early childhood education and development. Their leadership has improved the profile of early childhood within the Department of Education.

Mr Tony Roberts, the Executive Director Schools North and President of ACEL NT, was awarded the ACEL NT Fellowship Award. Tony Roberts works tirelessly to build the capacity of others and has made significant improvements to educational outcomes. Tony has the ability to bring people together and create innovative and collaborative solutions, and that is at the core of everything he does.

I congratulate all the ACEL NT award recipients and thank them for their valuable contribution to educating children and young people in the Northern Territory.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Mr Deputy Speaker, the wonderful Red Flag Dancers graced the Chamber on 26 April in Darwin at Parliament House. They attended the opening ceremony for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association committee meetings. I want to share more details about the Red Flag Dancers who travelled from Numbulwar last week to attend the CPA opening. This is information from their social media biography and includes some of the acclaimed accolades for what they do very well.

The Red Flag Dancers are a professional, colourful and energetic traditional dance group from the remote Aboriginal community of Numbulwar, located on the southeast coast of the Arnhem Land, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, in the Territory.

Numbulwar is well-known for its isolation and traditional lifestyle, where people still live by the law of their ancient ceremony. Members of the group have previously bridged the gap between ancient Aboriginal Australia and the modern world, having danced and sung with the Bangarra Dance Theatre, the Australian Ballet Company, Zakir Hussain, Sultan Khan, Yothu Yindi, and at WOMEX, WOMAD and the opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games.

Red Flag songs and dances are stories of the Makassan traders who sailed from Indonesia to trade and share culture with the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land in the Territory. The culture is alive, developing and changing with every generation of the Nundhirribala clan and the Red Flag custodians. The Red Flag Dancers are the major attraction to the world-renowned GARMA Festival and Darwin Festival each year when they perform.

The dancers and musicians perform in full traditional dress with their dancing backed by some of the most respected traditional singers and didgeridoo players in Australia. Their lead singer, Grant Nundhirribala, is the winner for six awards, is the lead singer of the Yilila band, named after our family outstation, and has been featured as a guest artist with the Australian Ballet Company and Bangarra Dance Theatre.

The members of the group all learned to dance before they could walk and are Australia's most outstanding ambassadors and educators of ancient Aboriginal music and dance. Their list of accolades and performances is impressive. I will read some of the places they have performed:

- 2000 Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games
- 2002 GARMA Festival
- 2004 Adelaide Festival, WOMAdelaide Festival, Darwin Festival and Barunga Festival
- 2005 Arafura Games Opening Ceremony, Darwin Festival, Barunga Festival and Cairns Festival
- 2006 Collaboration Australian Ballet Company and Bangarra Dance Theatre, Sydney Opera
- House/Melbourne State Theatre and Darwin Festival
- 2007 Festival of World Cultures, Ireland
- 2008 Bellinghen Global Carnival and Festival Mundial, Netherlands
- 2009 WOMEX, Copenhagen.

In 2016 the Red Flag Dancers were able to perform in their own community at the first Numburidindi Festival. They came to the Legislative Assembly inauguration of the 13th Assembly to welcome me, the Member for Arnhem, into the Parliament House Chamber.

I formally thank Madam Speaker, Hon Kezia Purick MLA, for inviting the Red Flag Dancers to Parliament House to share their song, history, kinship and culture at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association opening, which was held on Wednesday 26 April 2017.

I acknowledge Ms Ella Geia and share my appreciation for her coordination of the 13-strong group who travelled from Numbulwar on a small charter flight, 30 minutes across the Gulf of Carpentaria to Groote Eylandt, where they boarded their commercial flight. They almost did not make it to Darwin as their commercial flight turned off the runway due to mechanical problems, and they waited several hours to get the all clear and for a mechanic to travel from Darwin to Groote to check out the plane.

I am happy to report to the House that they arrived to Darwin safely, although late, on Tuesday, which was also Anzac Day. But they were still able to make it in time the next morning, on Wednesday, to perform at parliament. A special thank you goes to my cousin, Grant Nundhirribala, the lead singer, for attending the event. Grant is an extremely important song man in our region of the Territory. An extended special thank you goes to all the Red Flag Dancers performers, my Nundhirribala family, for travelling the great distance to be part of the CPA opening ceremony.

I wish to make extra special mention to my mother Didamain Uibo, who attended the ceremony and danced with our family to showcase and share our family's culture. I should also give a little shout out to my father, Mick, who attended and very proudly supported his wife dancing with our family. It was lovely to see.

I congratulate the Red Flag Dancers from Numbulwar community for such a wonderful performance on the day. They are fantastic and very professional. It was their second time within eight months at parliament. I think Madam Speaker has a soft spot for the Red Flag Dancers. It was great that they were specially asked to attend and showcase our culture and family history.

I would love the Red Flag Dancers to travel to a bunch of different events. If people are interested I will give them a little plug. They have a Facebook group called Red Flag Dancers; it is easy to find. If you would like to see photos and videos of festivals they have attended and travelled to, they are on the Facebook page.

Mr SIEVERS (Brennan): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Treasurer and her team for their hard work on the budget. This is a good budget and it has been a tough week. They have worked hard to deliver for Territorians. I am sure all members in the Chamber will join me in congratulating them.

I also wish to speak about the Darwin Dragons Rugby Union Club, Charlie King and the No More campaign.

As the assistant minister for Men's Policy, on Saturday 29 April I was pleased to attend the Warren Park rugby union facility to link arms with the Darwin Dragons Rugby Union Club and Charlie King to support the No More campaign. The No More campaign is a strong message and campaign to say no more to family violence across the Territory, and Charlie King has been instrumental in driving this campaign.

During the event Charlie King spoke about the ongoing commitment this Labor government is giving to the No More campaign and how pleased he was to be able to grow this program across the Territory over the coming years. The president of the Dragons, Mr Puru Westrupp, also spoke at the event and gave a very strong message to all the supporters and players in the club that the Darwin Dragons Rugby Union Club is very serious about this message and is a proud club that will get behind this campaign.

The Darwin Dragons Rugby Union Club and every supporter, along with Charlie King and I, then linked arms and made the No More pledge to family violence, together as one. It was a strong commitment that every person in attendance supported. The Darwin Dragons not only made the pledge on this day, but they also announced they had created their own domestic violence action plan for the club, which is fantastic news.

As the assistant minister for Men's Policy, I am very pleased to announce in parliament today that the Darwin Dragons are the very first ever rugby union club in Australia to make the No More pledge and to take a stand together against family violence. I congratulate them for being the first and for being so strong in their commitment to the No More campaign.

I am very proud of the Darwin Dragons Rugby Union Football Club, which organised the inaugural No More campaign event. I also commend to parliament the leadership of the head coach and president, Puru Westrupp; the vice president, Kenny Sutton; the public officer, Seranie Gamble; the secretary, Michelle Crookes; the management committee, particularly Damien and Alex Suebert; and the members, volunteers, players and supporters.

Congratulations and well done to everyone at the Darwin Dragons Rugby Union Football Club. Thank you again to Charlie King, and I look forward to many more great stories of the No More campaign in the future.

Mr COLLINS (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to alert members to the fact today is International Firefighters' Day, which is observed each year on 4 May. It was instituted after a proposal was emailed across the world on 4 January 1999 due to the deaths of five firefighters in tragic circumstances in a wild fire in Linton in Victoria. Each year firefighters face times of tragedy and triumph, arguments and lessons, reflections and celebrations. These vary in their impact and influence on each individual and are now part of our lives. In many cases this cannot be easily dismissed. Linton was one such tragedy.

On 2 December 1998 a tragic event shook the small Linton community, Australia and the world. Firefighters in Linton, approximately 150 kilometres west of the city of Melbourne, Victoria, were fighting a large wildfire and called for assistance. This urgent call brought firefighters to the scene from a wide area, including volunteers from the Geelong West Fire Brigade, not knowing the tragedy that was in store.

Garry Vredeveltdt, Chris Evans, Stuart Davidson, Jason Thomas and Matthew Armstrong were the crew on the Geelong West tanker on that day. They were part of a strike team and were being sent to help extinguish the bushfire. As they headed out from the fire to refill their tanker with water there was a sudden, violent wind change as a cold change hit the area. The flames engulfed their truck, killing all five members.

International Firefighters' Day was started by JJ Edmondson, a volunteer firefighter from Victoria. She had her safety and training drills engrained over the years and had always been aware of the friendship with other firefighters that could lead to the joy and sense of being part of a greater family, as well as leading to potential loss.

When the Geelong West firefighters lost their lives, this struck her quite hard. It did not matter that they were from a different brigade or another region. They could have been from another state or country, but what was important was that they were firefighters and they lost their lives doing something they had been trained for and were proud to do. They died trying to save lives and properties of other people.

The support and fellowship that flowed from the tragedy spurred Ms Edmondson to a New Year's resolution in 1999 to organise an internationally recognised symbol of support and respect for all firefighters, and a date which this could be coordinated worldwide. International Firefighters' Day is a time when the world's community can recognise and honour the sacrifices firefighters make to ensure their communities and environments are as safe as possible. It is also a day on which current and past firefighters can be thanked for their contributions.

It is well known that I do not hide my past life as a firefighter. I have said it before and I will say it again; it is the best job in the world, although it can be a dangerous occupation, as the events that led to the inauguration of the day. I was very fortunate in this aspect though. Whilst I may have been in more danger than I realised at the time, I never felt that I was in danger, even in the middle of a burning building at 2 am, wearing a breathing apparatus and being unable to see my hand in front of my face. Maybe I was just stupid; that is a real possibility. But I always felt a sense of calm and belief that I was in control, and that came from training. In spite of that, I did not have many incidents where I was in much trouble.

I was what US firefighters call a 'white cloud'. This is a reference to a firefighter's belief that recruit firefighters fall into one of two categories: those who attract all the fires and excitement, or black clouds bringing in the rain; and those who are the opposite, or white clouds, for whom nothing much happens. You might think this is funny, but this is pretty accurate.

From the day I left the training college and received my first posting I seemed to miss all the big jobs. I was sitting at home on my first day of annual leave, watching the news, and there was my crew fighting a major fire somewhere and I had my feet up. This happened to me on more than one occasion. It is not that you miss all the fires, but you just do not attend anywhere near as many as the black clouds. They are my fond memories.

It might come as no surprise that the most moving day I experienced as a firefighter was not when I was at work. I was on holiday in Singapore. I arrived back at the hotel room after dinner and turned the TV on; it was September 11. I watched as the events unfolded, feeling for those poor firies, knowing exactly what they were required to do, climbing all those floors, attacking the fire and carrying that really heavy gear. Then it happened; the first building collapsed. I was stunned. I did not think it was possible, from the experience I had of fighting building fires, but I knew immediately what it meant.

The term 'hero' is used far too often by the media. No firefighter I know sees themselves as a hero; they see themselves as an ordinary person doing a job they love and getting to help people. People are sometimes asked to do extraordinary things, but they never shirk doing what they are asked to do.

The date chosen for International Firefighters' Day, 4 May, was linked to the feast day. I thought it was because of Star Wars day. 'May the fourth be with you.' It was linked to the feast day of Saint Florian, the patron saint of all firefighters. Saint Florian was the first known commander of one of the firefighting squads in the Roman Empire. He lost his life, as did his colleagues, protecting the same humane ideas which firefighters all over the world share today.

On this day, International Firefighters' Day, I acknowledge all firefighters, including the volunteer firefighters and permanent ones across the Territory. I thank them for their continued commitment and sacrifice to everyone in the Northern Territory.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, honourable members, for your adjournments tonight. They are always very diverse and insightful.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.