Royal Commission Costs

Mr HIGGINS to CHIEF MINISTER

Given the significant cost of implementing the findings of the Royal Commission into the Detention of Juveniles in the Territory, will you now rule out the new Darwin museum that no one wants and reallocate these funds, instead of going cap in hand to Canberra again for the money?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, a couple of important points. In our consultation, where people could have their say, support for the Myilly Precinct investment, which includes the museum, came in at 57%. We have been consulting about everything we are doing in the Darwin city and the city’s deal. Our response to the Royal Commission should not be dependent on a museum in Darwin, an art gallery in Alice Springs, a fire station in Katherine or the Purkiss Reserve upgrade in Tennant Creek.

We are responding directly and specifically to the Royal Commission. It is only reasonable – I am interested to see if the Opposition Leader has the same thought – that considering the Commonwealth paid for half the cost of the Royal Commission that it is at the table as part of the solutions. The response and fix. That is only reasonable.

I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to talk to his party colleagues in Canberra and say, ‘You were there to start the Royal Commission, receive the Royal Commission report and you should be there when it comes to implementing the Royal Commission’. We will. We will not shirk our responsibility when it comes to looking after children in the Northern Territory and making sure Territorians are safe, and neither should the Australian government.

The Australian government paid for half the cost of the Royal Commission and should be at the table when we talk about the response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission. It is named in that report. In fact, one of the recommendations of the commission’s report is that there should be a productivity inquiry into how the Commonwealth spends its money in the Territory, because at no stage during the hearings of the Royal Commission could it get an accurate and adequate response to how and where the Commonwealth money was spent. It kept going back to the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth kept changing its answer about how and where that money was going. It was never confident, even at the end, about having a fulsome response from the Commonwealth government about how and where its money was spent.

It has recommended that the Productivity Commission looks at this and provides advice about what the Commonwealth government is doing in the Northern Territory. We are at the table. We have provided details of our response. What has been missing is any detail about the Commonwealth government’s response. Territorians have the right to it. Several days after the Royal Commission report has been handed down, we are disappointed in the Australian government’s failure to adequately respond.

We have heard rhetoric, nice words, but we have not yet heard from the Australian government, on behalf of Territorians, any level of adequate response that goes to looking after children and the safety of Territorians. At the heart of this is how we make Territorians stay safe - which includes the little kids in the Territory so they do not become adult criminals - and ensure families and businesses in the Northern Territory are safe.

The Royal Commission provided recommendations in that space and we have not heard the Australian government respond.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Royal Commission Costs

Mr HIGGINS to CHIEF MINISTER

As the Chief Minister has just said, for clarity if you are asking the commonwealth for half of the cost where is your plan for that money and will you bring that plan detailing how you are going to spend that money into this House?
ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I was quite clear about this on the Friday and it is quite clearly spelt out in the Royal Commission. They have asked us in three months’ time to present to the children’s commissioner—so that will be about mid-February—our work program for the replacement to Don Dale and how do we provide detention facilities in the Northern Territory that break the cycle that actually set up in a way on country and community or in places—and when they are in Darwin and Alice Springs they are built and designed in a way that responds to the needs of youth justice in the Northern Territory.

We have three months to provide that work program. The Royal Commission recognise that you cannot just build new detention centres or new justice facilities overnight. They have provided a three month time frame to provide the work program. We would love the Commonwealth to be part of that. I have made an offer already to the Commonwealth that they can be part of the drafting up that work program. We have not had a formal response to that. I have had a verbal meeting. That offer is still on the table they can be part of developing that work program that provides that detail.

Northern Australia Investment Forum in Cairns

Mrs WORDEN to CHIEF MINISTER

You attended the Northern Australia Investment Forum in Cairns just yesterday. Can you please outline what the purpose of this trip was?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we know that creating supporting jobs in the Northern Territory is crucial and that keeping people employed actually goes towards solving a lot of the issues that we have in the Northern Territory. You talked about royal commission before, full time job something that pays for the roof over your head and food on the table is actually really important for a healthy stable family environment so we want to have jobs in the Northern Territory. We have a comprehensive jobs plan, we have that 10 year infrastructure plan now out of the economic summits project so we are able to go to Northern Australia Investment Forum with live opportunities and offers, real jobs, real projects and things people can invest in.

It was an investor’s forum—there was a lot of money in the room. One of the meetings I had was with an investment farm worth $1.6 trillion dollars that is actively looking at investments in the Territory. They are extraordinary people looking for projects that they want to invest in. We had a number of companies who came on the delegation—Project Sea Dragon which we have talked about a lot, they have gone through all their approvals phase and are now looking for finance.

The Hayes Creek Project, the Aratuka Rare Earth Project—an excellent project just north of Alice Springs—the Amaroo Phosphate Project. One that got a lot of attention because I think people are still getting their head around that we are going to be doing this in Darwin, and it is so important to break the mould of what people think you can actually do in the Territory and that is the Energy Renaissance Project and the Battery Factory. That attracted a lot of attention because it was thinking about Darwin in a different way and thinking about Darwin the way that we have been putting it consistently to Australians, to the Prime Minister and others that you should do things close to market, close to the gas, close to the water port of Darwin.

That can be up and down the track in the Territory because we have the railway line but too often the Australian government, the Prime Minister talks about doing things on the east coast. They talk about our gas and getting it down to the east coast looking after people in the south. The east coast corner of Australia is as far from the rest of the world as you can get.

If you want to be globally competitive you have to think north and you have to think the top of this country. You have to be close to market. Eight days from Darwin to China, if you use China as your bench mark. Sixteen days from Brisbane and even more further around. Darwin is where you need to be exporting from and that is what we are working on. That is the pitch we took to the people, the investors in Cairns and they were very interested in what the Northern Territory has to offer from prawns in the west to rockets in the east to the Battery Factory in Darwin to the mineral resources of Alice Springs.

There is a lot on the table and a lot of major projects out there and the Territory is ready for that investment and the Territory is the best place to make that investment because this is where you can be globally competitive from. This is where you should be investing and we said to everybody come to the Territory come to the north, do business here, grow jobs here.
Mr HIGGINS to CHIEF MINISTER

In 2014 the Stella Maris inquiry found that Minister McCarthy acted and I quote:

Without accountability, responsibility or with proper consideration by granting Unions NT a Crown lease.

In September of this year, Minister McCarthy failed to ensure that Minyerri and other communities were provided with interim housing, forcing them to lived I squalid, fourth world conditions. Last Friday the Royal Commission concluded that Minister McCarthy had been, I quote:

... continually briefed about the youth justice crisis but failed to act.

When is enough enough? How can Territorians trust this minister to discharge the duties of his office and in the same vein as the question you posed about former minister Elferink, will you sack him as the minister?

ANSWER

No. Minister McCarthy has my full confidence.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr GUNNER: You have just identified a political witch hunt, that we all knew Stella Maris was, then you went on to Remote Housing in the Northern Territory which is one of the most difficult policy areas we have, especially when it comes to delivery.

We have spoken a lot about the transitional housing arrangements in Minyerri and I think the Minister is delivering comprehensively across Remote Housing in the Northern Territory in an extremely difficult portfolio area. When it comes to the Royal Commission, I am the Chief Minister and the leader of this party and I have taken full responsibility. I did that in opposition and I take it now when we are in government.

The only way you can be part of the solution is if you accept responsibility. We as a party are in rehabilitation because we have done the wrong thing consistently over the years, as have previous governments, when it comes to breaking kids and not building them up. It would be highly irresponsible and misleading of the debate we have had in this Territory to identify one individuals for that. Parties are responsible and have made wrong decisions. That goes to a failure to understand how Cabinet government and Cabinet responsibility works.

Gerry McCarthy is part of our Cabinet and as a Cabinet we have taken a strong stance towards rehabilitating our path to youth justice in the Northern Territory, beginning with the decision in February of $18m to fix a broken youth justice system. Mr McCarthy was part of that decision and is an excellent member of our Cabinet who provides very good advice to us about how we need to be mindful of the decisions we make because they impact the Territory, children and safety of Territorians.

We have taken that approach this term on the first 1000 days which I think will deliver a serious benefit to the Territory. It may take years for that to fully flow through the system as those young kids grow up into teenagers and young adults. We have to spend in the first 1000 days, which is the direction we have taken as a government and as a party this term because we are on the steps to rehabilitation and how we can do better for Territorians.

We can only do that because we have accepted responsibility for the mistakes we have made in the past when it comes to youth justice in the Northern Territory. That is how we can say thank you to the commissioners for the road map they provided and we are going to take those practical steps as a Cabinet, government and team to making sure kids, families and businesses are safe in the Northern Territory. That is what we are doing for Territorians.

Infrastructure Jobs

Mr KIRBY to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING and LOGISTICS

Minister, can you please update the House on how the government is using the $1.75bn infrastructure budget to support Northern Territory jobs?
ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question. It is important we do what we can as a government to support Territorians to create jobs, attract private investment and grow our economy right across Territory cities, regions and remote communities. It is about getting out there to create more jobs and build and grow this economy.

The infrastructure budget was a very deliberate decision of this government in the first budget that we delivered, a record $1.75bn infrastructure budget, to ensure we were supporting jobs and growth right across the Northern Territory. We have ensured this money is going out the door to support local business and do the important work. It is also important to remember this is important work to build better infrastructure that enables better economic development opportunities, give Territorians more access to vital services and a better life.

The department has been working very hard to get those tenders out to support local business and in the first quarter of 2017, from July to September, a total of 235 quotations for tender were awarded across all contract types in tiers 2, 3, 4 and 5 with a total value award of just under $176m. Of these, about 99% were awarded to Territory enterprises.

Of these, 167 were construction contracts awarded to Territory enterprises at a value of $163m, that is 98% going local.

On a year-by-year comparison of 2016–17 for the first quarter from July to September, there was an increase of $70m in contracts awarded to local business.

The foot is down on the pedal and it is about ensuring that money gets out the door, flows through to do this important work and because we have strengthened our Buy Local procurement policies—it is about supporting local business.

We also contained a record repairs and maintenance budget to get that money flowing through the economy as quickly as possible as well as doing that important work.

The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics is managing $224m of this record $297m repairs and maintenance budget and the expenditure to date is totalling well over $54. We have money flowing through across the Northern Territory, getting out the door to support the businesses in the first quarter.

We cannot stress enough how important infrastructure is to Territorians. We have large deficits in infrastructure and need to see more roads, housing, better services and health clinics. Making sure that when we do deliver, that we get them out the door to deliver quality projects that support local business is a priority of this government.

Bank Tax

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to CHIEF MINISTER

Your mate, the Premier of South Australia, Mr Jay Wetherill, has said that the South Australian bank tax is dead and that it was a bad idea. Do you agree that it is a bad idea and will you rule out a bank tax being imposed on Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I believe there is a critical difference in approach here. As a government we have talked about revenue measures full stop. What we have said is, there are a range of levers here, how do we pull them to direct and drive investment.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr GUNNER: What we have said is that we are after outcomes. We would like to support local jobs over fly-in fly-out workers, is there a way of doing that through the payroll tax system? I went to the mining club lunch a couple of months ago and said we would like to encourage and reward long-term mines over
short-term mines and we would like to look at the ad valorem system versus a system where we take money only at the profit stage and if there is a way we can do that, maybe with crediting involved that looks after mines. We have had that conversation with the mining club.

I am obviously frustrated by empty shopfronts, empty blocks that could be invested in the Alice Springs, Darwin and around the Territory. Is there a way we can approach that through the taxation system? We are after people’s ideas.

We have done this because we want to learn the lesson from what happened last term where people got slapped, without any notice, with a 30% power water price rise. They did not just do it once, they hit the SkyCity Casino without any notice or negotiations for $6m. They changed the mineral royalty payments without talking to anybody.

What we have said is that we want to be up front and say you had an opportunity to talk about all of these things going into last budget. We want to provide people with opportunity to have their say about what we do in the Northern Territory and how we pull the levers. We are open to ideas.

We are being up front, going into our second budget about how we tackle these things. The first time a government has done this in decades, have a proper conversation with Territorians about how we handle the second budget. This is something the CLP will struggle with, because they never did it. They waited until budget day and they hurt people. We are saying, ‘let us talk about what we do and how we do it’.

The CLP scrapped first home buyers concessions without talking to anybody. They took away a concession.

We are open to ideas. We are talking about it going into our second budget and want to talk to Territorians about what that is. Any politician who has been involved with parliament for any length of time has received a lot of free advice that says, ‘scrap every tax: stamp duty, payroll, pokies, MVR, or the lot’. You very rarely get any advice about anything else.

You have to pay for the schools and hospitals. We are asking what advice Territorians have about the status quo, how they want to shape it and how they would like to make changes in the Northern Territory. We are doing what the CLP could never do, which is have a proper conversation with Territorians about the revenue base in the Northern Territory and what is the right tax mix to drive investment in the NT.

Royal Commission – Recommendations

Ms AH KIT to MINISTER for TERRITORY FAMILIES

How will the government’s response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission help to build a safer, fairer and stronger community?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Karama, who is as passionate about this issue as the rest of us in the team on this side of the House.

I echo the Chief Minister’s sentiments about taking responsibility about the failings of previous governments, including our own, and being part of a positive future in the Territory—that it is a safer and fairer place for our community, kids and families.

The Royal Commission found:

A system which is meant to make the community safer in fact made it more dangerous.

It is a very clear message that we have to hear. A punitive approach does not work. This system failed not only the kids but our whole community.

I thank the commissioners for taking a reasoned approach to the recommendations they have provided. There are 226, and we are working through them systematically. The focus is that we need a system that works. We had a system that was like a toolbox with one tool in it—no options for police, the judiciary or child protection workers.

We need to make sure we continue the reform process, which we have started strongly.
We had our $18.2m in youth diversion programs; we have undertaken procurement for bail accommodation and support programs in regional centres; we have banned the use of restraint chairs within the youth detention centres—that was one of the best pieces of work I have done this year. It was a proud moment to make that change in a systemic way and be clear about how we expect our young people in detention to be treated. We are continuing that work, but there is more legislative reform to do.

We have agreed, in principle, to one act, which includes child protection and youth justice. That is one of the strong recommendations from the Royal Commission. We have also agreed to stronger independent oversight, which is important. That includes making sure the Children’s Commissioner’s role continues to be strengthened.

This is a long haul. For too long we have tried to run a system that was stuck in one gear with only one option. We need a flexible, modern youth justice system in the Northern Territory.

National Transport Hall of Fame

Mrs LAMBLEY to CHIEF MINISTER

As we speak, the National Transport Hall of Fame, based in Alice Springs, is making plans to pack up and move interstate. Yes, the National Transport Hall of Fame is leaving town. It is doing so for two reasons.

One is crime. It has been battered by crime over the last 12 months, on average twice a week.

The second reason is the Northern Territory Department of Business has threatened to close it down due to senseless red tape and bureaucracy gone mad. Through an inability to control crime in Alice Springs, and red tape gone mad, your government is destroying the iconic National Transport Hall of Fame and the economy of Alice Springs. What will you do, Chief Minister?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, as the Member for Araluen may be aware, we have in place an eight-week action plan. We put forward $250 000 towards it. This week we have pulled forward the police Operation Shulton to commence early. We did that in consultation with Territory Families and youth engagement officers to make sure we respond prior to the holiday period commencing. There are some concerns about increasing activity at the moment. We want to make sure we are more responsive than what we had planned. We had the eight week action plan ready to go which is longer than the six week holiday period, so we had made a plan which is longer than the summer holidays.

We commenced the police operations earlier to make sure we are responsive to the concerns people had in Alice Springs. In December we have seven new police officers starting in Alice Springs out of the recruit squad that graduates on 1 December. Early next year we will have for the first time ever a recruit training squad occur in Alice Springs, outside Darwin. The people we are recruiting to that, experienced police, know they will be training in Alice Springs in the Southern Command.

It is deliberately timed at the start of the first school term to make sure those families will be prepared to settle in Alice Springs and will know exactly where they are working and will be trained in the community they will be living in and representing which is excellent. There will be 30 extra police for Alice Springs then and seven in December, the most comprehensive action plan ever done; those are not my words, they are from the Chamber of Commerce in Alice Springs.

That is the best initiative for street kids they have seen in the decade the Chamber of Commerce has been there. We have plans in place for Alice Springs over the summer period. We have commenced some of those plans early…

Mrs Lambley: A point of order, Madam Speaker! 110 Relevance. The Department of Trade, Business and Innovation is threatening to close the Transport Hall of Fame down. What are you going to do about it?

Madam SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Mr GUNNER: I will follow up on that accusation because in all my meetings with the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation, they have not once said they are closing down the National Transport Hall of Fame. I will discuss it with them and I am sure if there is a basic red tape issue we can fix it. The Deputy Chief
Minister is indicating that she is more than happy to meet with the Transport Hall of Fame around the transport issues. I will follow up with the red tape from the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation.

I think sometimes the Member for Araluen needs to come forward and talk with us because we can always work through these issues…

Madam SPEAKER: Chief Minister, your time has expired.

Payroll Tax and Business Impact

Mrs FINOCCHIARO to CHIEF MINISTER

How many extra businesses will be hit by payroll tax under your big tax revolution? How does introducing punitive new taxes on already struggling small businesses support business growth or survival? When will you admit to Territorians that your payroll tax hike is a direct attack on jobs and Territorians are being made to pay for your mistakes and pet projects?

ANSWER

The Leader of the Opposition and Deputy Leader of the Opposition obviously have not been listening to my comments around payroll tax. I have been talking about how we can incentivise local jobs over fly-in fly-out workers. The advice I have been hearing is that is more around a credit or incentive type of approach. They are obviously not listening or partaking in a constructive debate, which is unfortunate because I am very open to taking on any ideas the CLP have if they have constructive ideas about how we can direct investment to the Northern Territory.

In government last term, budget after budget they consistently hurt businesses, industries and Territorians without talking to them, without any level of consultation or purpose. We are comfortable talking about what the right tax mix is for the Northern Territory that creates a positive environment for investment. How do we get the outcomes? How do we make sure there is a return when it comes to local jobs? This is really important.

For some reason, the CLP cannot support our initiative for local jobs over fly-in fly-out workers. When I spoke to SEAAOC just a few months ago and said we want to put local jobs first, the opposition attacked me. They said they support fly-in fly-out workers for the Northern Territory as the model. I do not think they understand the consequences of that decision. Building up and training locals, making sure we have stable communities, let alone the GST return we get; it is better for the worker, company and community.

They have an extraordinary position, yet the CLP said they support fly-in fly-out workers ahead of local jobs, a bizarre position to take. I cannot get my head around it. It seems an extraordinary policy direction for the party to take.

We believe in local jobs and are asking if there is a way to use the payroll tax system to support local jobs over fly-in/fly-out workers. We are having a conversation with Territorians. This is what you should do, not just hit them with a 30% power and water price rise directly after being elected, when you said you would cut the cost of living.

What an approach! We are learning our lessons from the mistakes the CLP made last term. We will talk withTerritorians about the tax mix in the NT and how we can ensure it drives economic investment, improve our returns, make sure we get local jobs and ensure Territorians do not miss out on a return from, the resources in the NT. Sometimes that happens. I do not think it is good enough that for a couple of years a mine operates and there is no return to Territorians.

At the same time, how can we reward a mine that has been long term and created jobs in the NT, especially when they are for locals. There is a connection and a return. We can use our tax system to leverage investment and a return to Territorians.

Madam Speaker, we are very comfortable having this conversation with Territorians before our second budget.
Palmerston Regional Hospital – Update

Mr SIEVERS to MINISTER for HEALTH

The construction of the great new Palmerston Regional Hospital is progressing very well and is on track under a Labor government to open in mid-2018. Post-construction, can you please update the House about how many jobs will be created for Territorians at the new Palmerston hospital?

Members interjecting.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I sense the excitement in the House when we talk about the Palmerston hospital. I pick up on the interjections from those opposite—a great CLP idea that you failed to deliver! We can all talk about one of the most famous media conferences in the Northern Territory when the media were taken out and shown …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, please pause. I know everyone gets very excited about the Litchfield regional hospital, but I would like to hear the minister’s reply.

Ms FYLES: Yes, Madam Speaker. There is much to talk about regarding the Palmerston Regional Hospital, from a government that not just talks about it, but delivers.

For people of Palmerston and the rural area, it is exciting that after the chaotic, dysfunctional CLP government that dug holes, filled them in, used special concrete and did everything but deliver a hospital, there is a hospital taking shape.

Territorians deserve to have quality health services with care and jobs provided as close to home as possible. Construction of the Palmerston Regional Hospital is on track and budget for completion in March 2018 and then the commissioning phase will begin. Hopefully, the hospital will open in July 2018 so that residents of Palmerston and the rural area can access health services closer to home in a state-of-the-art facility. This hospital, which is a campus of the Royal Darwin Hospital, will not only provide services to residents of the Palmerston area, it will also help ease pressure at Royal Darwin Hospital.

We have now commenced the recruitment strategy for engagement of up to 300 new staff. You read my media release, Madam Speaker, and contacted me. People can find information about jobs at the hospital on the NTG website. I have asked them to make sure those links are easy for people to find. Talking to family and friends, I know some people would like the opportunity to work a little closer to home and in their community.

Last week, the first advertisements were published to recruit 20 emergency department nurses. These nurses will received extensive training at the emergency department of Royal Darwin Hospital before starting at the new hospital. I was pleased to meet representatives of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation and to talk to them about our plans for recruiting and making sure we have a high-quality staffing team to deliver services to Territorians.

The Palmerston hospital will employ a range of workers, from health practitioners such as doctors, nurses, Aboriginal and Allied Health professionals, right through to essential support staff such as kitchen staff, patient care assistants and cleaners.

My colleagues, the Members for Brennan and Drysdale, are extremely excited about this hospital. I had the opportunity to be on-site with them and they have been advocating to me, as the Minister for Health, about how important this facility is.

There will be a further 60 positions that will be advertised before the end of the year, including clinical coders, switchboard and administrative staff and further nursing positions.

I look forward to the opportunity to update the House on this exciting project, which the Territory Labor government can deliver.
Aboriginal Affairs Subcommittee

Mr GUYULA to CHIEF MINISTER

As the Aboriginal Affairs subcommittee of Cabinet is supposed to include all Aboriginal members of the Legislative Assembly, why have I been excluded from this subcommittee? Furthermore, when I have written to inquire why I have not been to subcommittee meetings, why has my letter been responded to?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it is a subcommittee of Cabinet. It is a government committee, so the Aboriginal members of the government are on it. You have not been excluded, you are simply not a member of the government. We would be happy to talk with you about that, but I am sure you prefer your Independent status.

We are happy to discuss you appearing and talking with us at some stage. It may be appropriate to have a meeting at some stage next year with you and—I will not invite you to join the party, Gary, but as a remote member. It is a government subcommittee.

I am happy to follow up on the correspondence, but it is not an exclusion. It is just a government committee.

Northern Gas Pipeline

Mr COLLINS to MINISTER for PRIMARY INDUSTRY and RESOURCES

To borrow some words from a former Prime Minister, it is my melancholy duty to inform the Assembly officially that in consequence of a reshuffle of assistant ministries, I am no longer the Member for Johnston’s sidekick. As much as that news pains me, my question remains—I am not complaining about my new minister, I am just talking about my old one.

Can you update the Assembly on the status of the Northern Gas Pipeline and how this project is delivering jobs in the Barkly?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, that is probably the best-delivered question there is. It is my pleasure to talk about what this government is doing with the Northern Gas Pipeline. I thank the Member for Fong Lim, my former assistant minister, for all the work he has done.

It has been a big team effort to support this project. The amazing work of Jemena in Tennant Creek—it is our commitment to make Tennant Creek the mining services hub of the Northern Territory.

My learned colleague, the Member for Barkly, has been pivotal in the information being received and his links to the community.

The $800m project is kicking goals in Tennant Creek. It is creating jobs in remote areas. I am very proud of this, and I congratulate Jemena on the delivery of the pipeline and the work it has done so far. It has given more than $11m in contracts to local people, which changes their lives and gives opportunities for the industry to grow and for local people to have jobs in civil contracting trades, entertainment, meals and catering, to name a few.

As you all know, I love stats, so I will roll a couple out.

A total of 105 contracts have been awarded to NT companies; 23 Indigenous companies have been awarded contracts; 285 jobs have been created in the Territory; 2016 of those jobs on this project have gone to Aboriginal people. We have 622 kilometres of pipe; 457 kilometres in the Northern Territory; 195 kilometres in Queensland.

The Queensland leg of the Northern Gas Pipeline is completed. Jemena has completed 262 kilometres of the 457 kilometres, with a remaining 195 kilometres to be completed in February or March next year.

This is amazing work by Jemena. It is ahead of schedule by more than 30 kilometres. Last month I attended the Barkly Regional Resources Economic Development Conference with the Member for Barkly and heard
of the great work Jemena is doing. I also attended a breakfast with Jemena and the local contractors it had engaged.

That is a first for me. You always cop a bit of a hiding, a couple of black eyes when you normally do that, listen to contractors from the companies, but it was very positive. Tennant Creek is buzzing. It is a hum of excitement and there is more to come from this government in regards to Tennant Creek and the mining services hub that we want to create there.

Land Tax

Mrs Finocchiaro to Chief Minister

At a property council function in 2016, you categorically ruled out a land tax, yet just over one year later, your government is proposing a big new land tax.

Is this a case of another broken promise? Will you now, once and for all, rule out a land tax under this Labor government?

Answer

Madam Speaker, I went the Property Council last week and spoke to them directly, knowing the previous conversations I had with the Property Council. I spoke for 15 minutes, took questions for at least 45 minutes, so I spent at least a full hour on stage, talking with the Property Council about the various issues, especially on our revenue paper.

What I made clear to them was that we want to have a conversation with all stakeholder, including the Property Council about what it is we can do, how do we quote the best tax mix in the Territory and what are the right ways around.

We had some advice from the Property Council when we were there. One of them said that if we consider a land tax, it has to be broad based. Another asked if we could look at the difference between improved versus unimproved, so we had a conversation in the room about the various forms of taxation you can have in the NT. We talked about stamp duty, if we cut or lowered stamp duty, what would we replace it with, how we would handle that. What would we do with payroll tax, ad valorem—a lot came up that we wanted to talk about.

It was very clear and was a constructive conversation. We said that we were giving an opportunity that business has not had in the Territory for decades, which is to put forward a constructive idea about what they think is the right tax mix for the NT. What is it? What is the shape that will best drive economic investment in the NT?

We are giving them that opportunity to contribute to the second budget, our next budget, about the tax mix in the NT.

I want to thank the Property Council for having me in, allowing me to speak and taking those questions off the floor. I spoke with them directly and up front about what we are doing with the revenue paper and the kind of conversation we want to have with Territorians about the shape of the budget and the tax system, recognising that these are levers we can pull and the way the tax system is shaped can drive and direct investment.

As we have seen concessions to first home buyers scrapped by the CLP, so a change made without consultation that I think was deeply unpopular, brought back this term. We have seen more than double first home buyers in the NT.

How you adjust your tax system drives and direct returns. I think that was a positive return for the Territory, because it got more first home owners buying their little piece of the Territory.

That is what we are doing. We are being up front and saying we are going to have another budget, that is a fact. We are going to consider, as part of that budget, how we spend and earn and we want you to be part of that conversation about what we do.

For the first time in decades, we are having businesses and Territorians at the table to talk about the revenue mix in the Territory.
Mrs FINOCCHIARO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! 110 Relevance: Will the Chief Minister rule out a land tax in the Northern Territory?

Mr GUNNER: I have given the Deputy Leader of the Opposition the exact answer that I gave the Property Council which is that we have put out a paper that discusses everything. We have opened up all the opportunities to have a conversation about what the best tax system is for the NT, to make sure it can pay for our schools, hospitals and public roads, but at the same time, drive and direct investment in the Territory.

Business has a seat at the table that they have been denied for decades.

Urban Public Housing

Ms AH KIT to MINISTER for HOUSING and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Can you please update the House on how this government is investing in repairs and upgrades to urban public housing and how this is generating local jobs across the Northern Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Karama for her question, who takes great interest in urban public housing.

I am very proud to be able to talk about one parallel of the Labor government’s stimulus package across the Northern Territory and that is an investment into repairs and upgrades of urban public housing. Not only in terms of delivering jobs and supporting that middle level trade sector across the Northern Territory’s regions, but also supporting some of the most vulnerable Territorians.

From September 2016 to October 30 this year, I am informed that 254 small businesses registered for our regional centres, $7.4m in repairs and maintenance orders have been placed and $6.1m worth of orders have already been spent. That is a wonderful achievement and I acknowledge the Department of Housing and Community Development in terms of the work that has been conducted to get those important funds flowing through public urban housing, through the contractors, through the construction sector and delivering those important outcomes.

It is about stimulating local economy and that means directly stimulating local jobs and it is good to see that the trade sector of the Northern Territory has acknowledged that important work.

When we talk about the urban public housing stimulus program we are very much targeting good investment and real investment that supports local and small businesses. We are talking about upgrades to roofs, kitchens, bathrooms, fencing and disability modifications and security upgrades.

It is important to factor in that it is not only about making the dwelling a good comfortable home it is also about reducing the wait lists and that is an enormous challenge for any government in the Northern Territory and it is good to see that a stimulus program will start to repair and improve houses faster and have an impact on those wait lists.

A big shout out to Territory industry. If you have not already registered it is important that you are aware so please call info line on 8999°7969 and visit the Department of Housing and Community Development website To be eligible you must be a registered business in the Northern Territory, have a workforce of 19 employees or less, have an annual turnover of between $10°000 and $5m and not be a current NT Government employee.

The Northern Territory government is listening, we are consulting, we are hitting those targets and I am standing here very proud to be the Minister for Housing and representing the Labor government.

Members: Hear, hear!

Ms NELSON to CHIEF MINISTER

In late October this year the retail price of unleaded petrol in Darwin was averaging 129.9 cents per litre. The gate price was around 121.3 cents per litre, the retail margin was nearly 8.7 cents a litre. Today the average
price in Darwin appears to be 144.9 cents per litre and the gate price 128.6 cents per litre. A margin of 16.5 cents per litre—nearly double that a month ago.

Bearing in mind, since your petrol app came in the prices have gone up. Chief Minister, what positive steps are you doing to force the fuel companies to bring margins down to a reasonable level so that the cost of living for Territorians who rely heavily on their cars and trucks for transport and their businesses does not keep going up and up?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, since concerns were raised about the increase in price rises we noticed through the MyFuel app which provides the handy information. We have written to the ACCC. We brought in MyFuel that commenced a couple of weeks ago and the Director General of Consumer Affairs has written to all the petrol companies with a please explain—so three steps have been taken.

The Treasurer spoke yesterday with the ACCC so I might get the Treasurer to answer in a minute about her conversation with the ACCC. We actually had a surprising turn yesterday where Sydney and Melbourne were more expensive than Darwin. There is some funny things going on with petrol prices in the country but I will get the Treasurer to talk about her conversation with the ACCC that occurred yesterday.

**CHIEF MINISTER referred to TREASURER**

Madam Speaker, we need to keep the pressure on fuel companies around fuel prices and that is the whole purpose of MyFuel NT. Like you, I was alarmed when I saw prices rise quite steep at the start of November just a few days before MyFuel NT came into place.

I took a range of actions because I was not happy to see those prices jump at that level so I contacted the ACCC. I have spoken to the Chairman, Rod Simms, on a few occasions now. I also have formal correspondence back from the chairman of the ACCC about looking into fuel market. I have spoken to fuel companies and I was on the phone to them asking them to explain to me why their prices have jumped to the level that they have. When you look at the fuel markets right across Australia you will also see that the Northern Territory is not alone when it comes to the current fuel prices.

The latest prices I have about average prices as of today, if you look at Darwin, it is about $1.40 per litre, Sydney $1.47; Melbourne $1.48; Brisbane $1.48; Adelaide are doing all right they are at $1.23; Perth $1.46 and Hobart $1.45.

This is something that is happening across the nation, but I did say to those fuel companies that we need to keep the pressure on fuel prices here in the Northern Territory. One thing I would like to say, while I am on my feet, about what we have seen here through MyFuel NT is that there is one local company here in Darwin that I would like to commend on the record for being a Territory company that is consistently delivering lower fuel prices, that is Fuel Express. Fuel up in Winnellie—it is doing the right thing by Territorians and have kept that price at the lowest level since MyFuel NT was introduced. It is doing a great job, trying to support Territorians by driving down fuel prices.

We will keep the pressure on fuel companies and do everything we can to keep a lid on fuel prices, and never let them go back to the dark old days when Territorians were being ripped off at the bowser.

We will keep that pressure on because it is an important cost-of-living element to Territorians.

**Art and Cultural Institutions – Supporting Growth**

**Mr McConnell to Minister for Tourism and Culture**

Can you please tell the House about any progress towards creating new or enhancing existing art and cultural institutions to support jobs and economic growth across the Territory?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Stuart for this question; he is an avid supporter of the arts and culture across the Territory. I am always pleased to provide updates on our investment into arts and cultural institutions across the Northern Territory—not only in Darwin and Alice Springs, but in our remote areas across the breadth and width of this beautiful place we call home.
I am pleased to provide this update because it is about connected, healthy, vibrant communities. That is important to note. It is also about providing a boost to the economy and investing in arts and culture and in our tourism industry.

Eighty-seven per cent of international visitors come to Australia looking for a genuine arts, culture and heritage experience. We want to make sure we provide that in the Northern Territory.

The opposition would scrap these job-creating investments in arts, culture and tourism, but we continue to invest. In the Top End, consultation just finished on the museums master plan for Darwin and Palmerston. The community have shared their ideas and aspirations for our future arts and cultural facilities, including the new museum of the Northern Territory at Myilly Point and the fine arts gallery in State Square.

That museum master plan will be delivered to government by the end of the year. I look forward to releasing it and making sure we share that vision for our cultural institutions across Darwin and Palmerston. This is about making sure we share our stories, connected communities and sharing our stories with visitors. It complements consultations that have been under way on the design concept for the museum of the Northern Territory.

We are pleased with the response from the community. There have been a number of pop-ups around Darwin, Palmerston and the whole Northern Territory to make sure that museum tells our story and shares our identity.

Government will receive the report in the new year which will inform detailed design work curation and other key features of an incredible asset for our community and the people who visit.

In Alice Springs consultation are under way on a potential location for the national Indigenous art gallery through Have Your Say. This is generating lots of conversation in Central Australia. I am encouraged by the number of people who are having their say and being part of that community discussion in a positive way.

The expert steering committee has assessed the suitability of a number of sites based on cultural considerations, size, expansion, sense of place and connection to landscape, and we look forward to continuing that process with the community.

I have previously mentioned that Nganampa Development Corporation is leading consultation on the national Indigenous cultural centre. It held a two-day workshop and has gone forward with its plan.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Minister, your time has expired.

**Dan Murphy's Liquor Licence**

**Mr HIGGINS to CHIEF MINISTER**

Territorians want certainty and action. Dan Murphy’s applied for a licence nearly a year ago under one set of rules. Midway through, your government decided to change those rules. You are now saying you cannot tick off $40m of private investment overnight. How was it, then, that you were able to cross off Dan Murphy’s and a $40m overnight?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, as the opposition is aware, we will be on urgency this sittings week. I believe the Attorney-General has already given notice that we will be scrapping the 400 square metre limit this sittings period in November.

We have commissioned, as the Leader of the Opposition is aware, an expert panel led by former Chief Justice Trevor Riley, to provide us with advice about how we can tackle alcohol in the Northern Territory and make sure we look after the health and safety of Territorians. It was an incredibly comprehensive review, with 220 recommendations, including the reestablishment of an independent Liquor Commission, which was scrapped last term by the CLP.

That will be coming in, in February. With opposition support, we believe we can pass that on urgency also. We will make sure opposition and Independents stay fully briefed between now and February. This is the process we are undertaking on urgency in November, and with support from the cross-benches on urgency in February.
The Attorney-General has met with Dan Murphy’s and we have been working with them through the process. Dan Murphy’s is not unused to the fact that you have to work through a process when it comes to transferring or getting a liquor licence. This is quite common for them. We will be responding urgently in November on the 400 square metres and in February on the independent Liquor Commission, which was the recommendation from former Chief Justice, Trevor Riley, about how we approach these decisions. It is a decision independent of us. We do not decided who sets up liquor stores in the Territory. It is not a political decision by us, it will be made by the independent Liquor Commission we can establish in February.

That is the process we are going through. Dan Murphy’s is aware of it. We are giving them certainty about what we are doing. The Attorney-General has already given notice for that 400 square metre amendment to the bill in this sittings in November. We will keep working with the opposition and the cross-benches and in February we are very happy to establish that independent Liquor Commission to make sure we can then handle it.

That is the process we are pursuing. We have been meeting with Dan Murphy’s, as well all others in this space. There are 219 recommendations in the Trevor Riley report we are working through with industry, NGOs and other stakeholders to make sure we implement those. We want to tackle alcohol harm in the NT, which is at the heart of this. How do we ensure that the health and safety of Territorians are looked after?

It is the first time ever we have had a comprehensive review of everything. We have taken on the big picture of how we can ensure we have a healthier, safer Territory. The independent Liquor Commission is a big part of that. We are looking at implementing that in February.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his support through this process.

PFAS Contamination – Support for Katherine Residents

Ms NELSON to MINISTER for HEALTH

Last week we heard that the federal Minister for Health expanded provision of blood tests and mental health support to include more residents of Williamtown who are also dealing with the PFAS contamination. Has there been any movement from the Commonwealth government – which includes the Opposition Leader’s colleague, Senator Scullion – to support the residents of Katherine by providing access to blood tests and social and emotional welfare support?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Katherine - a passionate representative for the people of Katherine - for her question. She has been working, lobbying and advocating tirelessly regarding this legacy issue of PFAS for the people of her electorate in Katherine.

I was there recently and spent time with her and her community. I can understand the concern about this legacy issue and the need for all levels of government to work together. The Member for Katherine has been collecting hundreds of signatures from concerned residents seeking that the federal government provides the same health and welfare support to the residents of Katherine as those on the east coast of Australia. It is a little community a long way from the east coast, Sydney, Canberra or Melbourne, but the residents of Katherine deserve the same access as people in those more populated areas.

The petition will be forwarded to our federal representatives for tabling in the coming House of Representatives’ sittings. The federal Member for Lingiari, Warren Snowdon, federal Senator Malarndirri McCarthy and Luke Gosling have been very passionate about this issue and advocating in the federal parliament on behalf of Northern Territory residents.

Last time I called on Senator Scullion to go to Katherine, he got on the plane the next day and went there. I again call on the CLP Senator to listen to the residents of Katherine and advocate with his Cabinet colleagues, the Ministers for Health and Defence, and make these health and welfare supports available to the residents of Katherine.

We have heard, with interest, in the last few days that the federal government will extend blood testing and mental health services and other health support to more residents surrounding RAAF Base Williamtown in New South Wales.
Why can we not have the same thing for the residents of Katherine? There have been no advances. I have personally spoken to the federal senator and Minister for Health, Greg Hunt and explained to them the need and anxiety in the community of Katherine that people want these blood tests and the associated supports so they can manage their health going forward.

The Department of Defence is continuing with detailed site environmental investigations which also includes a human health risk assessment and ecological risk assessment. I am advised that the interim human health assessment is expected to be released before the end of 2017. With just weeks left, I call on the federal government to include the residents of Katherine so they can have the information to manage their health. The assessment that will be released will evaluate conditions and assess various PFAS exposure pathways including water and food consumption.

We are certainly working with the national health authorities around the evidence of exposure but we really need the federal representatives to come on board and provide that testing and the surrounding supports for people in terms of the PFAS issue.

Whilst I am on my feet, I ask that further questions be placed on the Written Question Paper.

CLARIFICATION OF ANSWER
National Transport Hall of Fame

Mr GUNNER (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I have some more information in response to an earlier question. I can provide advice around compliance with the Associations Act for the National Road Transport Hall of Fame have not met their financial obligations under the Associations Act over a period of 2011–2016 and are working with Licensing NT to address noncompliance. Proper governance and management is a requirement under the Associations Act.

I can confirm the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation have not threatened to shut down the hall of fame at all; it is in fact the opposite. The small business champions have visited the hall of fame to offer assistance in relation to governance and compliance issues. Their offer has not been taken up yet but their most recent visit was in June of this year. I will follow up again.

At the moment I can confirm we are not threatening to shut them down, in fact we have been threatening to help them in relation to governance and compliance and there has been noncompliance for five years from the National Road Transport Hall of Fame.