Dear Residents,

People will probably be aware of the political turmoil within the CLP Government over the past few months. As a result, the Chief Minister decided he no longer wanted me to serve as Minister for Cabinet. This move was nothing to do with my competence or performance. It was a political move, and politics is neither fair nor rational!

But putting political dramas aside, I want to reassure all the people of Araluen that I am not going anywhere. I remain completely dedicated to the people of Alice Springs and the Electorate of Araluen. The positive outcome of this whole business is that now I get to spend more time in Alice Springs and am free to truly represent the interests of my constituents. As a Member you only ever have time to scratch the surface.

I would like to sincerely thank the overwhelming number of people that have offered their kind words of support. Politics is a nasty business but knowing I continue to have strong support is very reassuring.

I have owned and operated a business in Alice Springs with my husband for 20 years. I have been a Local Worker and health professional for 20 years. I have been a politician for 9 years, including 4 years as an Alderman and Deputy Mayor on the Alice Springs Town Council, and almost 5 years as the Member for Araluen. I am passionate about Alice Springs. My commitment to you is that I will continue to work hard to ensure our town remains a great place to live, work and thrive.

Since coming to Government less than 3 years ago, I have had the great honour of being the Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health, Disability Services, Education and Children and Families, plus 8 other portfolios. I am forever grateful but this has clearly been a hectic period of constant changes. Hopefully from now until the next NT General Election in August 2016, we can seriously focus on what Territorians want.

Many people have asked me if I intend to run as an Independent at the next election. This is not on my agenda. I have been a member of the Country Liberal Party for 7 years. I am not intending to jump ship but I value your thoughts on my role and my work.

You can call my Electorate Officer and pass on your thoughts. If you do not want to identify yourself that is fine. All we ask is that you tell us which street you live in.

The Araluen electorate as it currently stands

The division of Araluen was created following the 1983 redistribution. It was named after Araluen, the residence of the late EJ Connellan. The homestead still stands today at the rear of the Araluen Arts Centre.

Suburban localities include Alice Springs (south of Stott Terrace), parts of Araluen, Gillen and The Gap.

Rural areas include, Arumbeera, Connellan, Flynn (Desert Park area), Iliparpa, Temple Bar Station and White Gums.

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Dear Residents,

One of the highlights for me over the past couple of months has been attending the beautiful International Women's Day Dinner on Saturday, 7 March. It was a lovely evening at the Star of Alice with great company. Congratulations to the National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame for organising this very special event.

The guest speaker was Dame Quentin Bryce. What struck me about Dame Quentin was her love and commitment to her community. She talked about the importance of "grassroots" community work and her lifetime commitment to improving her own community.

Privately, she spoke to me briefly about the importance of honesty and integrity in politics. She wished me luck in my political pursuits. I truly valued her sincerity and her obvious understanding of what life is politics is really like for women.

As a young woman I studied Social Work at Queensland University. Compared to most other university courses studied by my peers, social work was unscientific and rather "airy fairy". It was like a 4-year voyage of personal discovery. We were forced to grapple with universal values and existential issues faced by people at the extremes of life - tragedy, milestones, and stages in development. Straight out of school into such heavy naval gazing was overwhelming for my young mind - but my social work education weirdly did prepare me well for politics. Being clear on what motivates you, informs you and guides you in life is critical when you take on a leadership role. Interestingly, many of our current national leaders are practicing Christians. But religion need not be the only credible guide for leaders. None of us are perfect, we all make mistakes and occasionally say and do things.

Mission Australia offers a Post Release Support Service, which assists people who have been released from prison to access support services and secure accommodation, training and employment. Their Tenancy Sustainability Program provides support for people leaving Alice Springs who are at risk of losing their tenancy in public housing.

The 2015 Electoral Review is underway with the first stage of submissions closed. The challenge for Central Australia is that our population has slightly decreased, whereas the population in the Top End, particularly in Palmerston, has significantly increased. This ultimately means that one electorate in Central Australia will be lost.

There are five Central Australia electorates: Araluen, Bravilin, Gaterore, Namatjira and Stuart. One of these seats will be sacrificed to create a new electorate in the Palmerston area.

The question is which electorate will go, and how will the boundaries of the remaining electorates change. No electorate in Central Australia will remain unchanged. We will all be affected.

Political parties, through their submissions, have lobbied the Electoral Commission to make changes that maximise their potential to win. The Commission has an extremely complex job in deciding what is fair and correct, taking into account population projections, whilst not destroying existing communities of interest.

My hunch is that one of the town seats in Alice Springs will go - hopefully not Araluen! But the boundaries of the two remaining town electorates will be very different.

Visiting with Centralian Middle School Girls Academy and Girls at the Centre and catching up with the team at Mission Australia

On Wednesday, 11 March I had the pleasure of attending an International Women’s Day celebration with the Girls Academy and Girls at the Centre groups at Centralian Middle School. All Year 9 girls were present and a selected group of female mentors were invited to share their stories with the students.
NT BUDGET WISH LIST

The NT Government will announce its 2015/2016 Budget on Wednesday, 29 April 2015. This is when we find out how the Government will spend tax payers money over the next 4 years or the “forward estimates.”

With the sale of TIO last year, the Government has a windfall of $420m to allocate. Most of this will be spent on much needed flood mitigation infrastructure in Katherine and Darwin, but there will be significant funds leftover to towards other big, expensive projects. The weeks and months leading up to the formulation of the Budget is the best time to lobby Government for what you want. As a Back Bencher this is precisely what I have been doing, lobbying to get the best deal for Araluen and Alice.

Three items high on my Wish List for this Budget and which I have been lobbying for are:

1. New netball facilities needed for Alice Springs

On Tuesday, 24 March I gave a speech in Parliament calling on Government to upgrade the tired and old netball facilities at Eastside, and to attract the hard and dedicated work of many netball officials, the concept of a new purpose built facility has gained little traction with Government.

Netball is the most popular sport in Alice Springs. It has the highest number of people participating of all Alice Springs sports.

Despite the fact that every other girl and woman in Alice Springs is involved, netball remains just about every male-dominated sport in town. Due to a serious lack of parking, most netballers have to either park along the busy Undoolya Road, in the dust bowl across the road, or in the IGA Supermarket car park around the corner. It is surprising no one has been hurt with such a level of pedestrian and motor vehicle traffic congestion. This is a serious situation that needs attention.

Like the thousands of other netball mums, dads, grandmas and grandads that come along to netball each year, I think we deserve better netball facilities and adequate and safe parking.

2. Youth services in Alice Springs

The debate about the need for a youth curfew has recently been reignited.

In the summer of 2010/2011 the problem of youths roaming the streets of Alice Springs at night reached crisis point. The town was under siege, with violence and anti-social behaviour escalating to levels never seen before.

Since the CLP has been in Government, we have reduced funding to night time youth services, leaving the town exposed again to serious social unrest.

With the closure of the Tangentyere Night Time Youth Program, Congress Night Time Youth Service, the Youth Hub and YSOS (Youth Street Outreach Service), there are scant youth services left on the ground. Savings had to be made, but we have now cut over $2.5m worth of annual funding to Alice Springs youth services.

Listening to a debate on ABC radio recently on the need for a night time youth curfew was like Ground Hog Day. This debate was running hot during 2011 and 2012 as the town grappled to address the problem of youth on the streets at night. The solution was found to be, properly resourced and well integrated night time youth services. A youth curfew was not needed.

However, the debate has been rekindled, and the debate needs to be heard again.

3. Alice Springs public housing crisis

There are approximately 1100 public houses in Alice Springs. At present there are approximately 100 empty public houses in Alice Springs. This is shocking and unacceptable and it has serious implications for the whole community.

With 100 empty houses it is simple to work out that this means that anywhere between 400-600 people are going without housing. It also means that throughout every part of Alice Springs people are living next door to, across, or up the road from an empty public house or unit that is in disrepair, is deteriorating and that is possibly being trashed by vandals.

Whichever way you look at it, the whole community suffers by such a large number of public houses remaining empty.

And why are they empty? The challenges faced by the Department of Housing is enormous. It performs one of the most difficult roles of Government. There is no quick fix or easy solution to the problems of public housing.

But adequate funding for repairs and maintenance and tenure supervision and support is a starting point. It is a bottomless pit but an essential obligation of both the NT and Federal Governments. The ramifications of inadequate public housing funding effects the quality of life of all residents.

We need to ensure that the repairs and maintenance budget for public housing in Alice Springs is sufficient to allow the turnover of public housing tenancies.

Neighbourhood champion: Peter Lewis

In 1974, Peter and his young family, wife Gwen, and 3 year old daughter, Anne Louise set out to travel around Australia. However, like so many stories we hear, once they arrived in Alice they decided to stay. They promptly travelled back to Victoria, sold up, packed up and moved to Alice Springs to make it their home.

Initially, Peter worked as a mechanic at B & F Auto Repairs and after a few years spent time working out bush driving plant. It was after this that Peter stumbled into working for Power and Water... and 31 years later, Peter holds a DLRA (Dry Lake Racing Association) land speed record. This record was achieved in 2014 at Lake Gardner in South Australia, driving a 30 year old modified dragster.

Peter is well-known around Gillen and has advocated for many years now for the Finlayson Park. He has headed up meetings and discussions regarding the park with nearby residents and the Alice Springs Town Council. Recently, Peter in conjunction with Mayor, Damien Ryan, and the Alice Springs Town Council, organised a Neighbourhood Day tree planting and barbecue at the park. Around 70 residents from the area turned up to plant 30 trees, get to know each other, and enjoy the barbecue sponsored by the Council. Neighbourhood days encourage neighbours to meet, greet and form connected communities.

Peter is an active community member and has made a significant difference to the neighbourhood in which he lives. Peter says, he and his wife Gwen will remain in Alice Springs throughout their retirement. He says, “I intend to stay in Alice until it’s curtains.”

“Live your dream” Peter Lewis, Gillen

Dr Arun Mahajani visits Alice Springs

I recently met up with Dr Arun Mahajani, when he was travelling through Alice Springs with his Uricle who was visiting from India.

Dr Mahajani is a retired general surgeon who arrived in Darwin in 1972 from London and fondly reminisced about his regular visits to Alice Springs over a 24 year period.

Dr Mahajani visited Alice Springs Hospital almost every year from 1972 to 1991 to relieve the local surgeon during holiday periods. He greatly enjoyed his visits to Alice Springs, commenting that it was a great pleasure to work in the friendly atmosphere of Alice Springs Hospital. Dr Mahajani enjoyed undertaking clinics, taking rounds and operating.

Mahajani is now happily retired in Darwin with his wife, Dr Sadhana Mahajani.

Dr Arun Mahajani

L-R: PH Parangiyer, Robyn Lambley MLA, Dr Arun Mahajani.

Advancing Araluen