

Madam Speaker Aagaard took the Chair at 10 am.

**RESPONSE TO PETITION
Petition No 54**

The CLERK: Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 100A, I inform honourable members that a response to petition No 54 has been received and circulated to honourable members. The text of the response will be placed on the Legislative Assembly website. A copy of the response will be provided to the member who tabled the petition for distribution to the petitioners.

*Petition No 54
300/301 Bus Route from Alice Springs
Hospital
Date presented: 10 August 2011
Presented by: Mrs Lambley
Referred to: Minister for Transport
Date response due: 22 November 2011
Date response received: 11 November
2011*

Response:

The petition expresses the concerns for public bus patrons using route 300/301 from the Alice Springs Hospital to the southern areas of Alice Springs, including the Old Timers Village.

I am pleased to advise that the Northern Territory government has, in consultation with the service provider and local community representatives, reviewed route 300/301 and made changes which allow the bus to service the hospital on both the inbound and outbound journeys.

These changes will mean that passengers will no longer need to wait at the interchange for a connecting service when travelling to and from the hospital and the southern area of Alice Springs, including the Old Timers Village. This change was effective as of 24 September 2011.

The Department of Lands and Planning has also implemented an additional route 300/301 service at 11.45 am for commuters travelling during the midday period. This change was effective as of 31 October 2011.

VISITORS

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Year 7 Rosebery Middle School students,

accompanied by Ms Irene Franklin, Mr Luke Ehrlich, and Ms Angie.

On behalf of honourable members, I extend to you a very warm welcome.

**GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIVE
ARRANGEMENTS**

Mr HENDERSON (Chief Minister)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I advise honourable members that, on 28 October 2011, His Honour the Administrator made the following appointment of ministers of the Northern Territory:

- Daniel Robert Knight - Minister for Justice and Attorney-General, Minister for Essential Services, Minister for Senior Territorians, and Minister for Young Territorians;
- Delia Phoebe Lawrie - Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Employment, Minister for Trade, Minister for Asian Relations, Minister for Racing, Gaming and Licensing, Minister for Alcohol Policy, and Minister for Defence Support.

Madam Speaker, I table the *Northern Territory Government Gazette No S61* dated 28 October 2011 relating to these appointments.

MOTION

President Barack Obama – Vote of Thanks

Mr HENDERSON (Chief Minister)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move - That the Northern Territory Assembly:

1. congratulates the President of the United States, Mr Barack Obama for choosing to come to the Northern Territory during his trip to Australia;
2. congratulates President Obama for becoming the first President of the United States to formally visit Darwin;
3. congratulates and expresses its gratitude to all involved in organising and facilitating the President's visit;
4. welcomes the announcement from the Prime Minister and the President regarding the boost to joint Australian/United States military activities in the Northern Territory; and
5. sends a formal copy of this motion and the *Hansard* debate to the Prime Minister, the Honourable Julia Gillard,

and the President of the United States,
Mr Barack Obama.

Madam Speaker, it was an extraordinary day for the citizens of Darwin and the people of the Northern Territory when, last Thursday, we had the great honour and privilege of a visit to Darwin by the President of the United States, Mr Barack Obama. It was an immense occasion and, as the Chief Minister, may I thank the Prime Minister and the President for choosing to come to Darwin.

As I said, when the President's visit to Australia was announced, that he was visiting Canberra and Darwin - the President of the United States has to visit Canberra - but he chose to visit Darwin, and it was an extraordinary day for our entire city.

I thank all Territorians for their wholehearted support during the President's visit. Apart from one or two very minor exceptions, we were at one in welcoming the President of the United States to our great city; the capital of northern Australia. Driving in the motorcade from the RAAF Base to the Esplanade for the wreath laying at the USS *Peary*, I was astounded at the thousands of Territorians and citizens of this city who turned out on a route that was not publicised. You did not have to be a rocket scientist to work out how to get from RAAF Base Darwin to the Esplanade; there are only a couple of routes. It was absolutely extraordinary to see the very genuine warmth of the welcome from the people of our wonderful city to the President of the United States.

I would also like to thank our officials who worked hard for a long period to make the event the success it was. The city looked fantastic. The arrangements worked very well. To those who suffered any slight inconvenience, we apologise, but those inconveniences were slight. To everyone - and there were hundreds of people, public servants, our police force, and people from Robertson Barracks - who worked so hard for many weeks preceding this visit, my very genuine and personal thanks to everyone who worked to a level previously unexperienced in Darwin. Our Police Commissioner and his senior team were responsible for the security operation, and I know they threw themselves headlong into that. Many people were working 18-hour days leading up to the visit. To those people, you know who you are, my eternal thanks.

I received advice from the United States Consul General for Melbourne who has responsibility for the Northern Territory, Frank Urbancic. I personally thank Frank for his great professionalism in working with all our people across government, our police, and myself in planning for this particular visit. I thank Frank and

his team for the great interoperability and cooperation we had with his team, as the US Consul General responsible for the visit, with the Ambassador for the United States to Australia and his team, and the White House.

Madam Speaker, it was an extraordinary day. Frank Urbancic did say, when I had a quick debrief with him after the wheels of Air Force One left Darwin, that the effort from our people in Darwin was world-class. That is a great big rap to everyone who was involved in that effort. He said wherever the President goes, the amount of security and pre-planning is extraordinary. In most parts of the world, meeting with officials in host countries, there are numerous reasons why things are too hard, too difficult; no, we are not able to accommodate this or that. Mr Urbancic said everything put forward from the US side was met with: 'Okay, how are we going to be able to achieve this?' There is no higher praise. It is on the *Parliamentary Record*. To everyone who was involved across the public service, our police, 1 Brigade, and other people in our Defence Forces, right from the top, it was a world-class effort.

It was a long time planning this visit. Obviously, the significance at the national level was President Obama's visit to Australia to speak to a joint sitting of the federal parliament to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the ANZUS Alliance, a significant alliance for Australia, the United States, and New Zealand. Also, the President choosing to commemorate the sacrifice of the 91 US sailors who lost their lives when the USS *Peary* sank on that fateful day of 19 February 1942. The significance of the event was about acknowledging the strength and success of the alliance, how to build on that going forward as a nation with the United States, and also to commemorate what happened here 70 years ago on 19 February next year.

This event was planned for some weeks prior to the President's visit. I had a number of requests that I am very pleased to say the White House agreed to, particularly the event at the USS *Peary*, where the Prime Minister and the President laid a wreath. I asked whether it would be possible for some of our senior Territorians who were here on that terrible day 70 years ago to meet the President of the United States. I was pleased when, very quickly, the White House advised the President would be honoured to meet some Territorians who were here. What a fantastic and very touching moment that was.

The President met, in order, Anthony Duke – Tony Duke. Tony's father, Melvin Duke, served on the USS *Peary* and survived the raids on 19 February 1942. Melvin came to Darwin several times for commemoration ceremonies over the

years and his ashes were scattered from the USS *Peary* Memorial on the Esplanade on 18 February 2002. Tony Duke, his son, lives in Alice Springs and, at very short notice, was able to come to Darwin to talk with the President of the United States about the extraordinary survival of his father and his story. It was a very touching moment.

I then introduced the President to Margaret Heron. Margaret and her sister were living in Darwin in the care of their uncle at the time of the raid whilst their mother worked in Alice Springs. Margaret was nine years old and was playing with her sister and hid when the planes came over and the bombs fell. They were evacuated to Alice Springs on an Army truck and their mother was surprised to see them in Alice Springs and had no idea what they had been through. It was an extraordinary story. Here was a lass whose mother was in Alice, living in Darwin, and at nine years of age - it was absolutely terrifying and, again, it was wonderful to see the President not only hearing Margaret's story, but giving her a hug.

Aunty Mary Lee is well known to many people in this House. Mary's father worked at the wharf and was killed in the first raid when the *Neptuna* blew up. Mary was also nine years old and, together with her mother and eight siblings, was evacuated to Katherine with many other civilians after the first raids. When Katherine was bombed on 22 March 1942, they were evacuated to South Australia. Mary is a Larrakia traditional owner and a matriarch of her clan. It was fabulous to hear Mary's touching story. The President gave Mary a big hug also and Mary welcomed the President in language and gave him a name. It was fantastic to be part of and witness that.

Another well-known Territorian, Riley Wing, was a 15-year-old youth in Darwin during the first raid, waiting for a boat to take him to a school in Brisbane where he had a scholarship. Riley was evacuated, spent the war in Adelaide, and enlisted in the RAAF when he came of age - one of a number of Chinese men who enlisted and served overseas. It was Riley who, after speaking to the President for a few minutes, said: 'Mr President, you are not here for very long, you are only here for a couple of hours. You won't get much of a chance to see Darwin. You should stay longer'. The President said: 'Absolutely. I will be coming back and will be bringing Michelle and the kids with me'. That is where the *NT News* got that front page from: Riley Wing invited the President to stay a little longer.

Finally, the President met Freda Williams. Freda was in care as a child at the Garden Point Mission, one of 42 girls transferred to Darwin Convent just before the raids. When the planes

came over and dropped bombs, the nuns took the children inside to take refuge under the beds. The children were evacuated south the following day. It was very moving as Freda told her story to the President and the President gave Freda a hug. Freda spoke to him in Tiwi as well, which was very special.

This debate will go to the White House. I thank the White House for agreeing to my suggestion to meet those fantastic people. For me, that was the highlight of the visit: the very genuine way the President engaged with our Territorians who were so badly affected by that event 70 years ago.

After the commemoration at the USS *Peary* Memorial, the motorcade went back to the RAAF Base to an extraordinary scene where a couple of thousand people - troops and residents of Darwin - had been entertained; a suggestion I made in the planning for this. It was great that the White House quickly agreed to Jessica Mauboy and Gurrumul Yunupingu entertaining people while they waited for the President. I heard from people who were there about the fantastic show they put on. Both Jessica and Gurrumul's exposure in the United States has gone through the roof, so it is not going to hurt their careers too badly either. That was fantastic. Of course, we had a very well-known Larrakia elder, Billy Risk, perform the Welcome to Country and I am advised that was a very moving moment as well.

As the Prime Minister and the President came to speak to everyone at the RAAF Base in the hangar, the roof went off. The Prime Minister, for everyone who was there, gave a magnificent off-the-cuff speech about the depth and genuineness of the alliance between Australia and the United States, what happened here on 19 February 1942, and our commitment to move forward, as a nation, with the United States. Then the President made an amazing speech - again off-the-cuff - and, for everyone who was there, the hairs were standing up on the back of the neck. It really was a bit of a rock star performance. He was very genuine in getting around and shaking as many hands as he possibly could. It was an extraordinary day and a privilege for those people who had an opportunity to shake hands and say welcome to the President.

Regarding the announcement made by the Prime Minister and the President of the United States about increased US Defence activity in Darwin, I can say to Territorians and to the House through this debate, that I was engaged all the way through the decision-making process. Obviously, that had to be kept strictly confidential as the issues were worked through. However, this was a position where I was kept abreast by our Defence Minister, Stephen Smith, all the way

through. I thank Stephen for extending that confidence to me as Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. This is a decision of the federal government; it is not a decision for the Chief Minister. However, I was taken into Stephen's confidence all the way through as this was being planned.

Honourable members probably recall, a couple of years ago, the United States initiated an ongoing review of the US Force posture in the Asia-Pacific region. Earlier this year, our Defence Minister, Stephen Smith, also initiated his own Australian Defence Force posture review that has flagged, obviously, an increased focus for our Australian Defence Forces on northern Australia and Western Australia. That document specifically talks about Darwin and Perth strategically becoming more important to our Defence Forces as they look at their strategic positioning in this nation. That has coincided with the United States' thinking and acknowledgement that the Asia-Pacific region is becoming more and more important to the United States. There was, obviously, synergy in those two reviews taking place at the same time and the Prime Minister and the President determining there was going to be increased cooperation and collaboration between US Defence Force personnel and Australian Defence Force personnel in the Northern Territory.

In the coming years, there will be a deployment of US Marines to Darwin. I say very clearly in this House, as I have said on numerous occasions - and both the Prime Minister and the President have stated - this is not about establishing a US Base in Darwin; it is about increased deployment and exercises between US Marines and our Defence Force personnel. The initial deployment will consist of a small liaison element and a company of 250 US Marines that will take place next year, 2012. The exact details are still being planned and the intent in the coming years is to establish a rotational presence. This will not happen until 2015-16, 2016-17 with plans for a rotational presence of up to 2500-person Marine Air-Ground Task Force.

These Marines will exercise and train on a rotational basis with the Australian Defence Force in the Northern Territory. Those rotations will be for about six months at a time, so there will be no permanently deployed marine presence here. What we will see, and details are still being worked though, is a contingent of administrative support from the United States and locals hired to that job to support the rotations on an administrative basis, but those rotations will be for a six-month period.

There will be significant opportunities for combined training. The Marines will be

accommodated at Robertson Barracks, so a significant construction effort is required to provide for additional accommodation for them at Robertson Barracks. A significant part of the announcement was prepositioning here for the United States humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capability in Darwin in the event that a natural disaster in our region requires assistance from Australia and the United States. We will be able to respond much more quickly, and much more effectively, with that equipment prepositioned here. It also builds on the capability of Royal Darwin Hospital and the fact that Royal Darwin Hospital is now positioned to cater for disaster victims from the regions.

So, a very significant announcement, with quiet concern from some people about whether this will change the face of Darwin - I do not believe it will. We have always accommodated and welcomed US Defence personnel on rotation through Darwin whether it is ship visits, deployments for exercises at Mt Bundy, Delamere bombing range, or Bradshaw. This is going to see an increase in that. The Marines will be accommodated at Robertson Barracks and when they are not engaged in joint exercises, any R&R they enjoy in the Northern Territory and Top End will be well managed. On the occasions they are in Mitchell Street enjoying a cold beer, they will be supported by Military Police.

I do not believe it is going to change the face of Darwin. There has also been much silly nonsense spoken about us becoming an increased target. For heaven's sake, look at what happened here 70 years ago. We already have a significant presence of Australian naval capability, Robertson Barracks with 1 Brigade, and associated brigades at RAAF Base Tindal; already about 20% of Australian deployment capability is based here in the Northern Territory. This does not make us any more of a target than we possibly already were and, if people are genuinely concerned, I say: 'Think about what is already here'. This is a tiny additional fraction from the United States to what is already here and we have those joint exercises on a regular basis anyway.

It was a significant day and the amount of exposure we received globally was unbelievable. The main US media websites and much tourism information - everyone in the United States was saying: 'The President is going to Australia, that is fine, but going to Darwin - where is Darwin?' They understand Sydney, but did not really understand Darwin. This fabulous, small tropical city with a huge multicultural population on the doorsteps of the growth in the region, with a lifestyle second to none, has received huge media coverage, as well as the fact that we are one of the top 10 cities to visit in 2012.

No amount of the tourism budget could ever have bought the exposure we received from the visit by the President. I was pleased to hear the President say, in his speech, that he enjoyed the unique gift of crocodile insurance from the Territory Insurance Office. It was not my idea; it was the idea of Richard Harding and the team at TIO. I congratulate Richard - well done. You could not take that croc insurance out of Frank Urbancic's hand; he was getting it photographed with everyone and it was a real highlight of the visit.

We also made a formal gift to the President of a beautiful painting from the Tiwi Islands. The synergy between the Tiwi Islanders being the first to spot the Zero squadron heading for Darwin, the fact that one of those Zeros was shot down and the first Japanese person to be captured on Australian soil was captured by a Tiwi Islander, meant the painting from a very well-respected Tiwi Island artist was acknowledged. Hopefully, it will find pride of place in President Obama's library when he finishes his time as President.

Madam Speaker, I refer to the motion to say that this was a very significant and historical visit. Everyone will remember the day the President of the United States came to town. I sincerely thank everyone who worked so hard for so many weeks preceding this visit to make it the success it was, and it ran like clockwork. United States Defence personnel have always been welcomed to Darwin; they always will be welcome in Darwin. We will never forget the sacrifice made, not only by the sailors on the USS *Peary*, but also by so many US Air Force personnel during World War II. They stood and fought shoulder to shoulder with Australians, not only defending this city and Northern Australia, but also defending our nation and fighting shoulder to shoulder in the Pacific. It is a great alliance. It has endured for 60 years, and I am sure it will endure for another 60 years.

I urge all honourable members to support the motion, and once again thank President Barack Obama for visiting Darwin – it was a very historic day.

**Tabled Papers
Pairing Arrangements –
Members for Arnhem and Sanderson; and
Members for Casuarina and Blain**

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, before calling the next member to speak, I have two documents relating to pairs before me. The first is for the entire sitting day for the member for Arnhem and the member for Sanderson, signed by both Whips. The second is for a pair from 5 pm today until the close of business for the

member for Casuarina and the Leader of the Opposition, signed by both Whips.

I table the documents.

Mr MILLS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, yes, this motion is of course supported. It gives us the opportunity to speak of a significant event in the history of the Northern Territory. The event, as the Chief Minister has described, was extremely well run. The logistics we witnessed were something we have not seen before. The involvement of local agencies was first-class. The interaction between local agencies, Australian national agencies, US agencies based here as consular offices, and embassy staff, and those who flew in for the occasion - was an experience which, of itself, was unique and imparts a new sense of what is possible in running events and what we can do when we work together. Congratulations to all involved.

It was a remarkable event and has been commented on around the country. I spent a couple of days immediately after the visit in Western Australia, where everyone was talking about the visit of the President to the Northern Territory. It has placed us on the map in the context of this important strategic decision made by the United States. I note the Chief Minister's comments reflecting on what a great event it was, how enjoyable it was and, quite rightly, talking about the exchanges that occurred in that time, which were certainly significant. I hope we will hear more in time to come and from other speakers. I expected more from the Chief Minister regarding the serious nature of the decision made by the United States to shift its strategic and diplomatic attention and resources from the Middle East, and the challenges in Europe, to this region; a significant shift that has drawn a response from all our neighbours.

It requires - not to run commentary - a response at many different levels. There is an international response, and the government and others who speak - the Australian government - has the obligation to respond to those issues, as do other nationals: the Indonesians, the Japanese, or the Chinese. There is a change in the dynamic within the region and there is commentary and reflection on what that means. That has gone quite well. Many of the comments made at that level were predictable and it has been well managed.

There is the national significance of this. The President made a decision – well, the nation of the United States made a decision - that this was the place to come because of its significance. It reminds us, and reminds the nation, that the Northern Territory and Darwin, in particular, is

strategically placed. There is now a reminder, nationally, of the importance of the location of this tropical capital city. If the growth region is immediately to our north, as it clearly is, reinforced by the strategic decision of the United States to place its emphasis in the region, then it reminds us, as a nation, we are in this region and are required to respond. More specifically, it identifies the Northern Territory, and Darwin specifically, as that place. That is why they came. That is why the visit was made.

The significance of that decision nationally sends a clear message. At the Territory level, we have to acknowledge it was a good event and everyone had a good time. It was pretty special meeting a man of his calibre and international significance in the Northern Territory and Darwin. However, it does require a response. What will we do in light of the significance of the decision to visit the Northern Territory - the significance of the decision to shift strategic focus into our region? What is our response? Congratulations to all involved but now comes our response.

Clearly, things are changing in our region and many have commented for some time that the economic growth within our region requires a response of this kind. That commentary has been in play from Paul Keating, through the Coalition to John Howard, Kevin Rudd, and now to the Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard. The decision has been made. It is clear the strategic shift has good reason to occur, and now has occurred. It is perhaps played up in some respects as being a complete scene changer. In my view, it is a natural progression and has been coming for some time. Clearly, the United States has a desire to move from Iraq and Afghanistan and, with this clear and unambiguous focus on the region, it changes the balance.

In the Northern Territory, we have our own response to make. We can comment on what this means in an international context, and I have a particular interest in that. What does this mean for us and what should be our response? In my view, this decision has been coming for some time. This decision was not made out of the blue. It reinforces the arguments run in this Chamber about balancing our land release programs and getting our policies right, so there is a balance between supply and demand. There was a reason for that urgency.

Now that we have this decision, more than ever we need a renewed focus on what matters, a meaningful response to the decision that has international, national, and regional significance. The first of those is land use; getting the overarching strategic plan for how this community, this Territory, the greater Darwin area, responds to such opportunities. There will be inherent risk,

but those risks can be managed if you have a plan, such as infrastructure requirements. Does the government have the capacity, the willingness, and the recognition of what this means? How would we then move swiftly and strategically to better position ourselves to take advantage of the opportunities, and to manage the risks that flow from this level of growth which is imminent? These are the areas we need to be responding to.

It is of genuine concern that, after a decade, the Labor administration has still taken a superficial and unenergetic approach when it comes to long-term strategic planning: what kind of infrastructure; where does heavy industry go; where will a much larger population be located? It has been 10 years, and there has been insufficient response from the Labor government on those very important issues. We can reflect on what a good event it was, but that significant, enjoyable, and important event requires a response now. After 10 years, that has not been the case. More than ever, the urgency requires us to move. If we can pull off support for an event like this, we really need to roll up our sleeves now and get on to the other business. That involves a response on many different levels. A comprehensive, coordinated, long-term view of the infrastructure we require in the Northern Territory is a practical and sensible response. If this speech is being sent to the US, as stated in the motion, I am sure they would like to see that we are responding at that level; that we recognise the significance of this and are moving ourselves into a position where we can better accommodate the decision, and make it something which will be of mutual benefit.

One of the reasons I had meetings in Western Australia is the deeper significance of this requires us to work at a level, with the Kimberleys particularly, because the north of Western Australia and the Northern Territory are both facing this region - food security, opportunities around that, how we work together to strategic and mutual advantage just within this region. These things need to be considered in the light of the visit and the decision this visit symbolises.

What effect will this have on our workforce planning? This brings it into sharper focus, and these are the things we have been talking about from opposition for some time. What effect will this have and what decisions will flow from the significance of this decision in having an infrastructure plan that is coordinated and articulated, with a broader plan about land use? How do we then direct our focus and provide leadership in developing appropriate skills to position ourselves, knowing this is the beginning - a progressive step - and it is taking us somewhere?

There is much more to play up within our region. One only has to consider the incredible and ongoing growth of China, and the excellent and growing connections between the north of this country and its resources, and those resources being met in China, and that trade will continue. The rise and the increase, the importance and strengthening, of the economies of Indonesia, Singapore, and Japan - we are in that space and there is much that is possible, but it should not happen by accident. We must be on the front foot and we need to have that level of discussion, debate, and a more mature response to what we have just witnessed.

This has significant implications and I look forward to hearing further from the Labor government about this part of the visit. We thought we were in a pretty special place when Oprah visited the Northern Territory and went to Uluru. We got great profile, and it was going to do great things. We did not see a great deal come from that in tourism numbers and the like. Now, we have reference that the President of the United States has come to the Northern Territory and got that great international profile, particularly in the US. Well, are people going to come? They may do, but the fact is we have work to do. It is real work, serious work, mature work, and it is an understanding of what has just happened in our region, the significance of this visit and what it means, and the response that will follow from it.

These are the things the Territory opposition is taking very seriously with an eye well over the horizon. That is why the description of the Strategic Planning Commission is an essential element to be able to put ourselves in a far more proactive position regarding strategic response to planning required when these events occur. They have now occurred and it is very clear that a response is required, and that is why a release of our business policy sends messages to our business community that we are getting ourselves ready; we are in that space. There will be consideration of how Asian Relations and Trade will increase in importance - something that has been neglected in the last 10 years or so. That is a space we need to move into. This is not about political positioning; it is about strategic positioning to advantage and putting the Territory into a far more proactive position with what we have just witnessed. These are the serious elements which need to be discussed in light of the visit of the President of the United States.

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to be given this opportunity to make those comments, but the simple summary is that the US position in this region is now strengthened, it will serve the interests of regional stability, it will advantage and strengthen Australia's position within the region but, more specifically, the question is: 'What does

this mean for the Northern Territory, and how do we respond to that?' I have outlined some elements of that, and that is the level of the debate we should be having in this place at this time.

Ms LAWRIE (Deputy Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, as the Treasurer, the newly-appointed Minister for Asian Relations and Trade, and Minister for Defence Support, I add my congratulations on the visit of the President of the United States of America. It is significant, as the Chief Minister said, that the President had to go to Canberra, but he chose to come to Darwin. It has put us in the global spotlight regarding the strategic position of Darwin.

It gave us an opportunity to showcase our beautiful, tropical Top End and the friendliness of the local constituents. The pure joy and embracing of the presidential visit to Darwin was evident. People were lining the streets and there were tears as the motorcade went through the streets. It was incredible to see the flurry of electronic Twitters and Facebooks of people who took time out from their day to catch a glimpse of Air Force One or the motorcade. Like any visit of such significance, everyone wanted to meet the President, but it was, quite appropriately, a tightly-controlled visit regarding security.

The invitation lists were a combination of work between the White House and Canberra. We had a degree of input in the Territory with the suggestions the Chief Minister quite appropriately made regarding the USS *Peary*, the survivors of the World War II bombing, and the children of survivors. It was an appropriate, small gathering. The only real event local Territorians had a chance to score a gig at was the RAAF Base event. That was a very tightly-screened and controlled event with the protocols between the Territory government, the federal government and, ultimately, the White House, which had total control over invitations.

The few who got to be in President Obama's sphere were thrilled and delighted at the honour and opportunity. I came across many who really wanted to meet him, particularly among the young Territorians, in the weeks leading up to the Presidential visit. The 16 to 30-years-old were incredibly embracing of President Obama and there was much excitement about his visit to the Top End. I cannot count the number of people who approached me directly to ask: 'Can you get me an invitation'. My response was genuine, and repeated quite often: 'We have no control over the invitation list as it is tightly controlled by the White House, the federal government, with a small degree of input from the Territory government, into the RAAF event'. Appropriately, the invitations to the RAAF event were to key community leaders

representing multicultural Northern Territory and Territorians of significance.

I join with the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in thanking all the public servants across the Department of the Chief Minister and our police force for ensuring this was a recognised, world-class effort concerning the logistics of this visit. As to the logistics, it was great to see, right through to our local private hire car companies, where they picked up an incredible amount of work. There was some conjecture as to exactly how many US officials were in town in the weeks leading up to the Presidential visit. There is no doubt a significant contingent of US officials patronised local businesses. Private hire cars made a good amount of revenue in that period of time. They shopped locally, and I am told they availed themselves of our local tourism destinations and were thrilled at what they saw.

These were all good opportunities for the Territory as each of those people know someone who knows someone. As the Chief Minister said, the global coverage, particularly into the US, was phenomenal. You cannot spend that amount in advertising to get that level of coverage. As a tourism opportunity and awareness raising, it was second to none. My comment is, we have had the two big Os; we had Oprah in Central Australia, and now we have had Obama in the Top End. The Northern Territory is on the tourism destination map for the United States. It is a very exciting opportunity to realise and pursue.

There is no doubt that the historic first visit by the President of the United States to the Territory was significant. He is an incredibly charismatic President. The level of respect he drew very quickly for his very short visit was incredible. Anyone who came anywhere within his presence was overwhelmed at what a charismatic and genuinely caring man he is. Watching the television footage of the hugs he gave the elderly women at the USS *Peary* was a moving experience.

The international exposure of his visit is significant in the business opportunities, but clearly the most strategic aspect, the most significant aspect of his visit, is the announcement by the Prime Minister and the US President that there will be an expansion of our links with the United States, with the deployment of US service personnel in and out of the Territory, and expanding exercises. Those deployment opportunities are significant for our Defence industry and also spread opportunities for our local businesses in logistic supply and support opportunities. Obviously, retail will receive a boost - you can imagine a US ship visiting our port and what that does for the local retail opportunities

as well as our hospitality sector. I have been out and about as minister for Business, also with my key contacts as Treasurer and now Defence Support, engaging with key business people around town and there is a genuine, strong level of acceptance and embracing of the business opportunities from that strategic announcement.

If you want to put it in an economic context, our Defence industry is worth about \$1.3bn per annum to our economy. You have something like \$600m in wages, and they also provide through-support to some 4500 non-Defence jobs. That is the scale of what we already have. When you look at where we are as a strategic hub with the United States putting through their posture review - the decision that they see the critical importance of the Asia-Pacific region and are moving greater attention into the Asia-Pacific region out of that posture review. We are the best location for strengthening the alliance between the United States and our nation in strategic growth expansion and the relationship between our Defence forces.

What we will see out of the announcement is, most visibly, extra service personnel coming through the Territory. That provides opportunities, a greater spend through our retail and hospitality and Defence industry sectors, and spin-offs for Territory businesses. You only have to walk down the mall when there is a big ship in port to see how local businesses genuinely benefit. The increase in our ship port calls as a result of this agreement between our nation and the United States will have a real, localised retail impact for the benefit of our local traders.

Defence is also a significant driver in our construction sector and the maintenance industry. Around \$220m was spent in 2010-11 in contracts flowing from this sector, which included \$120m in major capital facilities in both Darwin and Katherine. The announcement by our Prime Minister and the United States President provides for a great deal of construction spend and impetus into Darwin because of the role of Robertson Barracks in being the staging point for the six-month deployments, but both the Prime Minister and Defence Minister Smith clearly articulated that RAAF Base Tindal will also have a critical role to play. Increased joint operations envisaged as part of the US announcement will mean a greater investment in training and accommodation infrastructure which will provide more work for our local enterprises.

I want to take members through the advice the government has received through Defence Minister Smith. Even prior to taking on the Defence Support portfolio, as the Deputy Chief Minister, I have been in close discussions with the Chief Minister for many months now. I can assure

the Territory community that the Chief Minister has been involved every step of the way in discussions with Defence Minister Smith and the Prime Minister around this historic agreement between the United States and Australia to increase and expand the positioning of the alliance with the US personnel deploying here. I have to assure people that the Chief Minister has pursued the best interests of the Territory at every step of those discussions. I also have to say how respectful the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister have been to the Chief Minister's views. We have a very constructive relationship with the federal government, and are able to build on that through all the discussions in relation to this announcement. Of course, we were bound to secrecy throughout that process, quite appropriately.

Now the announcement is in the public domain, it is down to work. The rubber is hitting the road; we are already in further discussions about how we work very closely together to see various elements of this implementation plan rolled out. I guarantee, in my role as Treasurer and Minister for Defence Support, Business, Asian Relations, and Trade, that I will be working extremely hard to ensure these opportunities are realised by local Territory businesses.

The announcement by Defence Minister Smith regarding the detail certainly shows the United States Force posture initiative is an extension of our existing Defence cooperation and arrangements. We already have exercises involving large numbers of United States military personnel. The bulk of the US forces will rotate in and out for around six months at a time. Some US staff will be posted to Australia to provide support services for these deployments. I can speak on a firsthand basis, as my sister is a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy. She has been on deployments in Baghdad where she deals with the rotation of personnel in a logistics sense. You have to have people located in Robertson Barracks to ensure the deployment of those personnel. It is no small exercise to be able to deploy troops in and out of a posting like that.

Key staff will be located in the Territory to ensure the smooth roll-in and roll-out of those six-monthly deployments. The nature of that staffing element will be informed by further scoping of the implementation arrangements. It is envisaged that the US staff would undertake equipment and facility maintenance, exercise planning, and those associated activities would liaise with our Australian authorities. Both the Australian and United States planning will be informed by the progress of the initial company-size deployments. I am advised that rotations on the scale of a mature marine, air, and ground task force would not occur before 2016-17.

To give a sense of the scale, increased joint training will add to the existing training activities we currently conduct with the US, such as Exercise Talisman Sabre, a biennial joint Australia and United States military exercise. The 2011 Exercise Talisman Sabre featured 14 000 US personnel across six Defence training areas in Queensland and the Northern Territory. As I keep saying to people, this is not new; we have the capability and the experience, through these exercises, of dealing with rotations of large numbers of US personnel. Similarly, through Exercise Wallaby, around 5500 Singaporean personnel conduct annual training exercises at the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area, and around 200 Singaporean military personnel regularly rotate through Australia to maintain equipment. We have been in that key strategic role in the exercises with our allies and will continue to be. This is an expansion of what is a sensible, strategic strengthening of the alliance between Australia and the United States.

These initiatives are about improving cooperation between our nation and the US, and other countries in the region. All the information and advice coming from Canberra says the federal government recognises a strong and adaptable US presence in the Asia-Pacific, and a strong alliance-reliant relationship is the best way to guarantee continuing peace and security in the region. Peace and stability is crucial to the continued prosperity of the region from which all countries, including China, will benefit. When the media was rife in the announcements leading up to the US President's visit to our nation, I pointed out to our local media that, at the time, our minister for Resources was in China. We have a proud and enduring relationship with China. That will continue. I can say to people who think we will take our eye off the ball concerning our Asian Relations relationships: 'You have to be kidding'. We recognise the critical importance of our strategic positioning within this region. We have built on relationships created through previous governments, and we will continue to build on those relationships. They are critical to the opportunities of trade, but also to the strong friendship we have between our near neighbours.

Indonesia is a key partner in our relationships but, across the region, we have built on and strengthened significant relations. China is a friend of the Territory; Chinese people helped build the Territory. We have a proud and strong Chinese community in the Territory so we can build on our alliance and relationship with the United States and continue to build on our relationships with our Asian neighbours. It is the appropriate thing to do regarding the growth and future prosperity of our nation, but we have ensured that we are providing assistance and opportunity for our neighbours as well. It is a

mutual benefit relationship. Our relationship with China is a mutual benefit relationship; our relationship with Indonesia is mutual benefit. They will be given the due regard, deference, and respect we have always given our neighbours and we will continue to pursue the strengthening of those relationships.

The logistics of what we are talking about is some 250 US Marines will be deployed with the Australian Defence Force at Robertson Barracks. Over time, we will see a growth and extension of that, rising to about 2500 through 2016-17. This is simply an extension of deployments we have seen in the past. We have previously hosted larger marine deployments in the vicinity of 1000 or 2000 personnel. The key difference between those previous activities and the joint initiatives proposed is the US deployments will take place annually and will be of longer duration. They will be deploying for six-month periods.

A marine, air, and ground task force typically includes a ground combat element, an aviation combat element, a logistics combat element, and a command element. A marine, air, and ground task force rotating in and out of our nation will typically include around 2500 personnel and include vehicles, artillery pieces, and aviation assets. Robertson Barracks in Holtze near Palmerston, and also Tindal RAAF Base in Katherine will be critical to these deployments.

We see real opportunities for the Defence Support Hub in the repositioning of US equipment ...

Dr BURNS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I move that the member be given an extension of time pursuant to Standing Order 77.

Motion agreed to.

Ms LAWRIE: Thank you. The Defence Support Hub is a strategic area of land to support Defence requirements and attract more investment in terms of contracts into the Territory. We provided a fully-serviced site with easy access to the port and rail facilities, international airport, and modern road networks. We have constantly lobbied the Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence to recommend the support hub in the repositioning and maintenance of US equipment and stores for disaster relief, so that is definitely on the agenda. Last week's announcement strengthens our case to host US equipment at the Defence Support Hub and we will continue our discussions with the Australian government over that site.

I acknowledge the gifts the President received. The beautiful artwork from world-renowned Tiwi artist, Jean Baptiste Apuatimi is, as the Chief

Minister said, a very appropriate gift to provide to the US President, as the Tiwi were the first line in the air raids during World War II. I also add my thanks to Richard Harding at TIO for the croc insurance gift, which certainly captured the US President, and went viral pretty quickly in the global media and the interest that provided.

The questions posed by the Leader of the Opposition around how we look at the strategic planning implications of this decision are valid. The Territory government has very proudly been in the realms of long-term planning for quite some time now. If you look at the Greater Darwin Region Land Use Plan released in February this year - I urge the Leader of the Opposition, if he has not already had a detailed briefing on that, to get one - it provides for the residential and industrial land use plan through another decade for the Territory. There have been extensive consultations on that; three months of holding forums across our community. The Planning minister has pursued getting and collating information on the Greater Darwin Region Land Use Plan, so to pretend there is no strategic planning is simply to defy reality and have one's head stuck in the sand. I urge the Leader of the Opposition to pull his head out of the sand and have a good look at the Greater Darwin Region Land Use Plan because consultations have been held and it is coming to its final conclusion.

Once the government makes a decision as a result of those consultations, which will be very soon, that will then trigger a statutory 28-day public consultation process. So, if the opposition has not formally put in a submission, you have a 28-day window once we go to the statutory process where you can put in a submission. I look forward to seeing the opposition's views on that Greater Darwin Region Land Use Plan. I acknowledge that the members for Nelson and Goyder have both put in a formal submission to the Greater Darwin Region Land Use Plan.

Regarding our relationship with Defence, we are looking at housing implications. Yes, the announcement has pointed out that US personnel will be housed on base. If you look at the broader issue of how you have a complementary relationship with an increasing Defence buildup in our nation into the Top End, Defence Minister Smith has been flagging, through his own posture review, the strategic role of a buildup in the Territory of Australian Defence personnel - of course, you must look at accommodation. I point out to the Leader of the Opposition that it was only about a month ago that Defence Minister Smith committed to the expenditure of \$200m for an additional 900 units of accommodation to be constructed in Darwin. That is not a small announcement; it is a significant announcement.

It also took a Labor government, for the first time ever, to strike a memorandum of understanding with Defence Housing Australia to plan for the roll-out of construction of Defence homes across the Top End. You might have missed it, so I will point it out again: it was a Labor government that struck a memorandum of understanding with Defence Housing Australia for the first time. Until then, Defence would undertake its own construction needs where it wanted to, without a clear pipeline of construction and agreement with the Territory government. You could appropriately plan for where their housing needs would be met, and you could appropriately plan to ensure you were not adversely affecting the housing market. With that memorandum of understanding, we have managed to secure Defence taking 30% of the new suburb of Muirhead, located adjacent to Lyons, and 15% of the new suburbs of Bellamack, Johnston, Zuccoli, and Mitchell. Getting a spread, what we call a salt and pepper, of Defence personnel through our community, is the appropriate way to go in a strategic planning sense.

It took a Labor government to strike that MOU with Defence Housing Australia to ensure we were strategically planning where Australian Defence personnel would be accommodated throughout our community, in the appropriate densities, so it would benefit Australia Defence families and benefit our broader community. We have done the work; we have done the strategic planning. We have signed off on it, and we have a five year roll-out of housing construction, funded by Defence Housing Australia, providing the opportunity of that new development at Muirhead and underpinning the economic viability of the Palmerston East suburbs. We also, within that MOU, ensured we have capacity and take-up of 15% of Muirhead for our affordable and social housing, equally complementing the 15% of affordable and social housing sitting across the Palmerston East suburbs. Again, it took a Labor government to recognise that, in a strategic planning sense, you had to capture at least 15% of a marketplace in new subdivisions to set aside the land for affordable and social housing.

In regard to the strategic issues raised by the Leader of the Opposition, I put on record that we are already there. We have already done it. We have done the planning, we have set the land aside, we have the memorandum of understanding and agreements in place, and the capital expenditure has been funded through three successive Territory government budgets and significant announcements recently by minister Stephen Smith in the expenditure for new accommodation in the Top End through that \$200m commitment.

Looking at construction around the bases, we have seen the significant opportunities of Coonawarra – the Berrimah Defence establishment. It is no longer a base; it is a Defence establishment. There are opportunities for infill developments at Larrakeyah Naval Base. If you look, you will see vast areas have been cleared with the old stock gone and new construction under way. Obviously, the opportunities at Robertson Barracks are quite significant. They have had a rolling program of construction at Robertson Barracks for quite some time because, whilst we saw 7RAR signalled and posted to Adelaide, we are seeing a logistical buildup in 5RAR there.

I am delighted to be the Minister for Defence Support at such a strategic time in our Defence history in the Territory. I am born and raised as a local. I know Defence has always been here. They have always played a supportive and critical role in our community. They have built, then rebuilt, and rebuilt this town following World War II and Cyclone Tracy. They provide jobs for local Territorians. Many Territorians, because they have grown up in a strategic Defence town such as Darwin or Katherine, join the services. We have a far greater relationship, understanding, and awareness of Defence than any other capital city in our nation.

On the morning of President Obama's visit, I happened to be at Marrara Christian School as the local member of parliament. Defence services people were there talking to middle school students about careers in Defence. We understand Defence better here than anyone else in our nation. We are in the right place, strategically, in the Asia-Pacific region. It makes sense in the posture of your outcomes to strengthen our US alliance. We embrace that. We welcome the opportunities. We are onto the challenges, and we have the right relationship with our federal colleagues to ensure we are front and centre and fully participate in the strategic opportunities the announcement by our Prime Minister and the US President have provided.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I support this very important motion. Three things came from President Obama's important and momentous visit to the Northern Territory.

First, the President's attendance at the remembrance ceremony for those who lost their lives on the USS *Peary* - sunk during the first bombing of Darwin - was an important opportunity to remember not only those who died, but also to tell many people in Australia, and the rest of the world that, as the President said, the bombing of Darwin was Australia's Pearl Harbour. It is good to see the bombing of Darwin will now become a day of national significance.

Second, it was an opportunity for our troops who have fought alongside the Americans in many wars, especially recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, to meet the President. It was an opportunity for the President to show his support for our troops. From the reaction he received from the troops, they very much appreciated his visit.

The most important reason for his visit was for both Australia and the United States to re-energise the alliance between our countries, especially with the announcement of an increase in the number of US troops coming to the Northern Territory. I listened to the member for Karama giving some details of that buildup in troops and, I must admit, I found it very difficult to get exact and precise figures and details about the agreement. I do not know whether those details have been made public, but I Googled quite substantially last night looking for details of what was actually being proposed, rather than simply what I had heard in the media. I would appreciate being able to get a copy of that agreement.

We are very foolish in this day and age to think we are bombproof and can stand alone in this volatile world; Bali is evidence that that is not the case. Although we might regard China as an economic trading friend, it is not a democracy and has a very powerful military capability. In my research last night, I looked up the issues regarding the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. If you believe China is a country you can negotiate with, then you need to think twice when it comes to its relationship with countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam in relation to the Spratly Islands - a very important part of Southeast Asia, especially concerning the opportunities for oil and gas. We should not be blind to the expanding influence of China. After all, who supplied the patrol boats recently to East Timor? Also, there is its influence in the Pacific islands. There is no doubt China is our friend, but one should not hide the fact that it is not a democracy and probably has one of the biggest armies in the world today. I would rather be friends with another democracy, the United States, which holds similar values to ours, and not live in hope that all we have to do is do nothing and be safe.

These issues should be debated today. The Leader of the Opposition touched on those important issues. We live in this region and cannot necessarily live in a cocoon. We can worry about whether there is a new road being built somewhere, whether the weather is getting hotter but, sometimes, we do not look far and wide enough to understand that we are part of the largest population growth in the world - that is, the Asian area. There are a number of volatile disputes in our region and a large number of countries are not democratic such as Burma,

Vietnam, Laos, China, and a country we should be very wary of, North Korea. We need to ensure people who support democracy, such as Australia and the United Nations, form strong alliances to promote democracy; to show democracy is the only way to govern, and give people, who do not have those freedoms, the hope they will eventually have the rights we have in a democratic country like Australia. We have to ensure we do not just live here as citizens in a utopia when, in fact, we live in a region where a good percentage of the world's population lives and where there are a variety of governances, including some you would clearly call dictatorial.

Madam Speaker, I also would like to say something about the stationing of troops in the Top End and the potential for this creating some problems, both from a planning and social aspect. When the announcements were made about 20 years ago that the Territory and Darwin would be home for an expanded military presence, there was much preparation. At that time, I was on the Litchfield Shire Council - and there was possibly more than one committee. I was on an integration committee which included government departments, non-government groups, local government representatives, and Defence Force representatives. We sat down on a regular basis to work through issues and develop plans to ensure the Defence Forces were not separated from the rest of the community, but were part of the community.

This is an important stage in the planning for the troops who are coming to Darwin. We need to ensure the United States troops staying in Darwin, even if they are only here for six months, feel they are part of the community. The worst thing that can happen is: 'They are American troops and we are the rest'. That type of mentality will do no good for relationships between the United States troops and Darwin citizens. We need to get in early and set up committees, so any potential problems are nipped in the bud and any potentially serious social implications are sorted out before the United States troops arrive. This area has not yet been touched on, but is an extremely important area.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned future planning. As the member for Karama said, Robertson Barracks is in my electorate, and to hear there is going to be a large buildup of troops living on the base sounds slight alarm bells. For the last 10 or 15 years, I have been trying to convince the federal government or the Northern Territory government to change some of the traffic issues around the barracks because they cause problems in the residential area of Knuckey Lagoon. There are problems on Thorngate Road even now because of the planning of the front entrance to Robertson Barracks, which was

designed before 9/11. Before 9/11, you could just about drive straight into Robertson Barracks, show your ID, and keep going. Nowadays, you cannot; everyone has to show their ID and invited visitors must fill out a form and be accompanied by a member of the Defence Force. In the morning, when all the troops are arriving, you get a huge buildup of cars backing up onto Thorngate Road.

I am emphasising that the development of Robertson Barracks, being on Commonwealth land, did not require planning approval. Unfortunately, because it did not require planning approval, there was insufficient work done to assess the effects of a large number of people living or working in the barracks and what effect that would have on areas outside the barracks, specifically Knuckey Lagoon, and, to a lesser extent, traffic going to and from Palmerston and the rural area.

I am hoping, as part of this buildup of troops, many of whom would be living at Robertson Barracks, that the government will make an alternative entrance to Robertson Barracks a priority. The Brigadier of Robertson Barracks, Gus McLachlan, has indicated his strong support for a new entrance to the barracks, which will possibly go through the boundary of CASA land on Stevens Road in Knuckey Lagoon allowing traffic to queue, if required, through the gates but not affect any traffic in the area. It also would take much Defence Force personnel traffic travelling through the residential area of Knuckey Lagoon, which has been a problem Knuckey Lagoon people have highlighted to me on numerous occasions. If we are going to expand Robertson Barracks, we need to ensure the appropriate planning, from the point of view of traffic, and the effect on locals, is taken into account and something is actually done. It is often difficult to talk to the Department of Defence people in Canberra. They live in another world and turn over so quickly that the people you spoke to one month are often not there the next month.

The member for Karama mentioned the Defence hub, the old Defence hub, part of which is still sitting in water amongst the magnetic anthills. That is another issue I have raised several times with the planning authority. Why did you develop a piece of country that is partially wet? There is a good area that has been developed. It is sitting there doing nothing and, until a contractor comes along and is able to use that land for the maintenance of equipment at Robertson Barracks, the land is simply sitting there vacant. It would be good if the United States government could use that land for the storage of humanitarian supplies.

Government may need to consider – and I have not discussed this with Litchfield Shire Council – whether, due to the priority of the road leading to the barracks, and because of an increase in traffic if the United States uses the Defence Support Hub for storage of humanitarian supplies, it should take over Thorngate Road. There are no Litchfield Shire ratepayers on that road. The Commonwealth government does not pay rates. It might pay some money towards the upkeep of those roads, but if you are going to increase the amount of traffic, if we are going to put 2500 troops and a storage facility there, then I am not sure that asking a local council to maintain and support that road is fair. I put it to government to consider whether it should take over the maintenance of that road.

The visit was terrific. My one concern was that the public was a little confused. The public wanted to see Obama. Originally, there were reports that you could get free buses into town because there would be no parking and roads would be blocked. Then there was talk on the radio that you would not be able to see the President because he would be behind black plastic. Then a police officer announced on radio that it was simply a private visit, which gave the impression you were not going to see the President. In the end, you could see him if you stood on Bennett Street - although I gather you were told not to loiter - but if you stood along those barriers, you could see the President.

There was some confusion. I even heard Harbour View Plaza people wanted to go home early. In fact, they might have gone home early because they thought there would be such a traffic jam and they would not be able to get out of the place. There were mixed messages being sent out and that is unfortunate because many people would have liked a clear indication of where they could have stood to wave to President Obama. The people who went to the RAAF Base were selected, and the people who went to the USS *Peary* Memorial were selected. People who wanted to come to wave to the President did so by hoping for the best. It would have been nice if that had been better planned so people knew exactly where they could wave their flag, or view the President as he went past. In my case, I went back to the office at Howard Springs and watched Air Force One fly over the pub. That is the closest I was to the President. I was pleased to see on television our local resident, Riley Wing, speak to the President. He was one of the Darwin residents at the USS *Peary* Memorial.

Despite that, I believe the majority of Territorians were extremely happy to see the President take time out of his busy schedule. I realise he was travelling between Canberra and Bali, but it gave a great opportunity for the

President to recognise the importance of Darwin. I am sure he will always remember it, not only for paying respect to his troops, but for his words 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie' when he met our troops at the RAAF Base in Darwin.

With all the hype and celebration, which was fantastic, we should not forget this important occasion was part of the bigger picture, and the bigger picture is the US now focusing on Southeast Asia to offset the influence of China in the region. As much as people might say it is not a threat to China, you would have to be blind Freddy not to realise that is exactly what it is about. China has big influence in this area and will continue to influence this area. We have to be very wary of that. Yes, we are friends of China; however, in making that statement, we must realise that China is not a democracy. You only have to look at Tiananmen Square to understand what China is about when people have different points of view. You only have to look at Tibet and the recent deaths of Tibetan monks. You only have to read about the Spratly Islands and find out what China thinks about other countries having some say in the ownership of those islands. You only have to look at the number of people locked up in China after speaking out against the government. The reality is; it is not a democracy. It is a communist country and, although it might be looking good from the point of economics and the lifestyle and wealth of many of its residents, it still does not have the freedoms we regard as normal in Australia and the United States.

We need to ensure this alliance is not just about a military alliance. It is about sending out a message to this region that democracy should be promoted. We need to promote democracy. We need to speak up for the people in Burma who do not have a democratic government, the people in Vietnam, the people in Laos, the people in China, and the people in North Korea who do not have the same right to speak up and have free elections as we do. We cannot sit back and hope things work out and will be smooth in the future. This is a fairly unstable part of the world; Afghanistan is not that far away and we do, on a regular basis, see the problems associated with volatile parts of this region.

It was great to see the President visit Australia. All Territorians were pleased and excited about him coming to the Northern Territory. I have a little packet of mints, Madam Speaker, which you might have received from a group of American politicians who visited recently which has 'Obama achievemints' on it. That is my souvenir of President Obama. Even though he did not give it to me personally, I fib, because the visit of those politicians was so close to President Obama coming to the Territory that I will remember that every time I look at the packet of mints.

Madam Speaker, I thank the government for bringing forth this important motion. It was a joyful occasion but we also need to remember it is a very serious matter brought to our attention by his visit. We should not lose sight of that fact.

Mr GILES (Braitling): Madam Speaker, I will start by thanking the Chief Minister for bringing on the motion, and thank the President of the United States for visiting the Territory. I recognise the strategic importance of recent announcements that will provide a fantastic injection to our local economy. I also join the Chief Minister and thank all those people who took a role in facilitating the visit of the President, including our police force, Territorians involved in the federal police, and all staff at the Legislative Assembly who played a role.

I see a future where Darwin will continue to grow and take up the mantle of Australia's Southeast Asian capital. There will be a continuing need for other nations to strategically position themselves in our capital, whether that be offices, consulates, or otherwise, and we will always welcome those partners.

It was interesting being in Alice Springs on the day of the Obama visit and since that time, talking to people about the visit and hearing the excitement in people's voices as they were talking about - not the person himself, as not everyone likes the President - but everyone appreciated the fact that the President of the free world, as you might call it, was in the Northern Territory. People were actively acknowledging the importance and value of the President coming to the Territory - not taking about the Berrimah line, but the Territory as a whole. As Territorians, many people were very proud and had many questions about the visit.

I want to focus on, leading into the most pressing question, why the President did not come to Alice Springs, when Pine Gap is located in our town? I would have liked to see the President come to Alice Springs. I am sure the President wants to go to many places, and receives requests all the time to go to many places. Obviously, time is a constraint.

During this debate, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the valuable contribution American nationals make in the Central Australian community. They are an integral part of the social fabric of Alice Springs society; they contribute socially, economically, and culturally. I thank the American government and its nationals for living in Alice Springs and for their continued support, particularly for the cultural relevance they have to our town. Alice Springs would be a completely different place without those American nationals; they are a fantastic part of our community.

It would also be remiss of me not to emphasise the need for improvements in law and order in Alice Springs. I go back to one of the incidents which occurred in Alice Springs in February this year. This is just part of Labor's failures in maintaining law and order, particularly throughout the regions. In February this year on Memorial Drive, a 50-year-old American woman was viciously attacked with pickets, punched, knocked to the ground, and repeatedly kicked by a gang of youths. That woman was immediately flown to Royal Adelaide Hospital for facial reconstruction surgery. This is just one incident, but one which had a significant effect on our friends who work at Pine Gap, from the American point of view. As a jurisdictional government, we have to provide confidence to our citizens of their personal safety, and that confidence extends to our overseas visitors and workers who reside in Alice Springs and work at the joint Defence facility, Pine Gap. While law and order in Alice Springs may not necessarily be seen as a strategic issue of international importance, for locals in Alice Springs - including American nationals - crime and law and order failures by Labor are of great concern.

Most people would know, by the six-monthly crime figures to March of this year, crime has gone up by 307% from the 2005 figures. We know each year it gets worse as the culmination of Labor's failures continue in law and order. The situation right now is no different, with it being difficult to find any police on the streets. At the moment, it is almost as if there are no police in Alice Springs. You drive around and you cannot see them, you cannot find them, you cannot see them walking anywhere. It is almost as if all the police are on leave – you could almost take Fort Knox at the moment. It seems staff leave, resignations, long service leave, workers' compensation, and so forth, has left Alice Springs police without enough staff to fill the rosters at certain times. With the other limitations which have been applied to police overtime, it is difficult to see a police presence, let alone see a police officer turn up to a crime – and I am not talking about the communications system.

Last Saturday, residents of my street had to make a citizen's arrest of a drunken person who had walked along the street smashing up cars. I thought it was an emergency. Phone calls were made to police - holding someone to the ground who was in a frustrated state waiting for police to arrive. However, the response time was not sufficient.

Police were called last week to the rear of the Mbantua Gallery when a group of more than 20 people were sitting in a car park, in broad daylight, in public, drinking and being abusive, and participating in antisocial behaviour – a regular

occurrence, another event. A call was made at 3.18 pm and again at 4.08 pm, and police still had not arrived. The crowd dispersed, causing drunken outrages and rampaging through the streets as they moved on to the next destination to have a drink.

I do not blame police, but the restriction of resources being applied to the force means certain areas of Alice Springs go to wrack and ruin. Northside shops are a prime example. Not only are drunks hanging around the shops but, in broad daylight, they are drinking VB in the doorway to the IGA supermarket and at the front of the Cellarbrations bottle shop. This may not seem relevant to a motion on the President's visit to the Northern Territory, but when you act in politics you are thinking globally and you have to act locally, and the American citizens who live in Alice Springs and work at the joint Defence facility have to put up with this every day.

The ongoing spitting, yelling, fighting, and swearing at Northside shops is just not good enough. There are no police there. I am not there all the time, 24-hours-a-day, but I go there at different times and live like anyone else and you cannot see police, you cannot get the police van to the shops.

I have not seen the police motorbikes or the police horses. I know there are currently restrictions on police, and I am not talking about remote stations; I will talk about that in the Indigenous statement debate. The situation is that law and order is an ongoing concern in Alice Springs and if we want to provide greater comfort for the citizens of Alice Springs, including American nationals at the joint Defence facility, law and order is a key point that needs to be addressed so we can give people confidence. Otherwise, it will have a detrimental effect on the future of the joint Defence facility - whether that is people residing at the facility or other things which may occur - but when you have people living in our town who come from overseas they expect to live in a safe society, just like the rest of us, and that is not occurring.

I congratulate Natasha Griggs, who has been campaigning for a long time to have the Bombing of Darwin recognised as a national day of significance. She has not been given the credit. She has fought for this and run this in federal parliament, and it has now been recognised. Other people have stolen her thunder, but she fought long and hard for that and I congratulate Natasha, our member for Solomon, on that.

In summing up, while I welcomed the visit by the President, we have to ensure Pine Gap employees, just like all Alice Springs residents, live in a safe environment. Next time the

President of America comes to Australia, he might pop in to Alice Springs and pay a visit to Pine Gap. By that time, we may hear an announcement about an expansion of services to Pine Gap that will support the social and economic fabric of Alice Springs.

Dr BURNS (Education and Training):

Madam Speaker, I support the motion put forward by the Chief Minister and supported by this parliament. I have been particularly interested in what speakers have had to say on this motion and particularly, the member for Nelson, who spoke very well. Although I did not agree with everything the member for Nelson had to say, his analysis of the strategic needs of our region and the challenges we face was very apt and accurate.

My perspective is, over the past 60 years, the alliance with the United States, the ANZUS alliance, has been very important. As someone who grew up in Queensland and remembers – well, I did not remember the battle of the Coral Sea – but as I was growing up in the 1950s, I was surrounded by people, parents of other children, who had been part and parcel of what happened in Queensland. We moved to Queensland from New South Wales in the 1950s. The imminent or possible invasion by the Japanese, and the battles of the Coral Sea, were very high in Queenslanders' minds. Historically, we all recognise that without the support of the United States in the Coral Sea, the war in the Pacific could well have taken a different and disastrous path for the Allies in general, and Australia in particular.

This has been a very important alliance for Australia and, similarly, with America and its strategic presence within the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean over the past 60 years. There has been much talk, including from the member for Nelson, about the rise of China and the eminence of China in the region; in the Indian Ocean region, in the Asian region, which is quite correct, and no one can dispute that. As we look back through the history of the past 60 years, there have probably been a number of powers which have risen in that region over that time. Of course, Japan was one. Every year in Darwin we commemorate the attack on Darwin by Japanese forces, the same Japanese forces that bombed Pearl Harbour. Japan, at that stage of history, had economic and political designs on the region. World War II was an expression of that.

I emphasise that it was American forces that came to support Australia in the battle that raged around Darwin. We commemorate the USS *Peary* every year. I go every year to commemorate the 90-odd sailors, many of them very youthful, who lost their lives as the *Peary* sank. It is said that, as the *Peary* sank, they

continued to fire their guns at the Japanese attacking force. Such heroism and bravery needs to be commemorated. In Darwin, we do that every year, and it is great to see people come from the United States. It is great to see the presence of Consular officials and the Ambassador of the United States to Australia, from time to time, present at those functions. As a member of the Australian American friendship society, participating in those social events, I have come to know our American allies much better.

Reflecting on the Indian Ocean, at various times the Soviets had a strategic presence in the Indian Ocean. That was seen to be quite threatening. Over time, different powers have arisen in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, but there has been one constant and that has been the American strategic presence. It is a very important alliance to Australia. The importance of that alliance was underlined by the speeches by both the American President and the Australian Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, it was my honour to be present at the function, the gathering on the RAAF Base, and I do need to make an apology to Adrian Renzi, because he interviewed me the day before and asked me whether I was going to see President Obama and I said no, and, at that stage, I was not. I was quite prepared to work in my office during that day, bearing in mind the importance of the day, and leave the invitations to others, particularly the good people of the Northern Territory. I was informed late in the morning of Thursday that two people had withdrawn and asked if I would like to attend with my wife. Of course, I jumped at the chance. It was a real privilege, a real honour, and it was very exciting. Everyone was excited about the President of the United States coming to the Northern Territory.

If I cast my mind back, I was in Brisbane in the 1960s, and still at high school, when President Lyndon Baines Johnson came to Brisbane. That was not such a happy occasion because, at that time, the Vietnam War was a very controversial issue within Australian society and in America as well, so that visit was dogged in some ways by controversy. Nonetheless, Lyndon Baines Johnson, a very tall man of great stature, even in spite of, I suppose, the assassination of John F Kennedy, went in a motorcade. There was a very high level of security around him, but he was able to meet the people in Brisbane at that time and it was greatly appreciated.

The world we see now is a different world. The front lines have changed. There is no front line and that is why President Obama had to be surrounded by such intense security. It is regrettable that we could not have a motorcade in

Darwin, and there could not be events where the Darwin populace could get really close to President Obama. However, world events and the threats to the President of the United States from certain groups, not least of all Al Qaeda, are real, they are not imagined, hence, the tight security around the President. He was still able, at the function I attended, to move along and meet, first and foremost, the Defence Force people who were there - the troops, the men and women of our great Defence Force, who were very pleased to meet the President and shake his hand, and he was pleased to meet them.

There was a comparatively smaller contingent of civilians, and President Obama was very generous in moving along and shaking hands. The Mayor of Alice Springs, Damien Ryan, was near me and the President paused and had a conversation with Damien about the American facility at Pine Gap. The President welcomed the support of the people of Alice Springs for that Defence Force facility. That has been controversial for decades and it has been said it would make Alice Springs and Central Australia a target for terrorist attacks and all types of things, which has not eventuated.

One of the positive things the member for Braitling said was the importance with which people who work at the base are viewed by the citizens of Alice Springs and how they are part and parcel of that community, and a very valued part of that community. When I was speaking with Adrian Renzi last week, we spoke about the base and agreed it was a very important part of life in Alice Springs and the people were very important to the community of Alice Springs.

Who knows, member for Braitling, the President indicated he might return to the Territory. He might return to Central Australia and to Alice Springs, a wonderful part of the world. No doubt, the member for Braitling would see himself as being in government at that time; he could possibly be Police minister. He might be sitting at a big desk working out rosters for the policemen and checking to see whether they are at the Northside shops when he goes shopping. If they are not, he will have something to say about it. The fact is, member for Braitling, the deployment of police under the *Police Administration Act* is the purview of the Commissioner of Police. If the minister wants to make directions, he can, under the auspices of the act, but he has to give a written direction to the Commissioner of Police, which needs to be tabled in this parliament. If you are ever Police minister, there could be a constant stream of directions you are giving the Police Commissioner about where police should be deployed around the Territory.

I have confidence in our Police Commissioner. I commend the police for ensuring the security of the United States President while he was in Darwin. Anywhere the President goes in the world he is a target, and we did not want to see something terrible happen on our soil, on our watch.

I will return to the content of the President's speech. He talked about Darwin being Australia's Pearl Harbour, a very apt description of what happened in those years so long ago. We are coming up to the 70th anniversary next year, and that will be a wonderful commemoration of what happened 70 years ago. It is important in the history of Australia, important in the history of the region, and to me personally. As I have said a number of times in this House, my father was here for the first day of bombing and he did not like to speak about it. He said it was a terrible day and not a day went by that he did not think about it.

A terrible thing happened that day, but we are witnessing now, through the ongoing collaboration and partnership with the United States, a very important alliance. A number of people have put forward an opinion that the next century will be the century of Asia, both strategically and economically. Australia's north, principally the Northern Territory, is very well placed in that century. We will be a centre, not only strategically, but also economically. We are that centre already.

The very fact the President decided to come to the Northern Territory - he could have simply flown over and gone to Bali to the conference they have just had. It is very important he decided to call in, albeit for a couple of hours, to meet as many Darwin people as he could and people from Alice Springs, principally the Mayor, Damien Ryan. I also had the honour of shaking his hand. I have to say he is a very engaging person who looks you straight in the eye. He has charisma and a presence about him. I was mightily impressed by his oratory and his personal presence.

We were also able to showcase some Territory talent on the day, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu and Jessica Mauboy, who wowed the crowd. All the Defence Force personnel were asking for photos with Jessica after her performance; she is very popular. I suppose we can remember Jessica as she was growing up. She appeared at a couple of functions I hosted. I do not think I could afford her now. It was lovely of her to come over and give my wife and me a little kiss and say hello. We told her how proud we were of her; that she is on the world stage. I also noticed Daniel Bouchier, a Tennant Creek lad with SKY News - co-hosting. I said to Daniel: 'You are up there with the world; just be yourself'. He is a

personable young man and has a great future as well.

It was great for the Territory. It is great to see the bipartisanship in this motion, Madam Speaker, and I commend the motion to the House.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION

Proposed Censure of Minister for Transport and Minister for Justice and Attorney-General – Cox Peninsula Ferry Service

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, I move - That so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent this House censuring the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Justice and Attorney-General for conspiring to corrupt the tender process by involving themselves in the campaign to get rid of the current provider without providing procedural fairness in that process.

Well may the minister be twitchy talking about this matter in public. This hatchet job which the now Attorney-General, the member for Daly, and the Minister for Transport have conspired to involve themselves in has led to great embarrassment for this government and so it should. I am mindful of the issues the Leader of Government Business raises; however, I will be talking about the conduct of two ministers of the Crown in relation to how this matter has proceeded in the Northern Territory. Since raising this issue, I have had a multitude of complaints made to me about the tender process and some of the shortcomings of the tender processes in the Northern Territory.

I draw honourable members' attention to the Minister for Transport's Mandorah Ferry Community Reference Group terms of reference. The objective of this exercise was to inform the Minister for Transport - who cannot even be bothered staying in the House over this issue ...

Dr BURNS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Drawing attention to the absence or presence in the Chamber of a member is against standing orders, and he knows that.

Mr ELFERINK: I realise it is against the rules and I withdraw the fact the minister is not in the House, Madam Speaker.

... to inform the Minister for Transport of the community's priorities in relation to requiring, timing, and the frequency of future ferry services between Darwin and Mandorah. The purpose of this reference group appointed by the minister was to consult with ferry users, business operators, and the local Mandorah and Belyuen

communities in order to inform the minister of the community's needs regarding the timing, frequency, and cost of future ferry services. The scope, inter alia, included, review existing ferry utilisation data and recently-gathered survey data. That gets me to the first part of this issue. The survey to which the Minister for Transport ...

Dr BURNS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I do not currently have a copy of the motion so ...

Mr ELFERINK: It has been circulated. I handed it to the attendant moments ago.

Madam SPEAKER: Could we have it circulated as soon as possible, please.

Mr ELFERINK: The survey upon which the minister is relying is, in all likelihood, the survey conducted in December 2010 by the member for Daly, the very person who was then appointed by the minister to this committee. The population was surveyed - 380 survey forms went out and 79 people replied. At the outset, this data already has a question mark over it because you have 380 go out and 79 replied. That does not indicate a large community groundswell and a feeling of antipathy towards the current ferry operators. If a community the size of the Wagait community is absolutely incensed about the quality of service they are receiving, they would have responded in much greater numbers than they did. Nevertheless, of 380 survey forms that went out, 79 people replied, of which 33% used the service daily, 28% used the service on a Monday to Friday basis, 24% used it weekly, 5% monthly, and 10% other - I am not sure what that means. That gives you an idea that there was a fair spread amongst the 79 people who responded.

The interesting issue is that, of the survey respondents, a request for changes to the services answer of the 79 was: yes, 51; no, 28. Of course, the people who have a problem with the service are going to respond in greater numbers than people who do not have a problem with the service. Nevertheless, this survey data was put together with a couple of nice little pie graphs and put out for public comment, I suppose. However, this was the survey upon which the minister decided he was going to start asking more questions about the Mandorah ferry service.

The local member, the member for Daly, would have been well aware the tender was coming up. He would have been well aware the tender was just around the corner. Indeed, I pick up on the comment by the Leader of the Opposition that, at that time, he was the minister for Business, so he would certainly have been aware of the tender coming up.

Yes, there would have been people complaining about the service. There are people who complain about the bus service every single day in the Northern Territory. I receive complaints about it; I do not doubt the Minister for Transport receives complaints about it. How many ministers has he appointed to oversee community reference groups in relation to a bus service here or in Alice Springs? I suspect none. No, this particular service was going to get a special amount of treatment from this government. It was going to set up a committee to look into the service provided. Then, in the scope of the review, they were to consult with relevant businesses or, to quote it exactly: 'consult with relevant business'.

One would have thought that, under the normal course of things, the Minister for Transport would have expected one of the relevant businesses in relation to this issue would have been the service provider itself ...

Dr Burns: No.

Mr ELFERINK: Well, I have spoken to the ... 'No', says the Leader of Government Business. We are going to have an inquiry into the Mandorah ferry service but we are not going to ask the very service provider who provides the service. Talk about a hatchet job, Madam Speaker! The problem with this government is they have gone into a place where they think they rule the roost, and they will steamroll and muscle anyone who raises any questions. 'No', says the Leader of Government Business, 'Of course we did not speak to the ferry service provider'. What was the name of this reference group? Let us have a look: the Mandorah Ferry Community Reference Group. This was the group that was going to give advice to the minister about the ferry service. They were going to meet, and they met several times, and the minister was going to appoint his mate, the member for Daly, as the chair of this group - despite the fact the local community did not want that appointment.

If the letter from Jack Ellis is any yardstick, they wanted to elect a committee. But, no, the control had to remain there. So, the minister selected his mate, the local member, because he was firing it up as a good, local issue - a nice, little political issue to get it all fired up to be seen as being a good local member. That is what this was about.

I am amazed that the government could claim - or any person could claim - that by not talking to the ferry operator as a result of being a part of the Mandorah Ferry Community Reference Group, is a reasonable position to hold. It is unsustainable and it continues to smell of the hatchet job this is.

It is interesting, because I refer to the letter from Jack Ellis to the Minister for Transport:

We believe with the groundwork of the past month and the local expertise and knowledge available, a group selected from the community, by the community, is preferable to the system you propose.

That letter was written before the minister responded, so the minister should be on his feet in this House today explaining what groundwork was done prior to the establishment of this committee. What groundwork was the minister involved in, and what groundwork was the now Attorney-General involved in, when it came to organising this group? Because other than the survey, there was clearly something else going on behind the scenes and it is alluded to in the letter from Jack Ellis. You would think that the minister who said: 'We listen, we consult, and we listen' would have listened to that piece of advice but no, in his letter of reply to Mr Ellis:

The Northern Territory government recognises the importance of input of the Cox Peninsula community in determining the scope of future ferry services.

Hang on, how? What does 'The Northern Territory government recognises the importance of input from Cox Peninsula community in determining the scope of future ferry services' mean? 'Determining the scope of future ferry services': surely you are not suggesting, minister, that you were in some way going to involve yourself in the tender process and find out exactly what the standards were that you wanted in the tender process. Minister, you have your sticky fingers all over this process and, Madam Speaker, the minister went on to ignore the wishes of the local community. In fact, what did the minister do? The minister appointed his mate to the reference group. It is my understanding that members of the reference group walked out of that reference group after some time because they were so uncomfortable with doing the things they were tasked to do.

That concerns me, and I have subsequently spoken to Jack Ellis on the telephone and he told me he was one of the people who walked out. He did not want to be on the committee because the committee was not elected. I have also received advice from other people living out in the community that they formed the opinion the member for Daly was engaged in a hatchet job and that is what this was about. It was about removing the existing operator from having an opportunity to be the successful tenderer. This group was clearly under the understanding that it was going to be talking to the minister about all these issues surrounding the Mandorah ferry. I

quote from the Mandorah ferry committee minutes which were available on the world-wide web. I have all this material exactly where the minister directed me to:

That group, regardless of its size, will then decide who is going to meet with the minister. It was noted that ultimately the minister will probably have an overall decision on this.

Clearly, the reference group is under the impression that the minister has a decision to make. He has a decision to make, he is running the show, he has his hands on it, he appointed his mate and guess what, all of a sudden, the tender goes out shortly after all this occurs. The tender for the new Mandorah ferry service goes out and there are two applicants. There is one applicant called Fast Ferries out of Sydney, and the current operator, Sea Cat Ferries and Charters, which currently operates the service and has done so for the last 13 years. The department puts out a media release on 28 October after the tender process has been started saying that Fast Ferries Pty Ltd has been named as the preferred tenderer of a regular scheduled passenger ferry service between Cullen Bay and Mandorah commencing 1 January 2012. Well, isn't that interesting? The current operator has been sidelined and the new operator, or the preferred tenderer, is going to be Fast Ferries Pty Ltd.

Fast Ferries Pty Ltd is run by a fellow by the name of Steve Morton, who I have spoken to. A little bit of background about Mr Morton. Mr Morton used to work for Sydney Ferries, the mob that runs the ferries around Sydney. Mr Morton was engaged in what I believe was called the Northcote Mutiny, which ultimately led him to being dismissed from Sydney Ferries. In his defence, he was successful in his bid to have the dismissal ruled as unlawful on the grounds that it was an unfair dismissal. Nevertheless, the response of Sydney Ferries was to refuse to employ him despite the fact the Supreme Court of New South Wales had said they should re-employ him ...

Dr BURNS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! We know members have freedom in this place, they have parliamentary privilege, but I ask that the member - he is dealing with someone else's character and this was always my concern about this debate. I know we have rules about this, and rights of reply. I remind the House of that, and I am sure you are cognisant of it also, Madam Speaker.

Mr ELFERINK: Madam Speaker, if it assists this House, none of these comments I am making are not on the public record – they are all on the

public record – and have been published in major newspapers down south.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Port Darwin, nevertheless, in our House, I remind you that in using someone's name you do so cautiously, given people have a limited right of reply here. So ...

Mr ELFERINK: As I said, Madam Speaker ...

Madam SPEAKER: I am speaking, thank you, member for Port Darwin. While you do have parliamentary privilege, I ask you to use that in a cautious manner.

Mr ELFERINK: Indeed, Madam Speaker, and I have been at great pains to point out that he was successful in his bid to beat the unlawful dismissal. But one can, I hope, still, in this age of free speech and parliamentary democracy, ask questions; and that is what I am doing.

So the question I am asking is: why would Sydney Ferries continue to refuse to employ this fellow? Anyway, that is a side issue and I was not going to spend a great deal of time on it. Nevertheless, it turns out that this operator does have a ferry available for the Mandorah ferry service, except there is only one problem – it is not ready yet – it is sitting in a shed in Sydney.

I notice the Minister for Transport is laughing. I have spoken to Mr Morton and I understand that what he has told the Minister for Transport is he has two other ferries which are currently doing other routes; he will bring those to Darwin. Then, when he has finished building the other ferry, which he will use for the Mandorah ferry service, he will bring that up and put it into operation, and the other two can be let go.

I feel less than completely comfortable with that type of arrangement, and I would imagine the Minister for Transport would feel uncomfortable with that type of arrangement as well. Well, we will get, 'I will build you a ferry at some point'. I am not suggesting for one second that Fast Ferries has done anything wrong. What I am going to raise though, later on, is the effect this reversal of a decision last Friday will also have on Fast Ferries. When the department put out their media release taking the preferred tenderer status away from Sea Cat and granting it to Fast Ferries, what the government essentially did was signal, in the middle of a campaign, by the way, which says, 'buy local', you must buy local, local businesses are what we have to support' – by the way, the ferry service is going to another firm in Sydney – but that is an aside, the fact is that this government, and the tender process, saw Fast Ferries pick up preferred tenderer status, and they went on down the road of spending more money

so they could bring the boat which was sitting in a yard up to speed some time after the contract starts. All the while, there is a ferry service operating here.

What became immediately apparent after the government media release was issued in October was not only was it going to remove the Sea Cat ferry from Cullen Bay to Mandorah, but the unintended consequence was the ferry service to the Tiwi Islands was also probably going to get the axe because the operator could not run the single service. To make this work, he has to run both services. This was not in the consideration of the minister or his mate, the member for Daly, when they were putting their hands all over this process. Their mind was at: 'Let's just get rid of the current operator' because that is all this is about. It was the reason the member for Daly put out the survey in the first place. I can imagine how it went. The member for Daly contacts his mate, the Transport Minister, and says: 'Look, I've done this survey. Some of the punters out there are unhappy with the service. We have 54 people out of 380 people surveyed who said it is a pretty stinky service and, as a consequence, I think we should find a way to change the arrangements'.

I would like the minister to table the tender documents because I will bet you London to a brick that in those tender documents is a change of requirements about what is needed to run the Mandorah ferry service. The service that has run for 13 years has been running adequately and, whilst there have been some people grumbling about it, the majority of people surveyed either did not bother to reply - basically, the majority of the people did not bother to reply and of those who did, whilst there was some grumbling amongst them, most of those who did reply were a small, select group.

How do you get involved in the tender process and then, in the same breath, argue that it is at arm's length of government? Well, that is quite simple. You change the tender requirements in favour of another operator and then let that tender. That, I suspect, is precisely what happened. I would love to see the minister table the tender documents here. The other thing I would like to see him place on the table in this House is the response from the Mandorah committee itself.

The other thing he needs to explain, and something he failed to explain during Question Time, is if you have no interest in the tender process, or the outcomes of the tender, why set up a committee? Why conduct surveys and get advice from all these people when you intend to do nothing with it. If the minister is such a distance away from the tender process, why on Earth bother going through this? What does he

hope to achieve? It is just an intellectual exercise. We thought we would make us feel good. We thought we would survey the people at Cox Peninsula to see how they felt so we communicated with the community ...

A member: And get a good feeling.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, and get a nice feeling about it; a warm, fuzzy feeling in the warm cockles of our heart, or was that information needed for some purpose? The only purposes it could be needed for was to either change the tender documents to write out the existing operator - which is what I believe happened - or to involve yourself in the tender process in the first place. We have heard denials: 'Never got involved in the tender processes', but it does not make sense to have committees or appoint a mate to head a committee, contrary to the wishes of the people in the community. It does not make sense to do all this extra work for yourself when, ultimately, you are not going to do anything with the information.

Is that a way of deceiving the people at Cox Peninsula: 'Look, we are going to do surveys, we are going to have committee meetings and we are going to do all this stuff', but we will not tell the people of Cox Peninsula that we are not going to do anything with the information they give us. We consult, but we will stick it in a filing cabinet and they will have a nice, fuzzy feeling. That is the argument the minister has run and it does not make sense. If that is what they have done, it is quite deceptive in its intent towards the people of Cox Peninsula. Clearly, the people sitting on that committee thought they were going to have some input; they said so in their minutes. Who were they going to have the input to? Not the tender process - the minister and his mate. That is why this government stands condemned.

The problem with the procurement process - like Caesar's wife - it not only has to be beyond reproach but also has to be seen to be beyond reproach. When ministers involve themselves in this type of skulduggery behind the scenes, in appointing their mates to chairmanships of committees, in the way these ministers have involved themselves in the preliminary procedures leading up to a tender process, then the whole tender process is brought into question - from the highest level of government.

Surely, the government and the minister should realise - the first law officer, the Attorney-General of the Northern Territory should realise - you just cannot involve yourself in these types of things, in this way, and then feign surprise when the outcome is exactly what you sought to do at the outset, which was to drop an axe on the current ferry operator. I suspect it comes down to something as simple as this: they simply did not

like the guy, so they thought they would find a way to do a hatchet job on him - and that is what has happened.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, what we have ended up with is rather than have a ferry terminal, we have a terminal ferry.

Mr McCARTHY (Transport): Madam Speaker, I will respond succinctly to the play on semantics from the member for Port Darwin - very succinctly. At the outset, let me be clear: ministers are not involved in commercial negotiations for government tenders - simple as that. The procurement process is rightly independent and is overseen by a Procurement Review Board. The existing tender for the regular ferry service between Cullen Bay and Mandorah ends on 31 December 2011, and commercial negotiations are ongoing. I repeat that, Madam Speaker: the preferred tenderer does not mean a signed deal; the negotiations are ongoing.

In March, I established the Mandorah Ferry Community Reference Group. The ferry is an important service for the residents of the Cox Peninsula. The reference group was established to give Cox Peninsula residents an opportunity to identify their priorities regarding the timing, frequency, and fare structure of future ferry services. The community reference group has no involvement in the tender process. Ministers are not involved in the tender process. The procurement process is rightly independent and is overseen by a Procurement Review Board. Public advertisements were placed calling for nominations to the community reference group, and a final committee was appointed to provide a sound cross-section of residents. I was pleased to appoint the member for Daly as the chair, as he is a very active local member and committed to delivering the best outcome for the constituents of Cox Peninsula.

The committee met on 26 March and 9 April, and their agenda and minutes were published online at www.nt.gov.au/transport. The responses from the reference group are online for everyone to see. Feedback from the community reference group about the community's priorities in regard to ferry schedules and fare structure was valuable to the Department of Lands and Planning in preparing the scope of the tender - the Department of Lands and Planning ...

Mr Elferink: It came through your office, mate. It went to your office; they were talking to you.

Mr McCARTHY: The reference group, including the member for Daly, did not have a role in the tender assessment process and did not have a role in the selection process.

On 30 May, I announced the government tenders for the ferry service would open in July - which they did. The tender period was open for six weeks. On 28 October, the Department of Lands and Planning announced it had selected Fast Ferries Pty Ltd as the preferred tenderer for the service. Preferred tenderer does not mean a signed deal. The status of the preferred tenderer meant commercial negotiations would commence with Fast Ferries. The statement noted Sea Cat Ferries and Charters had submitted the other bid.

On 18 November, the Department of Lands and Planning advised it had been approved by the independent Procurement Review Board to start commercial negotiations with Sea Cat Ferries. The Department of Lands and Planning advises it is expected to finalise a contract in mid-December 2011 but, at this stage, the commercial negotiations are ongoing.

The member for Port Darwin quoted from the Minister for Transport's Mandorah ferry community reference group terms of reference. I thank him for that because it is available on the web and was a communication statement to support the residents of the Cox Peninsula.

I would like to expand on the correspondence the member for Port Darwin quoted from Mr Jack Ellis. I received that correspondence and replied to Mr Jack Ellis, and the member for Port Darwin once again selects certain semantics and uses a legalistic-type of approach to prosecuting his argument and all very good; I enjoy it actually, but he is barking up the wrong tree. Concerning Mr Ellis, let us go into a few more details about how good government works, how good consultation works, and about encouraging constituents to be part of a good open process. I quote from a letter I wrote on 7 February 2011 to Mr Jack Ellis:

Dear Mr Ellis

Thank you for your letter of 28 January 2011 regarding the establishment of the Minister for Transport's Mandorah ferry community reference group. The Territory government recognises the importance of input from the Cox Peninsula community in determining the scope of future ferry services ...

That relates to the terms of reference and I attached a copy of the terms of reference and a nomination form for the Mandorah Ferry Community Reference Group. I was proactive in encouraging Mr Ellis' background knowledge, his residency, and his advice, and this is in writing and is documented. I went on to say to Mr Ellis:

The focus of the reference group will be to provide me with the community's priorities

regarding the timing, frequency, and cost of future ferry services. The Department of Lands and Planning is also carrying out a financial assessment of the provision of a regular ferry service between Darwin and Mandorah to inform the preparation of the appropriate tender documentation.

The Department of Lands and Planning in doing the job they do:

In determining the membership of the reference group, I will be seeking to ensure representation from a broad cross-section of the community.

I outlined that expressions of interest for membership of the reference group will close on Monday 21 February 2011. I wrote that I encouraged members of the Mandorah ferry steering committee to nominate for the group. I attached the nomination form. I attached the terms of reference and I encouraged Mr Ellis to be part of this process:

I note that the range of issues raised in your correspondence, a number of which already have appropriate avenues for consideration and determination.

I went on to supply Mr Ellis with the appropriate contacts he should contact immediately and I encouraged him to make contact with departmental officials, so we can continue a good, open process. Any concerns, and I quote from my letter:

Any concerns regarding these assets can be forwarded to Mr Ernie Wanka, DLP, Director Roads. Mr Wanka can be contacted on telephone 8924 7620.

This was in relation to concerns Mr Ellis had about the jetty and the pontoon. I went into further discussions about transport assets. I informed Mr Ellis about our government's commitment in the financial year to transport assets and that is open, accountable, and I encourage him to make contact with the department:

The department contact for the ferry negotiations is Mr Paul Rajin, Director Transport Services and can be contacted on telephone 8924 7598.

I concluded and, in past tense:

I thank the members of the community reference group, all nine of them, that represent a good cross-section for continuing to work with government and for continuing to work secure the best outcome for Territorians.

The member for Port Darwin, from what he has been saying, may not value that, which I translate to be not valuing the input from Territorians; the community most affected; the community that is advising government. So, I can put a spin on semantics as well. The member for Port Darwin does not value the input from Territorians; our government does, and it is as simple as that. A famous quote from a member from Port Darwin: it is recorded on the public record.

Madam Speaker, this process is open and accountable. This is about delivering outcomes for Territorians in transport infrastructure and operations. This process is ongoing.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, listening to the debate as it started, the member for Port Darwin mentioned Mr Jack Ellis. As you know, Mr Jack Ellis has been around for a long time. He used to be the Editor of the *Litchfield Times*. Having been on local council in the Litchfield area, I know he can be fairly critical when he wants to be. He is someone who has taken an interest in local affairs for many years.

In later years, he produces a newspaper called *The Wagaitear*, which I am online to get copies of, but he also continues to keep fit by umpiring Aussie Rules. I meet him most Wednesday nights at Marrara No 2, as I attempt to keep up with him as we run around the oval. Mr Ellis and I have discussed this matter, as part of a normal type of discussion you would have with one of your mates. When the member for Port Darwin raised this issue, I thought I would contact Mr Ellis. I do not intend to comment about the tender so much, but some of the things that have been said today in parliament.

I asked Mr Ellis what the actual reason was for this committee being set up. He said it was to look at the future of the services in the area. They were asked to produce suggestions on what items should be included in the tender document that were not in the service currently provided. He also said that they would ...

Mr Elferink: What items should be in the tender document for the services not currently provided?

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WOOD: No, calm down. I am just reading the notes he has given us. What are you getting excited about?

Mr Elferink: I am getting excited about these guys with their fingerprints all over the tender system and you defend them.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Port Darwin!
Member for Port Darwin!

Mr WOOD: Look, get excited with the minister, but leave me to finish what I have to say.

They were also asked to look at what they saw would be the future of the ferry service. They were those broad issues about the future of the services for the Mandorah community.

What was also said, and I believe the member for Port Darwin quoted, that Mr Ellis had written to the minister complaining about the way the committee was formed. Mr Ellis said that is exactly what he did do, but then, after that letter had been written, he said the minister then asked for nominations. The minister took into consideration the concerns Mr Ellis had, and the minister then asked for nominations from the community.

Mr Elferink: Which he then ...

Mr WOOD: While discussing this with Mr Ellis just a few minutes ago on the phone, the member for Port Darwin said that Mr Ellis had walked out of a meeting ...

Mr Elferink: That is what he told me.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WOOD: ... and I asked Mr Ellis directly: 'Did you walk out of the meeting?' He said, 'No'.

Mr Elferink: That is what he told me. That is what he said to me.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WOOD: I have no beef in this, and I will come to that at the end of what I have say; I simply asked a question. He said he did not walk out of a meeting - and these are his words: 'I am not here to champion anyone in this debate'. He said Rob Knight - and he is not always a good friend of Rob Knight if you read *The Wagaitear* - 'Rob Knight did a particularly good job in balancing the committee as a politician'. They were his words. I am putting the facts Mr Jack Ellis, who I have known for a long time, said to me. I said I would report that to parliament. People can take that any way they want, but I felt it was my job to report that to parliament.

In relation to the tender documents and how this matter has been handled, there has been much discussion about it. I am not here to say necessarily what is right or wrong because I have not had the chance to analyse the issues before us. There has been a bit in the paper about it; there have been some SMSs; and there have

been letters, some for and some against. When Nigel Adlam from the *NT News* rang me about it, I said if there are genuine concerns about the tender process, it should go to the Auditor-General. That is the way it should be. This would be in his province, and he can look at the whole process independently and see whether it was done properly.

Madam Speaker, I am not here to debate whether the existing tenderer would be better than the new tenderer, or whether the process to change tenderers was fair or not because I do not have enough information to debate that. I was listening to debate, and it was also part of one of the questions where Mr Ellis was said to have done certain things. I rang Mr Ellis to confirm whether that was true and I am reporting what he said to me on the phone. I will not quote him because he said something else about what the member for Port Darwin had said, but my suggestion is that the member for Port Darwin ring Mr Ellis when this debate has concluded.

Mr TOLLNER (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I am happy to speak on this censure motion because there is no doubt in my mind that the minister deserves censure, together with the member for Daly. Quite clearly, these guys have it in for the owners of the Mandorah ferry service; they want to see the back of them and do not care who gets the contract as long as it does not go to the current owners. That is it in a nutshell, isn't it boys? You have had a gutful of these blokes and you want to move them on - simple as that. Why they do not come out and say that is beyond me because, frankly, this whole thing has been a complete fiasco. While we spin off on a tangent talking about the reference group, the fact is, we have one Territory business which has been told it does not have a future in the Northern Territory ferrying people around. We have an interstate company which, I am led to understand, has not secured a workable boat and it looks unlikely it will be able to involve itself in the contract.

Unfortunately, it will come down to the people of Mandorah and the Tiwi Islands who will miss out because of this debacle. The minister can say he has not had anything to do with it and the member for Daly will say he has never had anything to do with it - they will shirk their responsibilities. It is a real pusillanimous approach - unbelievably cowardly, and it never seems to surprise me. Only a couple of months ago, the Territory government relaunched its 'Buy Territory' campaign. We all want to support Territorians and it is very difficult to take umbrage at the government resourcing and supporting a campaign that encourages people to buy things locally.

The unfortunate thing about this government is it has no faith in Territorians to do the job, to supply the services or the goods because, time and time again, we are seeing Territorians being overlooked. This Mandorah ferry service is just typical of so many other things that have been happening. Probably the real standout is the aeromed contract. It went to a bunch of interstate people. NT Aeromedical Services operated, I think, for 75 years - the second-longest serving aeromed service in Australia, second only to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. When they lost that contract, I understand there was a nurse who had worked for the company for over 30 years, without a job. It went to a bunch of people who had no connection whatsoever with the Northern Territory. For \$25m a year, the Territory government will turn around and ignore Territory businesses that have been doing the job quite adequately and consistently for 75 years - known around the country as one of the great aeromed services. This government simply dissolved them – absolutely appalling.

Their distaste for Territorians is seen at all levels of government. I look at the minister's own Land Development Corporation. You might not be unaware, but not one single board member of the Land Development Corporation is from the Northern Territory. You have to ask whether there are not people in the Northern Territory who know how to develop land, who have experience with developing land. My view is there are plenty of them. We have quite a robust land development industry in the Northern Territory but, for some reason or other, government does not think there is a suitably-qualified person in the Northern Territory to sit on that Land Development Corporation board. I find that completely wrong.

I look at the Liquor Licensing Commission. They have people there who are not even from Australia. One of their board members lives in Singapore – is permanently based in Singapore – and comes to the Northern Territory for meetings; quite often does them by phone hook-up. He is working out issues to do with liquor licensing in the Northern Territory. You have to ask the question: what does a lawyer living in downtown Singapore know about the Moil shops or the Jingili shops, member for Johnston? What does a fellow from Singapore know about whether they should have licences or not have licences, whether their trading hours should be reduced or extended? You have to ask the question: why don't they trust Territorians enough to support them with these services?

As I always say in this place, with this government, you do not listen to what they say; you look at what they do. If you listen to what they say, you are easily hypnotised into a belief that they are all-caring, they really do give a damn

about Territorians, but in fact, when you look at what they do, you see that is clearly not the case. Every aspect of government is being taken over by people from other parts of the country. This is a government that wants to turn this place into a New South Wales, a Victoria, or a Tasmania. They simply do not like the Northern Territory as it is. They do not like the Northern Territory attitude. They do not fit into the Northern Territory themselves. They are socialist, lefty, chardonnay-sipping, do-gooder, hand-wringer mob. They do not exist in abundance in the Northern Territory, so they want to create a bit more of what they get when they visit their mates in Sydney and Melbourne. They hang out at Trades Hall and the like in Sydney and Melbourne, and they see the place they want the Northern Territory to become.

That is, fundamentally, what this is all about: to change this place to be like any other part of Australia. You see it over and over again. We turn up here, we look at these stupid laws they bring in. More often than not these days, we are talking about national harmonisation laws. These guys will toe the line every single time because they want the Northern Territory to be like every other place in Australia. They like the idea that no one can drive faster on the roads up here than they can anywhere else in Australia; they like the idea that we all feel locked in, that we feel so constricted and suffocated that we can hardly move. Not just socially, but economically as well. That is the Labor way. Their socialist ideas mean we all have to be the same; we all have to conform.

That has never been the case with the Northern Territory. We have always been different up here - and proud of it. I came up here and I loved the 'have a go' attitude of the Northern Territory; I loved the 'live and let live' attitude of Territorians. The fact you could get away with things in the Northern Territory that you could not contemplate interstate - that was the thing that brought me up here; this free and easy lifestyle we have. But, no, Labor is not happy with that at all, they have to change everything to the point where we are just like another part of the country.

Where they see a bloke who has been operating a ferry service for almost two decades, they decide, no, that has to go somewhere else and, if there is no one up here who does it, let us go interstate and try, somehow or other, to create someone to come up here and take the job.

I was talking to a friend of mine who is involved with ships, knows a bit about them, and he said: 'Anyone who understood the first thing about the marine industry would understand that it takes forever to get a survey on a boat; and if you want to tender for something like that, you really should have the boat sitting here in Darwin Harbour ready

to go. You cannot win this type of tender and run out and buy yourself a boat and drag it up here in a week or so. These things take a bit of time to happen'. Take quite a lot of time to happen. You talk to people in the Northern Territory who have boats that need surveying, and you can be waiting for six months to a year to have that service performed. These guys sit here and say: 'We will give the Mandorah ferry the boot, and find some other hillbilly interstate, and he will come up here and do a job and we can finally get rid of this fellow, because the member for Daly does not like him'. That should not be how it works, and I am horrified that we come into this place and these guys cannot put up a cogent argument as to why they wanted to get rid of the Mandorah ferry in the first place.

Then they find out it has a few knock-on effects and there will be no Tiwi service either. As the member for Arafura will know, this government is no fan of the people on the Tiwis; that has been quite obvious for some time. I feel sorry for the member for Arafura, at times; she has to choose between loyalty to her electorate and loyalty to the government. Quite clearly, the government wins ...

Mr Elferink: Not always; she walked out once.

Mr TOLLNER: ... quite clearly the government wins most times. Although, the member for Port Darwin is quite right, she did walk out on them once; it will not be happening again I imagine, because she is welded on the Labor view.

I fully support this censure motion. This type of thing has to stop. These guys need pulling up because I find their dislike and distrust of Territorians quite repulsive. Their outright hypocrisy in relaunching 'Buy Territory' campaigns, to me, is outright hypocrisy. These guys do not support Territorians, not in any aspect of government, not in legislation they create, not in tenders they award, not in people they employ, not in consultants they employ – Territorians are remarkably left out of all these things. The sooner these guys wake up, and the public wakes up to what this government is up to, the better, because you do not listen to what they say, you look at what they do. There is no doubt about it: they are anti-Territorian.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 11

Noes 11

Ms Anderson
Mr Bohlin

Mrs Aagaard
Dr Burns

Mr Chandler	Mr Gunner
Mr Conlan	Mr Hampton
Mr Elferink	Mr Henderson
Mr Giles	Mr Knight
Mrs Lambley	Ms Lawrie
Mr Mills	Mr McCarthy
Ms Purick	Ms Scrymgour
Mr Tollner	Mr Vatskalis
Mr Westra van Holthe	Ms Walker

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, there being an equality of votes, pursuant to section 27(1) of the *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act*, the question is resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

**EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES
(NATIONAL UNIFORM LEGISLATION) BILL
(Serial 176)**

Continued from 19 October 2010.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Deputy Speaker, today I respond to the Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Bill 2011. This bill will bring us into line with a national initiative to reform early childhood education and care services throughout the country. The main objective of the bill is to establish a system of national integration and shared responsibility between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth in the administration of a national education and care services quality framework.

This legislation came about as a result of the Council of Australian Governments endorsing the national quality agenda regulation impact statement by the Early Childhood Development Steering Committee in July 2009. This steering committee brought forward several proposals which included the idea to unify the national system, to provide better quality assurance within the system, and set national standards. It has an emphasis on providing quality early childhood education and care services, streamlining the licensing and regulation bodies, and professionalising the childcare, early childhood and education industry, throughout Australia. It is legislation that has already been put before many other Australian states, and I understand the Northern Territory and Western Australia are amongst the last to fall into line.

Who will be affected by this uniform legislation bill in relation to education and care services? It will affect long daycare, family daycare, outside school hours care, and preschools. It is legislation which is all about regulation. It is all about unifying and regulating this industry and bringing it into one cohesive and homogenous system.

As my colleague, the member for Fong Lim, said in his speech, this is a Labor Party initiative; it is a Labor characteristic to want to homogenise the way we go about business; for example, in this case we are talking about early childhood education and care. They want to bring the Northern Territory into line with the rest of the country and there are merits to this initiative. It has been debated widely across the country. There has been consultation in all the states and territories about the impact of such legislation, and it has reached this point several years on whereby all states and territories, presumably by 1 January, will have this enabling legislation in place so the national quality framework can start to take effect.

This legislation will affect 250 services across the length and breadth of the Territory. As I said, it is all about regulation, regulation, and more regulation. This bill poses a number of problems for the Northern Territory. It is not all good and there is much hesitation and fear within the early childhood education and care industries about implementing and adhering to the requirements within this bill. I have heard from people on the ground that one of the major concerns is around the new staffing requirements, particularly, the requirements in child ratios and qualifications. The legislation requires a general upgrading of skills for childcare centres, preschools, and daycare centres; that they have a specific complement of qualified and trained workers on-site at all times in order to, presumably, upgrade the quality of care provided by these organisations.

It will be implemented in a staged way, presumably from when this legislation takes effect on 1 January 2012. Family daycare centres will require, for example, for seven children, a maximum of four under school age, a Certificate III for educators and a diploma for coordinators. It is about professionalising the industry; requiring a minimum standard of education of people responsible for supervising X number of children within their care. This poses a huge challenge for childcare centres, particularly in the Northern Territory. Childcare centres in the Northern Territory have difficulty attracting any staff whatsoever. The onus, the responsibility, the requirement, that childcare centres now provide not only untrained childcare workers but also a higher level and a higher number of trained and qualified workers is going to be almost mission impossible for some childcare centres in the Northern Territory.

For example, the Tennant Creek Child Care Centre is a centre which has 50 childcare places with only one qualified childcare worker on staff. All the other workers at this sizeable childcare centre are untrained and unqualified. In a town the size of Tennant Creek, approximately 3000

people, it will be extremely challenging to meet the requirement of this legislation that a trained teacher be available to that centre. In many other centres throughout the Northern Territory, they have the same problem. They cannot find qualified staff and, for that matter, they cannot find any staff whatsoever. I will refer to that point a little later.

The childcare industry is already embattled and disempowered. It is an industry which lays claim to having the lowest-paid workforce in the country. Most childcare workers are earning around \$18 per hour and, because of that, it is very hard to attract staff; I mentioned two childcare centres. The turnover of staff is very high in most centres throughout the Northern Territory.

This legislation is about regulation and more regulation. It is onerous; it is going to put more pressure on these childcare centres that are already struggling to attract staff, keep staff, and meet the already onerous obligations put on them by the licensing and regulation system currently in place.

This new legislation talks about the need to upskill and train workers. It assumes workers will hang around for some time, undergo and willingly participate in training, and desire to be professionalised, skilled, and educated in the area they work in. What we know on the ground is this is not always the case. Many people in the Northern Territory are attracted to the childcare industry because they like to work with children, they like to care for children, and they do not necessarily want to participate in any further training and education in this field. Some people do, but the very high staff turnover rates means most workers may be there for 12 months, they may be there for a couple of years, which does not necessarily mean they ever get around to completing the qualification they commence study for.

The main issue I am hearing when I talk to childcare centres about this legislation, regarding the national quality framework for early childhood education and care workers is around staffing; it is around the recruitment and retention of staff, and this issue alone will make it very difficult for this legislation to work in the Northern Territory.

One of the other features of this legislation is the introduction of a range of rather stiff penalties which are designed to ensure enforcement. The Minister for Education and Training alluded to it in his second reading speech: to ensure compliance and enforcement, to require enforceable undertakings, prosecutions, and internal and external reviews. There is much talk about regulation and enforcement and this legislation

includes a range of penalties and forms of prosecution which are, in my opinion and perspective, rather steep. Currently, these types of penalties are not in place but, if you flip through this legislation, you will see penalties ranging from \$1000 to \$50 000. For childcare centres mainly run by community management boards, the threat of being penalised, being charged with a penalty or a fee or whatever you call it, a penalty of anything up to \$50 000 is quite frankly terrifying.

This is something new for the Northern Territory. Penalties of this magnitude in the childcare industry and the early childhood industry are quite unusual; they are unprecedented from what I was told in the briefing we had with the Northern Territory government officials. It is quite bewildering that the Northern Territory government would comply and include these types of tough penalties for such a caring and struggling industry in the Northern Territory.

If you require a high level of education across the board for your workers within the industry, obviously, that is going to cost money. The officials we spoke to in the briefing told us there would be anything up to \$25 000 provided for workers to upskill, to professionalise, to undergo training that would complement the needs of the centre, that would be managed by the centre, and allow workers to have time off work to participate in the training and education program.

It is clear that the cost of implementing this legislation in the Northern Territory is not going to be manageable for most childcare centres. Most childcare centres will have to find more money from somewhere and, particularly for the employment of a fully-qualified teacher, that is going to be extremely expensive. You have the recruitment and retention issues around recruiting a fully-qualified teacher. Why would a fully-qualified teacher earning \$70 000 or \$80 000 a year, on 12 weeks annual leave a year, want to settle for a position earning possibly 20% less, maybe even more, with six weeks holiday a year? That alone is going to be a big battle. If, in fact, the early childhood services do find a fully-qualified teacher, which they have to within this new legislation, they will have to find extra funds to attract the worker and retain the worker, and who pays for that? Ultimately, it will be the parents or carers of the children using the childcare services, daycare services, or family daycare services. Ultimately, the consumers will foot the bill for the extra costs involved in complying with this new legislation.

This legislation really does not fit the Northern Territory and, in fact, it sets the current providers of early childhood education and care services up to fail. This is going to put more pressure on them. It is going to be more expensive. It is going

to mean more regulations, more regulations, and more regulations and, at the end of the day, you have to ask why; what is going to be the ultimate outcome?

It is not workable in the Northern Territory for many reasons. We have a system which, outside of Darwin, is a struggling industry. Excluding the preschool services, the childcare centres, long daycare centres, and family daycare centres are pushed to the limit. Most of them have long waiting lists. As I alluded to previously, they have very serious recruitment and retention problems around staffing. This legislation will put more and more pressure on a system that is already seriously struggling in the Northern Territory.

For example, in Alice Springs, we have seven childcare centres. All of them tell me they have waiting lists of over 100 children. They have serious staffing problems. When you talk to them, whatever they do, whatever they say they are going to do, whatever requirements are put forward for them to adhere to, they always refer to staffing. Staffing is always the issue.

In Tennant Creek, they have a waiting list of approximately 30 people as of a few weeks ago when I was there. They have a beautiful centre in Tennant Creek and, as I said before, the coordinator is the only qualified person. The coordinator shared with me that they have a very high turnover of staff.

In Katherine, I understand two childcare centres have closed in the last 18 months to two years, or thereabouts. Both of those, I understand, closed due to an inability to attract suitable staffing.

In Palmerston - what a peculiar situation we have there. We have one childcare centre, brand-new, never been opened, laying dormant in Palmerston for over 12 months. How hideous is that, when you have people in Alice Springs begging, crying out for childcare, and in Palmerston, we have a childcare centre that has remained completely inactive, empty, dormant for over 12 months. I have no explanation as to why that is the case, apart from negligence on the part of the Northern Territory government to get moving and get that utilised. Also, within Palmerston, I have been advised that another childcare centre is closing due to issues around financial viability.

When you talk about childcare and early childhood education and care services in the Northern Territory, it is a pretty grim picture. It might be working okay in Darwin where there is considerable demand in the old marketplace, the old market economy is able to function to some degree with success, but I also understand most

Northern Territory childcare centres are subsidised by the Northern Territory government.

There are some major issues in implementing the requirements of this legislation in the Northern Territory. Aspects of this legislation are very well intended. There are merits in joining a national and unified system. Allowing workers to move from one Australian state or territory to another makes perfect sense, and generally wanting people within the early childhood education and care industry to be better qualified, better educated, is a good thing generally; but, in practice, in the Northern Territory, I am advised it will be almost mission impossible.

The impact of this legislation on children also needs to be looked at a little further. When the national quality framework was presented throughout the different states and territories for consultation there was, I understand, considerable debate about the philosophy and ideology around this framework. I am by no means a professional person in this area; I do not have a vast knowledge of what is best practice, what is desirable or not desirable, but one thing I am reading into this legislation is the fact it is about more control and more intervention.

I read in *The Australian* some weeks ago, an article by a sociologist named Frank Furedi who wrote an article on 5 November in *The Weekend Australian* called 'Nanny State has no Business Muscling Mums and Dads Out of the Way'. This was quite a timely and enlightening article for me to read with my consideration of this legislation. He apparently wrote a book titled *Paranoid Parenting* and, within this synopsis of the national quality framework, he says it is an intervention into family life, into the lives of Australian families who depend so heavily on childcare as a means of survival. He accuses this initiative of panic mongering and says it is a form of social control, it is unnecessary, and it is demoralising and disempowering for parents. He said that by introducing such legislation we are not acknowledging the fact that when human beings are very young, yes, it is a great time to teach them certain things, but it is not necessarily about making them Einstein or trying to teach them calculus or scientific equations; it is really about play, interaction, and caring. He says:

It seems that politicians in and out of government cannot resist the temptation of intervening in people's private lives. Since 2009, Australia has a minister whose explicit brief is to deal with early childhood. The officially endorsed Early Years Learning Framework is based on the assumption that government can never intercede early enough in children's lives to

compensate for the incompetence of their parents.

The early years learning movement is based on the principle that since most parents - particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds - cannot be trusted to bring up their children satisfactorily, professional intervention is needed.

Those comments resonate with me. What we have here is regulation out of control. There are, as I said, some merits in this legislation, there is some good that could come out of it being implemented. However, by and large, it is intrusive and counter-productive in looking after the real needs of children of parents or carers who need to work. He went on to say:

It is important to comprehend that the Early Years Learning Framework promoted by the Australian government has little to do with real education. In any case, the last thing three- to four-year-old children need is formal education. The Early Years Learning Framework implicitly recognises this point, which is why it opts for what is described as 'strong emphasis on play-based learning'.

He then went on to say:

The constantly repeated claim that unless children are stimulated under professional supervision their brains will be at risk seeks to prey on parental insecurities.

At the end of the day, Frank Furedi is saying we do not need to professionalise early childhood education and care services; that it is about providing play. It does not have to be, necessarily, measured, upgraded, or meet academic standards; it is about providing a very basic and good-quality caring service which is in operation in the Northern Territory now. I go through childcare centres on a regular basis, and I see quality childcare services. I see services that are currently being regulated and monitored by the Northern Territory government in a very efficient and adequate way.

The recent decision of the Northern Territory government to remove the childcare licensing officer from Alice Springs was a retrograde step. I do not understand that, given what you are putting before parliament now, minister. If you put your money where your mouth is, you would put that officer position back into Alice Springs and allow us to have full access to this position. You seem to be hell-bent on regulation and more regulation. To remove a key licensing and regulation position from Alice Springs to Darwin does not really match your rhetoric.

What this government should be doing is attending to the shortage of childcare places in the Northern Territory. What the government should be doing is returning, as I said, the Alice Springs licensing and regulatory officer to Alice Springs. What the government should be doing is representing the working mums and dads of the Northern Territory; trying to create more positions so the mums and dads can work if they choose, so these people can contribute to the economy to make it stronger and more resilient. At the moment, we have 100 children in Alice Springs whose parents cannot find childcare for them. Presumably, those parents are trying to juggle work and childcare, or they have come up with some type of second-rate childcare arrangement for their children, or are not working at all and not contributing to the economy of Alice Springs.

Why do we have a situation where we are suddenly being expected to comply with the national initiative to have a national quality framework? Why is it that the Northern Territory government can attend to this, but not attend to the shortfalls and the problems within the system? This legislation misses the real need when it comes to early childhood education and care services in the Northern Territory. We should be focusing our attention on creative ways to create more childcare places in all areas.

I have not even spoken about the situation in remote areas. How can this legislation work in remote areas? There is, apparently, a second childcare centre in Tennant Creek. I know very little about that centre, but it has been put together fairly recently. I wonder how that second childcare centre in Tennant Creek will meet the requirements of this new legislation. How will a childcare centre at Yuendumu, Papunya, or Borroloola, those very remote communities, meet the requirements of this legislation?

During the briefing we had with the Northern Territory government officials, they talked about the fact there will be waivers in place. They are already talking about waiving certain centres or services in different areas, because already they are acknowledging this is going to be too hard to implement; it is going to be unrealistic, irrational, and impossible, for many centres throughout the Northern Territory to meet these requirements. For the government to come in with a big stick approach and slap a \$10 000 penalty on these centres for not complying is so counter-productive, so destructive, and certainly not in the best interests of the Northern Territory.

This legislation does not fit with the Northern Territory. As my colleague, the member for Fong Lim said: we are unique here; we have a vast geographical area; we have a very small population, around 230 000 people; we lack the

expertise; we lack the access to training required to upskill early childhood education and care service industry workers. It is going to be an incredibly difficult task.

In the briefing, we were told the requirements will be implemented in a staged and staggered manner. The time frames were not clear, but there was some recognition that even with waiving certain aspects, there would be a requirement to provide more time for these things to be put in place. I have been around the Territory for some time now and I cannot see that, given 20 years, some places in the Northern Territory would ever be able to comply with some requirements of this legislation. It really is unrealistic.

More than anything, it will place a burden on the providers, the existing providers of childcare services in the Territory. I will talk about Alice Springs because I know about Alice Springs best. I know the directors of the childcare centres in Alice Springs and have spoken to them widely about this. They have freely told me, without me asking questions, how the national quality framework will affect their childcare centres. They told me they can see positives in it, and they can. But, let us put that into context, and the context is: they see this as a *fait accompli*; they see this as something that is going to happen. It is going to happen on 1 January 2012; they have been given the date, they were given the requirements a long time ago, they have been involved in the consultation process, they see this as a *fait accompli*. It is going to happen and, like all people faced with a huge and overwhelming challenge, rather than be beaten by it, they are looking at it positively, they are trying to reframe it, and they will tell you there are some positives in it.

The fact that our industry will be professionalised, our industry will be recognised; there are good things in it regarding the unification of the standards and qualifications throughout the country. They have picked the eyes out of it, and most of the directors in Alice Springs will give you some positives about how it could benefit them and their consumers. However, when you scratch the surface and ask them what the issues could be for them, the challenges, that is when the list is extended and that is when they will tell you they are concerned about many aspects of how this legislation will affect their services.

It is a curious thing to put such an onerous set of requirements on such a flagging and failing industry in many respects. Most of the centres I speak to regularly take each day at a time because they are run by committees, and mums and dads, who struggle to put the time and energy into being a part of those committees. They struggle to meet their obligations as a committee, and now they are going to be in a situation where

the financial burden of this legislation will affect them personally, as well as the operation of the actual centre.

Many aspects of this legislation will be more than a challenge for the average childcare centre and, as I said, I believe it really is too much. The Northern Territory government should have gone in and batted for our particular and unique situation. The Northern Territory government should have spent more time advocating on behalf of people who work in the industry, instead of imposing this legislation and falling into line, and I can see why they have fallen into that trap; they should have gone out and advocated on behalf of the industry for better pay conditions. If you pay people better, you attract higher-quality staff, you may attract more trained staff, you may be able to retain more staff, but I do not think the Northern Territory Labor government has engaged in the process at all.

This government could be doing many more things, rather than imposing this legislation on the early childhood education and care industry. There are things this government could do; for example, fixing up what is going on at Palmerston. What is going on in Palmerston? What sort of fiasco is that? A brand-new centre - the GPs clinic opened in October last year and, at the same time, the childcare centre was built. That was 13 months ago and the childcare centre is not open.

Instead of placing onerous regulation after regulation on the existing, good-quality Northern Territory childcare services, where we have excellent directors and staff who are trying hard to keep this industry alive, to provide a good-quality service to the carers, and mums and dads, who rely so heavily on this industry for their survival and income, and for their children's stimulation and care while they are at work, why has the government not looked at other aspects of the industry, rather than just falling into line with this attempt to over-regulate and penalise the childcare industry.

The opposition does not support this legislation. We do not support the Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Bill. We feel the Northern Territory government has far better things to do before going down this track. The Northern Territory government has an obligation to look hard at the childcare industry in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory government should be getting on the phone to Kate Ellis. Kate Ellis has given the community of Alice Springs a series of very mixed messages about what she is and is not going to do with childcare in Alice Springs. The Northern Territory government needs to have a conversation with Kate Ellis about the 100 children on the waiting list

of the Alice Springs childcare services rather than wait for a \$50 000 scoping study to be completed. The Northern Territory government should be saying: 'Look, Kate Ellis, Alice Springs needs a brand-new childcare centre. Alice Springs needs to have some relief from this major problem which is causing our economy to stifle and not grow. It is contributing to the stifling of our economy'.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I said, we do not support this bill before the House today, and I urge the Northern Territory government to have a big rethink about this. Being in line with the rest of the nation on this issue is a good thing, but it totally misses the point. The problem is not about a lack of uniformity and connectedness, the problem is far greater and far different to what this legislation is responding to.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Deputy Speaker, I was interested in the member for Araluen's comments on the bill. Whilst I understand where she is coming from and have some concerns myself, in speaking to people involved in the industry in my electorate, they have some concerns but told me they were looking forward to the legislation. That is the basis on which I am approaching this debate today.

That does not mean I am completely happy with everything in this legislation, but I do see the benefits of having uniform legislation. There is a definite need to have flexibility which accounts for the different circumstances in which these facilities operate throughout the Northern Territory. Howard Springs is much different from Lajamanu. Part of the ongoing debate the government will have with its Commonwealth counterparts is that it must be very careful if it is going to judge remote communities as if they are on equal terms with someone in my electorate, or someone in the green belt of Melbourne where some of these so-called improvements originated. I ask that we go to committee stage because I have some questions.

A summary of what is before us today: the national uniform legislation aims for national quality standards, quality rating system, streamlined regulatory arrangement, and formation of the Australian Education and Care Quality Authority jointly governed by the Australian state and territory governments. While I support these goals and the concept of best-quality care and education for young children across Australia, I am concerned about the impact on schools and services in the Territory.

I have been assured that teams, which will carry out assessments against the following areas, will assess the service in context and against the community needs. As I said before, I

question the ability of the process to recognise the difference in a service located in the green parts of Melbourne to those located in a remote community in the Northern Territory. The rating will be against seven areas: educational program and practice; children's health and safety; physical environment; staffing arrangements; relationship with children; collaborative partnerships with families and communities; and leadership and service management. Each of these areas will have two to three standards under which there are elements which describe the outcomes for achieving the standard; in total, 18 standards with 58 elements.

Existing services will be grandfathered into the system. If, by 2014, they cannot meet the standards, the service will be reassessed and rated appropriately, and this may mean a downgrading of the service. This rating will be available to the public through a system similar to My School on which the NAPLAN results are advertised. That is one of my concerns, not only for remote communities but also where schools physically have problems upgrading.

In relation to staffing, there is to be an increase in the qualifications required by staff. I agree with having the right people look after children, but hope these requirements do not eliminate valued and appropriate people in the system. That is one of my major concerns, especially in after school care, where you have good quality people; mums who are wanting a little part-time work have been able to look after children because after school care is not education. After school care is childminding for kids who are waiting for their parents to come home from work. I feel this section has been influenced too much by that same system from down south.

There was a sheet handed out about improvements in the qualifications for people in outside school hours care. Fifty per cent of educators must hold one of the following qualifications from December 2013: (a) a two-year post-secondary course in childcare; (b) a post-secondary sports and recreation teaching or teaching qualification, or a qualification approved by the national authority equivalent to (a) or (b). Why would you want those types of qualifications if you only work a couple of hours a week? You would hope people who have qualifications and spend the time getting them would be looking for a full-time job; that is why they have those qualifications.

I have some concerns - and I raised this at a parent/teacher night at Howard Springs and parents raised it as well - about the need for these qualifications for outside school care. The government is putting in place scholarships, and has recognition of prior learning packages, and

this will cover the staff with over 30 years service. This is a good move by the government. Where people have been teaching or looking after children for a long period of time, it seems a bit silly - as they would be coming close to their retirement age - that you would require them to go back to university to get a Bachelor of Education or whatever requirements would be needed. Through the knowledge of the good service they have given, you know they are qualified, simply by their experience in that area. Also, the government is putting in place grants to cover costs of undertaking the recognition of prior learning packages.

Preschool assistants must be working towards qualifications. The question is: how hard will that be in remote communities? How easy is it going to be for preschool assistants at Kintore, Lajamanu, and Alpururulam to get those qualifications?

I have also been told many of these positions, especially in long daycare and outside school hours care, are part-time positions and there is a large staff turnover. This problem is recognised nationally. The family daycare and outside school hours care suits mothers returning to the workforce, and these people are often employed on a casual rate by the school council.

Currently, if a preschool teacher goes on holidays during the term, a teacher can be used to replace them, however, with the new requirements, it is not possible. Additional staff will be required because of the new requirements. The preschool ratio of floor space per child has not been increased in 30 years, so why do we need to do it now? The department has been doing a survey of schools to determine the current infrastructure, and what infrastructure changes will be required under this new legislation. I would like to go through that in a little more detail in the committee stage.

In relation to outside school hours care, this is not really part of a child's educational time. Basically, the children are unwinding after school with time to have something to eat and play. Girraween has a before school care provision where they provide breakfast for kids. I hope common sense will prevail so those breakfast providers do not need to have a certificate in cooking. We have to keep our feet on the ground and ensure we do not lose sight of common sense.

There is a growing demand for childcare places throughout the Territory. As the member for Araluen said, Alice Springs is having trouble meeting demands. The question is: will these requirements make it even more difficult to have the space and qualified people to meet the

demand. I should also say, when I was talking with a principal at one of the schools about this, that principal was supportive of the changes, but had concerns. She recognised, at the Girraween district centre, there is a desperate need for more childcare centres in the rural area. The Girraween district centre was planned by the government to have some small development such as a community centre, maybe a shop, maybe some residential development. It also had room for things like a community or childcare centre. It simply cannot do that because the government has not come up with an agreement, or been willing to put in the infrastructure. In this case, I am talking about sewerage to allow development of that district centre. A district centre in the rural area, in the Girraween area, will take off straightaway because the childcare centre at Howard Springs is full. It is a new childcare centre; it just celebrated its 1st birthday. There is a waiting list. It seems the government is slow in recognising that there are people in private industry willing to put the dollars in, if the government provides the land to do so.

Humpty Doo has a childcare centre, Bees Creek has a childcare centre, and Howard Springs has a childcare centre which was originally going to be an ABC childcare centre until they went broke. It was taken over by a gentleman from Palmerston who has been quite successful; it is certainly a very popular childcare centre.

Whilst we are looking at legislation, we also have to ensure there are facilities for people. This is only paper, this is only about legislation, about standards and things like that, but if there is still a demand for childcare facilities, the government should ensure it is making land available for such purposes. I am not sure of the reasons why there are difficulties in Alice Springs but there is demand that needs to be tapped into in the rural area. I hope the government will take it on as a matter of urgency to look at the Girraween district centre and do something about it because rural people would prefer to have childcare centres close by, rather than having to travel long distances, so that is an area that needs looking at.

I would like to ask some questions of the minister during the committee stage about the reasoning behind these changes. Many times, we accept without question why these great big national bodies make these decisions and you do get a feeling of helplessness when you ask a question about why that decision was made, the purpose of the decision, the benefits of that decision, how much the decision will cost the provider, and how much the decision will cost the parent. We need to look at all those matters in more detail to see what effects these changes will have, whether they are necessary, and the basis

for these changes. I will leave it at that at the moment.

Madam Speaker, even though I have my concerns, I have had discussions with the people in my electorate, specifically the primary schools that deal with these issues every day. The principals have given their support for it but, at the same time, recognise there are some issues and I will try to highlight those issues during the committee stage.

Mr CHANDLER (Brennan): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on the Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Bill. This legislation is to unify a national framework to integrate new licensing and quality assurance systems. From the outset, I appreciate the intent of this legislation, as its objective is to provide children with the very best of conditions during the early educational and developmental years by safeguarding children's safety, health, and wellbeing.

It is hard to argue; however, as with most legislation, there is a rider. The levels of regulation and, in some cases, bureaucracy, can lead to better outcomes for children but it sometimes comes at a cost. When you look at the existing cost structure for childcare centres, given this legislation does not provide any guarantee that things are going to get better, you have to question whether it is the right way to go.

As I said, it is hard to argue when you see on paper what the legislation is trying to achieve. Initially, and this is going back a good 18 months when it was first raised that national uniform legislation was going to be introduced, I was contacted by quite a few owners and operators of childcare centres and they raised some initial concerns. They were - in fact, quite frightened would be a good term to use. We know most Australians do not handle change well and, without having much information on the legislation at that time, it was very difficult to provide any assurances that they were not being led down the garden path. I have now had a chance to look at the legislation and, through the minister, would like to thank him for the briefing provided by people who are in this room today; also, the CEO, Mr Gary Barnes and Mr Picton.

Those types of briefings, reading the legislation, and listening to a minister's second reading speech help provide a genuine understanding of the intent of this legislation. It is one thing to agree with the intent; it is a different story when you start to break down the legislation and see whether it is really going to achieve what it sets out to.

The initial reaction from childcare centres was about the additional costs, that there was no guarantee of better outcomes, that this was more bureaucracy and, of course, the costs will be passed on. It is true to say that childcare in this country - not just the Northern Territory - is a very expensive commodity. I have had many parents speak to me over the last few years, even prior to getting into politics; being the chair of Bakewell Primary School for about five years, many people would talk to you about the cost of childcare. In many cases, parents are questioning whether they can afford to work. The basis of their income could be part-time, short contract, or other that does not provide them with sufficient income to cover the cost of childcare, let alone make any money above the initial cost of childcare, so you question why you are working in the first place. My wife works for a local school on a part-time basis and, if it were not for the graciousness of my children's grandmother, it would not be worth my wife working the hours she is employed, on the income she is employed, because it would not cover the costs of childcare. So, here we are introducing another layer of cost, and that is something that we really need to explore further.

Some childcare centres I have spoken to have actually taken the bull by the horns, so to speak, and taken on these changes, even prior to the legislation being introduced. I have to report that, in some cases, they are saying it is working very well; it is working for them. It is not true to say that that is going to be the case in all childcare centres. They all have different cost structures, they all offer different services to some degree, and, of course, they operate in different parts of the Northern Territory.

Having a closer look at the legislation, you have to admit that childcare is expensive now. Will there; however, be a long-term cost to this government? We know the Northern Territory government provides generous contributions to each childcare centre in the Northern Territory. I do not know if it is all of them, but I believe it is most of them. If it is true that the additional cost this legislation applies to childcare centres, and if that additional cost causes more to close down if the government does not step in and support - we know there are childcare centres out there today running on very marginal costs indeed. Some have made the decision to close, others are considering closing, and some, until this legislation is introduced, do not know whether they are going to be able to meet the obligations, which gets to the waiver side of this legislation and we will talk on that in a minute.

My concern is, if all of a sudden we have a number of childcare centres about to close down because of this additional legislation being applied

to them, will the government then be pressured to come in and offer additional support to those childcare centres, and therefore, is this another layer of cost to government caused by this legislation?

There needs to be a closer look at the legislation. Good legislation should always be supported; however, in my opinion, this particular legislation has both good points and bad points. Some of the good points: it does appear that it provides, for the first time, a career structure for workers, and, without doubt, workers are the most vital and important part of any business or government department. Any program whatsoever that employs people, you must appreciate that your staff are your most valuable attribute. So, whatever you can do to support them, to provide for them, is going to provide a stable and strong foundation to your business. That goes without saying. In one respect, this legislation, I believe, for the first time, provides that structure for careers in childcare.

However, having teachers in childcare facilities may put some additional stress on our existing schools. Will there be teachers who are encouraged to come across to childcare and away from mainstream schools? That is an opportunity some people will certainly take, for different reasons. We know we have a school system which struggles to get teachers to stay long term in the Northern Territory, particularly in remote locations. I know the government struggles with it. I am certainly struggling with it from a policy point of view of what you can do to encourage teachers to stay here longer. There are things you can do, like looking at the living conditions for teachers, their pay and other conditions, but here you have another layer where you are creating another area for teachers to go. It may be another level of stress the Education department needs to manage if, in fact, there is a run on teachers away from mainstream schools into childcare centres. If we struggle to get teachers to come to the Northern Territory, does this not make it even more difficult?

For those who choose to leave schools and go to a childcare centre, it may be a great opportunity for them. So, there is good and bad within this legislation. The bad goes down to the fact there will be additional costs, without doubt, and we know that in the Northern Territory parents battle with some of the highest living costs in Australia. We already pay high rents, high energy costs, the highest fuel costs, and the highest land acquisition costs. Good grief, I was looking the other day and you can buy blocks of land in Melbourne and western Sydney cheaper than you can buy blocks of land in Darwin and Palmerston.

This all gets back to attracting good people into jobs; if they cannot afford to live here, and stay here, they are going to leave, and they are leaving. I have said many times in this House how important teachers are to our education system and the welfare of our children. If they cannot afford to live here, because of the money we can afford to pay them, due to the high living costs, they are going to leave and will continue to leave; or those who come here will leave sooner, rather than want to set their roots here and live here for the long term.

The same goes for childcare, and this legislation will add another layer of cost to an already expensive place to live. It comes down to what people want out of life sometimes, and the careers they choose in their life have a great deal to do with the incomes they earn. It goes without saying, the things you want to do in life are often driven by the income you can earn. If you look at actors and actresses, some of them make a great deal of money, but there are more poor actors and actresses than what people know of or appreciate.

If you were a police officer or a teacher living in Victoria, where your income is probably similar to what you earn in the Northern Territory, but the living conditions and costs of living are dramatically different, you would question why you would want to be in the Northern Territory when you can be doing exactly the same job in Victoria. The reason I raise this is because, again, we are talking about national legislation; we are talking about this legislation providing the ability for people in Victoria, for instance, who have an appropriate certificate in childcare, to come to the Northern Territory and work. Conversely, we are also making it easier for those people who already work and live here in the Northern Territory to live in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, or wherever else they may choose. This legislation actually helps that cross-pollination of states but, I hope, not to our detriment because, if it comes down to the cost of living, there are many places you can go in Australia where the cost of living is much cheaper than it is in the Northern Territory. This legislation may be a vehicle for people to get out of the Territory, and I hope that is not going to be the case.

The other part of the legislation I find interesting is the built-in waivers because government already knows many centres will not be able to meet their obligations under this legislation. You have to question this because, if the legislation was so good, why do you need waivers in the first place? Does this not undermine the legislation in the first place? You recognise some will not be able to meet the obligations, so you pop in a waiver. Does this not create double standards? On the one hand, you may have a childcare centre which has committed

to the changes, absorbed the costs, and absorbed the flack from parents when costs have been passed on, or perhaps even absorbed the real possibility of closing their business, but they have struggled through. On the other hand, you could have a centre which has simply chosen to utilise the waiver clauses through demonstrating why they cannot or should not have to introduce the changes. How is that fair or even workable in the long term, given it is, predominantly, a free market we are talking about in childcare? You are setting it up so one childcare centre could be working on one set of rules, and another could be working on another. That does not seem sustainable to me, and I hope it does not occur in the long term.

Perhaps the worst part of this legislation is there is no guarantee things will actually improve. I know there have been studies on having teachers in early childcare centres. It is reported that having a teacher acquainted with these children earlier in life sets them up for a better education. Conversely, there is plenty of information that does not profess that same point of view. You can look at schools such as the Milkwood Steiner school, where they talk about educating children a different way and applying more rigorous academic rules and regulations further down the track when a child is more mature, rather than trying to deal with them earlier. Science says there is, perhaps, evidence that will support both sides of that equation. I am not sure. My eldest son was forever getting into trouble years ago in school. We had him going from pillar to post because we were told we needed to help this child. We took him to paediatricians. We took him to a lady in Fannie Bay who was helping him, just to ensure his eye sight and hearing were okay. One day, a paediatrician said to me: 'You know what? With this particular child, there are just some times when horses need to be left in the paddock 12 months longer, rather than bringing them in too early'. I thought it was an interesting point of view. I had never considered that before. In that particular case, he was telling me this kid needed to be out there playing and enjoying life a little more for a bit longer and then he would be ready to come in.

I suppose it is a little like the Steiner program, where they are dealing with children who are slightly older before they try to push curriculum down their throat. They are still learning; they just learn through a different method. During the time I spent out there the other week, I was amazed at the abilities of some of these children. It is a completely different way. I left there with a different view from what I walked in with. I certainly cannot argue that the results in the work I saw in the classrooms were not of a fantastic standard. When you walked into classrooms of Years 4, 5, and 6 and saw the quality of their

work, you could not argue that it is a very high standard.

There is evidence that suggests if you get to children earlier - and I suppose there is also evidence, as I said, when I spoke to a paediatrician, someone who was very experienced in that area, who told me my son needed a bit more time in the paddock before he was brought in.

You might want to question whether all this is going to lead to better outcomes. Is all this extra work, extra bureaucracy, going to lead to a better system? If it does, fantastic - absolutely fantastic. If this legislation leads to the outcomes that meet the intent of the legislation - absolutely fantastic.

What this legislation will absolutely guarantee is there will be a higher cost base to operate the industry and, of course, that is passed on to hard-working parents. What it also guarantees is a double standard, at least in the short-term. What it also guarantees is another layer of bureaucracy, something Labor governments are renowned for, in fact, famous for. Labor governments are famous for being able to dream up and introduce layer upon layer of bureaucracy and, as an example, I will quote from minister Burns' second reading speech where he says:

It will improve access to information about the quality of services, and reduce the regulatory burden for education and care providers.

When I first heard this, I thought: 'This will be a first'. I was enlightened to hear that comment. Minister Burns saying this legislation will reduce the regulatory burden on childcare facilities. Alas, I was disappointed because not more than 30 seconds later, minister Burns said:

A quality assessment and rating system based on national quality standards will be applied, and a new body ...

There you have it, less than a minute after stating this legislation will lessen the regulatory burden, minister Burns refers to a new body. I will keep reading from minister Burns' second reading speech:

... the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority will be established to oversee the implementation of the regulatory framework.

Can someone please explain to me how establishing a new department in an already over-bureaucratized area leads to reduced regulatory burden. If you read further, it is not one, but two levels of bureaucracy being

introduced. The first, the authority being established in New South Wales to guide the establishment of the regulatory framework and then another department or regulatory authority being established in each participating jurisdiction. Minister Burns has already stated this legislation will reduce the regulatory burden for childcare centres. I read further from minister Burns' second reading speech:

To support this role the law includes a number of offences and makes provision for a range of compliance and enforcement tools such as compliance notices, enforceable undertakings, and prosecution. Processes for internal and external reviews are also provided to ensure equitable decisions are handed down.

Again, I ask the question and refer to minister Burns' statement about lessening the regulatory burden. Let us continue:

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, which will be located in New South Wales, will guide the implementation and administration of the regulatory framework, promote national consistency, and be responsible for reporting to the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. This body will be governed by a board appointed by the ministerial council following nominations from the Commonwealth, states, and territories.

Nothing in that expresses a sense of reduced regulatory burden, but there is more; there is so much more.

In many instances, I would be the first to support national uniform legislation. In so many areas, it makes sense - instead of different legislation from one state to another, and allowing for cross-pollination of workers and business. In many cases, it has the ability to remove a layer or two of bureaucracy and that is a good thing. In this case, where no guarantee of improvement is given - in fact, the inclusion of waivers and conditions provides further cause for concern, as it does nothing but undermine the intent of the legislation and, let us face it, the intent is a good one. The intent is something I can truly say I understand; I see what is trying to be achieved here, but sadly, through this legislation, I cannot say I am overwhelmed with a sense of how it is going to make a positive difference.

When you weigh it all up, in the place we call home, where we have the highest cost of living, how can we support more legislation that adds another layer of cost for Territorians where there

is no clear evidence to support why there is a need? Are childcare centres so badly run today? Are the processes and systems they have in place tragic? The childcare centres I have spoken to have major waiting lists. It is not as though there is not a business case out there that would probably support far more childcare centres.

There are some very good areas of this legislation. There is the ability for training and academic achievement being recognised across Australia. The career structure staff could engage in to some extent, and the intention to have a teacher may improve the standards. The truth is, we already have very good childcare centres in the Northern Territory, run by very experienced operators and parent groups, and we certainly do not have an issue with oversupply. In some cases, there is a definite undersupply, if you care to read waiting lists. This legislation could put even more centres at risk of closing. It will certainly cost more to run a centre, costs that will be passed on to parents already suffering because of failed Labor policy and failure to plan, leading to the highest cost of living in Australia.

I am all for legislation that is going to make a positive difference, and this legislation may just do that. It may streamline many of the processes across states. I just hope it does not provide that vehicle, as I said before, for quality people to leave the Northern Territory because they can go interstate earning similar amounts of money, where the cost of living is not going to be as high as in the Northern Territory.

Madam Speaker, we want what is best for our children. We want good, sound legislation that is going to lead to positive outcomes. If this legislation does it, fantastic, but if it does not improve the outcomes it is hoped to achieve, I sincerely hope it is looked at in the future. If there is no improvement, it should be removed from our business. If it works, fantastic; if it does not, if it does not lead to those improvements, there is no need to have the additional costs required to cover it.

Dr BURNS (Education and Training):

Madam Speaker, I thank all members for their contribution to this debate. What we have heard in the main from opposition is assertions of a conspiracy theory on the part of Labor governments to increase the regulatory burden, increase red tape, increase costs, and send already overburdened child-minding facilities and businesses to the wall. Nothing could be further from the truth. One only has to go to the explanatory statement to find the intent of this legislation:

The reforms within the bill focus on improving the quality of education and care

services for all children - especially those from disadvantaged or at-risk backgrounds - reducing regulatory burden on services and providing greater access to information about the quality of services.

This legislation is all about the kids. It is all about giving our kids the best start in life they could possibly have. The research is clear; the authorities are clear on this. Those early years of early childhood education are crucial to the development of children to varying degrees. There has been an Access Economics report made public, looking not only at the efficacy of these changes, but also looking at the literature to back it up. I commend it to members of this House. It is publicly available - no need to ask me to table it, member for Port Darwin. There has certainly been cost-benefit analysis done on this.

I turn first to the literature review. The literature contains instructive research on the drivers of positive childcare outcomes. This research focuses on the regulatory aspects of quality provision, referred to as structural quality, and typically comprises staff to child ratio, group size, and teacher qualifications. There it is in a nutshell. This is what the literature and the experts are telling us; things we already know about our children.

I pick up on what the member for Araluen and the member for Brennan said. We do not want to be teaching our kids rocket science, atomic physics, equations, and whole lot of complicated things at that early age. What we need to be doing is stimulating those kids through play. That is very important and is what this is about; this is about giving kids stimulation early in life. We hear stories about childcare and a common complaint some parents have is they do not feel their child is getting enough in the way of stimulation through activities. This is very important, and I will quote further from the Access Economics report:

The most convincing evidence suggests that the effects of preschool on school readiness are likely to be smaller for more-advantaged children compared with their less-advantaged peers.

That emphasises the challenge we have in the Northern Territory, particularly through measures like our early childhood developmental index which clearly shows there are arrears, particularly in our more remote areas amongst Indigenous kids. We have a great deal of work to do and we need to do it flexibly across the Northern Territory; we need to be flexible in our approach. It might not be the same approach in the larger urban centres as it is within our remote communities. I felt the member for Araluen's approach was not even a glass half full approach, the glass was

empty and I think the glass had been put in a desiccator; that is how devoid of any sort of cheer or positivity about these changes she was. These changes are about our children and our children's future.

The cost - alluded to by a number of members; notably, the member for Brennan and the member for Araluen - the Access Economics report shows the model cost is about \$3.50 per day per child. That is over and above what it would be for CPI. In other words, the extra cost directly attributable to this national quality framework is about \$3.50 a day. My kids have grown up; if I had grandkids, I would say that is a worthwhile investment - \$3.50 per day for my kids' future, to ensure my child is receiving quality care and education. This extra layer of bureaucracy was mentioned and I will come to the alleged extra layers in a minute.

Three dollars fifty, so there is transparency in the process, so we can see on an assessment scale where these different childcare centres fit in the seven major areas - I think the member for Nelson mentioned them. Educational program and practice: this is an assessment area; an area where we want quality. Children's health and safety: what could be more important than children's health and safety and to ensure children's health and safety? Nothing! The physical environment is very important for the stimulation of children - and to have a pleasant environment. Staffing arrangements: very important. Relationships with the children: what could be more important than the relationships with the children in a particular facility? The collaborative partnerships with families and communities: contrary to the assertions made in *The Australian* article - I do not know if it was tabled by the member for Araluen, but she certainly alluded to it. These different arrangements are about ensuring these centres and facilities are engaging with the community and with parents. What could be more important than that? And there is leadership and service management. They are the seven areas and no one can quibble with those seven areas.

I will turn to the issues raised by members opposite about the regulatory burdens. In short, before I go into detail about what currently exists and what will exist under the new arrangements, overall there are two regulatory regimes. One of them works at a national level and one at a Territory level, bearing in mind the Commonwealth has primary responsibility for funding childcare throughout the nation. That has not just happened since 2007; that has been the case for decade upon decade - the Commonwealth has responsibility for funding in this area. The Commonwealth currently has some regulatory responsibilities and so does the Northern Territory government. What is proposed here is to

consolidate these regulatory capacities into one, which will be operating at a local level. Yes, there will be the overall stewardship, if you like, of ASEQA, which is the national body I alluded to in my second reading speech. The member for Brennan read out the extract from my second reading speech. They will have oversight, to some degree, about the implementation of this national quality framework.

I remind members opposite that it was Tony Abbott, when he was Health minister, who really pushed hard the idea of national registration for doctors and other health professionals. It is exactly the same model being adopted here, or very similar, in childcare. You are defeating your own argument. Here you have the leader of your own party nationally who led the charge on national registration for health professionals with an overarching national body, with regulatory bodies and boards situated in every state and territory. Then, you come and argue against this change which is very similar in its modelling. I do not have any problem with it.

Because it is worthwhile doing, I will allude to what happens currently and what will happen under the new framework. Currently, childcare providers must:

- (1) deal with several government bodies in relation to licensing and accreditation - that is, DET, DEEWR, and the National Childcare Accreditation Council;
- (2) provide information to the Australian government on childcare benefit and childcare rebate, re-enrolments and fees, and auditing. They are inspected by NT licensing administration which inspects services and ensures operating plans and compliance with the regulations;
- (3) provide information to the National Childcare Accreditation Council administration on all aspects of services on self-audits, policies, plans, and compliance with quality indicators;
- (4) have two types of regulations and inspections by external regulators; that is, licensors and accreditors which are the Northern Territory government and the Australian government funded in two- and three-year cycles. They are audited by the federal government and have two different agencies. The Australian and the Northern Territory governments assess whether the providers are meeting their requirements;

- (5) required to provide information to, and demonstrate compliance with, two sets of standards for two different agencies; that is, the Northern Territory and the Australian governments;
- (6) provide information to DEEWR for the administration of childcare benefit and childcare rebate; and
- (7) work with a Northern Territory licensing officer and also an accreditation advisor in Sydney.

The regime that exists currently is quite complex. The new national system will streamline all administrative requirements which service providers have to follow. The new system creates a one-stop shop for services. It is cutting through red tape. There will be only one set of regulatory requirements consistent across Australia. So, it cuts through on that: one set of administrative requirements consistent across Australia. You have consistent regulatory requirements, consistent administrative requirements; one standard to meet that is consistent across Australia, and one regulatory body for services to deal with. In my book, that is cutting through the regulatory burden and consolidating the regulatory burden. It is little wonder, as members opposite acknowledged in an almost grudging way, there are many service providers welcoming these changes.

I acknowledge one valid point the members opposite and the member for Nelson made; it will be a challenge in qualifications. It will be a challenge. I have dispensed with the costs side. I do not think it is a really overbearing cost for parents; that is, \$3.50 per day per child ...

Mr Elferink: You have been on \$180 000 for too long.

Dr BURNS: The member for Port Darwin quibbles, but I do not think an extra \$3.50 is an onerous investment in your child's future and education. The costs are not onerous. I do not believe the regulatory burden is onerous, but we do have a challenge with qualifications and I acknowledge that but, as members opposite acknowledged also, there will be support for services to achieve those ratios. We need to bear in mind, for those services dealing with children over three years old, I am advised all Northern Territory services, or nearly all, meet the regulatory requirements. With the over three-year-olds, we are already there, and, in fact, the Northern Territory, and services in the Northern Territory, are already in front of the game in that regard.

We do have a challenge in the under three-year-olds, but we are up towards the front of the pack in comparison to the rest of Australia. I am advised that 40% of our services for that group, three-years-and-under, meet current requirements. We do have to work with that 60% across the Territory and members opposite have already mentioned that government, in partnership with Charles Darwin University, will be offering support for people to upgrade their qualifications. We will be announcing later this year - get it, member for Brennan - in the next month or two, we will be announcing our policy, our Northern Territory Early Childhood Workforce Plan 2011-21. Government will have a framework and a policy framework around our proposals and our support for individuals and industry around this issue; it is a vital issue.

I have some information on the type of support we will be offering people. We will have more early childhood teachers' scholarships. We are developing those and they will be available for the period 2012 to 2016. The scholarship program will provide long daycare educators with qualified teachers with a range of part-time, flexible-delivery study options through Charles Darwin University including Bachelor of Teaching and Learning (Early Childhood); Bachelor of Children's Services; Bachelor of Early Childhood Learning; an Early Childhood Bridging program for teachers with over 15 years' experience in early childhood; and a Graduate Diploma specialising in Early Childhood.

For classroom teachers who are upgrading or specialising in early childhood, the scholarship will cover course fees, course books, and IT access. For long daycare educators who are upgrading their qualifications to become early childhood teachers, the scholarship will cover course fees, course books, IT access, up to 26 days study support, and up to 16 days supported practicum. There will be coaches to specifically support the scholarship recipients and avenues for people to study to Masters level. There are many avenues and much support for people in this area.

There were a number of other matters mentioned which I hope to turn to as well. I am just looking through some of the things that were said. There was allusion to the fact that we will be offering waivers, or there will be waivers available, as part of this regulatory regime; which is sensible and flexible. They are available under the current regime, although they are called conditions, and they are applied from time to time across the Territory. This is nothing new; the waivers, member for Brennan and member for Araluen, are nothing new. They have always been there and are evidence of flexibility and the willingness of the department and the departmental officers, God bless them, to work with childcare centres

and professionals who work in this field. I welcome this, because most people working in the department in this role have been around for a long time. They are very familiar with the individual services, the providers of those services, and the challenges those services face in the Northern Territory. It is good that we will look at these services in the context in which they are delivered, member for Nelson. That is very important.

Much was made by the opposition about the terrible fines that could be applied under this new regime. My officers advise me that the fines, in the main, are equal to or, in some cases, not as heavy as the existing regime. Under the current regime, there is capacity for hefty fines. As I am advised, it has only really been invoked once, and this was in the 1990s before this government came to power. I understand there was one particular case and that centre was fined \$5000. There is capacity to enforce, as you would expect. However, it is enforced in a judicious manner, and with a view to the problems faced by providers. It is wrong to say that somehow we are not only increasing the regulatory burden, but we are increasing the amount of the fines in enforcement of the regime.

I was very interested to hear the member for Araluen talk about low-paid workers in the childcare industry. I am very sympathetic to those workers and, to that end, I attended a forum in Palmerston about 12 or 14 weeks ago. I was very pleased to be there with not only workers in the industry, but also some providers. I encourage the member for Araluen to get involved in this campaign with United Voice. If you are very concerned about the childcare workers, there are some United Voice people up there. I can give you the names of the people you can work with. Here is a challenge for you, member for Araluen: United Voice has a program where they want politicians such as us to spend one day in a childcare centre. I have already offered. I tell you what: you make the arrangement in Alice Springs and I will come to Alice Springs - I suppose it is a long way to go to work – and work in that childcare centre with you. Both of us can step out and publicly voice our support for the wonderful childcare workers in the industry. How is that! I look forward to that. I will ask Mr Robert Picton to contact you. I will be available to work in a childcare centre. I believe I still know how to fold a nappy, but there you go. I will be very glad ...

Mr Giles: I can imagine why, working with the crew you have over there.

Dr BURNS: I did not hear that, member for Braitling. Anyway, there is a challenge for the member for Araluen and I to spend a day 'working in my shoes', or spend a day in my shoes, I

believe it is called. I am on the books to do it. I will not only do it in Darwin or Palmerston - and here is a challenge for the member for Brennan: maybe we can go out to Palmerston and do it together in a childcare centre in Palmerston. What do you reckon?

A member: You will need a visa to go there.

Dr BURNS: I will not need a visa. I am very well known in Palmerston.

There are a couple of challenges. There you go: I have gone from one day working in a childcare centre to three. We will have a lot of fun doing it. How is that?

The member for Nelson asked questions about remote communities. I can assure him that I am in discussions with Kate Ellis about those remote communities. Officers from my department are working very closely with minister Ellis' staff around a flexible way to work with childcare facilities in remote communities. Some of them are already very close, I would have to say; there are a number that are just on the threshold of meeting the requirements; there are others that will have to have more work. I want my department to be working with the Commonwealth officers and those childcare facilities in remote communities to assist them over time. It is not going to be overnight, but we want them to get to that standard. There is focus on that. We want all those Indigenous kids in remote communities to have the best possible start in life.

You asked about qualifications and you specifically mentioned after school care. The advice I have had from my officers is that it is basically status quo for after school care. Therefore, the mum you mentioned who is doing a bit of work in the after school care area could probably still continue. I am advised it is very much status quo in after school care, which is very important for working families.

You are going to ask questions about floor space and I hope I can answer them. I have some preliminary advice but it is probably best if I wait and hear specific questions in the committee stage of this debate. The member for Brennan - I have already talked about some of the bad points. I hope I have rebutted some of the issues raised by the member for Brennan. To his credit, he mentioned some good points, namely, providing a career structure for workers in the industry. That is very important and I thank you for bringing attention to that. Another thing to say is it will be good for businesses because, through the national framework, someone who has the service qualification in the Northern Territory can go interstate. They do need a local licence for a particular location, but it is easier for Territory

businesses to go interstate, and facilitates interstate businesses to come to the Territory. That could be a healthy thing because many people have spoken here about the need for more childcare places and facilities in the Northern Territory.

The member for Araluen mentioned the scarcity of childcare places in Alice Springs. I understand the Australian government has funded the Alice Springs Town Council to the tune of \$50 000 to do a scoping study, which is not only looking at the waiting lists and demand, but also at what flexible plans could be implemented to address some of the issues raised. That could be the use of existing buildings; it could even be proposals for new facilities.

The member for Nelson also mentioned the need for facilities in the rural area. If someone has a commercial proposition and can demonstrate there is a community benefit, they should be encouraged to approach government. If you have some people, you could certainly send them my way. Of course, it is very important that there is probity in these things, member for Nelson, but I have handled myself well so far in these things. The door always has to be open to listen to people and to put them in touch with the right agencies, having the right process so we can have a win for people, and particularly families. I know that is close to your heart.

The member for Brennan also mentioned there is no guaranteed success. I suppose that is true in life. It is true in politics. I know the opposition thinks it is a lay down misère for the next election. I hear they are even allocating themselves portfolios: 'I am having this one; you will have that one, who is going to be Speaker? Who is going to be this? Who is going to be that? What are we going to do in the first 100 days of government?' Let's hope you work more on policy development between now and then if you are successful. There is no guarantee of success in anything in life but the evidence is there.

I mentioned the review of the literature within the Access Economics report. I am receiving feedback from Professor Geoff Masters from the Australian Council of Education Research about the crucial time of early childhood and preschool for supporting kids, to ensure they are school ready - it is all about stimulating the kids, through games and reading to kids. That is why we have programs like Parents as First Teachers to better support parents in their interactions with the child, particularly with their school life and education in mind.

I have mentioned the quality rating system, which is a positive thing. It is transparent. It is very much like the NAPLAN regime that Julie

Bishop was keen to introduce, which Julia Gillard, as Education minister and Prime Minister, has carried on. Parents are looking for this type of transparency. The seven areas for ratings are very crucial and parents should be aware of them. We do have to look, as the member for Nelson said, at the context in which these services are operating. I hope I have covered as much as I can on the concerns raised by various speakers.

I note the member for Araluen talked about the Farrar Centre. I have to acknowledge on the floor of parliament that it has taken too long. It has taken much longer than I believe is desirable, but further works had to be done to the facility. After the original occupancy certificate, it had to be modified for its specific purpose. They went out to expressions of interest in March, April, May - somewhere around there - and there have been negotiations with the preferred tenderer. Bearing in mind this is a multimillion-dollar contract up to 10 years and, of course, the provider and their legal representatives are looking very carefully at every element of the contract, as you would expect from a non-government organisation. It is a big commitment. I acknowledge it has taken longer than I would want. It will be open for the beginning of the 2012 year, as will the one at Wulagi. These are extra places.

You mentioned other childcare places and facilities around the Territory. The one at Durack, I believe, has moved to the Defence base because that was a decision of the management; they wanted to consolidate there. In at least one of the ones in Katherine, I am advised there was a lack of demand. That is a problem with some of our childcare centres around the Territory, and an issue we need to address with those facilities and with the Australian government.

Madam Speaker, I am not saying it is all roses; there are challenges. I believe this legislation is a step in the right direction, and I commend the bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

In committee:

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

Mr WOOD: Madam Chair, as with many changes, there is a cost. I am interested to know whether the government has done a costing as to how much it will cost the Education department to bring in the changes - whether extra staff are required, or whether new facilities might be required. Has there been a study done of what that cost will be, and will that mean a reduction in the general Education budget, or will this be new money made available?

Dr BURNS: I am advised, member for Nelson, that DEEWR, the federal department, has allocated our department \$700 000 per year for the implementation of this national quality framework. I am not sure if it is over one year? It is ongoing, I am advised.

Mr WOOD: Could you explain exactly what that \$700 000 is to be used for?

Dr BURNS: I am advised it is to employ five additional staff to support the implementation of the framework with the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I was not actually alluding to that with my first question. What I am concerned about is: it is all very well to say we will upgrade qualifications, make ratios smaller, and require extra floor space. That will cost money if infrastructure has to be expanded and you have to employ more people who are qualified. There will be a cost and that cost will go to a school or a preschool. Will extra money be provided for those changes, or will the school have to absorb that, meaning less money in the overall budget?

Dr BURNS: I am advised, with infrastructure, they are already compliant - I believe that was the first part of your question. The second part of your question was about how much of the departmental budget will go towards supporting, as has been said in the debate, individuals and services to upgrade their qualifications. Is that part of your question as well? I will just consult.

It is quite complex. There is quite a lot of support. I am advised that there is support for people to get direct support from the Australian government for people to get diploma qualifications. There is further support for those who want recognition of prior learning – RPL, as they say in the trade - and that can be quite a complex undertaking in that it has to be put into a form universities recognise; there will be officer support for people to package that together so they get RPL. That is the advice I have received.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I will try to get it down into more succinct areas. If you are changing the ratio - and you might be able to explain that - not so much the ratio: in relation to preschools, I gather there will be a new standard for the number of square metres per child. Is that correct?

Dr BURNS: I did have the meterage here. I am sorry; I did have it here somewhere.

Currently, it is 3.25 m² per child for indoors and that remains the same. Currently, it is 14 m² per child outside and that will change, as I am advised, to 7 m² per child, which means those

facilities, from what I can see - it actually builds the potential for extra capacity in those services. I am advised the change in the floor space is not a negative thing but rather provides capacity for further places for long daycare.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I was referring more to preschools.

Dr BURNS: Sorry, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: I was referring to preschools.

Dr BURNS: I am advised preschools currently do not have a requirement for the outside area. It will be the same as I mentioned before for long daycare, 7 m² per child. If there are physical constraints that are beyond the control of the facility, I understand there is capacity for a waiver. That will be a matter between the regulators and the facility. The regulators are very reasonable people, member for Nelson. They have the wellbeing and safety of the child as their foremost consideration, but they also understand some of the constraints that operate.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. Have there been any changes in the number of qualified people and the type of qualifications required in preschools?

Dr BURNS: On advice, the answer is it will be a requirement in 2014. The anecdotal evidence is there are many people working in that area who have a Certificate III, and as I have outlined, there will be support from government for people to attain a Certificate III.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. In relation to qualifications for a preschool, it will be a requirement to have at least one early childhood teaching qualification. If that is the case, and as I said in my response at the beginning, if that particular teacher is sick, can they be replaced with a normal teacher from the school, or does it have to be someone with that teaching qualification?

Dr BURNS: There are a couple of questions there. The advice I have is a little over 40% currently have the required qualification. We spoke earlier about the capacity for primary school-trained teachers, or teachers who are primary teachers, to transition into this early childhood area and receive support. I have also talked about scholarships in that regard. In relation to your question, if the teacher is sick, they will need a qualified teacher for the centre to operate; however, it can work on a replacement basis. That is my advice.

The advice I have is that currently operates in preschools. If you do not have a preschool

teacher there, you cannot operate the preschool. That operates under the current regime, or so I have been advised.

Mr WOOD: You are saying the principal of the main school could not send a teacher to look after the children while that teacher was sick?

Dr BURNS: I am advised they can, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I know this might sound pedantic, but is there a limit to how long the teacher can be sick before they say it has to be a qualified teacher.

Dr BURNS: That is a hard question. In some respects, it is an operational issue and one would expect, if a teacher had to be absent, if they had an illness or some other reason, for a protracted period, there would have to be alternate arrangements to ensure the education of the children. Furthermore, I am advised the NQF does not change that situation, as it exists now.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. Actually, that was the member for Brennan's question; I would not usually ask such pedantic questions.

Minister, I believe I was told in the briefing – and I must admit I had not thanked the staff for the briefing. I was under the impression there would be funding for additional staff but there was a query about whether that would be ongoing funding. I do not know whether you can find out if that is the case.

Dr BURNS: I am advised that what you might be alluding to is the support if people are going to obtain further qualifications. There is funding for replacement while they are away, which is about \$25 000 per site. That is the budget.

Mr WOOD: I will move on to outside school hours care. I am interested to know what you see as a definition of outside school hours care. What do you see as its role? Is it educational, or do you regard it as child minding until mum and dad come home from work?

Dr BURNS: I am offering a personal view here, member for Nelson. As a parent and a member of a family which utilised such services, it is a service which provides security and a friendly environment for your children. I would expect a stimulating environment for your children in that time after school until you pick them up. It should be stimulating and my kids, at various stages, were at centres where they became bored. That is kids sometimes. That is my definition, as a parent, as a dad. Some educators might have a different definition, but that is my definition. In finishing, although that is my definition, I

acknowledge there have to be standards within after-hours school care about safety and the whole atmosphere and desirability of those services.

Mr WOOD: I understand that, minister. The reason I am asking the question is, whilst I understand education is important, looking after small children is important, and you need the right people with the qualifications for that - I am not saying the quality of after-hours school care should be of a poor standard - but it seems we are now moving to a diploma. You would have to ask who determined you need a diploma to work in after-hours school care, and what is the reasoning behind the requirement for that qualification.

Dr BURNS: The advice I have from the educators, member for Nelson, is after-hours school care actually provides extension activities, which should be stimulating. Moreover, I suppose, in this day and age, there are so many legal and social issues that possibly it is not expecting too much for at least some people operating these services to have some formal knowledge about it.

Mr WOOD: Minister, you hit the nail on the head. You said you were talking to your educators. Is after-hours school care an educational facility or is it a child-minding facility? If it is a child-minding facility, what is wrong with a Certificate III? Why do you need a diploma? What is the reason?

One of the issues I find difficult with some of these changes to national guidelines and improved qualifications is I simply ask the basic question: for what reason? I am not saying we should not do it, but when people want to change things - and this happens sometimes with Work Health, like putting tags on all the cords - for what reason? Is there proof there was something wrong with what we had? Why the change? That is what I am trying to get at: why the change for after-hours school care?

Dr BURNS: I could echo all the things I just heard, member for Nelson but, essentially, it is probably along the lines of what I said before; far from being a simple task, it probably requires a formal level of knowledge in some of the people running these particular programs.

I mentioned the legal issues. There certainly are social issues. There are the interactions between the children - some people are born with that sort of wisdom. I probably was not. Sometimes, it needs a formal framework of knowledge to be able to operate these things successfully. That is the explanation I will offer to you, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I am not saying there should not be some qualification. It should cover the ability of the person to actually operate one of these facilities. However, my visitation to after-hours school care is kids are having a bit of fun. They are out kicking a football, playing a bit of cricket, writing on the whiteboard, reading - whatever. It is not actually an educational period; it is about looking after kids.

My concern is, you can lift qualifications, but it comes back to people's ability to pay; that is, the workers who have left their children there. That is my concern; that the qualifications rise and therefore, the cost of after-hours school care rises and the parents have to pay extra money. If I were a parent, I would simply be asking you the same question about why a qualification has gone from a Certificate III to a diploma. What is the reason? Did it make any difference to the after-hours school care quality of looking after the children?

Dr BURNS: As I said earlier, in after-hours school care, it is very much the status quo. I understand the qualification issue is not set in stone yet, and there will be further discussion next year. When it comes up at the ministerial council, I will put your point of view very strongly. How is that?

Mr WOOD: I appreciate that, minister. I also hope you realise I relay messages I get from parents. They are not sympathetic in saying we should not have properly qualified people who do a good job. They simply asked the question: 'Oops, it was okay last year and my kids are all pretty happy. How come this year I have to pay a few dollars a day extra because someone out there in the great unknown of the academic world decided we should, all of a sudden, have a slightly higher-qualified person who might only operate for two or three hours of the day maximum'. It is not exactly a full-time job either. It is a concern that is partly philosophical and partly economical. We should question, at times, why some standards change.

I have some other questions here, minister, if you want me to continue. In the case of Girraween Primary School, they have a before school hours care. I was probably being a little facetious talking about whether you have to have a qualified cook to make the breakfast, to pour the milk on the Kelloggs, but is there going to be a requirement to have a diploma and a Cert III person doing the before school care?

Dr BURNS: It is all outside school hours care, and I will certainly relay your concerns about breakfast to the other ministers, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I do not know what the diploma will be. I have just about covered all the questions, except maybe getting back to some of those I mentioned in my response. That is, how are you going to approach the upgrading of qualifications of teachers in remote areas? Will they do it by correspondence? Will they do it by someone going out there? How will they get those qualifications upgraded?

Dr BURNS: I am advised it is proposed to have outreach to as many remote communities and sites as possible.

Mr WOOD: Could you explain what outreach actually means in the case of a teacher; a preschool teacher needs upgraded qualifications, say, at Kintore, Santa Teresa, or one of those communities?

Dr BURNS: I would envisage it will be like external education provided on-site, as so many other things are across the Territory, but I will consult with the officers here.

As I am advised, it will be a mixed method. Some of it will be on-site with the instructor or lecturer, or the educator on-site, mentoring, providing that information, the course work, to the student. Some of it will be available online and there will also be mentoring support, wherever possible, at that remote community.

I know you have spoken about Batchelor and their teacher education but it will be a similar service delivery and I believe it will be delivered by Charles Darwin University. We need to be speaking with Barney as well. There has been quite a lot of discussion between the department and CDU and they are very keen on delivering this as well.

Mr WOOD: This might be a practical question, but if you are trying to upgrade the qualifications of a person on-site, they would not then be teaching the kids, or looking after the kids. Will there be mechanisms to allow that person to leave their employment, get their qualifications, and have someone take their place?

Dr BURNS: I understand there is up to about 20 days allowed with the program for people to do that, so that is part of the financial support to allow people free time or the time to go and get those qualifications and allow someone to fill in for them while they are gaining those qualifications. I am advised it is for up to 16 weeks.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. In relation to the other side of remote communities - it may not just apply to them - but have you done an assessment of how many preschools will come up to the standard? We are going to have the

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority – I believe you gave them an acronym before - and they are going to go around and look at all these places. You will pay some money to see whether you come up to the standard. How will that standard affect remote facilities, and will they be disadvantaged at all?

Dr BURNS: I am advised approximately 70% are at the standard, and the remaining 30% are working towards the standard and are fairly close to that standard. The officers have been throughout the Northern Territory and made these assessments, and support will be given to those who need to work towards a standard; approximately 30%, as I am advised.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I have probably gone the full circle now. The 30% of facilities that need upgrading; they are being upgraded because the standard has to be improved according to the new national guidelines. Is there a cost in a budget which is allocated to bring those facilities up to standard?

Dr BURNS: I am advised most of them come up to standard with infrastructure. I was talking previously about the service, excluding the infrastructure. I am advised by officers that most of them do come up to standard with the infrastructure.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. That is pretty well all I can ask you at the moment. In summing up, from my point of view, I get a little concerned sometimes that you have the regulators, the administrators, and the harmonisers who want to change things - and I am not saying that is a bad thing. I believe it is a requirement of governments to ensure in some of these requirements that there is not a big cost, especially on families. I know we talk about \$3.50 per day, but you might have five children at school; two of them at preschool and three at an independent school - it would probably be harder again.

They are costs on people, and I believe it is important, when governments bring in changes that they fully assess the costs and the effects. I know it has been done here. I have looked at the table, which is as it was told to me in the briefing. It is a little hard to understand, but I believe I have the gist of it. They are costs parents are still concerned about and it would be wrong of me, and other members of parliament, not to ensure the issue is raised. That was raised with me at parents and friends meetings, especially in relation to after school care. I thank the minister for his answers.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Madam Chair, it is my understanding there is no government assistance

to be provided to childcare centres to recruit and employ the qualified teacher required under this legislation. Can the minister advise if that is correct?

Dr BURNS: In a simplistic sense, member for Araluen, if a facility wants to go out tomorrow and advertise for a teacher, we are not subsidising that advertisement. What we are doing is subsidising the service for one of their employees to upgrade their qualification, which is the scholarship program alluded to previously.

Mrs LAMBLEY: So, there is no government assistance to employ a fully-qualified teacher at the childcare centre, just the upgrading of their skills and education?

Dr BURNS: What we are doing through the implementation of the quality framework is giving them adequate time for people to be trained, so I believe we are providing that assistance. It is not as direct as putting an advertisement in the paper, etcetera. It is really growing our own, which is what we should be all about, as Territorians.

Mrs LAMBLEY: So, you are providing assistance to train and educate people to become teachers, but you will not be providing assistance to employ teachers in childcare centres.

Dr BURNS: I think I have already answered ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is my understanding of what you have said. Is that correct?

Dr BURNS: What I am saying is, we are not providing a subsidy for placement of an advertisement to employ a teacher. What we are providing, through the implementation of the National Quality Framework, is time - quite a long stretch of time so existing employees can upgrade their qualifications to become teachers. That is, as the member for Brennan said, a positive career path and it is growing our own and growing people from within that service, which is a preferable way to go.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is a preferable way to go, but you are not answering my question, minister. The question I am asking you is: will you be paying for the qualified teacher who will be required under this legislation to be employed in all childcare centres in the Northern Territory? Will you be paying their wages, annual leave, sick leave, superannuation, and all other costs associated with the employment of that teacher? My understanding is the answer is no. Can you clarify that please?

Dr BURNS: The employment relationship exists between the facility and the employees. I

have already told you how government is supporting people to upgrade their qualifications. I also said at the outset, the cost to parents over and above CPI is \$3.50 per child per day. That is the extra cost. I do not think it is an onerous extra cost and government is investing. There will be millions of dollars invested in this scholarship program to support the facilities with replacements while staff are gaining their qualifications - I believe I mentioned 16 weeks before - and we are supporting centres and individuals to employ people.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am not asking about the scholarship program or the training of teachers. I am asking about the employment of the teachers. I will take your response to mean no, because you are not answering my question, so the answer is no.

How was the figure of \$3.50 per day per child extra, which you have said will be charged to the carer or parent who pays for the childcare, calculated? If you are looking at employing a full-time qualified teacher in every childcare centre, that is a minimum of \$100 000 a year extra which the childcare centre will have to come up with. You are looking at 50 or 60 places tops; that is at least \$40 a week. What you are saying is \$17.50 a week extra; how have you come up with \$3.50?

Dr BURNS: It is not me coming up with \$3.50, member for Araluen. Access Economics has done a comprehensive study into this. This is not Chris Burns' figure; this is Access Economics' figure. You can go into all the flat-earth economics and calculations you want. This is a calculation by Access Economics which is skilled and qualified far more than you or me in this. This is their figure; it has been tested in several jurisdictions over the four-year history, as I understand it. Several jurisdictions have tested these economics. Basically, I do not think there is disagreement about it. The \$3.50 is after the Commonwealth subsidies. I am more than willing to table the Access Economics' report for you, so you can read it. That is my reading of it, and everyone else's reading of it - \$3.50.

In relation to the question you asked about preschool, I did say we do not have an employer/employee relationship with the facilities. Of course, in those government-run facilities, we do. We will be participating in the program to upgrade people's qualifications as well, particularly in the bush. For the non-government sector, government offers a 25% subsidy, as I understand it - 21% subsidy - towards teaching and those particular systems. Government is offering assistance. Some of these people are our employees.

I turn again to the Access Economics' report. I can table the individual page if you want me to, or the whole report that talks about the \$3.50. If you multiply that by five, it is actually somewhere around \$15 ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: \$17.50.

Dr BURNS: Yes, somewhere around there, per week. It is actually less. I rounded it up to \$3.50, but it is actually less than \$3.50. It comes out to somewhere between \$15 and \$16 a week. Access Economics has come up with that figure.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, you mentioned before there has been a grant of \$700 000 from DEEWR to employ five workers to implement this National Quality Framework strategy. What will those positions be doing and where will they be based?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Araluen, you need to resume your seat once you have asked your question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Oh, okay.

Dr BURNS: I was going to ask the member - I was a bit distracted there; I was getting further advice on some of the elements of questions you asked before. I would appreciate it if you could repeat the question. Sorry, member for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You mentioned the government has been given a \$700 000 grant from DEEWR to employ five workers to implement the National Quality Framework in the Northern Territory. I am wondering what those five positions will be doing and where they will be based?

Dr BURNS: It is mainly around the regulatory aspects. We are going from regulating about 80 services to about 250 services. I mentioned in my reply to the debate about the consolidation of the regulatory regime from what existed before. Most of the regulatory regime will operate in the Territory, so those positions will mainly be taken up with the regulation going from 80 services to about 250 services. Regarding the location, I do not believe that has been determined yet. I would like to see those positions spread across the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, is there any intention to bring the Alice Springs childcare licensing officer position back to Alice Springs?

Dr BURNS: I am discussing that matter with the department. I would certainly like to see positions relocated to Alice Springs. In the roll-out of this regulatory regime, I can see the wisdom of

having someone based in Alice Springs. It will be a part of my discussions with the CEO.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In your second reading speech for this bill, you talked about the fact this national regulatory system will give focus to delivering quality education and care for children aged from birth through to primary school years. You talk also about the importance of the wellbeing, health, and safety of children, but mainly you talk about the quality service that will emerge from this national quality framework. How would you describe childcare services now in the Northern Territory?

Dr BURNS: Obviously, I have departmental officers here. I do not go around to every childcare centre in the Territory or every facility. The message I get is we are on a journey of improvement; we can always do better. I read out the research before about the importance of ratios of providers to children, and the qualifications of those providers. This is another step in that process of continual improvement. I have been to a number of childcare facilities, as you have, and I only have praise for those workers and this framework is not denigrating our childcare workers. It is not saying, and I am certainly not saying: 'You have not done a good job'. What we are saying is this is another step in the process of continual improvement, as it is with any profession, whether it is social workers, medicos, pharmacists, or teachers. All of us are on - all politicians for that matter - a journey of learning, experiencing, and, hopefully, improving.

Further advice I have had – and it is a good comment – it is further recognition of the professional expectations we hold as a community of this group because we are entrusting our children to them and we all want the best for our children, and that is the journey we are on with this national quality framework.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Just one final question, minister - why do you think a qualified teacher would settle for less money and reduced leave conditions by going from a school system to a childcare centre? What incentive would be there for people to downgrade their conditions?

Dr BURNS: It is a good question, member for Araluen, and there is probably a group of people who would choose to work with that particular age group. What was that you just did? I would not want to misinterpret that, member for Araluen, I will not misinterpret it, but it may suit some people to work at particular facilities in particular locations. It would be very rewarding work and I would hope we could attract teachers into that. The hours could actually be less in many cases, so it may well be the hours suit someone with a family themselves. There are many reasons - it is

the same as why people decide to be school-based constables. Obviously, they are not working the shift work, they do not get the same sort of loading other police officers do, but they really enjoy the work, they enjoy working in the school environment. They might be getting less money, but it suits their domestic circumstances.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have no more questions, Madam Chair.

Bill agreed to without amendment.

Bill reported; report adopted.

Dr BURNS (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Madam Speaker, I thank all the officers who have been involved with this bill for their dedication and hard work.

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

TABLED PAPERS

Northern Territory Electoral Commission Annual Report 2010-11; and Northern Territory Electoral Commission Division of Araluen By-Election 9 October 2010 Report

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table the Northern Territory Electoral Commission 2010-11 Annual Report, and the Northern Territory Electoral Commission Division of Araluen By-Election 9 October 2010 Report.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE Member for Arnhem

Dr BURNS (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I believe there was an oversight earlier today and I did not seek leave of absence for the member for Arnhem for today.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION

Note Statement – Building Strong Families and Strong Communities Through A Working Future

Continued from 26 October 2011.

Mr HAMPTON (Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage): Madam Speaker, I support the statement by my colleague, the member for Arnhem, the Minister for Indigenous Development. There is probably no other subject, in this parliament anyway, that gives rise to much debate, much different ideology of Indigenous policy on both sides of the parliament. Nationally, this country looks to the Northern Territory when it

comes to how we can close the gap, and how we can improve the living conditions for our first people of this country and the Northern Territory. Indigenous policy is a very topical, debatable subject, and one that raises much contention and many differences between both sides of parliament in the Northern Territory Assembly.

I begin by congratulating my colleague, the Minister for Indigenous Development, particularly over the last couple of years, for driving the Northern Territory government's *A Working Future* policy. It is the key policy of this government and the Labor Party in the Northern Territory, to try to make a difference in the bush. It is not a panacea for the many problems we see in our Northern Territory remote communities, towns, and town camps; but it is a good start.

She took on a huge job when she became minister to continue to drive this government's vision through the six parts of our *A Working Future* policy. It is not a small task. It is one of those portfolios where you cannot please everyone. Everyone has a view. Everyone has the silver bullet solution, right throughout the country, in what they see as closing the gap and what needs to be done. Is it separatism? Is it segregation? Is it self-determination? We have all these different words, such as assimilation, bandied around when you are talking about Indigenous policy. Everyone has a view on it; everyone has an answer. It is just one of those tough policy areas where you are not going to be able to please everyone. Everyone will have an opinion, right or wrong, on what path we, as a government, have decided to go down with Indigenous policy. It is a very tough gig.

It is a great opportunity, particularly as an Indigenous member of parliament, to be involved in it. It is an opportunity, as a government member, which not too many people have in their political life, to be around the table as a Cabinet minister talking about such an important issue as Indigenous policy and trying, as a local member and a local Indigenous person, to have input into that policy. I am very grateful for the opportunity the people of Stuart, in particular, have given me over the last five years to do that, to make a difference. As I said, my colleague, the member for Arnhem, the minister, has done a great job over the last couple of years. There are many contentious areas. It is a tough gig and I acknowledge her for the work she has done so far.

This government's Indigenous policy is called *A Working Future* and we know there are six parts to it. Throughout the minister's statement, she referred to those six parts. She referred to it as providing the strategic framework and moving forward from many decades of neglect to,

hopefully, more decades of prosperity. We have a great Caucus team representing the bush on this side of the parliament. My bush Caucus colleagues have all had input into this and we continue to discuss it through our bush Caucus network, seeing how we can improve on *A Working Future*. It is not the perfect solution to all the problems; they are complex and difficult issues we have to deal with, as local members, as members of government, but also as Territorians. I believe we are heading in the right direction.

I have been the member for Stuart for the past five years. The seat of Stuart is an interesting seat. It is the largest seat in the Northern Territory parliament. As I say to many constituents and many people, it is the size of many European countries. That has its challenges in getting out there and mixing with constituents. It is a very diverse electorate, going from the southernmost community of Nyirripi through the western side of the Territory to Yuendumu, Lajamanu, through the Victoria River District, right up to Timber Creek, Pine Creek, Barunga, and Beswick, to the east of Katherine, Mataranka to the south, and also down the Stuart Highway through Ti Tree and Stirling, and a little over to the east to Mulga Bore. There are many diverse groups of people and diverse regions in the seat of Stuart. There are quite a number of *A Working Future* growth towns in my electorate, which is one of the very important parts of the *A Working Future* policy.

I do a great deal of work in the smaller communities as well; something I will probably touch on later. With the growth towns, as part of *A Working Future*, we have local implementation plans, and we have very active local boards in my electorate through the shire model. We should not forget about the smaller non-growth towns. Something I do as local member, when I am out and about, is try to talk to those local members of the smaller communities about what they see as their future.

I have quite a few growth towns in my electorate. Throughout the Central Desert shire region, there are the growth towns of Lajamanu and Yuendumu. Through the Victoria Daly Shire, there is Kalkarindji and Daguragu. I also have the Roper Gulf Shire Council in my electorate of Stuart. None of those communities in my electorate are actual growth towns, but I will still work very closely with them on what they see as their priorities and the future for their communities.

The minister touched on local implementation plans with those growth towns in my electorate. I am very happy to see many of those local implementation plans in the electorate of Stuart ticking along and achieving some great things for their communities.

In the Yuendumu and Lajamanu growth towns, we are seeing things such as Families as First Teachers Indigenous parenting support service program being implemented and rolled out. Internal roads through Lajamanu have been named and gazetted. Lajamanu School has had its multipurpose pavilion, early childhood safe area, and new classrooms through the Building Education Revolution completed. It was great to be there this year to attend the opening. Parenting workshops for young mothers are being established, and are being led by local Warlpiri women.

That was some of the achievements. With progress of the local implementation plan for Lajamanu, funding has been approved for a new crèche, childcare facility, and work has been done in identifying the preferred site in consultation with the community. In planning - very important again as part of the Territory growth towns *A Working Future* element - there is a final town plan being drafted or now being shown to the community. With that is the proposed new airstrip that was approved at the recent local reference group meeting. It will be great to see the construction of a new sealed airstrip, hopefully, next year.

There is also the Lajamanu business and economic profile that has been developed. That is going through stakeholder feedback and community approval before the publishing of the profile. Also important in our growth towns and the local implementation plans is the development of an alcohol management plan for Lajamanu and continued sealing of the highway in that region.

Achievements in Yuendumu include the Centre Bush Bus operating a scheduled passenger bus service from Yuendumu to Alice Springs, and we have seen higher-capacity buses commence this year. There is the continuation of the sealing of the Tilmouth Well to Yuendumu section of the Tanami - one I am always on about as the local member and wanting to see that sealed all the way to Yuendumu eventually. Very important too is remote Aboriginal family care workers to be located and working in the community. Families as First Teachers, the Indigenous parenting support service program, has been implemented at Yuendumu. There has been some construction of support staff accommodation for the new Indigenous child and family centre to be built at Yuendumu, and continued upgrade of telecommunications service to support the healthy towns projects at both Yuendumu and Lajamanu. In progress is the establishment of a new Northern Territory Emergency Services Centre to be constructed; and the child and family centre has been agreed to by traditional owners and will, hopefully, begin construction next year.

In the other growth towns: in Daguragu and Kalkaringi within the Victoria Daly Shire, some upgrade projects have been achieved and there is progress on different projects. We are looking at a 402 kW solar station currently being constructed which will be commissioned early next year. That will certainly assist the community and the shire with running costs for their power station. The Kalkaringi School's resource centre, classroom block, basketball court shelter, and electrical repairs have all been completed and optic fibre to the exchange, and construction of the fibre reticulation to the Northern Territory government sites at Kalkaringi have been completed. That was under the Digital Regions Initiative.

Regarding *A Working Future*, it is good to see some of those achievements, and progress in some of those other projects - a very important part of the Territory growth towns element of that policy.

In the growth towns, it is very important they are seen through a hub and spoke service delivery model. We know places such as Yuendumu and Lajamanu are the service model for many of those smaller communities that are not growth towns in regards to the school and health services. Doing a trip through that part of my electorate to Yuendumu, Nyirripi, and Willowra last week, there is much work going on between the clinics with renal services; and between the schools with other schools being able to access facilities such as the swimming pool at Yuendumu. I was at Nyirripi and, the day I arrived, there was a group of kids who had gone to Yuendumu to participate in a bush schools' swimming carnival. These are the things growth towns are designed to be; the hub and spoke service delivery model that can provide a really good service to those smaller communities.

Turning to my portfolios, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, with Natural Resources, Environment, Sport and Recreation, Information Communication Technology, all my portfolios provide an important springboard for Indigenous development. With the green economy, in my portfolios of Environment, Parks and Wildlife, and Climate Change, there are also important pathways towards Indigenous development. With sport, we all know how important sport is in our remote communities and to Indigenous people and the role sport plays in creative and cultural economies is very important. The cultural and creative economy includes writing, crafts, design, architecture, the visual and performing arts including music, television and film production, cultural tourism, and sport and can be seen as adding or creating value and generating values for individuals and communities.

These sectors are critical to Indigenous development in the Territory. My department's Indigenous Sport Unit plays a very important role in the development of Indigenous people in remote communities. In collaboration with the shires, the Indigenous Sport Unit plans and delivers sustainable sport and active recreation services and programs to create Indigenous development pathways in remote areas of the Northern Territory, including the Territory growth towns.

This government has been kicking goals through our employment of community sport and recreation officers in our remote Indigenous communities. This government provides over \$1.8m to fund 58 community sport and recreation officers employed in these remote areas and I can inform the House that of these 58 community sport and recreation officers, 76% of them are Indigenous people. I can also say, as a local member, there are many wonderful non-government and community service organisations that my Indigenous Sport Unit works with. People such as the Mount Theo Program, Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service, and The Bush Mob are all valuable and very important non-government organisations that complement my department's work on the ground.

Territory 2030 strategy specifies targets, halving the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and increasing Indigenous labour force participation rates. Through its four-year priorities, the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport has committed to growing its Indigenous employment to 14% by the end of 2012, as well as expanding the Indigenous Rangers program and growing Indigenous businesses related to our natural and cultural assets. This will be achieved through ensuring opportunities are provided and promoted to current and potential Indigenous employees to boost employment and career development, increasing recruitment rates of Indigenous people in the department, and the provision of career support mechanisms for Indigenous people.

One example of how this works to support Indigenous development is the Carbon Farming Initiative. The CFI is a valuable step towards establishing effective markets in carbon sequestration and abatement, reductions of greenhouse gas emissions, and meeting Australia's international commitments on climate change. It is particularly welcomed in the Northern Territory, as we have the skills and experience to play a major role. The Northern Territory is a pioneer in this area through the West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement project, or WALFA, which established both the science-based and operational capacity in remote landholding groups

and includes investments by ConocoPhillips and Darwin LNG in the local West Arnhem economy.

The digital economy is a global network of economic and social activities enabled by platforms such as the Internet, mobile, and sensor networks. A new report commissioned by Google and carried out by Deloitte Access Economics has found the Internet contributed around \$50bn to the Australian economy in 2010, a little more than the contributions made by iron ore exports. Deloitte predicted this will grow a further 7% a year to be worth around \$70bn in 2016. Access to the digital economy is critical for Indigenous development. Only a decade ago, with a few noteworthy exceptions, the Territory was seen as the ICT backwater of the developed world. We, on this side of the House, are proud of this government's achievements and understanding of the importance of information communication towards Indigenous development.

One of the examples of this achievement is this government's ICT policy contributing towards the West Arnhem Land fibre project. It was developed in 2008, when this government partnered with Telstra, Rio Tinto Alcan, and the Northern Land Council to deliver \$35m-worth of 800 km fibre link connecting nine communities, including seven of the Territory's growth towns and more than 10 000 people across Arnhem Land to fibre. Today, some 3600 students at schools in these communities now have broadband links comparable with schools in both Darwin and Alice Springs. Another example is the hospital in Nhulunbuy. For the first time, it has had reliable access to the online patient information system. This government has worked hard to ensure improvements to the telecommunications services delivered to Territorians, with a significant focus on our remote communities, and every local implementation plan for our growth towns includes a requirement for that.

This government also successfully secured Australian government joint funding of \$15m through the Digital Regions Initiative in the ICT investment in 17 of our 20 growth towns. This allows the deployment of applications to improve health services, education, and staff professional support and development.

Mr WOOD: A point of order, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker! I move an extension of time for the member for Stuart, pursuant to Standing Order 77.

Motion agreed to.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Nelson. On ICT, it is very important that we continue to invest in our growth towns as part of *A Working Future*. It is part of all our local

implementation plans for the growth towns that they have access to this type of investment.

We have also been able to secure funding from the Australian government to establish free public Internet access in libraries and learning centres in 40 remote communities. These are just some of the ways my portfolio is contributing to Indigenous development in the Territory and to our government's *A Working Future* policy.

As I travel around my electorate, as the minister said, it is about creating jobs in the bush. That is somewhat of a contrasting issue I see in my electorate. There are parts of the electorate where there are many young men particularly, but many young people looking for jobs; they want to engage in jobs, and it is about how we support those young people who want to work. I believe that is very important. With CDEP, in some places, it has been a contentious program. In some places, where there is no labour market, we will always require some sort of labour market program - call it CDEP or work for the dole. In my electorate, I see different parts of the electorate where there are young people wanting to engage in jobs. It is about how we support those young people in getting those jobs and showing them some direction and leadership in that.

In other parts of my electorate, I see people who, unfortunately, do not want to work. They are caught up in other things, particularly alcohol abuse. That is still a challenge for us as a government and as parliamentarians. This government's record with its Enough is Enough policy of tackling alcohol abuse is a very important step forward and an important step in the right direction. In many parts of my electorate, there are many jobs going, particularly through the shires, but it is how we engage those young people, how we turn their lives around, get them away from things such as alcohol abuse, and engage them in real jobs.

Jobs are an important part of *A Working Future*. We do not have the silver bullet here. There are many challenges. There are Indigenous people who want to work. We need to show leadership and support to those people. Unfortunately, there are still many young people and others getting caught up in alcohol abuse in places like Katherine, Alice Springs, and Tennant Creek, so it is how we engage those people as well.

There are many challenges with service delivery. Sometimes, it comes down to the personalities of the people on those communities who are working in those areas, and that sometimes determines whether the level of service delivery is good or bad. What we need to do is grow the local workforce. That is what we

are trying to do through *A Working Future*. As I said, *A Working Future* is not the silver bullet; it is not the magic wand that will turn things around, but it is this government's framework for how we are seeing things move in the right direction. It is great to see in the minister's statement that we are making some small steps forward with the recent *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011* report that found increased life expectancy for Indigenous Territorians with the mortality rate declining by 27% between 1991 and 2009. That is certainly a step in the right direction.

The report also found significantly reduced young child mortality rates for Indigenous infants and young children under four years of age since the early 1990s. There are also improvements in literacy rates for children in Years 3 and 7, and an increase in Indigenous employment between 2002 and 2008. There are some steps in the right direction, but there is much more work to be done.

Through the local implementation plans, we are developing a transport options for Territorians living in the bush strategy. As a result, we now have bus services operating in many remote communities, some of those non-growth towns. In places like Ali Curung, Hermannsburg, Papunya, Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Daguragu, Kalkarindji, Ngukurr, Numbulwar, and Yirrkala - my colleague, the member for Barkly, has been leading that strategy. We know transport is a big issue in the bush, getting people into town to access services, and getting them back home. I congratulate my colleague, the member for Barkly, for the great work he has done.

With local safety and security, we have had the deployment of eight additional community engagement police officers. I have met the two in my electorate at Lajamanu and Yuendumu and they are great assets to the community, particularly in working with the school community and the elders in working and implementing their school attendance plans. One of the projects I have been working on at Yuendumu is the school attendance plan and the upgrade of the football oval. We have had a few meetings at the school and things are progressing. It was great to hear the other month that the school recorded an attendance of 100 or more students on quite a few occasions. Again, some of these things are complex, but you have to keep chipping away. You have to keep working at it with a whole-of-community approach and as a local member. The two community engagement police officers are very welcome assets to those two communities.

Infrastructure is also very important. The healthy towns IT infrastructure program has been a very important part of the *A Working Future* policy. We are upgrading telecommunications for

health, education, police, businesses, and systems in the 17 growth towns and it is a very important part of the hub and spoke model. Police stations, in relation to law and order and community safety, are good. My colleague, the member for Barkly, joined me at Yarralin a few weeks ago and we had the local shire meeting at the new police station. We had everyone there, from the community members to the police, to the shire staff, as well as those from Katherine. They are not just police stations on some of these remote communities; they are community assets and things such as shire local board meetings can be held there - a very important addition to the people at Yarralin.

Solar power stations - there is one being established at Lake Nash but it is also important that we continue to upgrade this type of infrastructure in some of our remote communities to bring down the costs of running diesel-powered stations.

Bus services are operating at places such as Mutitjulu, Yulara, Docker River, Wallace Rockhole, Ipolera, Areyonga, Ikuntji, Mt Liebig, and Kintore. A great deal of work has been done by this government through *A Working Future*, and our regional transport strategy, to ensure we provide transport options for people to get into town, and also to get back. Safe houses are very important to provide safety to both men and women who need that type of service.

We just talked about childcare centres. I was very happy the other day at Timber Creek to see they have a brand-new childcare centre. The challenge now is to not only get the staff, but to get the community engaged in the brand-new childcare centre at Timber Creek. It is a decentralised part of the Territory, and the key is to get many people from the smaller communities accessing that facility. It is great they have one there. They are working very closely with Ngarliwurru and the school to ensure we can get proper and full use of that childcare facility

The minister has done a great deal of work in getting the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council together, working, and focusing on driving the *A Working Future* policy as well. It is being driven, not just by government and ministers, but also by those respected members of the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council. As the minister said, they have recently delivered a charter of principles to minister Macklin, outlining better ways of doing business. It is very important we have people from the community and the ground up, sometimes directing and leading that type of government policy.

The minister spoke a fair bit about local government reform. It has been a challenging

reform for government. It was this government that took it on. There have been issues with it through my electorate. I know it is not the perfect system. Even though it is only three years old, we have to keep chipping away at it. That is the approach of this government; we will take on some of the difficult policy issues. They are not always popular. As I said, Indigenous policy is one of those policy areas that are not always popular. You are not going to please everyone. However, the local government reforms are one we have to just keep chipping away at. I was really refreshed in looking at how the local board at Yarralin worked the other day. They have challenges, but they are chipping away, with government, and we have to just keep working together.

Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, it is one of these things you can keep talking about. I am pleased to support the minister's statement ...

Mr ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, your time has expired.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I noticed the heading of this statement by the Minister for Indigenous Development, is Building Strong Families and Strong Communities Through *A Working Future*. The word 'future' is a key to what we need to talk about today. At the same time, we should not forget the past. It is interesting; the past is easy to forget.

The minister said on page 3 of her statement, where she was talking about local implementation plans:

It involves putting in place the fundamentals for the development of our regions which have been in the too-hard basket for so many years - town plans, lot boundaries, zoning maps, urban design plans, street names, infrastructure plans, secure land tenure - the foundations other towns in Australia take for granted ...

I worked at Nguui in 1974. In 1974, it had a surveyed town plan. The council put in street names. The council was involved in many of the things we are talking about. We had zones. There was sewerage being built when I first went there. There were lot boundaries. We did those things then. The crying shame is, somewhere between the mid-1980s and now, much of that fell off the perch. It was done in other communities. I am fairly sure I saw town plans for Maningrida and Port Keats. They were done, but somewhere along the line, it was not continued. I say that because we think there were no people working in this area years ago - there were. What we are doing now is catching up on time lost by

developing new plans, which should always be developed in any city or town on a continual basis.

The one area we did not deal with in my time was the issue of secure land tenure. This is still one of the big gaps this government has failed to come to grips with.

In the 1970s or 1980s, no one was concerned about it because it was not something that came into focus or discussion. It is now obvious there needs to be certainty and that is why you need leases. I would have liked to see more in this document about this issue. If we are dealing with growth towns, and growth towns is only one part of this *A Working Future* document, we need to deal with small communities, and we need to deal with homelands or outstations. If we are talking just about growth towns and this idea that growth towns will be so-called normal towns, the same as any other parts of Australia, then you need to have lease arrangements.

Bob Beadman brought out these reports and it is interesting to go back to them sometimes. In 2009, he spoke about township leasing and his recommendation was the Territory government actively advance township leasing negotiations in all Territory growth towns. He also said:

- (a) *actively participate in the development of township head leases in all Territory growth towns;*
- (b) *apply considerable effort to securing long-term land tenure for Northern Territory and local government assets on all Aboriginal land.*

...

Plan for a future in which a Northern Territory entity is established to manage the land administration functions of township leasing and sub-leasing.

He brought out another report in 2010, and said: 'By far the largest investors in infrastructure on Aboriginal land are the three levels of government'. He goes on about the facilities the governments have. He spoke about how the Territory government 'is taking a "three-track" approach to securing the government infrastructure described at the start of this section'. He said most government infrastructure on Aboriginal land will not be secured via long-term leasehold interest by August 2012, and then he made some recommendations:

If the Northern Territory government remains resolved not to establish its own township leasing entity, then urgent negotiations begin with the Commonwealth

to accelerate the pace of progress on township leasing ...

And he especially mentioned five-year leases.

In November 2010, a further six months later, he makes the following statements:

- *the absence of any progress in township leasing on the mainland of the Northern Territory (NLC and CLC areas);*
- *as a result of lack of progress on township leasing, the need for separate leases to be negotiated for a vast array of government assets;*
- *capital works being held up because of a log jam of leasing applications...;*
- *the continuing lack of private sector investment, either because of the hurdles of gaining a lease or because of overly onerous conditions built into the few township leases concluded...;*
- *the 'elephant in the room' of what happens at the end of the Commonwealth's five-year compulsory leases when no long-term lease has been concluded, particularly over remote public housing;*
- *the way to private home ownership being blocked.*

I raise that because, until you get this sorted out, we are not going to progress anywhere in relation to growth towns. The whole concept of leases was to allow people, for instance, to buy their own house. The whole idea of leases was to allow business to come into communities. The whole idea of leases was to free up the development within a community. Yet, I do not see any report in here which says where we are at with township leases, or with individual leases for that matter.

Bathurst Island, Nguuu, was put out as the great example where this idea of township leasing would lead to ownership of housing by Indigenous people and there are people who do own their own house. But, as you read in Bob Beadman's report, some of the terms for leasing are quite onerous. You have the issue of the five-year leases brought in as part of the intervention. We cannot be too far away from the end of the five-year leases. Many houses have been upgraded under SIHIP and technically, they would belong to NT Housing. What happens when the five-year leasing program is completed? Is there anything in this document to say what the future is? What is the working future in relation to these

leases? There does not appear to be anything in this document to answer that. It is a really important part of this so-called growth town model. Without leases, I do not believe you have a growth town. We seem to have come to a bit of a dead end in relation to leases in these communities, except for Nguigu and Groote Eylandt.

The other area that relates to leases or growth towns is where do we stand with government instrumentalities? I once had a motion before parliament saying I believe government instrumentalities should not be paying any more than peppercorn rentals, and the member for Stuart just spoke about Yarralin Police Station. He said it is more than just a police station, it is a community asset. I can bet your bottom dollar that in many towns the size of Yarralin, you would not get a police station; it would just be too small. This process, pushed by the Commonwealth government and, I believe, supported by this government, which I think is a mistake, is they are saying: 'Yes, we will agree to pay a lease arrangement based on unimproved capital value on all government assets on Aboriginal land'.

I believe that is a bad move. It is not because I believe Aboriginal people should not be entitled to compensation for profit-making infrastructure, businesses on their land, but nearly all infrastructure on land on Aboriginal communities belonging to the government is 99% for the benefit of the people. As I said before, in many cases, those facilities would not be there. I would be interested to know how far the government has gone down this path. How many government instrumentalities in the Northern Territory will have to pay a lease payment; what will that lease payment be, and what will be the total cost to the taxpayer to provide those services to communities? That is a really important issue that certainly has not been developed enough in this debate, because the money will go to certain people only. The money should be going to more facilities in these communities for the benefit of all people in those communities, not just the chosen few.

Roads are another area I have raised before in a local government debate. If you have a town on the mainland and you want it to be an open town, then you need an open road to get to that town. If it is the case, especially in the Arnhem Land area, maybe the Daly, maybe some parts of Central Australia, where roads are not gazetted roads and are still part of Aboriginal land, then that road is not a public road. You have the issues of who is to maintain that road, who is to pay for the gravel on that road? Is the local council meant to use its equipment to service that road? Those areas still need a clear answer, and I am sure councils will want a clear answer.

I remember in the last Wet Season, I was told some traditional owners wanted a particular road upgraded, but the price of gravel they wanted to charge was exorbitant. You have the issues of you might have a road, but you do not have the gravel at a reasonable price to fix it, yet the only people using that road are the people who are asking you for the high price of gravel. Those issues have to be sorted out. If you are to develop the future, then some of these foundation issues have to be sorted out; if they are not, then you are just not going to achieve anything.

I turn to the issue of permits. Under the intervention, there was a lifting of permits. When the intervention finishes, will permits still exist? Whilst I support the concept of permits for large tracts of land surrounding a growth town, if you are to have a growth town then you should not require a permit to enter that town. I fully agree that outside of that growth town, you require a permit, but if the government really believes in growth towns as normal towns, it will develop a town where no permit is required, leases are easily accessible, businesses can develop, Aboriginal people can build and buy their own house, and the public can obtain access. Without input from outside, you will never get the development of some form of economy. It will be such an internal economy that it will never grow unless it receives more money from the Commonwealth.

The other area requiring definite feedback from the government is the future of communities outside the so-called hub and spoke. There are many communities outside the hub and spoke and yet, for some reason, we still do not have answers about what is going to happen to those. I am not referring to homelands and outstations. The government has a policy on those and essentially, they will receive some services - limited services. I am talking about the communities like Alpururulam with a population of around 500 to 700, varying at times. It is not a growth town, it is not an outstation. It is a properly constructed town with facilities such as you have in any other town, yet no new houses, and that is what worries me. It is like many other communities. The heading of this statement is Building Strong Families and Strong Communities Through *A Working Future*. What is the future for those small communities that are not going to receive any new houses? What is the future for the families in those communities? You will find overcrowding will build up in those communities while, at the same time, you are trying to relieve the pressure in growth towns.

Alpururulam is not the only place. Santa Teresa is outside the 50 km mark. What is the future for Santa Teresa for housing? People have children, and they want a place to bring up those

children – no new houses. If you do not have the lease arrangements worked out, there is not even the possibility of building a house on those communities. What is the future of Kintore, which is miles away from a growth town, outside the 50 km hub? What is the future?

Naiyu is a classic for me, probably because it is a place where I worked for part of my life. It is a beautiful town, well-kept houses, a clean community but no new houses. How does Naiyu believe it is going to build strong families and strong communities if it does not have access to new houses?

Peppimenarti is a small town. Maybe 40 years ago, it would have been regarded as an outstation; today it would be regarded as a small town. What about Bulman, Beswick, and Barunga? Where do they fit? They are all thriving, little communities, or they were, but now they do not have the opportunity for new homes. There is a real need for the government - and I know it is bigger than the NT government - the Commonwealth government to say what its solution is. You have to get these leases up and running. These communities need to be able to build their own houses if they can, but the government also has to send them a message that it will help where necessary, they will get some new houses. Or send a message that they can get cheap loans to build their houses. But they cannot build their own houses if there is no land available through a sensible leasing arrangement. Government has to come out with a strong, clear policy about what is going to happen to those communities.

There is not a great deal of time to discuss many of these issues. If the federal and Territory government wanted to show they really support some of these communities, they should put some of their government offices into these communities to show support for these growth towns - not just agencies. In Katherine, they have a government precinct. In Palmerston, there is a small government precinct - a place where people can go to get advice, renew their licences, and things like that - some infrastructure put into that town by government to make it look like a normal town.

We also have to look at questions such as why we still need general business managers. I will give you an example, if we want a model that is a good model, outside of the growth towns. I refer to Robinson River. Robinson River is not covered by the shire; it is run by an Aboriginal community. The member for Barkly would know it. Their CEO is Bill South. It is a fantastic community. I gave a talk to the garden club the other day on Robinson River. People were so grateful they actually saw a good news story about a community. They have a general business manager there, probably paid

about \$200 000 a year. You would have to ask why. It does not have a law and order problem. It has a few issues like any other place. It has 100% kids going to school, nearly 100% employment, it creates money through selling its cattle, and it has a GBD. What message is that sending out to people? It also has someone who is going to introduce a local employment person. The Commonwealth funds it for I do not know what sort of money. Why do you need someone like that there? They already have nearly everyone employed. There is a limit to what you can do in that community. It is isolated; it is 95 km from Borroloola. However, it is a great community which you could use as an example ...

Mr McCARTHY: A point of order, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 77, I move an extension of time for the member.

Motion agreed to.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, member for Barkly.

That community is able to build its own airstrip, build its own BER classrooms, build its own store, sell its own cattle, has goats to supply meat, has a vegetable garden, and is neat and tidy. It wants to fix up its own houses instead of getting the alliances to fix up its houses. There is \$1.4m available for refurbishment. They have two qualified carpenters. One of them is Aboriginal and one is non-Aboriginal. They are able to do that work themselves. They can do it because they have shown they can do it. I have written to Mrs Macklin. Here is a classic example of saying give that community the money and they will fix their own houses, and develop ownership. It is not for every place, but here is a place that is actually showing it can be done.

They also do not want CDEP scrapped. They say once CDEP goes, they will have this new system of CDEP, which I do not quite understand, but it comes under Centrelink. As far as they are concerned, people will sit down. There will not be the incentive to work and be trained. I have written to Mrs Macklin and the Chief Minister asking on behalf of the community that they get all the money to refurbish the houses, and they do not scrap CDEP. This is a really good community. When we have communities like this, we should tell people what a great place it is. We hear too many stories of the bad side of life. This is the place where each person who earns an income pays \$15 towards rent, or rates. Each person who pays that \$15 gets toilet paper, soap, and cleaning materials, so there is always soap and toilet paper in every house. They have no scabies. It is said that scabies is the reason for renal failure. That is what I understand today. A simple thing of giving people soap and toilet paper appears to mean there is no scabies in that community. What a

great idea! I wish other people would take that up; it is fantastic. We need to promote that kind of thing. We need to give support.

Robinson River has no new houses. Why should a place that does well not be rewarded with a few more houses? It will never be a big town, and has limited opportunities for employment, but they are sending their kids to St Philip's, Yulara, Kormilda, and Marrara. They send their kids to boarding school with the hope they will go somewhere else to get a job but will always regard Robinson River as their home.

When we are looking at *A Working Future*, I see some good examples of what is happening now, but I am scared it will all collapse if governments do not support these communities by ensuring they have employment, by giving them projects, and by giving them new houses or the ability to build them themselves. They have mud brick houses at Robinson River and, unfortunately, the problem is they put a type of thatched sealing in made out of grass and the white ants have got in to those ceilings. I am sure they can fix them up, but it really is a great community.

We will talk until we are blue in the face about education, and I will talk until I am blue in the face about employment, and I still think someone has to take the bullet, bite the bullet, and say welfare has to drop, is no more. We have council set up, for better or worse, whether they are reformed or they stay the same, it is irrelevant in this argument; they are a classic body you could use as the main employment agency. I remember when I used to go through Queensland when the roads were dirt, especially the one from Winton to Cloncurry, the Landsborough Highway. I used to wonder why there was only a little bit of bitumen done every year. You think: 'Come on, you can do a bit more bitumen'. One of the reasons was local councils in Queensland were the employment body for that community. If you wanted a job, you went up to local council and you would work on the road. Part of the reason the road took that long is because they wanted to spread that work out over a long period; it gave people work. There is no reason why our councils cannot be the main employment body for people who cannot get, you might say, the real jobs, because there are only limited real jobs in those communities. People who talk about how we are developing real jobs are talking through their hat because there are only limited real jobs in those communities and there are many people still unemployed.

Mr Snowdon and Mrs Macklin recently made an announcement about change, some extra jobs, but to be honest with you, it is just scratching the surface. If we want people who are not going to

get into trouble with grog and ganja, as the member for Stuart said, if we want people to start on the road to getting employment and improving their skills, then you have to work, even at the bottom level.

I went to Burnie Horticultural College and studied a so-called Diploma in Horticultural Science, which was the highest qualification you could do at that time. We saw the word 'science' and we thought that was what we did - studied science. No, we did not. We raked leaves, we weeded gardens, we dug holes in the ground, we put fertiliser on - three days a week in the first year - and the rest of the time we studied biology, botany, and science. Why? As they said, you have to start at the bottom. You start at the bottom, you know how to work; that is what apprentices used to do.

Why do I hear people moan when I talk about getting rid of welfare and people have to work on a council picking up rubbish and planting trees? Well, you have to start work somewhere, you do not start at the top as the manager of Coles or something; you start at the bottom and you work up. We should be doing that. We should be making sure people get a reasonable wage for doing that work, beautifying those communities, establishing pride in the community, and establishing pride in the person. They are the really important things. We do not seem to have a government with the guts to overcome criticism it will get about this being a racial matter; that we are picking on those people. I do not care whether it is white people in that little town - if you say there is no welfare, that if you want to get some money you go to the local council, you will get a reasonable job, and you will be able to work. You have to back the council up and provide managers and infrastructure like tractors and trailers to keep that going. Look at all the work you could have with refurbishing houses. There is a classic example where we have handed work to companies when we should have handed that work to councils and created work that way.

A Working Future has to be something practical. When I read this stuff, I think: 'I have heard it before, I have heard it before, I have heard it before, I have heard it before'. I try to come from what I call my background, which has not always been in politics. It has been slashing paddocks, spraying weeds, picking watermelons, picking capsicums, planting coconut trees, packing eggs, all that sort of stuff. The point is, we need some down-to-earth people trying to change things around. Much of this stuff is too highfalutin and too theoretical; the answers are in our own hands to fix them, but we do not seem able to change things.

We can write to Mrs Macklin until the cows come home. I sat down with her at the Palmerston Community Cabinet and said: 'We need to have councils doing refurbishments. We need to have people employed, not sitting on welfare'. That was what, six months ago. Has anything changed? I start to say, what is our federal government about? Is it about good looks, or is it about changing people, helping people? I believe that Bill South from Johnson River actually put his ...

A member: Robinson River.

Mr WOOD: Robinson River, you are right. There are crocodiles there too, you know. I think he hit the nail on the head. He said if the federal government will not support the money going to fix up those houses instead of it going to an alliance company, if the federal government scraps the CDEP program and puts it over to Centrelink, then our federal government supports unemployment, and I believe he was spot on. If we do not get these changes, we are just going to continue with the social issues we see in our towns, the issues with drugs and alcohol, and the issues with crime.

Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, the government talks about whole-of-government. One of the reasons people are getting into trouble is they have nothing to do; they are bored. If you are going to talk about whole-of-government, you have to talk about this bigger picture. Until you talk about the bigger picture and do something practical about it, then I believe we will be standing here for the next 10 years saying exactly the same thing. We want strong communities, we want strong families, we want a working future. Well, let us actually do something, rather than talk until the cows come home, as we do in this place quite often.

Ms LAWRIE (Treasurer): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to contribute to the *A Working Future* statement. In my capacity as Treasurer, I work very closely with the minister for Indigenous policy, ensuring we are putting behind the policy, the support and resources to make a practical difference on the ground; a difference by ensuring there are training opportunities - where there are job opportunities, people are trained to be able to take advantage of those job opportunities. As to the issues about the replacement of CDEP, and how you create real work at the shire level, our government has stepped up and responded with a \$30m investment in workforce capacity for the shires in replacement of the federal government once they put a stop to CDEP opportunities in the shires.

Picking up on the member for Nelson's contributions, you need to look at those practical measures on the ground, and we are doing that.

You have to have your policy settings right, you have to have your understanding of where key resources are going to implement your policy settings, and you need to see those practical, very real outcomes occurring on the ground. I believe the ministerial statement provided on *A Working Future* takes us through each of those elements. It underpins that we have a plan for the growth of our remote regions of the Territory. We are genuine about making our towns and communities better places to live. Through all the levels of government, working with community and land councils, working constructively together, I believe it is one of the most significant policies in the history of the Territory in having *A Working Future* and a plan for Territorians across our remote communities.

Having the aspiration of making them normal towns in the sense of having all the appropriate services and infrastructure in place, like any other country town in Australia, is an appropriate aspiration. In a planning sense, we are seeing these genuine efforts to create the townships coming to reality. Officers from Lands and Planning have been on the ground, consulting in the growth towns about the actual layout, the planning logistics layout, being able to identify lot boundaries, zoning maps, urban design plan, street names, infrastructure plans, and dealing with and negotiating the issues of land tenure. The Labor government has undertaken all these activities to support the *A Working Future* policy.

In other parts of our nation, not having all those elements would be somewhat unthinkable, but as you also heard from the contribution by the member for Nelson, that effort pretty well stopped in the 1980s, and what little effort there had been prior to that was certainly Commonwealth government in a significant way.

The services and infrastructure in the towns need to be akin to what you expect to see in similar-sized towns elsewhere in our nation. That means you have to pay very clear attention to the delivery of services in education and health, and you have to prioritise your infrastructure improvements to meet both housing and economic opportunities in each of these towns.

I turn first to education because improving school attendance and improving training outcomes are key elements in providing and underpinning a productive workforce in our regional centres and remote towns. With each of these key elements built on and in place, it is a pathway to improving and addressing the issue of long-term disadvantage faced by Indigenous Territorians across our remote communities.

A key to this is consultation. One of the lessons learned from the past is, imposing down

from higher tiers of government into communities as to what the results will be will meet with failure. Whereas by consulting and working with all the representative people of the community, you get a much better outcome. It is intensive work; it is more resource intensive, it takes a little longer to do it and get it right but without a doubt, you get the consistencies and the line up between the tiers of government through the views, aspirations, and priorities of the community and a much better outcome.

That is what the local implementation plans have done, in a very real way - on the ground consultation, getting everyone signed up to their priorities through the federal government, the Territory government, the shires, through the meetings and forums held with the people of that community, signed up to what their priorities are. It is around listening to the local people about the service delivery and their infrastructure priorities. For example, we have been able to strike agreements about early childhood service delivery. You can choose the mobile preschool program as a great example, providing access to preschool children. Gapuwiyak and Ramingining and all those LIPs contain commitments to roll out the fantastic program, Families as First Teachers, which is a fantastic initiative.

Playgroups, parent workshops, home visiting, and books in homes services all assist with getting children into that critical transition into preschool and learning early in life. Giving children the best possible start in life has to be a key priority across the efforts we are making. It is great to see that underpinning all these local implementation plans are communities signing up to this engagement for remote schooling and student engagement, particularly at that critical early childhood level.

I acknowledge the policy work done, complementary to this, in training our own teachers locally, trying to improve enrolment and attendance and the initiatives which fall under the policy work of Every Child Every Day – a significant body of policy, again supported by the appropriate resources to try to achieve the improvement in the outcomes of our schooling. We are seeing improvements in some areas with the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011* report which showed improvements in literacy rates for children in Years 3 and 7. Whilst this is a modest improvement, it is a step in the right direction and provides a foundation to build on.

The local implementation plans also focus on improving health outcomes and there are a number of LIPs which include the construction of new health clinics as priorities; these include Numbulwar, Elliott, Galiwinku, and Ntaria with upgrades to occur at Papunya and Maningrida.

This follows recent spending in the last two budgets which allocated funding to upgrade clinics at Borroloola, Wadeye, Millingimbi, and Gunbalanya and the new health centre at Umbakumba. These are very real improvements to infrastructure which provide for an improved health service delivery across these towns.

As we recognised in the Minister for Health's statement last sittings, growing our own health workforce is a critical area to providing effective and stable health service delivery across the remote communities of the Territory. If you want to see a shining example of a local, skilled-up, and capable workforce, you need look no further than our Aboriginal Health Workers. With our unique challenges in tropical, remote, and generalist medicine, training in the Territory will give new and existing health workers the skills and knowledge to make a real difference. The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011* report found life expectancy for Indigenous Territorians has increased, with the mortality rate declining by 27% between 1991 and 2009. The mortality rate for Indigenous infants and children under four has reduced significantly since the early 1990s.

The housing program, the roll-out of SIHIP, has been not without its challenges, but is making real improvements to family lives. It has put more than 2000 families into new or improved housing. They are seeing the upgrading of housing in remote parts of the Territory which we know is fundamentally critical to closing the gap of disadvantage. We will continue to work with the federal government to provide and roll out better services that, importantly in the local implementation plans, has been a consultation process generated out of discussions with people in their communities.

With jobs, both the towns and communities need to be in a position of attracting private investment to complement the amount of public funding going into the communities, ensuring locals are given opportunities to build up their own businesses and, ultimately, purchase their own homes and have their own wealth base. The availability of secure, long-term leases is pivotal for this to happen. Economic development and other opportunities flows out of these - and we recognise that. That is why we are in the space of negotiations with all key stakeholders regarding leasing in our remote towns.

I acknowledge the contribution by the former minister for Business who talked about the importance of the effort we are putting into Indigenous training. There are 20 projects on the ground being supported - real projects on the ground being supported - through combined Northern Territory and Australian government

Indigenous training, with a commitment of \$2.2m. There is also the Jobs Guarantee program, where students living in remote Territory growth towns who achieve a Year 10 certificate of education and training are given a real pathway to employment. Getting those links between education and the training pathways to employment are absolutely critical.

Increasing the number of Indigenous people from remote areas in a job is absolutely a priority under *A Working Future*. As I said, to back that up, we provided a \$30m, three-year funding package to support 530 jobs in the shires. If you listened to the contribution of the member for Nelson, who talked about getting people off welfare and into real work where they are doing the work the shires need, that is a genuine Northern Territory government-funded resource program to deliver 530 jobs across our shires; a \$30m package. We have also put into that package provisions around guaranteeing a level of work for shires to get out there and upgrade government assets such as schools and roads in the bush.

Saying you have the policy is one thing – well, here we are, we actually have real funding to deliver real jobs, to do the upgrades through the shires of critical infrastructure such as schools and roads. These are on top of about 300 jobs provided across housing maintenance, tenancy services, and essential services maintenance - all coming from national partnerships and agreements we have with the federal government.

As you heard from other members in the debate, you need to look at the critical link of transport when you are looking at opportunities to grow a stronger working future in the bush. Access to transport provides access to jobs, schools, clinics, shops, and other services in the larger towns in the region. That is why we are taking a multipronged approach to the transport strategy. I thank our Minister for Transport for driving that forward. When you are looking at upgrades to roads, bridges, stream crossings, barge landings, and airstrips across the Territory; that is practical infrastructure to improve access to transport for people living across the remote areas of the Territory

In Budget 2011-12, we continue that new, fundamentally fantastic transport strategy of providing bus services and linkages between the regional centres and growth towns. Increasingly, where we are rolling the regional bus trials out to is a pretty impressive growth year-on-year with providing additional funding for those critical transport links, and I thank the Transport Minister for driving that strategy forward. It does make a difference obviously, if you can get from A to B, with your access to critical services, but also

making the liveability and growth of these towns a very genuine opportunity.

Our commitment in framing policy work has been significant, and we know we have done much, but there is much more yet to do. You cannot erase decades of neglect overnight, but you can get the right policy and framework in place, which we have done through *A Working Future*. We are the only state or territory jurisdiction in our nation that has a bold plan for the growth of remote regional towns; remote regional towns populated by Indigenous Territorians. Have a look at Western Australia; they have similar issues. Look at Queensland, South Australia - similar issues with remoteness and an Indigenous population which requires access to better services, education, health, training, and jobs.

We are the government that stepped up and said: 'This is a bold plan, this is how we are going to do it', and we have identified *A Working Future* strategy. We have backed that up with the resources year-on-year in successive budgets to support it, so we are not just setting people up for expectation without coming in and actually packing in the work at every level, through the local implementation plans, being able to consult what those priorities are with the resources roll-out, through the constructive working relationship with the federal government and the shires. We supported *A Working Future* for growth towns policy with previous work we had done in taking the hard, tough, but sensible decisions around community government councils collapsing into the shires.

I am still waiting to hear, despite the empty rhetoric from the opposition, how many shires they would embark upon in their so-called policy reform. The numbers kick around and vary a bit. Sometimes you hear, maybe it is six, maybe it is 71, maybe it is 68. What is it? Contribute to this policy debate. Put on the record how many shires there would be in the CLP's policy? Get real, remove the rhetoric, and stop playing with the aspirations of people's lives for improvement through pathetic, petty politics. Get real and put the numbers, put the policy in detail, on the record. That is what these statements are about. It is a very real opportunity for people who propose to be the alternative government, to actually come clean with detail.

We did the tough work. We aligned the shire model with the old ATSIC boundaries to cut through some of the different tensions in the bush with recognising the boundaries that people were used to under the old ATSIC boundaries. We went in; we supported the shire reform with additional resources into the shires. We continue to listen to, and work with, the Local Government

Association of the Northern Territory as key stakeholders, funding a series of projects to ensure we are slicing through the IT, administrative, and financial needs of the shires and, obviously, supporting the shires in this latest round of further funding to support jobs, 530 jobs at shire level, that had previously been Commonwealth CDEP funding. That was removed, but we stepped up to the mark as a Territory government and said: 'No, these jobs are critical to the work the shires do in maintaining and improving communities'.

It is tough to actually land on significant policy, which we have done. You then have to back it up with the right resources and the right areas in service delivery and infrastructure, which we have done, and will continue to do, because we have the local implementation plans that set out the planning for how, where, and what the priorities are. It has also been tough to get three tiers of government working together and then working with the land councils and traditional owners to ensure everyone is going to venture on that journey together, so you get a greater constructive outcome.

Rhetoric is easy; you can pretty well cover all the empty, hollow rhetoric espoused from the would-be-if-they-could-be alternative government in the opposition there. It is about time they start to talk the detail. How many shires under their new shires reform? They had 27 years, by the way. We did not see it then. But okay, if you take them on their word now, never, now seeing the light on the hill with shire reform, well, how many shires? Get real with the detail. Stop treating people with contempt, because people are not silly. Do not treat Territorians with contempt, they will see through that. You will lose any shred of respect you might have had unless you start to put detail there.

There are many people doing many amazing things across the challenging distances of remote service delivery. There are fantastic projects and programs and people delivering them wherever you travel in the Territory. You have the spoke and hub model of the growth towns supporting the homelands and the outstations. We are a government that continues to proudly work across the Territory with the resource centres which support the homelands and outstations in trying to maintain their viability and take care of the interests of the people living in those outstations and homelands. I know our minister for Indigenous policy has worked proactively with the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council to pursue refinements in Indigenous policy, particularly around the linkages between the growth towns, outstations, and homelands.

Madam Speaker, I commend our minister for this statement. It is a fundamentally important area of government policy work, government service delivery, and we get to see a very bright future across the Territory for any Territorian regardless of where they are living. Much effort has gone into this, there is still much more to do, but we are up for the challenge and this statement shows we have the right plans, the right visions, and the right resources to deliver the right outcomes for all Territorians.

Mr McCARTHY (Lands and Planning):

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to add my support to the minister for Indigenous policy's statement on the progress of this government's *A Working Future* policy. The vision and determination to grow and develop the Territory's remote communities is a real point of difference between this Labor government and the Country Liberals, because this Labor government is committed to a bright future for all Territorians.

It was interesting to hear the member for Nelson speak about developments in town planning and street names in the 1970s. He asked the question: 'What happened in the 1980s and the 1990s?' That is an interesting question, because that is when I arrived in the Northern Territory, at the beginning of the 1980s, under a Country Liberal Party government. The member for Nelson asked the question, what happened? What changed? Something fell off the perch. Well, the other side of that is, the Country Liberals have dusted their shiny suits, they have saddled up, and they have ridden back into the bush. They are out in the bush telling stories; they are listening and telling stories.

This side is telling a story also, and it is called *A Working Future*. The story is about delivery. The story is not about promises; the story is about what is actually happening. There is a significant gap to be addressed. I believe we all have to 'fess up to our responsibilities, as we are reminded so many times by this opposition. However, let us give credit where credit is due, and let us take responsibility for our own. With the Country Liberal Party, there was a significant time frame in the Territory where they took their eye off the ball; they concentrated on the big end of town, and the bush suffered. There is no two ways about it, but it has to be addressed. If we all are realistic in this House and examine the progress of the *A Working Future* policy, the progress of a Labor policy that supports all Territorians, then we will give credit where credit is due. It is a long haul, it is a long road, but we are up for the challenge.

There are many stories to tell about investing in health, education, housing, and community safety in the bush, and supporting job

opportunities and economic growth in our remote and regional areas that benefits our whole community. The *A Working Future* policy is a turning point for the Territory from which we can work together to address those decades of neglect. It sets a standard, which Territorians living in the 20 strategic growth towns deserve, and it sets a standard where the same services and infrastructure will be delivered as you would expect in any regional area or town of the same size. It will take a Labor government to do it because we are up for the challenge. We are above the criticisms, we are above the small-minded politics of this opposition, and we continue to get on with the business of developing the Territory for all Territorians.

There is an interesting comment about the hub and spoke model of service delivery under *A Working Future*, which allows for strategic decisions to be made, rather than an ad hoc approach of the past; and that is what it was. I lived through those decades of an ad hoc approach. It was a reactive environment, not a proactive environment. That is a fundamental difference in policy. This government has very much taken a proactive stand. If you look at Corrections where we have said we are not achieving in the area of Corrections, we need to make some radical changes, not only in policy, but also with the backing of significant resources.

The ad hoc approach of the past did not work. A strategic approach for the future, *A Working Future*, is working and will work. Local implementation plans being developed in consultation with the people of each community give residents a real voice in the future of their growth town. It is great to read those plans and take them with you when you travel in the bush, and discuss them with people because they are community aspirations. It is good consultation and it engenders community aspirations, striving for a better future for their kids, and a great way to have a dialogue with remote people with a strategic document to work from which came from those communities, from the people.

Measures such as town plans, lot boundaries, street names, and land tenure are all central to driving economic growth and the job opportunities that will come. The town plans are being prepared by the Department of Lands and Planning and will support secure land tenure for individuals and businesses and allow investment in the communities. The town plans identify the existing infrastructure such as schools and police stations and also identify where the future growth of all towns will occur. The commitment to developing town plans makes it clear that a Labor government sees the potential of our growth towns and is committed to working with residents to maximise the opportunities for economic and

social development. In a Territory sense, something new, something innovative, something fresh.

As the Minister for Lands and Planning, I recently approved the town plan for Ngukurr. Two additional town plans have already been gazetted for the growth towns of Angurugu and Umbakumba. Town plans for Lajamanu and Ramingining are currently on exhibition and a number of others are nearing completion. Another important indicator of the move towards normalising the infrastructure standards in our growth towns is about the naming of streets and roads. Something as simple as naming of streets and roads - it may seem a small step, but street names define an area with a sense of identity and structure.

You can imagine trying to explain where your business or home is without a street name. That was the problem of the past, and now we are normalising towns. We have a standard we expect, and a standard we are delivering and rolling out in the growth towns. It has been wonderful to work with the Place Names Committee. Not only wonderful, but a pleasure and a lesson in history, which I enjoy, through every piece of communication which comes in from the Place Names Committee which has been working with local people right across the Territory. This committee invests a great deal of time in consulting with the community on potential street names. Through this process, the committee can work with residents to identify names which reflect the town's cultural tradition, history, and local landmarks, or recognise and celebrate families and individuals.

I adjourned in this House with a speech about the late Mr Smith from Alpururulam, a true old gentleman who worked tirelessly from the formation of Alpururulam, from the move off the Lake Nash cattle station in the early 1980s to one of his important jobs as a senior Territorian in coordinating an effort to name Alpururulam's new street names. They are all Alyawarra names and have real meaning and special significance for the residents of Alpururulam. They are certainly a move to the future in promoting positive identity, recognition of culture, and supporting locals in their aspirations for their towns. There are great stories coming out of the growth towns through this process. The town is able to identify with its own street names that represent great meaning for the people and the place.

Significant consultation has been under way, not only in growth towns, but also in smaller communities. Through this work, 149 growth town roads have been formally named. Some of the growth towns which now have formal street names include Ali Curung, Elliott, Wadeye,

Daguragu, and Kalkarindji. Consultation is under way in a number of other communities, including Yuendumu, Angurugu, Galiwinku, and Maningrida. I look forward to receiving reports on each growth town from the Place Names Committee.

The *A Working Future* policy confirms the Territory Labor government's commitment to ensuring the Territory's prosperity is shared between all Territorians. To truly achieve that, in addition to improving services in growth towns, we are also working to improve access between towns and regions. Access to transport connects people to health, education, and job opportunities. We have heard a number of members from government speak about this - the Treasurer just recently and the member for Stuart. There will be more who will talk about the important transport links the Henderson Labor government is delivering to reduce isolation for those living outside our main centres.

This body of work is the government's Integrated Regional Transport Strategy that was finalised late last year - a wonderful consultation process across the community, with a consultancy and getting out there and talking to people about transport, transport networks, the needs of transport, and in new territory unheard of before. It is wonderful to be part of that work going on across the Northern Territory. The strategy was developed in consultation with residents and businesses in growth towns, the transport industry, and service providers.

It is delivering new initiatives in strategic trials, allowing for careful assessment of effectiveness and success, and providing the opportunity for change to better reflect a community's needs. We have heard from members about the different areas. The member for Stuart gave a very good summary of new bus services we are trialling - actually 10 new passenger bus services in remote communities across our growth towns.

It is also reflecting research into the hub and spoke model. We are looking at Maningrida and Wadeye about how to develop models that outstation people can access to get into town and to return from town. It is not only about being able to get to Elliott, Tennant Creek, and Ali Curung. That wonderful bus service has started on the Gove Peninsula. I acknowledge the member for Nhulunbuy for her energy and support in seeing this trial succeed; not only bringing people to town and taking them home safely, but covering an incredible number of people from outlying communities going to work. This is what the development of the Maningrida model is all about. This is what the model for Wadeye is all about. It is how to get people interacting with their town, with the services of their town, and then back out

to their homelands or outstations where they choose to live.

The model in Nhulunbuy is particularly innovative and based on a good business model. It is run by the local business, YBE, and the service operates five days a week connecting Yirrkala, Ski Beach, and Wallaby Beach to the township of Nhulunbuy and the mines. It is connecting people with opportunities, as well as sport and recreation, social events, shopping, and all those things people expect from regional towns. More than 12 700 people have already used this bus service. Passenger data is telling us the figure represents more than 6390 public passengers and more than 6330 workers - a great result as locals are using the bus for work, to access services, and for social reasons.

I am a regular catcher of buses when I am in Darwin. I like to do my research and I like to get on to the public bus service. It helps to catch a bus, to talk to people, to talk to operators when you are delivering policy, and it is wonderful to see the same culture emerging in the bush. Recently, in Borroloola, it was fantastic to ask how the new Bodhi Bus service is going. I did pass it on the Carpentaria Highway once, there were not many passengers in the bus, and I was a little nervous about that, but it was wonderful on Thursday in Borroloola to hear there are many people using that bus. They are using that bus to go to town, to access services in the larger towns, and they were using that bus to get home safely. That is creating a real business model, so not only is Bodhi trialling a new concept for this government, with the courage and the tenacity to step out there in the regions and deliver, but they are also building a good business model. I am talking to them about jobs and about how we can employ people at both ends of a bus service in the bush. There are many examples from members on this side who have talked about these new bus services. It is wonderful to be able to work with Centre Bush Bus and Bodhi Bus which are doing a great job.

The vision about fly-in fly-out workforce that comes from this side is commendable and something our government is determined to pursue, because we are about maximising every opportunity. When we talk about a fly-in fly-out workforce, we talk about it in a positive sense with the opportunity coming out of growth towns such as Yuendumu, Maningrida, and Wadeye to work swing shifts on major projects in other Territory centres and return home for days off with their family. I am getting some airplay in the regions where families are starting to listen to our government's proposal about living in some of the most beautiful parts of the world, certainly the most beautiful parts of the Northern Territory, and being able to access real prosperity from a major project in a region or an urban centre.

This is the way of the future. This is definitely focused on young Territorians living out bush, and their opportunities to not only work in major projects but also to gain that prosperity, take it home, and share it with families and their community. That is not only in a monetary sense, but also the wonderful world experiences and world view they will develop when they are working on major projects. At the same time, they will be able to continue with cultural practices and ceremonial obligations or, if they like, just sitting on that beautiful billabong at a place like Robinson River with the fishing line in chasing some barra when the river has started to flow.

It is because our government is supporting all Territorians to have a go and reach their potential that people are listening. People are listening to a real story, not idle promises, but a real story with real delivery and significant resources to back that up.

There is also essential air travel and we are investing in aerodromes at Lajamanu, Yarralin, Canteen Creek, and Utopia. We are also investing in marine with barge landings: \$6.2m over three years for an upgrade of barge landings at the growth towns of Wurrumiyanga, Ramingining, Maningrida, and Gapuwiyak. Government is consulting with these communities and vessel operators looking at issues such as cargo handling areas, installation of lighting, and upgrades to ramps. It has been great to move around in the big end of town and talk to transport logistics companies who support the regional integrated transport model because they are telling me that increasingly, their business focus is on growth towns. They are the big players in transport logistics and they are expanding their markets all the time.

With road infrastructure and transport logistics improving, they are focused on growth towns as well and I am translating that conversation into the possibility of jobs because they need logistics people at the end of their supply chain, managing those important transport logistics, just as they need people in town servicing the regional and remote areas. It is pleasing to see big companies are talking about big opportunities for people right across the regions regarding transport operations and logistics.

Our government's strategic investments in transport services are an important element of the hub and spoke model to support the development of growth towns. As we invest in the infrastructure in growth towns, so too we invest in the vast road network stretching across the Territory. Our roads program is developed with feedback from key industry stakeholders on the basis of need and priority. This year, we are investing \$307m into our roads, a 213% increase since 2001. It is

interesting, as Minister for Transport, and Construction and Infrastructure, we are regularly criticised by this opposition about what we are not doing, but they certainly are not interested in the story about what we are doing. When you see an increase like that, statistical analysis of 213% increase since 2001, and that is certainly a celebrated date, when the Labor government took charge of the Northern Territory, then that is real work going on across the Territory.

New roads infrastructure ...

Ms WALKER: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I move that the minister be granted an extension of time, pursuant to Standing Order 77.

Motion agreed to.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for Nhulunbuy.

New roads infrastructure is being built to support the growth towns, improving road safety and access between centres. I am pleased to report, following this year's record Wet Season, government responded with a \$93m repairs and maintenance investment. As soon as weather permitted, crews were mobilised and works carried out to repair and strengthen the roads. I am proud to say the crews are still out there working on our main arterials and rural roads to ensure they are prepared for another Wet Season. It looks like we already have the onset of that.

On the Carpentaria Highway, the Tablelands Highway, and the Stuart Highway the other day it was good to see those crews hard at work in some very challenging conditions. That is what Territorians are all about; you give them a challenge, they will take it up. It has certainly gone a long way to ensuring people are employed, to keep Territory jobs, to keep companies working, and to provide new jobs. It was good to see a couple of new traffic controllers on the Stuart Highway on Friday afternoon who were not Irish girls; there were a couple of Indigenous guys I passed. Nothing against the Irish girls; I know they have been very popular across the Territory, but it was nice to pull up at a traffic control area and see a couple of Indigenous guys working with the traffic control companies, working with big business in what is a massive job on our Territory road network.

I also take this opportunity to highlight some of the other very important roads projects that are under way for the benefit of Territorians living in growth towns. The Port Keats Road - and I must thank the member for Daly; that was a fantastic trip. He badgered and badgered me to get out there, to check out that part of the Territory and I took him up on his offer. It is really good to work

with local members. Maybe the member for Brainting might like to invite me around the northern suburbs of Alice Springs some time and show me the bitumen around that area. That trip to the Daly was wonderful, not only meeting all those interesting people, but also seeing and being on infrastructure and understanding the challenges.

The Port Keats Road is subject to flooding at a number of points, limiting access in the Wet Season to several communities, including Wadeye and Peppimenarti. Major works are under way to improve flood immunity at Tom Turner Crossing, Five Mile Creek Crossing, and Tommys Creek. The Tommys Creek and Five Mile Creek Crossing project will improve accessibility to the community during the Wet Season and enhance the emergency evacuation options of the community during flooding. The NT Road Transport Association, strong lobbyists for roads transport infrastructure, is also complimentary of this government's work in that area where their operators do a lot of work.

A tender for upgrading works to increase the waterway area at Tommys Creek Crossing and upgrading of Five Mile Creek Crossing has been awarded to Steelcon Constructions; \$1.57m in works to upgrade Tom Turner Crossing are almost complete, delivered by Territory Construction Services. Take a drive down the Daly River Road and you will start to see what will become a new bridge over the mighty Daly River. Fulton Hogan Constructions is delivering more than \$20m in that contract which involves earthworks; the earthworks are almost 70% complete and will be followed by important works in the structure of that bridge. At the moment you can see pile casings on the western bank have been installed, concrete is being poured and reinforced, and it will create a bridge which will be about 13 m higher than the existing crossing - real road transport infrastructure for the future of the Territory and the future of our growth towns. The project includes 2 km of new approach road, embankment connecting the bridge to the existing Daly River and Port Keats Road, and the communities in Daly, Wadeye, Palumpa, and Peppimenarti will benefit from the new bridge through improved access for the delivery of greater health services, education and, of course, employment opportunities.

The sheer size of the Territory means this government cannot carry the workload alone and our partnership with the Australian government is of paramount importance. It really is important that we work with the Australian government. An example of this is the Territory and Australian governments' investment in Territory-specific community beef and mining roads, a program from 2008-09 to 2011-12. The program has

delivered significant funding for works on strategic roads across the Territory, including an allocation of \$15m towards upgrading the Central Arnhem Highway stream crossings. Working partnerships with both the Central and Northern Land Councils are central in these works, identifying priority issues, and assisting to facilitate the works on the ground.

It is rewarding to work with the Department of Construction and Infrastructure and the Department of Lands and Planning when we have the opportunity to work with traditional owners in areas like the Central Arnhem Highway, which is opening up that area for growth and for growth towns, and to listen to the concerns of the people, to work together, to work in a sense of cooperation and respect, and sharing two worlds. Learning about North East Arnhem Land has been a fascinating experience for me as a member of the Henderson Labor government and also working with people from those areas on transport logistics and road transport infrastructure and the benefits that will provide for the remote communities.

I truly believe arts and culture can unlock opportunity in our growth towns. We know it draws children to school, it unites the community, it can inspire, and it can lead. This government knows its value and is working to support and grow opportunities for Territorians. The Henderson Labor government has boosted funding to the Indigenous art program, including \$150 000 allocated to an Indigenous music touring circuit which has been receiving great comment across the Territory in the last 12 months. We have provided additional funding for arts projects in remote, regional and community festivals, including the successful Desert Festival held in Alice Springs - the desert festival in Alice Springs and the Desert art festival as well.

This year, I had great pleasure in attending the festival in Alice Springs over a number of days, meeting with artists across many media, and directly participating in some of the events. I do not have time to tell you about that but it certainly was a fantastic festival which has been grown under this government. It is really pleasing to see the incorporation of all those remote communities, those regional and remote communities which are part of the Alice Springs festival. They are part of the heart and soul of that festival and are in town celebrating in such a positive light and positive environment. The Bush Bands Bash is one example where bands across Central Australia are vying for the opportunity to participate in the professional development workshops, to hone their skill and craft and their stage presence, and then perform for a huge Alice Springs crowd.

The Territory invests more than \$324 per person in cultural funding including libraries, arts, museums, and environmental heritage. That is more than twice that of any other jurisdiction, and about three times the national average. This Labor government is serious about supporting the growth of this sector because we know it means jobs in our regional communities, supporting the wellbeing of our communities, and it acknowledges culture, heritage, and those important aspects of community development that are above and beyond infrastructure development.

Madam Speaker, I conclude by making comment on the new era in Corrections that will deliver real change and provide opportunities in the bush that are complementing our *A Working Future* policy. The Barkly work camp, now operational with 38 prisoners, is an example of a successful regional initiative that is supporting prisoners to be engaged in meaningful work activity, giving something back to that community, while prisoners are learning new skills for a better future. Government is investing in recruiting an additional 43 community Corrections officers across the regions to support the new era, focused on growth towns. These offices will provide greater supervision and support for offenders by also making those important links with industry and organisations in the bush to provide, first of all, work placements that will lead to real outcomes in employment.

We are expanding the highly-valued Elders Visiting Program, recognising the important role Elders have in mentoring and guiding offenders away from crime. A central element of the new era is a stronger element on rehabilitation. There are many great stories I could tell; I can go on and on. It is about a positive story; it is about what is happening now. I am proud to tell it, Madam Speaker ...

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, your time has expired.

Mr GILES (Braitling): Madam Speaker, I thought we were going to the MPI. I will speak on this Indigenous statement. I thank the minister for bringing it on. It has only been about 12 months since there was another statement on the same topic. I am not sure what has really changed in that 12 months.

We still have ongoing concerns with SIHIP; infrastructure failures; education outcomes for Indigenous Territorians that are the worst in the country and the worst they have been; and private home ownership on Aboriginal land is not occurring regardless of the statements that are continually raised. There are little things like causeways at Palumpa not being fixed, water services at Malinja, the situation about the living

conditions in places like Utopia, and the situation we see now with police stations in remote communities which have gone backwards. We continue to see an intervention in the Northern Territory.

There are ongoing concerns with sexually-related crime and the incidents involving children. Fundamentally, there is a complete lack of economic development anywhere in an Indigenous community. I have said many times before that the biggest failure for the federal and Territory governments - both Labor at this point in time - is the lack of any economic development anywhere.

The member for Nelson spoke about welfare reform. I am all for welfare reform, but I acknowledge you cannot do these things if you do not have any jobs. You can talk about shire jobs or the jobs Mal Brough turned from CDEP positions into real jobs. You can talk about those things but, fundamentally, there is no private sector development. Everything else is just welfare, whether it is government service provision or organisational welfare to deliver some form of a service.

Things need to change; economic development has not occurred. But, then again, I would not expect that from the socialist government. I would like to think the feds might step in and have some undertakings towards economic development. The communities of the Northern Territory are represented federally by a failed member of parliament, the member for Lingiari who, for 25 years, has done nothing for economic development. He is the reason things are so much worse in the Northern Territory's Aboriginal communities than they are in communities in Western Australia, Queensland, and South Australia. That is the similarity that goes through Indigenous communities in the Territory and it is not cross-jurisdictional. The sooner we get rid of the current member for Lingiari, the better things will be.

I want to talk a little about the Country Liberals approach to Indigenous policy. The governments - the Territory government and the federal government - highly managed from a bureaucratic perspective, running Labor concentrated governments which are operating a social engineering model of driving people into large urban centres through a cost-saving exercise for ease of servicing those people in whatever social policy setting that may be. When I sat down to write the Country Liberals Indigenous policy in support of my colleagues and my party, we looked at the way Labor is running Indigenous policy from a federal and Territory perspective and looked at alternate models.

Personally, I had to break some of the paradigms I previously believed in about how things needed to operate. For many others, what I presented to people within our party and within shadow Cabinet and other areas was challenging and a complete paradigm shift. My time and experiences working in Indigenous affairs in particular, for the purposes of this debate, whether that is housing, employment, or in my political position, getting out to communities, talking to people, really hearing the stories, and what the real issues are, have led me to a position where I believe we should be supporting people in the bush.

That is the driving aspect of why we have raised concerns about shires. Sure, we know with any change, there is going to be difficulty and pain and it is not about jumping on a populist-based agenda to ride on the back of the pain. It is about recognising the real issues inherent in the application of the shire model. There are some CEOs who are very upset, or the CEO's partners who like to be abusive of these shires, but fundamentally, it is about the people on the ground and the people on the ground want better service. What that looks like - and I know the Treasurer wanted to have a bells and whistles description - will be determined after the election. We have said we will move to a model of regional councils. Not back to the old model, play politics if you like, but we are not going back to the old model and we are not putting a number down because we want to determine the best fit in consultation with the people.

That is what it is about. It is about improving the services. It is about where the previous local manager at a community used to be able to facilitate assisting people with financial management, or how to process a cheque, or supporting people at that local level. That does not happen now. It is about ensuring facilities are there, so roads can be graded, rubbish can be collected and, more importantly, it is about letting people have a say in their life, their personal governance, and the governance of their community because that has been removed through this shire process.

So while I, in particular, have used words like 'toxic', I stand by those, because the shires in the majority of the communities, homelands, and outstations of the Territory have become toxic. The shires are just one element of the government's socialist policy that is failing and driving people into town. Where I spoke about a paradigm shift in the Country Liberals position, it is a paradigm shift to say we should be supporting people in the bush. It is not about saying 'kick all the Aboriginal people out of town'. It is about recognising the challenges of driving people to town. Particularly, I believe the challenge of that

is the lack of social and economic infrastructure in urban centres.

That is mainly around the ability to find, or the lack of, housing at an affordable price for the people who move in. It is causing massive challenges in the regional centres of Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, and Katherine. I believe that will increase fundamentally in Darwin and Palmerston, and that is not a political point-scoring issue, that is exactly what will happen, and the bridge over the Daly, which is a very good initiative, will be a part of the drive of urban drift into Palmerston and Darwin.

We need to work to support development in these communities. That is why we want to focus on the regions. The Territory is about the regions, that is why we support a regional-based approach for local governance. We are not throwing the baby out with the bathwater, we are not going back to the old model, but we need to get that voice back to the people on the ground. That is why we also spoke about the Country Liberals supporting outstations and homelands. That is where people want to live. If that is part of their country, we have to respect that.

We also have to, from an economic perspective, acknowledge there are between 2200 and 2500 public housing assets out there in the form of housing. We have said that if it is a person's principal place of residence, the kids are going to school, and people are participating in the economy in some way, we will support those homelands and outstations. We will go further with our policy announcements in the future. Our policy announcements will be about recognising language, law and culture, and the right for people to live on their own country, as long as they are participating in the economy, whether that is through CDEP, training, or work for the dole, or a real job. Whatever that may be, as long as people are active, doing something, we will support those people.

I acknowledge that Indigenous affairs is very topical in the Northern Territory, and the recent announcement about some of the Country Liberals' preselected candidates has gained some discussion in the media. Bess Price, the candidate for Stuart, is one such person. Yes, she was the Chair of the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council, the IAAC. I can tell you, under a Country Liberals government, we will not have that Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council. We will disband that council. We know the IAAC was a committee of well-meaning people, but the minister did not always listen to it. If the minister listened to it, we would not be in such a debacle in some of the areas of Indigenous policy and the outcomes we have seen.

The direction the Country Liberals will move towards, should we win government, will not be one of having the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council, but we will have a model of what we will call First Circles. We will create and develop a First Circle in the Top End and a First Circle in the bottom end, which will each meet twice a year with the full Cabinet of a Country Liberals government. The First Circle recognises that Aboriginal Territorians are the first people; and the circle because we want to sit down with people and take advice on the development and implementation of policy from Aboriginal Elders from across the Territory. We are not talking about bureaucrats or employees of organisations; we are talking about Aboriginal people from across the Territory who are nominated to be part of that First Circle to meet with the Cabinet of an Australian government. My understanding is that it will be the first of its kind. We will take advice from traditional Aboriginal people to set the direction about where we head.

Where we head is about the regions. It is about economic development, it is about giving back and recognising the importance of these people in a policy setting, and understanding that we are not going to achieve outcomes in social areas such as educational attendance, educational outcomes, and economic development if we do not value the contribution and acknowledge the language, law, and culture of Aboriginal Territorians.

I could go on and lambast the government for its failures in a heap of other areas, but I am not going to do that. I just want to spell out the reason the Country Liberals have taken the position we have: we recognise the valuable contribution of Aboriginal Territorians. We support people to go back to country, to live in the community, to live on an outstation. It will be a long road but we are reversing the approach Labor has been taking for some time in bringing people to town. That is not the approach we want to take.

I want to touch on police in communities. When the intervention was running at full flight and the federal government was supporting the roll-out of Themis police stations and funding federal officers in certain police stations, there was a high level of policing. Communities were very satisfied about the level of law and order control they had through the numbers of police, but how quickly that can all change. Since the removal of the federal involvement in policing in remote communities, we have seen a complete roll-back of the level of policing operated by the Northern Territory government; the slowing down of overtime, and the inability to contact police after 6 pm in these communities. Now, if you want to talk to your local station, you have to go through the Darwin communication centre as we see in

places like Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, and Katherine. That is having a detrimental effect on the safety of people in communities.

I know of a story of someone in a Central Australian community who was advised that a woman rang the police, was transferred to Darwin, and said: 'My husband is coming back from Tennant Creek. He has been drinking and whenever he comes back here, he beats me up and gets involved in domestic violence. Can the police make sure they look after me and keep him away from me when he gets back to town because he has been in Tennant Creek drinking?' The officer at the communications centre in Darwin asked: 'Has anyone been hurt?' 'No one has been hurt at all'. 'Well, we cannot do anything about it'. This person came home and one thing led to another. That is the situation people are finding themselves in now through not being able to talk to their local police.

Police are not able to be as responsive because they have to go through the communications centre in Darwin. I can name half-a-dozen communities which have contacted me directly complaining about this. I have written to the minister for Police about the situation at Palumpa, about how they cannot get police to turn up on their allegations, cannot get police to turn up when people are travelling from Peppimenarti pub back to Wadeye and they ring the police: 'We cannot come, we do not have overtime, we will be on our regular schedule in two days', and they are complaining about the police not coming.

It is happening at Alparra, it is happening at Alpururulam; it is happening in many places. Since the federal police pulled out of the police stations, policing has fallen over and it is not because of the officers; it is because of the funding provided down the line and the way the process has been set up through the Darwin call centre. If you are in a community of 500 people and you cannot talk to the officer, something is fundamentally wrong.

I was in Ali Curung in the member for Barkly's electorate on Monday a week ago and, as I entered the community, I called into the police station. I could see the car at the back of the Ali Curung station so I knocked on the door. There is a sign that says if you cannot see anyone, hit the button. I hit the button, the phone rang, and the phone rang out, did not stop, minute after minute after minute; no one. If you are a local person at the police station and you are trying to contact the police, the call has gone through to the Darwin call centre and you cannot get the police to answer the phone, and this is at 10 am.

These are ongoing concerns being raised across the Northern Territory. I spoke earlier

today on the motion about President Obama and crime in Alice Springs, and I said you cannot see a police officer driving around Alice Springs. I know the member for Johnston tried to make a joke about how whenever the member for Braitling goes down to the Northside shops there are no police, but there are no police. You have this Banned Drinker Register, and all these strong alcohol reforms, and the 2 km law dry town, and they stand at the shop front drinking beer. There are no police.

I talk about my electorate which includes a CBD. I will talk right now about what is happening with this influx of people in town. On the corner of Head Street and Angguna Avenue, there is a seniors complex into which Territory Housing have just put - I will not name the unit - an Aboriginal person - in a peaceful seniors complex. There are now 30 people living in that one-bedroom apartment, running riot through the complex, and ruining the place. It is the same at the Wauchope Flats, member for Johnston, minister for Housing. Exactly the same thing is happening at the Wauchope Flats along Dixon Road. What you are doing through your policy of bringing people into town is turning Alice Springs into one huge community, and these housing complexes are becoming ghettos.

Then, add the fact there are no police around. Whether that is a decision that has been made to hold back overtime, stop filling shifts, or because of the reduction of police numbers, or whether that has come from the Police Commissioner or the Police minister - however that is - the fact is, there are no police in town. When you can sit at the back of the mall, in the big car park in the CBD, and see 20 to 30 people sitting around, drinking in the open ...

Ms PURICK: Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 77, I move that the member's time be extended.

Motion agreed to.

Mr GILES: Thank you, member for Goyder.

I have photos here. Police were called at 3.18 pm - no response; 4.08 pm - no response. I went there at 4.30 pm and people had moved on. I took a couple of photos of some of the bottles of grog. These are not very sexy photos, but they show bottles, and more smashed bottles, and cans, a whole box of wine bottles that has been taken in, more wine bottles, more bottles again, and VB cans. If I can get phone calls from constituents to come and have a look at it and get the camera out and take all these photos, and police are not able to respond, something is fundamentally wrong.

I made a comment in here today about - I think I used the term 'citizen's arrest'. A couple of local residents had to grab a bloke, hold him down, and wait for the coppers to turn up. I know you have to wait when you ring - I get that. I know sometimes people are busy, but to wait for extended periods of time for these responses is just appalling. And you are turning places into ghettos! I request you get on to Territory Housing and fix that bad tenant on the corner of Head Street and Angguna Avenue. It is just killing the place. There are people moving from Hoppy's Camp to the Northside shops where you can publicly drink now, because there are no police. You could steal Fort Knox. Then, up to Head Street, the Elliott Street flats, the Wauchope flats - that little triangle is just appalling.

I have heard you on the radio, minister. I am talking directly here, through the Speaker. I know you actually care about this stuff because I have heard you talk about how neighbourhoods and communities decline. It is happening everywhere. The influx of people into town is just killing it because there is nowhere for people to live. So, they get in there and they jam up and ruin everything, and completely degrade society. I am not just bringing this up from my personal experiences of travelling to the shop - which you laughed at before - but ambulance officers are asking me to do something, begging me to do something.

A lady who lives on Aldridge Street rang me today and sent me photos of damage done to her house last night by residents who live in overcrowded accommodation in Erumber Street flats. They smashed up her house while she was inside with her two kids. That was yesterday.

All these effects of your failed policies are on a whole range of things. You do not fail on everything, but this population migration into town is killing us. It is killing us. If you had a Country Liberals member in Tennant Creek, you would find - and I am not advocating politically - there would be a bigger voice about this situation in Tennant Creek. In Tennant Creek, it is very bad as well.

The \$36m spent on SIHIP in Tennant Creek, with not one new bedroom built, has not helped anything. I have already talked about the shires. When you go through the Northern Territory evaluation report done by the feds, it lists, in a number of places, what the shires model has done to remove the voice and the personal feeling of people out there, where they do not have a future. If you go through the Australian National Audit Office report into the role of SIHIP, and I am not quoting, it says there is no chance of getting to the figure of 9.8 people per house. That is the target under COAG - 9.8 people per house. Despite \$1.7bn from the feds and \$240m from the

Territory government - despite \$2bn - you are not going to get to 9.8 people per house.

You have to ask some questions; it is a lot of money. It needs a fundamental change; it needs a fundamental change about the way things are done. I have laid out tonight the change in direction of where we are heading and the reasons, the philosophical approach that will underpin the way we do things, and that includes supporting regional councils; not attacking the CEOs, but supporting regional councils. Supporting outstations and homelands for people where it is their primary place of residence, their kids go to school, and they participate in the economy. We will establish two First Circles, one in the Top End and one in the bottom end, of Aboriginal Territorians, not CEOs, not representatives of organisations, but people, to sit with Cabinet twice a year for each First Circle, to tell us about how we should be developing our policy and to tell us about implementation. I sat here and listened to most of your side's speeches and most of the things talk about inputs, talk about how much money - most of the time it is federal money - but it does not talk about how you are changing people's lives and that is what we are about.

I will not talk any more on this statement. There have been successes in some areas, but fundamentally, the overall position of moving people into towns through social engineering approaches has failed. It is failing all Territorians; particularly, it is failing Indigenous Territorians, and is driving a wedge between black and white in most parts of the Territory. If you continue this approach, Darwin and Palmerston will continue to see the media releases from the police that I get every day about a man of Aboriginal appearance was caught breaking into a house; a man of Aboriginal appearance in every media release I see. And they are more and more every day from Darwin and Palmerston and that is exactly where you are driving it to.

I, and my colleagues, the member for Araluen and the member for Greatorex, have seen it widely. I know the member for Katherine sees it in Katherine and it is going to happen more up here, so there needs to be a fundamental policy shift.

Ms SCRYMGOUR (Arafura): Madam Speaker, I support this statement. Every time I hear the member for Braitling speak, and the more I hear him speak, he is endearing himself to us. It is real left wing policy, member for Braitling. You should join us, mate. He is talking about a rebadging of Labor policy and I applaud him - and this is genuine - I do think in terms of wanting to change the CLP and get outcomes for Aboriginal people in the regions and remote communities, I think the member for Braitling genuinely does

believe that, and I say good luck. It is about time. Someone has been in there and can be that conscience to try to get the CLP to change.

Forgive me for being cynical, as someone who worked in this field for a long time prior to coming into parliament and having to try to get the CLP to change its policy and approach to Aboriginal people in a different way to try to get those outcomes, I hope you can. I genuinely hope you can, member for Braitling, and I hope I am still around to see you do that because that would certainly take the Northern Territory in a different direction and I will applaud you and compliment you. I am going to compliment you because I think you genuinely want to try to get some better outcomes.

Having these different circles, you have existing structures already there, and one of the fundamental problems or ideologies the CLP has always had is their lack of ability to engage land councils. Regardless of whether we think they are good or bad, the land councils are there; they are the statutory bodies set up to represent Aboriginal people. They have land trusts, which are landholding bodies, and if you want to get the outcome for economic development and growth in those communities, the land councils have to be seen as a serious player in that.

I know you have managed to convince the chair of the Central Land Council, who is a member of the CLP. To engage the land councils, if the CLP will start doing that, not just your favoured ones - I know the Leader of the Opposition loves to go to the Tiwi Land Council. It is common knowledge the seven men of the Tiwi Land Council have always been CLP sympathisers, and I have known that. Every ALP member who has ever stood in this House for Arafura has always known the inner sanctum of the Tiwi Land Council has always been a breeding ground for the CLP, particularly for CLP candidates. It will be a telling sign whether the CLP will go to the Northern Land Council. You have talked to Anindilyakwa, but the biggest circle in terms of convincing - the greatest holder of the land mass in the Northern Territory - is the Northern and Central Land Council, so it would be a change to see whether the CLP will change their ideology and their position regarding engagement of those major land councils.

I have always been a critic of the most coercive measures which the Commonwealth enacted in legislation in 2007. I have always drawn a distinction between those measures on the one hand, and the other things like Commonwealth funding for housing, education, policing, and child protection. Those are the things I have always supported, and they were pursued in conjunction with the Northern Territory

government. No one can describe them as any part of any intervention, and they cannot be used by past or current federal governments as justification for the intervention.

The Commonwealth government's attempt to take back powers granted in the *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act* and resume direct rule from Canberra has been a fundamental failure. However, I do admit the events of 2007 have had the effect of focusing the attention of government on Indigenous affairs in a way that has changed the way people think about policy responses to the issues that affect Aboriginal people. It is now accepted that a whole-of-government approach is appropriate, that measures identified within the general portfolio responsibilities of Education, Health, Child Protection, Justice, Regional Development, and Housing and Local Government all have to be included in any effective long-term solutions. This seems to be an appropriate opportunity to reflect on the path behind and the path ahead in relation to each of those areas.

Most people agree that education is the most important area. Upon coming to government in 2001, Labor took steps to implement recommendations in the *Learning Lessons* report. Resources were allocated to establishing proper secondary education programs in schools in large remote communities. This resulted in the first ever Year 12 graduations at a number of those communities. I have spoken in this House previously about the reaction of the former member for Nhulunbuy, Mr Syd Stirling, and the former member for Stuart, Dr Peter Toyne – and their commitment. Seeing both those men, when we did come to government - their commitment and eagerness to implement the *Learning Lessons* report; something they had pursued with vigour in opposition. They had an opportunity afforded to them to bring about substantial change to the lives of Indigenous kids in those remote communities in relation to education. When you hear people opposite say: 'You are always going back over the past', it is important to look back over the past because, yes, it has been nearly 10 years but when you look at the neglect of 26 years it takes that long to reinstate the neglect which occurred over those 26 years ...

Mr Elferink: I do not think you quite meant what you just said.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Whether you like it or not, member for Port Darwin, I remember when you were the member for Macdonnell; you used to bleat about how even when you were in government, the CLP government would not implement some of those changes and you held a bush seat for eight of those years. If you look at that electorate in which you were a member, and

you were a member in government for eight of those years, what changes occurred in that electorate over eight years in which you were a member of the CLP government - very little. If you look at how many kids in that electorate graduated, it is also interesting.

But, I digress. One of the central and important policies we as a government need to look at is the long-standing problem of truancy. My colleague, the member for Johnston and now minister for Education, has taken that on with great vigour and pursued the critical and immediate task for families, communities, schools, and government of physically getting children into classrooms and keeping them in those classrooms - not just two or three days a week, but attending five days a week. A range of indirect carrot-and-stick measures are currently being pursued which seek to motivate children and parents towards changing their behaviour.

I commend the government for the initiatives in the Every Child, Every Day strategy. I look forward to more direct measures for dealing with hard-case truancy. I have said previously in this parliament that kids who are abandoning their chance to be educated are seriously harming themselves. Parents who are allowing their children to abandon their education are harming their children. People want to talk about being tough; well, we need to not flip around the edges with this and become serious because there are some hard-case truants who we have not dealt with. A way forward is to look at an approach which would involve people being legally empowered to pick up children who are not in school and to take them to school or a designated alternative place of education and get those children to stay in school.

When I think about that, I think of schools in my electorate like Gunbalanya and I commend principals like Esther Djayhurrnga, and Sue Trimble and John Bray, the Executive Director in Jabiru. I also commend the Department of Education and Training, which has worked with the Jabiru and Gunbalanya school communities, and the communities, to look at restructuring and how they can get better results. With both Jabiru and Gunbalanya, they have turned around, and the attendance rates in Gunbalanya have gone up to nearly 80%, which is fantastic, given the year before their attendance rates were well below 50%. There certainly have been many changes. I commend the minister and the department in working with that school to try a flexible approach, particularly the 3-9 program, which is working fantastically well.

The member for Nhulunbuy, in her role as parliamentary secretary, has often talked about the 3-9 program. In Gunbalanya, the 3-9 program

has been a fantastic win/win for the educators, the children, and the community. The 3-9 program gets the whole of the community into the school, and part of the learning environment is encouraging some of the young people who had previously opted out of school to come back into that system. I let the minister know it is working well. I commend the department, John Bray, and all the staff at Jabiru and Gunbalanya, along with ERA and the many providers that are part of that agreement, in making things work out there to get the great results.

The member for Braintree often talks about economic development and that none of these drivers are working. He should have a look at the mining sector and what it is doing at Jabiru. ERA has been around for a long time. I know there is real stigma with uranium and the mining there, but they have put much work into their community profile and their relationship with the Aboriginal people, particularly in that region. Things are starting to turn around. They are looking at becoming a major jobs provider. At the moment, there are 30 young men from Gunbalanya who go to Jabiru to work on that mine site. There are jobs happening in many of our outstations, particularly in my region. With the members for Nhulunbuy, Stuart, and Arnhem, we see jobs happening.

The ranger programs in many of these outstation regions provide many job opportunities for Aboriginal people. It goes towards caring for country and is probably one of the biggest capacity building exercises for Aboriginal people. It also provides an important job in border protection, particularly many of the communities and outstations along our North Australian coast. They play an important role in border protection. I have to acknowledge a previous federal minister who was a colleague I knew quite well, Bob Debus. When he was the federal minister for Customs - I think it was Customs - he allocated funding to those Aboriginal ranger programs to look at border protection which ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Arafura, it is now 9 pm. Do you wish to continue your remarks until the end of your time, or would you prefer to do it at the next stage another day?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will do it at the next stage, Madam Speaker.

Leave granted.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Madam SPEAKER: The Assembly is now adjourned pursuant to Standing Order 41A.

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Madam Speaker, tonight I wish to compliment and briefly speak on the senior poets who live in the rural area.

Every year, during Seniors Week, there is a senior's poetry lunch; this year it was held on 20 August at the Taminmin Community Library. It was hosted by the member for Nelson, who is also a guest poet, along with me - not being a very good poet, however - and many local poets from around the rural area down to Darwin River, Berry Springs, and beyond.

They are all original works and it is a lovely day. Refreshments are provided and, as a consequence of that day, they put together a booklet which is distributed to anyone who loves and enjoys poetry. It is called *Rural Reflections*, and this year it has a collection of some 15 original works. They have been going for about 10 years.

The group started very small, originally kicked off by Sandra Parker, a poet herself. I also believe Waldo Bailey, Gerry Wood and Lynne Gerdes were in the original group of poets. It was a small group who put together a collection of poems. From that time, it has grown to bigger and better things, and this year around 80 people attended the function in August. It is held in the community library, and the library staff, notably Iris Beale, do a great job in hosting the event, providing music and other entertainment for everyone. I congratulate all these people and particularly the organisers, Sandra and her team.

I would like to compliment some of the poets. They are young children, young students, as well as some not so young people. I will read into *Hansard* some of memorable pieces.

This is by Kenneth Zane and it is *Cadel the Great*:

*Cadel, 'tis said, was the name of kings,
back in medieval Wales,
Now a greater Cadel has come,
beyond the stuff of fairy tales.
A knight on a modern quest,
against cheats, fatigue and fickle chance
And with half the world as witness,
He's won for us, the Tour de France.
This boy from the Territory bush,
has well earned his world wide fame,
and though he's lived in other places
we have the earliest claim.
We watched him on the telly
and bleary-eyed, cheered him all the way,
'til at last, we shared his triumph,
as he rolled down the Champs Élysées.*

I would like to read two more, Madam Deputy Speaker. Some of the poets and the people who

read these pieces are quite moving, and this is from a lady, Jacqueline Williams, and it is called *Dementia*.

*It came into my life unannounced
People who knew me were wary
Could see something wasn't right
But I didn't know what was happening
Thinking life was just the same
And I could play my usual game
But when I was sent to a doctor
Who had carefully looked at my ways
He told me I have dementia
And have other places to go
But my mind will not be improving
It has found its place to live*

That is quite a moving piece.

One of our young poets in the rural area is Liliane Bregeon. Hers was short but, again, it was very touching. She is about nine-years old, or 10 possibly, and goes to school in the rural area. Her poem was titled *Why Can't We Go Back in Time*.

*Why can't we go back in time
See the people we have lost?
Why can't I see them for real
Rather than just photos?
Why does there have to be a thing called
death?
Why oh why can't I see him again?*

That was about a grandpa she lost.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to table this booklet, the *Rural Reflections* anthology for 2011.

Leave granted.

I compliment all the poets and the organisers and look forward to the poetry day next year and a copy of the anthology for 2012.

Mr McCARTHY (Barkly): Madam Deputy Speaker, tonight, I acknowledge and thank one of the Territory's long-term public servants.

On 11 November 2011, Mrs Ursula Kotrancz retired from the Northern Territory Public Service after 33 years of service.

Ursula moved to Darwin with her husband and two daughters in 1976 after living in Port Moresby for eight years. She began working with the then Department of Transport and Works on 4 October 1978 - the same year the Territory achieved self-government - and has spent her entire public service career with the department in its various forms. Ursula was employed with the Transport Services Branch in Darwin as personal assistant to the Director, Transport Services.

Over the last 33 years, Ursula has seen some name changes, building changes and management changes, not to mention the evolution of technology. Over the course of her career, Ursula has provided administrative support to 18 senior executives, and has accumulated a wealth of historical knowledge about the department and the public service. Her loyal assistance to the senior managers and the areas she has worked with over many years has been vital in helping the department deliver an ongoing program of major projects. Ursula has built strong working relationships with many staff in the department and her commitment to the department is well recognised by her managers and peers.

Ursula is now enjoying her retirement and looks forward to spending time on her passions of gardening, craft, and travel, as well as spending quality time with her family.

I thank Ursula for her valued service and commitment to the Northern Territory and, on behalf of government, I wish her and her family all the best for the future.

I also make special mention in relation to the Chief Minister's Public Sector Medal and David Jeffery from the Department of Lands and Planning.

As members of the Legislative Assembly, we are privileged to work with some very talented and committed Territorians across the public sector. Last week, the Chief Minister acknowledged this excellence with the 2011 Chief Minister's Public Sector Medal. David Jeffery from the Department of Lands and Planning was recognised at this ceremony for his outstanding and meritorious service in the public sector.

David, a licensed surveyor, has a 40-year career with the Northern Territory government, in itself worthy of recognition - four decades of commitment to Territorians. David consistently demonstrates his outstanding ability, enthusiasm and dedication to excellence in the public service. In his role as Manager of Client Services, David is the department's expert in his field of surveying. His job is to coordinate the subdivision of land in accordance with development requirements, concluding with a survey plan that maps out legal boundaries and paves the way for the issue of land title.

David's exceptional contribution is fundamental to the Northern Territory's development process and has resulted in significant land release and the construction of many commercial, residential and community-based projects. With an eye for detail, David is across a range of legislative requirements that can impact on how a

development proceeds, as well as the timing, fieldwork and format of various surveys needed. David is involved in commissioning and managing survey consultancies in a cost effective and timely way so project outcomes and timelines are met.

David has a unique blend of expertise and management skills that enable him to give expert advice and negotiate land development matters with everyone from Chief Executives to grader drivers. David is renowned for delivering excellent customer service; and for those who work with David, it is no surprise that he is one of the most called upon surveyors within the Northern Territory government. Indeed, David is highly regarded by the private sector and industry, and has been involved in a number of major land development projects, amongst them the ConocoPhillips refinery, the AustralAsia Railway and, more recently, the Darwin Correctional precinct and the Kenbi Land Claim.

David is currently managing cadastral surveys in growth towns, community living areas and remote communities. This work is important to achieving *A Working Future* in our remote communities and closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage by creating opportunities for business investment and home ownership. This is a complex process, involving three tiers of government, traditional owners, service agencies and consultants. To quote the Surveyor-General, Garry West, of the Department of Lands and Planning:

Without David's oversight and management of this dynamic environment where land and servicing requirements are constantly changing it would not be possible for government to meet its land tenure and leasing deadlines.

David has also been active in government's land release program in Palmerston East. Addressing the NT government's priority to release land in the new suburbs of Palmerston has been one of David's major achievements in recent times. David managed the subdivision surveys for Farrar, Johnston Stage 1 and 2, and Bellamack Gardens.

I congratulate David on receiving a Chief Minister's Public Sector award. He is clearly a deserving recipient.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Deputy Speaker, tonight I wish to continue talking about the Mandorah Ferry.

A particular issue I wish to raise with the government is: what has changed? Why has there been a change in preferred tenderers? For some reason, without explanation, last Friday the

department put out a media release saying the preferred tenderer would now be Sea Cat Ferries and Charters, rather than Fast Ferries. No explanation was given today as to what has changed. I am anxious to hear from the government what has changed.

While I am speaking about this, I will also turn my attention to comments made in the House by Gerry Wood today when he was speaking about the censure motion.

They were asked to produce suggestions on what items should be included in the tender document that were not in the current service provided.

That is Gerry Wood referring to a conversation he had with Mr Ellis, which confirms the concerns I placed on the record today in relation to the ferry tender process. It confirms that the government can claim to its heart's content it had nothing to do with the tender process, it was at arm's length from the tender process when, in fact, what it was seeking from the committee was the production of suggestions of items which should be included in the tender were not in the current service provided. That means the member for Nelson, quoting Mr Ellis, essentially confirms what I alleged in the House today.

I will touch on another issue very quickly in relation to this matter in regard to Mr Ellis having walked out of the committee. I was very surprised to hear the member for Nelson say that Mr Ellis had never been a member of the committee, was not attached to the committee, and had not been a part of the committee. I have a clear recollection of speaking to Mr Ellis on the telephone on 28 October, when I put out the media release 'Ferry Important Questions', and raised some issues about the processes in place at that time. The member for Nelson suggested that I ring Mr Ellis, and I rang him at the first opportunity to confirm the conversation we had.

Mr Ellis pointed out to me that the process of having the form sent to him, which was described by the minister here today, and a letter in reply sent to him by the minister, dated 7 February, did occur. Mr Ellis, in that conversation of 28 October, said words to the effect that he had received all of that material and had walked away from it, or was not interested in it. I took that to mean that he had been on the committee and had walked away from it.

Mr Ellis assures me that he was never on the committee. It is without a moment's hesitation that I apologise to Mr Ellis and place on the record the correction that he had never been on that committee. I wish I had heard him correctly and correctly understood the meaning of his words,

because it would have made my case even stronger.

Mr Ellis wanted nothing to do with the committee the minister was setting up, because it was not an elected committee and he did not feel it was representative of the community, which is supported in the letter Mr Ellis wrote to the minister, where he said, in part:

We believe with the groundwork of the past month and local expertise and knowledge available, a group selected from the community by the community is preferable to the system you propose.

So it was an honest and genuine mistake on my part; certainly not an attempt to mislead anyone. I am disappointed that I did not hear correctly, or did not come away from that conversation with the correct understanding, because if I had it would have made my point even stronger than I described it. I am on the record; that is my explanation as to what occurred - a genuine and honest mistake which only strengthens the argument I made today.

As far as I am concerned, this government and its ministers, in particular the Attorney-General, and the Minister for Transport, involved themselves in this process and sought to structure the tender in such a way that Sea Cat would be frozen out of the process. They have been embarrassed by it and they continue to be embarrassed by it.

For saying that much, Madam Deputy Speaker, I remain utterly unrepentant

Mr GUNNER (Fannie Bay): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to talk about another Darwin High School success story.

Darwin High School consistently produces wonderful students, and much of the credit must go to the significant support provided to them by some very qualified teachers and other staff.

As members may have read in the paper today, four Darwin High School students have been accepted into the prestigious Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, and another one has been short-listed. That is a remarkable achievement. The Western Australian Performing Arts Academy normally only takes around 15 students a year, so, for Darwin High to get four of them, plus another one short-listed, is quite an extraordinary effort and is a testament to their talent, skills ...

Mr Bohlin: Dedication.

Mr GUNNER: Dedication, thank you, member for Drysdale.

They are lovely people; I met them last week at Darwin High and had a great conversation with them about their aspirations and what they are looking at doing in Perth. As a government, we like to help them as much as we can. We were able to provide grant funding earlier this year to Sarah Calver and the Darwin High School performing arts department senior dance program. The students asked what type of grant funding was available if they go to Western Australia - and the government does have a grants program; we give out 40 grants a year to support high school students going into tertiary education - and even though they are moving to Western Australia, they qualify because what is offered by the Western Australian Performing Arts Academy is not yet offered in the Territory. It is something we have to work towards in the future.

I am sure for someone like Sarah Calver - who members may be aware has been involved in dance for almost 30 years now making contributions as a performer, educator and advocate - it is something she is working towards. It is like being able, finally, to train doctors in the Northern Territory. It would be great one day for people to talk about the Northern Territory Academy of Performing Arts. However, that is something down the track. For now, we are talking about four students who have been provided an opportunity to do something they love in an elite academy in Western Australia. They are: Danial Ireland, Melissa Tan, Cameron Goodman, and Nicole Kershaw, who, I am sure, we all congratulate. Stevie Kirke-Groves has been shortlisted and will soon find out whether she is successful.

This is another example of Darwin High School achieving well above and beyond, and I congratulate these students, and the school.

Mr GILES (Braitling): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to speak on a couple of issues tonight.

First, I would like to inform the House of the success of the Central Deserts Branch of the Ulysses Motorcycle Club which has been successful in its bid to have the national AGM held in Alice Springs from 12 to 18 May 2014. There has been a great deal of hard work go into that bid by the local club and I recently received a briefing from Alan and Ross from the club who have informed me of the proposal and what it will mean for Alice Springs. It is going to be fantastic in 2014; thousands and thousands of Ulysses members from across the country will be descending on Alice Springs.

It will not just be an economic driver for Alice Springs. It will be an opportunity for us to showcase the cultural landscape and all the social functions we have in town. It will be a driver for the Territory, because they are not just looking at promoting Alice Springs, they are looking to promote the Territory more broadly, seeking to put in place tourism packages the length and breadth of the Stuart Highway and into regional areas. Places such as Tennant Creek and Katherine will be supported, as will Darwin, with many people on motorcycles from 12 to 18 May 2014.

I encourage the Northern Territory government to get on board and support the Ulysses Club AGM, and even give consideration to project status to ensure appropriate facilitation. I know the national club, in conjunction with the local branch, will put on a fantastic event; they are very good at logistics management and do this around the country in different locations.

To get it back in Alice Springs for the first time in many years is fantastic, and one of the bigger events we can see coming up for the future. I call on the Northern Territory government to support a positive initiative.

I encourage the Minister for Tourism, and I have said this before in this House, to further investigate sponsorship for Adelaide United Football Club or, as I call it, the soccer club. Adelaide United, as I understand it, has proposed a sponsorship package to the Northern Territory government. I am not in the business of recommending the handing out of money willy nilly, but for \$50 000 to have a sleeve sponsorship promoting Central Australia – Alice Springs - is a fantastic opportunity, with the added bonus if Adelaide United make the Asian Cup, which will be in China, an additional \$50 000.

For a total of \$100 000 to support Adelaide United in this sponsorship package and potentially getting Alice Springs, Central Australia, or even the Territory - I do not mind either way - to the billion-plus people of China is a small investment, particularly with the tourism situation in Central Australia, with the confines of failed approaches, and also the global financial crisis and the high Australian dollar. An initiative such as this, which could be pursued in a broader strategy, needs further consideration. I encourage the Tourism minister to look at that.

Turning to something that made me laugh last week. I saw a media release from the Minister for Central Australia calling on the CLP to reveal its plans for the future of Alice Springs town camps. I have to say, I really did laugh. The minister then called on me to come clean on the party's plans to improve living conditions in town camps. Then he

said I had made it clear that I would stop the SIHIP program, so there would be no new houses.

When you a look at the \$150m Alice Springs Transformation Plan, you can clearly see there has been no transformation at all. I must admit, though, they did put some letter boxes in Morris Soak town camp the other day. It took 12 months from when the issue was first raised by the ABC in Alice Springs to get some letterboxes - a fantastic effort by the federal government. I would like to know how much it cost, bureaucratically or administratively, to get those letterboxes in the town camps, but well done.

The Minister for Central Australia, Karl Hampton, needs to have a good look at what his government has done over the last 11 years. Go out to Hoppy's Camp and tell me what has changed, tell me what you have transformed. If you want to take it further, the Chief Minister has constantly said he wants to see town camps reformed into beautiful suburbs and part of the town. What has he done? What has he done on land tenure reform? What has he done to make this happen?

For all the cuteness, I think the Minister for Central Australia should ask the Chief Minister what he has done and what his plans are. Clearly, there are none, apart from taking federal government money and poorly administering it.

Finally, I get back to crime. I received an e-mail on Saturday advising me of the second break-in at the Town & Country Tavern last week which, in combination with the three establishments the proprietors of the Town & Country manage, being Club Eastside, the Gillen Club, and the Town & Country Tavern, have so far had 44 break-ins for the year; 44 break-ins for the year in three pubs in Alice Springs. Heaven forbid, I thought they would reach 50 before Ricky Ponting did. Forty-four break-ins in three years and this government says there is no problem with crime or law and order. The proprietor asks: 'What can we do when you have every security measure the police recommend you put in, and you still cannot stop people breaking in?'. Ripping off the whole roof to break in, driving cars through cool rooms to break in; using crowbars, tyre levers, anything. It is a difficult position and, once again, I call on the government to do something about it.

Sure, we do not have any police on the streets at the moment, and the Police Commissioner needs to address that, but fundamentally society is broken when these things keep occurring. I have only mentioned three venues, but it is widespread; there is an epidemic of crime in Alice Springs. The government should hang its head in shame, and start to act. The first step is to get the

police back on the streets. What is happening in the river, what is happening with crime, what is happening in the CBD, and what is happening at Northside shops is an absolute disgrace.

The Public Housing minister is turning our housing estates into ghettos. They need to act to put resources back into Alice Springs and stop this occurring. Good people are fearful for their safety in their own premises, and good people are leaving town. That is no way a major city, Alice Springs, in Australia should be.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Deputy Speaker, I endorse the comments by the member for Goyder this evening about our Poet's Day which we have every year and culminates in an event which occurred last Saturday at Taminmin College Library, where those poets are able to see the fruits of their efforts in the form of an anthology. The member for Goyder nicely read some of the poems from that anthology, this year called *Rural Reflections*.

The member for Goyder occasionally also puts words into verse, along with a number of other people from the rural area and Palmerston, who come together and really show that poetry is still alive and well, especially in the rural area. When poets get together, they have an enjoyable day. I thank the member for Goyder for bringing to our attention the wonderful day we had on Saturday. And Sandra Parker, who continues to astound with her efforts in ensuring this particular day, and other days, are well organised and show the talents of the people in the rural area and Palmerston.

While I am on an arty note, I went to *The Nutcracker* ballet on Saturday night. I thought: Oh, a bit of ballet, that is going to be interesting. Well, it was one of the most wonderful nights you could go to. The Palmerston Association for Dancing put this beautiful ballet on at the Darwin Entertainment Centre, and the centre was full. It is not often you see the Darwin Entertainment Centre full for a ballet. One reason could be because there were many little ballet people there whose parents had to turn up to see their little darlings dance across the floor; but I really believe people came because it was one of the most entertaining nights I have ever been to at the Darwin Entertainment Centre.

The Artistic Director, and much of the praise should go to her, is Jan Hedenig who runs the Palmerston Association for Dancing. The music was conducted by Martin Jarvis, who I have not seen for some time, and the music was beautiful. From my little knowledge of this type of music, *The Nutcracker* ballet music was written by Tchaikovsky.

There were so many people, I could not mention them all, but one of the reasons I went is a young girl called Michelle Wilson who was the local principal artist. Michelle Wilson is a young lady who lives in the rural area with her family, mother, Sue and father, Chris, and I have known them for many years. Two years ago, Michelle was involved in a very serious car accident with her boyfriend on the way to Jabiru; they were hit head-on by a car overtaking when it should not have been overtaking, and both of them probably should have been killed. But they did survive, and spent a long time in hospital. Michelle has shown terrific courage in recovering from those severe injuries, both mental and physical, and continue her ballet career. She was wonderful on the night, beautifully dressed, and danced in most of the scenes in the ballet. I would have gone just for her performance.

The ballet included two principal guest artists, Madison Keesler who appeared courtesy of the San Francisco Ballet Company, and the other one was Adam Thurlow from the Australian Ballet and the Paris Opera Ballet. So we had two professional artists, acclaimed worldwide, in this performance by the Palmerston Association for dancing which added to the professionalism of the evening. There were a number of people who had major parts in the evening's events, and I will mention them.

There was Clara, who was danced by Michelle Wilson; the Nutcracker - Cameron Goodman; Drosselmeyer - Nick Manly who was also the Magician and the Mouse King; Herr Stahlbaum was no finer person than member for Drysdale, Ross Bohlin. He was up there in his wig and his fancy outfit doing some interesting dance steps, and he certainly looked the part.

Frau Stahlbaum - Sheree Higgins; Fritz Stahlbaum - Kaiden Oats; Harlequin Doll - Michelle Buse; Columbine Doll - Terri-anne van Cuylenburg; Spanish Dancer - Crystal Loft; Arabian Dancer - Nicole Kershaw, and the Chinese Dancers - Sau-Ching Leung and Georgia Chin, and there were many more people involved.

The costumes were fantastic, and one of my constituents, Maxine Way, was one of a number of people involved in the constructions, including Lara Kershaw, Pam Macleod, the wife of the Mayor of Palmerston, Margaret Carroll and Veronica Statham. The sound production by the Darwin Entertainment Centre was wonderful, which also did the lighting. The Production Manager was Chris Osborne, the Christmas Tree Artist was Darren Williams, the Castle Artist was Stacey Albano, the Poster Artist was Catherine Paton, and the resident musician was Doug Loft.

The theatre was packed with parents, young children and families. The principal guest artists were given extremely long rounds of applause in appreciation of their dancing skills. I know those people from Palmerston who were dancing, as well, were able to see the standard required if they wish to continue their career in ballet by watching Madison Keesler and Adam Thurlow as they danced across the stage. There are times when we should promote the great talent we have in Darwin and Palmerston and the rural area, and you could see it no better than in the *Nutcracker* ballet on Saturday night.

There were many parents involved because there were many little children running around onstage; I believe they called them Snowflakes. There were Snowflakes who were three-year olds, Snowflakes who were four to five-year olds, Snowflakes who were six to seven-year olds, Snowflakes to Grade 1, and Snowflakes to Grade 2, plus a few Mice and Soldiers and children's party guests. The Snowflakes really won the night for many people; they were very small, but were all dressed up in their ballerina outfits and enjoyed being part of the show; you could tell by the smiles on their faces.

I thank all those people involved who put together this really top class, professional production. From the amount of applause, and the numbers of smiling faces that left the Darwin Entertainment Centre that night, they know they put on something that will be remembered forever more. I know they do a production every year. This one is going to be hard to beat if they put something on next year.

I also thank the Palmerston Association for Dancing committee, Ingrid Jacka, Cheryl Salter, Jane Marshall, Terri-anne van Cuylenburg and Jan Hedenig for organising such a wonderful occasion - a night to remember in Darwin for a long time to come. Thank you for the entertainment.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.