



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACTS

PARLIAMENTARY SPEECHES 2024

TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER – THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER

These extracts are taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory



NORTHERN TERRITORY
of AUSTRALIA

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA
Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

MAIDEN SPEECH

TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory.

In February I was endorsed to run for the CLP and began to transition into my new role, listening to constituents and using my knowledge and skills to piece together solutions from the get-go. As stated earlier, the majority of the constituents are frontline services workers, public servants, small business owners, families and senior members of our community who just want to live the Territory lifestyle in safety. I am privileged to have met a lot of the residents in the electorate through my past work in finance. I am now more privileged to assist them all on a bigger scale.

I understand the cost-of-living pressures, as I have had mortgages, raised my family in the electorate and continue to live there. As we continued to live in the electorate, many of our family, friends and acquaintances raised the issue of crime and antisocial behaviour and the flow-on effects of the rising cost of living. This motivated me to run in the seat of Wanguri and the result of that hard work and determination is me being that voice in parliament today.

When the community is at risk of crime it is no longer acceptable to stand back. The electorate deserves a member who will listen and work with a team that has lived experience and will get the Territory back on track. I am prepared to bring my work, life experience, cultural background and hard work ethic to bring the NT back to the forefront where it belongs on the map as a member of the Finocchiaro CLP government. My promise to the people of Wanguri is that I will not rest; I will work every day to make this place resemble the wonderful Territory I know and love. I will continue to fight and advocate for those who need it.

Many who know me can attest to this work ethic. I have already seen some results in the last few weeks as we began to work from the office at the Hibiscus shopping centre. I know the team at the office will work just as hard as me. I thank my team members in advance; they are led by Jade at the moment.

In closing, there are a few more thank-yous for my family, some of whom were here this morning to present me to this parliament. They have been my biggest supporters. Apolnia, Veby, Yohanes, Faizal, Michael and Benhur stood by me and letter dropped each time I asked. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To my son, Rian Amos Helwend Carlson, you made me the person I am today, fighting for everything I missed out on as a child with parents who were less fortunate. I hope that I have made you proud, as I know you have missed out on a lot as I have worked many hours and will continue to do so, always advocating for others. I hope you see a parent who wants to make this place a better place for you and your future generations.

Last but not least, thank you to my husband, Aaron Carlson, who supported me through this journey. After being together for 25 years, he has stood by me when I have made decisions for our family. He did not agree but trusted all would be good. He encouraged me to be the new voice for the people of Wanguri. He worked tirelessly in the background and continues to do so every day. Thank you for all the early mornings and late nights, and till today nothing has changed. Thank you for letting me be a part of a bigger community and helping those in need.

Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me this opportunity to thank those who helped the people of Wanguri have a new voice. Thank you to the people of Wanguri for trusting me to be their advocate for the next four years. I hope there will be many achievements in this new term to show you all that I am committed to the community.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, let me begin by thanking my colleague the Member for Wanguri for her touching and heartfelt words and for the beautiful cultural ceremony with which she entered this place this morning. I thank all others who partook in a similar ceremony; it is an honour to be witness to those kinds of proceedings.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your ascent to the Speakership. I commend our Chief Minister for her inspired leadership in dragging you to the seat and, no less, to the Leader of the Opposition for supporting your nomination. We all repose an enormous amount of faith in you and hope that this will be a well-functioning parliament.

Madam Speaker, colleagues, distinguished guests and fellow Territorians, almost 30 years to the day I first entered this place on 4 October 1994 as a 15-year-old member of the Darwin Schools Wind Symphonic Concert Band to participate in the inaugural sitting of the Legislative Assembly in this Parliament House. I was in awe of this place on that day, and I remain so to this day. I have carried this small commemorative token with me over the many years ever since, interstate and abroad, to remind me of the place of opportunity from which I originate. In that spirit, I am enormously proud and grateful to have the chance to return here as a member of a different sort—as the Member for Fong Lim.

Fong Lim is, by NT standards, a relatively new electorate, having been created only in 2008 as a composite of original inner Darwin and newer northern suburbs. It is named after Alec Fong Lim AM, the first-ever Chinese-Australian Lord Mayor of Darwin, who was awarded the Order of Australia in 1986 for his services to the community and local government.

It has been represented by those across the political spectrum—Hon David Tollner, Jeff Collins and Hon Mark Monaghan. They are three people of longstanding public service in business, the legal profession and the education sector respectively. I pay tribute to them all and their collective contribution to our shared electorate, hoping to build upon their legacy.

That Fong Lim has changed hands electorally is testament to its informed and passionate constituents, whom I have the privilege of engaging with daily. They motivate and inspire me, with their open-mindedness, good humour, willingness to support good ideas and courage to fight for positive change. They are the type of people I am honoured to represent—willing to take chances and take you to task. I thank them for their conversations, support, honesty and even criticisms, without which I would not be here.

Likewise, to the many volunteers and campaigners who have reposed their faith in me, to afford me the privilege of standing in this Chamber today, I say thank you. Those people include Shane Stone, Terri Hart, Fiona Darcy, Carole Miller, Ray Bail, Geoff Hunter, Peter Hopton, Glenda Stripling, Noel Land, Peter Perrin, Chris Foy, John Horgan, Lucio Mattarazzo, Manny Koulakis, Sakib Awan, Penny Tastula, Nathan Lewis, Saifur Rahman, Fahad Alam, Denise Raymond, Kamal Masum, Vic Minchin, Maria Rust, James Perrin, Michael Poulter, Luke Myall, Jason Hanna, Eddie Willoughby-Smith, John Brears, Michelle Dunham, Peter Forrest, Sheila Forrest and Shirley Hooper.

That long but still non-exhaustive and discourteously short list is indicative of a simple truth: I stand on the shoulders of others and would have little to show for myself but for the sacrifice of many. No-one sacrifices more for us, though, than our families, and mine is no exception.

I am indebted above all others to my dear father who cares for me like no other and remains my enduring source of strength. Collectively, though, my parents, uncles, aunts, siblings, cousins and I owe our bountiful lives in Australia to the courage and the tenacity of my late maternal grandparents, Muhammad Nurul Huq OAM and his loyal and loving wife, Mrs Nargis Huq.

My grandfather was an enterprising Bangladeshi hydrologist, who first toured Australia in the late 1960s to work on the Snowy Mountains on a Colombo scholarship. Thereafter, in the aftermath of the war in East Pakistan and via a stint of refuge in India, he migrated to Australia in 1971 with his wife and three children, with the support of two kindly Darwin Rotarians, Peter and Nancy Fuchs.

My granddad taught me much—to appreciate cricket, read widely, cook generously and, indeed, eat heartily, but perhaps most of all he instilled in me the idea that gratitude makes optimism sustainable. Moreover, he helped me to appreciate the virtue of expressing gratitude through service. I am deeply committed to the idea of public service and proud to wear my grandfather's Order of Australia Medal today in his memory and in recognition of his services to multiculturalism.

Thus began Darwin's Bangladeshi diaspora, seeded from just a family of five—Nurul and Nargis; my mother, Nasreen; Uncle Nazmul; and Aunt Nazneen—to today's bustling Bangladeshi masses. It is a classic migrant tale no different from countless others, of course, punctuated by the happinesses, hostilities, hardships and heroism of starting life anew in a new place. What is distinctive and worthy of reflecting upon on this occasion, though, is not the who or the how, but the where in this tale—this Territory to which we all belong and collectively will seek to make an ongoing contribution towards.

In my heart I am a kid from Karama. It is where my father, Jillur Rahman, then an employee of the Northern Territory University library, established our family home in 1981, and where he stubbornly remains to this day. At that time, Karama was a brand-new suburb filled with young, aspirational families. Our house was modest but embedded within a strong community sharing a common favour: security of tenure owing to the munificence of public housing under the then government's Housing Commission.

From that home I enjoyed the luxury of walking a few hundred metres to Sanderson Primary School, the local primary school. Over seven years I gained not just a basic education, but exposure to extracurricular activities, including a quality musical education, the fruits of which I carry through to today.

A short bike ride away, adjacent to my grandparents' place in Anula, I continued on to the pedagogically vanguard Sanderson High School, where I was taught by committed educators of the highest order. Again,

I was exposed to a litany of broad educational opportunities—science fairs, maths Olympiads, sports carnivals, eisteddfods, Beats, debating and oration, performing arts productions, music camps and so much more. It was, by any measure, a privileged education, the depth of which I had no certainty of acquiring in any other part of Australia.

Two figures loomed especially large throughout my schooling, and it would be remiss of me not to mention them specifically. Jan Moore and Nora Lewis, thank you for your past, present and continued pastoral care.

Today I am a denizen of a different locale—Stuart Park, on one end of the vast urban electorate of Fong Lim. My connection to my electorate is nascent but growing daily, not least because, again, I see in it the opportunity of the old and the possibility of the new.

It begins in East Arm and Wishart, encapsulating much of Darwin's strategic land reserves in the Darwin Business Park, the Marine Industry Park, Wishart Estate, Berrimah West and Hidden Valley Estate. It then covers Berrimah Northcrest, a new promised land for young families aspiring to home ownership and community connection, before traversing Coonawarra and winding through Winnellie, the industrial heartland of Darwin. Across the way lies Charles Darwin National Park, the only such location enclosed within a capital city in Australia. Finally, there is the contrast of the old and the new—the tradition of The Narrows juxtaposed with Eaton's modernity and Woolner's serene suburbia, alongside the beauty of Bayview.

It is an electorate of contrasts, and one I am sincerely grateful to represent. It is illustrative of symbiotic harmony and the diversity of Darwin. It is, furthermore, a constituency of prospect, whose aspirations I hope to champion. Nowhere is this truer than in Stuart Park, the historically proud inner-city gateway to the CBD, replete with potential for rejuvenation and growth.

Rejuvenation and growth are constant themes I encountered whilst on the campaign trail, listening to the concerns and frustrations, but also the aspirations, of the people of Fong Lim. Ours is an electorate not immediately associated with natural beauty, civic activity or dramatic development, but things are happening in Fong Lim and opportunity beckons for all Territorians in that regard. Visit Dinah Park on any given day and you will find connections forming amongst community sport. Tipperary Waters has amazing food and views to rival the best of Darwin's offerings. The nooks and crannies of Winnellie offer entertainment and artisan products, not just manufactured goods. Fong Lim will surprise you.

It is a unique electorate and, I would argue, a potential powerhouse location for the Territory from which our next industrial revolution could be propelled. It contains more active businesses and NGOs than all other electorates combined, with quality residential options interspersed throughout, commercial facilities, attractive ready-to-go land and vastly unrealised growth potential.

Potential without commensurate facilitated opportunity is nevertheless hollow. That is why I am proud to be a member of the Country Liberal Party. I am the beneficiary of the opportunity afforded to me by a strong and stable CLP government that for 27 consecutive years delivered equitable access to high-quality public health, housing, education and infrastructure. It is that platform—in the most ethnically, racially and religiously diverse place in the country per capita no less—which laid the foundations for my successes thereafter, interstate and abroad.

I had the opportunity—indeed, the luxury—to earn qualifications at the University of Sydney in music, economics and law under the auspices of people like Professor Mary Crock, Professor Bill Pritchard and the Reverend Canon Dr Ivan Head. Ultimately, I had the good fortune to work as a research fellow, management consultant, government executive, project manager and policy adviser across the globe.

Failure too, though, has featured prominently in my life, never more so than in respect of my doctoral studies. Interrupted by myasthenia gravis, for a long time I felt my DPhil was a mountain that I was trapped on the side of and would never be able to scale. Lost down a crevasse, and forgotten by my expedition team, were many dark years. Eventually though, I freed myself. Then, for better or worse, I stubbornly refused to return to the nadir until, ultimately, I reached the summit and concluded the descent.

I am sincerely grateful for the help and support of those who helped me survive the long journey—Thyrone Hodgson, Tomi Johnson, Ruth Stackpool-Moore, Georgia Costigan, Rory Hill, Rob Campbell, Professor Gordon L Clark, Gordon Cunningham and Mary Smith, amongst many others. I am grateful, moreover, to those same people for guiding me back to Darwin to try in earnest to make a contribution here using the skills and knowledge that I have acquired on my journey to date.

Demography is indeed destiny. It was with that aphorism in mind that I returned here a year ago to work in partnership with others to try to address the demographic decline of this great Northern Territory. To that point it bears reiterating that our current workforce and population prospects were not always thus; rather, in the 40 years since 1983 we have trended from growing at approximately 30% population growth elapsed over a decade to approximately 20% in the 1990s and 2000s to less than 5% in the 2013 to 2022 period. It is an alarming trend, and one that is unlikely to abate without direct intervention.

Certainly that is my professional opinion, based on a life's work thus far, examining welfare reform and north Australia, future directions for Australian immigration policy and competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants. To put it another way, the Northern Territory is like a swimming pool where the water level is just getting too low to swim in comfortably and the water quality is starting to go a bit funny. Do we put up a shade cloth to slow the evaporation? Do we tackle the plumbing to slow drainage? Do we try to keep turning up the existing taps or simply pray for rain? More pointedly, why does it even matter?

To quote from Hon Shane Stone AC's maiden address to this House:

The fact is that population is the key to the Territory's ... success, growth and eventual statehood.

That sentiment remains as true today as it did when expressed almost 25 years ago.

Fortunately, I now count myself amongst a team of colleagues who share the view that it is time to find new hoses to fill the pool with. The Finocchiaro government is to be lauded in this regard, being the first in the history of this place to overtly acknowledge the importance of addressing sustainable population growth as the key to achieving sustainable NT economic growth.

We collectively recognise the existence of interstate, overseas and diasporic workers with families who could live, work, and contribute to the NT, given the right inducement. Moreover, we are providing new generations the chance to build here for the long term, as was the case for old Territorians. Already, the Finocchiaro government is signalling to market our commitment to enhance liveability, opportunity and upward mobility, through initiatives to turbocharge housing supply and help small business.

Fortune favours the brave and, to quote a freshman colleague, it is 'time for courage'. It is time to welcome people and enhance opportunities to connect them to local communities and activities, knowing that empirically this is what results in long-term retention and better integration outcomes. It is time to provide renewed hope and optimism, and ensure that newcomers once again get a fair go to become multigenerational Territorians.

Fellow Territorians, I come before you not as an evangelist, but as an empiricist, a social scientist and an applied economic geographer, driven by data not by dogma. I am fiscally conservative, socially liberal and economically rational, as was the foundational self-governing legislature of this Northern Territory.

No doubt, we all come to this Assembly with a unique perspective and biases. Nevertheless, I hope a shared aspiration to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore the Territory lifestyle permeates amongst us all at some level. We will, of course, differ in our specific progress prescriptions. I trust, though, that we share fundamental altruism in common.

In this regard, it remains incumbent on all of us in this House to protect, promote and advance the aspirations of self-governance, necessarily including a commitment to fiscal responsibility, to ensure opportunity for generations ahead. A collective commitment to raise investor confidence, stimulate population growth, re-imagine revenue models, ensure energy security, target industry support, reduce government wastage, promote market competition and deliver efficient services—these tasks will not be easy in the aftermath of decades of negligence on economic policy.

Fortunately, this government, of which I am a proud member, is making headway already, by addressing our economic reality and eschewing fiscal fantasies, as it must. Why? Because no less than the fate of our self-governing Territory rests upon the rebuilding of our economy.

Undeniably, we live in uncertain times in which the Northern Territory's geopolitical significance is heightened. Geography matters; the Northern Territory matters. We must succeed in restoring economic integrity for the benefit of not only Territorians but all Australians. I believe we can, and I trust we will, under the direction of this new government.

As the concluding maiden speaker on this first day of the 15th Assembly, permit me to say to my fellow members, the class of 2024, that it is an honour to be amongst you. Individually you are all remarkable. Collectively you reflect the depth and diversity of the NT and demonstrate passion and a commitment to public service that I am inspired to follow. Your first speeches give me hope, and I share your determination to work towards making the Territory the best that it can be. Moreover, I am inspired by your common commitment to listen. I believe this will be a parliament that listens to its people, led by a government that listens for the collective good.

I was privileged to be the beneficiary of opportunity gifted to me by this polity. It is why I am driven to ensure we revitalise opportunity for future generations of Territorians. I am yet further honoured to represent a constituency named after Alec Fong Lim AM, the embodiment of Australia's most successful multicultural community. I proudly bear my father's name alongside my eponymous electorate, knowing how much I owe to both.

Thank you to the people of Fong Lim for entrusting me with the opportunity to be of service. I commit sincerely to cooperation, compromise, contest and competition for the greater good, alongside my fellow parliamentarians, for the benefit of Fong Lim constituents. I hope to be worthy of the faith that you have placed in me. Our time here is fleeting, and our opportunity ephemeral. Let us therefore be compelled not by a desire to change the world, but rather to improve the socioeconomic conditions of existence for Territorians with whom we share our Territory journey.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I congratulate everyone on their maiden speech. Welcome to Parliament House; it is an honour and a privilege to serve the people of the Northern Territory, but most importantly the constituents whom you serve.

I congratulate the CLP government on its election win and welcome our new Independent and Greens members. Welcome and congratulations to the first-ever Greens member. I look forward to working with you both and our colleague Yingiya Guyula. Welcome and thank you for your maiden speeches.

I firstly acknowledge the Larrakia people as the rightful custodians of this land and extend an acknowledgement to all traditional custodians across the Northern Territory and Australia.

I also acknowledge the other four Aboriginal members who sit on the floor today: from the Territory Labor team, the Member for Arnhem, Selena Uibo; the Member for Gwoja, Chansey Paech; and the Member for Arafura, Manuel Brown; and the Independent Member for Mulka, Yingiya Guyula.

As a proud Yaegl man from the small coastal town of Yamba in Northern Rivers, New South Wales, my connections lie elsewhere. But since moving to the Territory, I have felt a strong affinity to this beautiful place. Like many other Territorians, I made the choice to live and work here. It is my honour to stand in the 15th Assembly as the re-elected Member for Daly.

I extend my thanks to the Assembly and the Legislative Assembly staff for entrusting me with the Office of the Speaker in the 14th Assembly. It was an honour to serve the community and parliament in this capacity. I am sure that the Member for Araluen will carry out this role with respect and fairness. Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment.

I am equally honoured to stand here as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for Territory Labor, under the leadership of my good friend Selena Uibo and as a shadow minister for a number of key portfolios. Every day I intend to work my hardest to represent all Territorians in this Assembly by holding the CLP government to account on its commitments.

I thank the Northern Territory Electoral Commission and its teams for their hard work in carrying out mobile polling across the Daly electorate during the last election. Like other bush seats, it is a vast electorate, but making sure that every constituent has had the chance to make their voice heard is a fundamental right in our democracy.

I was heartened with the increased turnout across the Daly electorate, but, unfortunately, less than 45% of enrolled voters in the Territory's bush seats cast a vote. It is a fundamental matter of equity that people in the bush are given the same access and opportunity to have their voices heard as urban voters, be they in the Daly, Barkly, Gwoja, Mulka, Namatjira or Arnhem electorate. The people of the bush will turn up when given a reasonable amount of time and education. I look forward to working with this government and the Northern Territory Electoral Commission to improve the turnout at forthcoming elections.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

BAIL & POLICE ADMINISTRATION

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

For far too long, members of the public have become victims due to laws that have not been up to community standards. We have seen the trauma caused due to violent offenders being allowed to be out in public time and again. Today we say, 'No more'.

Today we stand shoulder to shoulder with victims and their families to ensure that serious violent offenders start with a presumption against bail. The courts will be sent a clear message regarding what the CLP government and the community expects. They are the people who have put us here and they expect that the rights of victims and innocent people in the community are put above the rights of offenders to be bailed.

I will never forget Shane Powell, a worker in Alice Springs who lost his life when a stolen motor vehicle ran a red light, crashing into Shane and inevitably leading to his death. I sat down with Shane's family shortly after his passing and will never forget the resolve of his mother, Raelene, to ensure her son's passing was not in vain.

Today in this Chamber with Samara Laverty, another mother who has lost her son, I am proud to say that I will be supporting this Bill—Declan's law—to ensure that others do not have to go through what Raelene or Samara have been through.

I thank the Chief Minister for bringing this law into the Chamber and moving it on urgency. Enough time has gone by without these protections in place. I, for one, do not want another life lost due to delay.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, this is an important set of Bills.

Declan Laverty was killed in March 2023. As many of you will be aware, I returned to the Northern Territory only a year ago, despite having grown up here. I remember that I was in the UK on the day when Declan Laverty passed. I bring that up because it is useful to have a sense of perspective on the significance of knife crime and the threat it poses to a polity with some sort of international vantage. Statistics from the UK Office for National Statistics in the year ending that same March—2023—indicate that 41% of all the homicides in England and Wales were knife related. That is 244 out of 590 such offences at that time.

Knife crime is deadly. I do not want to diminish that statement, but 'deadly' in this context means exactly that. The Deputy Chief Minister spoke to the fact that there has been a discernible impact on the Northern Territory population because of our crime predicament. There are disincentives to be here. It could have been debated once upon a time as to whether it was cause or effect, but now the evidence is much clearer that people are disincentivised from wanting to come to the Northern Territory to live, work and stay, let alone play here, because of the state of social dysfunction. Crime and antisocial conduct is high on the list of matters that we must address as a result.

This government has a mandate insofar as any government can have a mandate to deal with these issues. We went to the election making it clear that we were committed to the idea of reducing crime. There are many ways to reduce crime, but one thing we have done is commit to listening to the people and our police in that context as well. We know there is a deterrent effect to being able to put these measures in place.

These issues matter across the board in the Territory too. Some of my colleagues—the Members for Drysdale and Blain—have readily been able to point to examples of incidents of crime when people who have been out on bail have reoffended. I represent a different type of electorate. However, even in the relative affluence of a place like Stuart Park, as recently as 23 September there were aggravated robberies with edged weapons when multiple people were threatened and businesses affected. Crime genuinely has a discernible economic impact, but it is its social impact that we are here to address in the first instance.

Emergency measures, the suspension of standing orders and this body of legislation that this government has put forward today are warranted in my opinion because they provide a cohesive package of disincentives for people to offend.

With respect to some of the statements made earlier by the opposition, the insinuation that those of us on the backbench of the government are not aware of what our Cabinet or colleagues are suggesting is simply fallacious. We are not only aware of the detail but also supportive of the totality of the packages that are being put forward, because we recognise collectively that there must be a cohesive strategy for how to reduce crime.

That begins with the stabilisation of the patient, if I can put it that way. The Northern Territory economically, as you will hear me say many times in this House, is a patient bleeding out on the table at the moment, but that is also the case socioeconomically and, indeed, socially in many regards. The first priority at this point

is to stabilise the patient. Then we can discuss the rehabilitation of the patient and think about how to encourage the patient to cease to be a patient.

There has been an enormous amount of focus from those who have spoken so far on what more will be done to address the root causes of crime. Oddly, that has been juxtaposed with a fair, in some ways, critique that adequate time may not have been given to all those in this House to assess what has been put before them. You cannot have it both ways. How much more detail would you like? At this point, we are putting forward an initial set of measures to stabilise the patient. I am confident that this government will put forward a package of measures to rehabilitate the patient and, as we consistently maintained throughout our election campaign, address the root causes of crime.

Handheld scanners and the expansion of their use is, indeed, a judicious measure at this juncture. To broaden the number and type of police members who can wand and the circumstances under which they may do so is not an abrogation of civil liberties, in my opinion. To provide for more locations and longer patrol periods in which to wand is also not an abrogation of civil liberties. We are seeking to create a deterrent effect. The important thing to understand about the deterrent effect is that there will also be a placebo effect of these measures. The deterrence will be for repeat offending, of course, but our earnest hope on this side is that the deterrence will also be for initial offending in time.

The Member for Gwoja spoke eloquently about his concerns in regard to a number of aspects of this Bill. He raised the Bail and Weapons Offences Review Taskforce July 2023 report, which I have read. It is one of many such examinations of the consequences of bail reform. I draw all members' attention to a range of other reports, particularly those commissioned by the Australian Law Reform Commission over some 20 years in this space plus other jurisdictional reviews, which provide a more nuanced take on the merits and demerits of presumptions of bail in different contexts. Notably, there are all manner of different opinions about the presumption in favour of denying bail when it comes to matters of family and domestic violence. That is a common theme and concern that has come up across the Chamber today in a range of ways.

The key is to find a way to strike the right balance. I do not believe in my heart of hearts that these are draconian measures and that they are ill conceived. Without wanting to attempt to score a cheap political point, the Member for Gwoja articulated it best for us in that regard: this does not do away with judicial discretion. This does not prevent bail being provided when the judiciary feels it is appropriate. It re-examines the roles of the judiciary and the legislature and the balance in between. As legislators we have an obligation to serve our constituents and to reflect the needs of the people. Right now, the patient is bleeding out and that is why stabilisation measures are required, necessary and prudent at this time.

The root causes of crime, and dealing with them holistically, are legitimate matters to be addressed. I reiterate that this government is committed to addressing the root causes of crime. In the current context, the Bail Legislation Amendment Bill and the Police Administration Amendment Bill strike the right balance and provide us with an opportunity and mechanisms to enable our police force to better do its job and our judiciary to have a wider set of options in relation to how to reduce crime.

The Attorney-General has clearly articulated the scope of the measures that are under consideration. On the basis of the clarity of the changes that we are making, I do not believe that it is unreasonable for all members of the opposition to reflect upon these changes and make judicious assessments about the merits of supporting this legislation.

If we are seeking to be bipartisan in our efforts, rather than providing opposition for opposition's sake, I challenge the opposition members, as they challenged me as a backbencher, not to express dissent but to express support for what is a common good—the reduction of crime in the Northern Territory, with a view to stabilising our economy and restoring lifestyle to our polity.

On that basis, I am pleased to speak in support of these Bills and commend them to the House.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the family and friends of Declan Laverty in the Chamber. My condolences go out to you again. I met with you just then and said hello. I understand why you are here today fighting for change. I support the fight for change with you. I also want to see change, but I cannot support this Bill. I believe that these actions will cause ongoing harm to the Northern Territory community.

In 2018 the Victorian Government responded to a violent attack known as the Bourke Street tragedy. It amended its bail laws in a similar way to how the CLP is amending the NT laws today. The evidence since this time has shown that there have been many unintended consequences from these changes. This was highlighted in a coronial inquiry into the death in custody of a First Nations woman.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

CRIMINAL CODE

THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

It has been 17 years since the start of the intervention. Aboriginal people recall that back then they grew up with a BasicsCard signed inside their community, with their elders being disempowered ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Mulka, your time has expired. I am sorry.

Mr MULKA: Yow. That is all I wanted to do. As long as I said my story. Thank you for accepting.

Members: Yow.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Mulka for sharing his story. We all appreciate hearing from a diversity of perspectives. I recognise that this has been a long debate and do not wish to unduly belabour points that have already been made, but I wish to respect all who have preceded me on both sides of the House and try, in earnest, to make a unique contribution. I ask for the latitude of the House in that regard, in the spirit of the discussion we are having about what has been identified as extremely important legislation. We all recognise the gravity of what we are discussing today.

The question was raised by the Member for Johnston, 'What on Earth are we doing?' It is a valid question; I find the answer, of all places, in what the Leader of the Opposition said at the top of the morning: seeking to break the cycle of crime. On my first day here I said that we would differ in our prescriptions for progress; that remains the case, but we have a prescription for crime that we are pursuing being circumvented here.

I commend the Leader of the Opposition on providing robust opposition, but I refer to our discussions yesterday about the fact that there is a totality of legal reform being advocated for to create a cumulative deterrent effect at a time when we all acknowledge the Northern Territory is experiencing a socioeconomic crisis. Deterrence and diversion, not detention, are the goals and the reason many of us who are new to this House wholeheartedly support this package of reform.

Earlier in the day it was raised that we should be mindful of the perspectives and concerns of the legal fraternity. The Leader of the Opposition raised that there were several of us with legal backgrounds who should be mindful of the gravity of the legislation we are considering and the impacts intended and unintended. I am happy to tell the opposition that the legal fraternity reached out to me—as I imagine it has to a number of my colleagues—as have others in academia, because it is fair to question why these measures are necessary, if they are necessary, and to speak in defence of them.

I had interactions with people in my electorate and beyond this place, nationally and even internationally, who questioned whether these are fair and just and necessary measures. My answer is yes, they are. One of those people is someone who guided me and was mentioned in my maiden speech because she was a guiding light in my life, Professor Mary Crock. She has worked in immigration and refugee law since 1985. She is a Professor of Public Law at the University of Sydney Law School, a co-founder in 1989 of the specialist community legal service known as Refugee Legal in Melbourne, Victoria, and she is an accredited specialist in immigration law. Professor Crock served on a variety of national, state and NGO bodies relating to immigration, refugees, disability and child protection. She has written extensively on immigration and refugee law, with many books, chapters and refereed articles.

I owe it to people like Professor Crock to explain why I stand behind this Bill. More to the point, I owe it to the people in the Fong Lim electorate, many of whom are previous supporters of the past government and its policies and have concerns, to explain why this is a justifiable and necessary Bill and measure.

I am not a legal scholar; I am an applied economic geographer. What I say in that regard is despite the aspersions from the opposition, we are not all a Johnny-come-lately to matters pertaining to Indigenous affairs. Some of us are deeply invested in the issues and have been for a long time. We appreciate that within the Bill there are consequences for Indigenous children, as there are for all children. My testimony to that work, and I do not want to labour it, is 20 years' worth of writing about it, which changed federal government policy. It was looking at a piece of work called *Australians Working Together*—to reference the Member for Mulka—welfare state restructuring and its impact on people in north Australia, and specifically its impact on Indigenous people within this polity.

My work is not unique; everyone here has in some capacity had professional lived experience in encountering Indigenous disadvantage, the criminal justice system and crime. We are here to collectively find a pathway forward at this juncture. We cannot rewrite the past, but I think it is fair to say that we all deserve a bit more credit in respect of being mindful of who these measures will impact and what the consequences might be.

As a government we have taken a considered position to back this package of legislation to try to deter, divert and break the cycle of dysfunction we are currently in. As the Chief Minister pointed out, this is a beginning not an end point for legislative and socioeconomic reform.

The work I was involved with, which I will not refer to exhaustively, involved contributions from a lot of people you will recognise, including Marion Scrymgour, but also LGANT, FaCS, Workplace Relations, the land councils, the Social Security Appeals Tribunal, the CDEP and Aboriginal community groups. I mention these is because the cumulative wisdom of these people, through this and other expressions of work, is that spatial uniqueness and scale matter. Place matters; our place is different, which is why we must be mindful of the differences of this place.

A primary objective of looking at things through a geographic lens has to be to demonstrate the difference the place makes in what we do and in public policy. It is a central tenet of forays into understanding the significance of spatial uniqueness and place contingency in moderating policy. My commitment as a geographer is to bring a spatial perspective to this debate because context matters. What works in one place will not necessarily work in another place. We all in this House know that. We are offering a solution that we believe will work in this place.

What then is happening in the real places I represent? I will not belabour the point; countless examples have been given. Ruddick Circuit in Stuart Park is riddled with antisocial behaviour, loitering, attempted break-ins and, worse—documented by my constituents and confirmed in police reports, with similar concerns across Fong Lim—Berrimah businesses I represent have been subject to ram raids just this year, including incidents with the theft of large quantities of weapons. These are not small problems; these are real issues.

Sadly, unduly, young people are involved in a disproportionate number of these incidents. That is why we are seeking to intervene earlier in ways that are novel for this House and polity. The reality is that the attributes and complexities of service and welfare provision in north Australia require sensitivity to the uniqueness of this place if we are to reach any potential in acting as agents of change and empowering individuals and communities.

Public figures from all sides of politics who have represented our polity have made clear that policymakers seldom incorporate place specificity in policy creation when it comes to north Australia. Some of them have been highlighted from the recent past, but here are three short quotes from 20 years ago.

‘Having clowns in Canberra making policy decisions about Port Keats is ridiculous’. That quote is from Hon Warren Snowdon.

‘The number of politicians in Canberra who actually understand Mutitjulu circumstances number less than 10’. That quote is from Senator Trish Crossin.

‘Any policy that comes out of Canberra has a one-size-fits-all mentality, given that only five out of the 150 electorates in the House of Representatives have constituents in remote Indigenous communities, and the other 145 could not care less’. That quote is from Senator Grant Tambling.

Those are harsh words delivered in the context of other policies that were one-size-fits-all. I can speak to my electorate until the cows come home, but I do not need to provide the incidence of dysfunction in my own electorate when everyone in this House can articulate it so forensically.

The research I was referring to is 20 years old—Northern Territory Labor governments have run this place for the best part of the last 20 years, and I am sad to say that the problems articulated remain and have deepened. That is the empiric reality. Problem-solving is my priority; I have made that clear. Inaction is its own form of negligence. We are seeking to act—not ill advisedly or wantonly, but holistically in a considered manner—with six Bills that collectively have the capacity to create a deterrent effect.

This Bill and associated Bills provide pathways for early intervention. I said and maintain that I come not as an evangelist but an empiricist and social scientist driven by data and not dogma. Our team is seeking to provide a pathway to early intervention. We have had 20 years of a controlled experiment, if you want to talk about data. We had 20 years of the prior government, give or take a couple, trying to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and improve our lifestyle, and we are where we are today. Being influenced by singular subject matter specialist narratives in isolation carries its own risk of evidentiary bias. There are groups across the spectrum that will indicate they have the solution to a part of the problem. We are seeking to zoom out and think more holistically about what we can do to try to stem the problem in time.

The Member for Blain made a salient point about conflating causation and correlation; they are extremely important differences to take heed of when we are putting matters of this gravity before the House. As a social scientist, I say to you that the stories my colleagues are telling you are not fairytales; they are horror stories. More significantly in the context of what I am trying to say, they are qualitative evidence that in totality have cumulative weight of their own. Each one of these incidents can be verified by a police report, a media release and statistical proof that we are in the middle of socio-economic dysfunction and crime, the magnitude of which is threatening the social fabric of the Northern Territory.

I do not want to isolate individual examples, and I do not consider myself as an advocate for any one group or cause, but I come from the original Bangladeshi community of the Northern Territory and a young gentleman who shares my last name, Sifat Rahman, died here as well in the midst of a crime crisis, as a consequence of the kind of violent random act that we frankly are shocked to associate with the Northern Territory. My community knows that young man and the many students associated in the Bangladeshi community at Charles Darwin University who have been seriously affected and traumatised and moved.

As I say, I do not want to highlight any single example, but Declan Laverty and Sifat Rahman are indicative of the scale of the problem we are dealing with here. They are the tip of the iceberg. The enormous iceberg underneath the water is the crime crisis and it will not be resolved unless we think holistically about how to chip away at the iceberg from underneath.

These six pieces of legislation in totality do something about that. They genuinely are an attempt to try to do something about it, and to create a pathway to early intervention.

I respect robust opposition. It is in fact why I returned to the Northern Territory, to be a part of robust opposition. The members across represent the opposition now. I respect your right to question the legislation we put forward in this House, but I also ask you to respect the overwhelming empirical, electoral and qualitative data that the election of a 17-member-strong government testifies to.

I have limited sympathy for those who have squandered the opportunity over two decades to demonstrate good leadership to provide the preconditions for better public health, housing, education and infrastructure. The CLP government is committed to addressing all those things in time and appreciates, as the Treasurer pointed out, that to do so will require courage, fiscal discipline and a range of initiatives that will be forthcoming.

Today is not the end of the discussion or the matter for us. Today is a beginning to try to stem the tide of what is otherwise an inevitable crime crisis that will roll even further out of control.

I add to the Member for Drysdale's sentiment, albeit in a different manner, that it is Labor's negligence that has led us to where we are now. It gives me no great pride to say that. Labor's negligence, specifically on economic policy, has led to the socioeconomic dysfunction that we are facing at this point. It failed to create viable economic and social opportunities to give young children options other than diversionary programs.

We will address all of that with time, but I ask all of you who doubt those of us who are supporting this Bill to give us a bit more credit. We know that there are challenges ahead and that this is not the finished article, but we know that this is a step in the right direction.

Based on all of that, I commend the Criminal Code Amendment Bill to this House as part of the overarching package of legislation the CLP is offering, aimed at deterrence, diversion and the reduction of crime in our Northern Territory.

Mr MALEY (Corrections)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the contribution we have all made to this debate, from either side of the House, the crossbench and the Member for Mulka, who gave us a unique perspective on this and lots of other issues. I thank him for making his contribution and felt it was touching, but we need to look, as the Member for Fong Lim said, at the bigger picture. We want to make the Territory a safer place. We think that this Bill is a drive to do that.

We will deal with other Bills, but this is our first sitting of parliament and, as the Member for Karama has said many times, we took this plan to the election, so it is not new. I thank the opposition for holding us to account on our policies. This is a promise. I do not know any Territorian I have spoken to over the last few months who does not know about our plan for community safety. In fact, they raise community safety with me and with my colleagues, as we have said.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

NUISANCE DRINKING

TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

On election night, which should have been a happy night, two members of my Yolngu family passed away, and the next day I had to do sorry business. There was no violence involved. They were two separate incidents. They just lay down and died, likely due to heart issues. It happens a lot, and we need to address the health issues in our community, but the fact that we have people with fragile health conditions should not stop us from keeping our streets safe. If someone like Kumanjayi Langdon passes away in custody, there will be a coronial and quite a bit of attention. If he passes away on the street, he will not get any medical attention lying in the gutter. I would prefer people get medical attention, come to the attention of authorities and be seen to, cared for and looked after rather than being left alone to pass away.

This Bill is about activating police powers and allowing them to intervene in problem drinking before it becomes a problem later in the evening. In my electorate of Blain I have seen too many times the drinking circle of 12 to 3 pm becoming the domestic violence incident or aggravated assault at nine or 10 pm. The pathway from excessive drinking and intoxication to assaults and domestic violence is all too clear.

I am proud to be a part of a government that will be taking a health approach to the scourge of problem drinking when we introduce alcohol treatment plans in the future, but for now we need to keep our streets safe. We need to intervene in the drinking circles before they escalate for the sake of the Indigenous women in our electorates and in our communities.

As the Member for Drysdale said, I would much rather someone who is intoxicated and causing a nuisance in a public place have a safe place to sleep off his intoxication and come to the attention of the appropriate authorities, rather than—as I and the Members for Drysdale and Karama and many of us in the House have seen—continue to drink, which can result in violent behaviour and cause significant harm to a helpless victim later that evening.

I commend this Bill to the House.

VISITOR
Ian Gordon

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Larrakia elder and resident of Drysdale, Ian Gordon. Welcome to the Chamber.

Members: Hear, hear!

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, nuisance drinking is a serious issue in the Territory and everyone has testified to its incidence and the extent to which it is a problem. My colleagues from Fannie Bay, Drysdale, Karama and Blain have provided ample, sad testimony to the state of our polity. It is impossible to ignore those stories. The challenge for us, as legislators, is to weigh those stories—that weight of evidence and testimony—against the need to protect civil liberties to ensure that we empower our citizens more generally, including our Indigenous citizenry.

I will not belabour the point in relation to specific instances of when these kinds of issues have taken place, but I cannot possibly ignore making mention of Bill Sullivan Park in Stuart Park. It has been an unusable space for a ridiculous amount of time because of problems associated with nuisance drinking. The fact of the matter is in a place where social services were being provided with the best will in the world, it still was unusable as a recreational space for families, children and our broader citizenry because police simply did not have the powers to police effectively in that area in relation to people who are intoxicated and—that ‘and’ is important, and I will come back to it in due course—causing a nuisance.

I spent some of my campaign time in and around the Westralia Street shopping complex. It gives me no joy to recount the anecdote that the first time I stood in front of those shops to meet future constituents, I was confronted with two people who were wildly intoxicated and causing a ruckus. The violence spilled over into the Westralia Street shops and affected the custom and workers of the Stuart Park corner shops. I mention it only because I could not believe that on my first outing in that space I had to be the one to call the police. To their credit the police came as promptly as they could, but, unfortunately, the response that I and other concerned citizens received was that there was not much they could do because the police did not have the powers vested in them to deal with intoxication and causing a nuisance under the same ambit.

We are seeking to provide a Bill to support a suite of legislation that is—I make no bones about saying this—tough on crime because we are in the middle of a crime crisis. We are in the middle of a social and economic

crisis in the Northern Territory. It is why I am in this Chamber. I believe it is why all of us, in one form or another, are in this Chamber. Unless we empower our police to deal with these issues, we cannot possibly expect to move forward on other issues.

This new public drinking offence has been created to give police more powers to fine, charge and arrest people who are nuisance public drinking in restricted public areas. The Member for Barkly was clear in his second reading speech about the scope of the legislation. Honestly, in some regards we are being unfair in conflating a range of issues associated with the Northern Territory more generally with the specific purpose and ambit of this legislation.

This legislation, as per the second reading speech, will address and deter antisocial behaviour and create additional pathways for things like the Banned Drinker Register. Notably, in new section 171A—which is what I am interested in—it creates a new public drinking offence such that we will now have an offence under the *Liquor Act* for drinking alcohol in a prohibited place if a person is also engaging in the act of causing a nuisance to other people in, or within the vicinity of, a public place. That is an important distinction because contrary to the insinuations that this Bill is targeting any one group of people, it is targeting people who are causing a nuisance no matter their race or background. The definition of a public place and the specifics of the fine are clearly articulated.

In relation to urgency, it is also clearly articulated that this measure will commence immediately after the legislation is passed. To the point made earlier questioning how this can be an urgent matter, it is; we expect it to take effect immediately. As part of a suite of legislation, it will have an overall cumulative deterrent effect.

Specifics matter, and that is why it is important to understand that we are not talking about the criminalisation of drinking but the criminalisation of nuisance whilst intoxicated. I am starting to tire of the lazy conflation of issues and the poor-quality reliance on data and evidence without any actual data and evidence other than lazy offhand remarks in relation to historic research that may or may not have relevance.

I am hopeful that we will behave better in this place and will all start relying on better information to make our decisions. I challenge those across the Chamber to provide the information on nuisance whilst intoxicated, which speaks to this matter. I have taken time to do the research, as have many of my colleagues, because I have shared it with them and we have had those discussions.

The Member for Mulka makes significant contributions to this House, and I respect the unique perspective from which he speaks. He pointed to the suggestion that nuisance is ill-defined, and it will be racially motivated or targeted and has no scope. I do not accept that.

To my understanding, and I am willing to be corrected, Part VII section 47 of the *Summary Offences Act 1923* is indicative of what defines nuisance. Non-exhaustively, the conduct intended to be captured under this legislation is consistent with that type of behaviour. It is not a case of us having not thought this out, thinking that any old thing can become a nuisance; it will be tested by the courts and mediated by our police in whom we have faith and trust. We are taking a leap of faith to entrust our police force to make the subjective decisions to define what constitutes a nuisance to restore public order at a time when there is clearly public disorder in innumerable electorates.

We are negligent in doing nothing. Moving forward we can only be guided by whatever data and evidence is at our disposal that we can sensibly apply within the context of our polity.

The former government speaks of its exhaustive attempts to address liquor legislation and harm reduction. It gives me no great pleasure to point to the controlled experiment that is the last 20 years of Labor governance which resulted in us having the domestic violence statistics that we do. It is possible to draw an empiric, causal and correlative relationship between those factors.

There is a number of people who have done great research to document what happened over the years. I note Sarah Clifford at Menzies School of Health Research is somebody who has been critical of a lot of the legislation and policy that has been enacted over time and has forensically documented it.

It is incumbent on everyone in this House to be across this stuff rather than lazily referring to a bit of the Banned Drinker Register, a bit of fetal alcohol syndrome, a bit of nuisance drinking and a bit of antisocial behaviour. Be specific; tell me why this is a bad law with reference to nuisance in this context. In the absence of that, I am compelled by the information I am provided by my colleagues and the literature that suggests we do not have a controlled experiment to determine whether there could be a deterrent effect by executing this suite of legislation collectively, which includes the connecting of nuisance and intoxication. This has not

been dealt with here previously. The suite of reform—if you can call it that—legislated by Labor over the last eight years specifically resulted in the suite of socioeconomic dysfunction that we have inherited. That is the reality.

Wide consultation has been taken in relation to this legislation, as with all the Bills we seek to pass. It is unfair to suggest that there has been no community consultation. I will tell you what also constitutes community consultation: every one of us having pounded the pavement to hear from constituents who provided us with real-world instances tied to a police report, a geographical location or a park. All of that constitutes testimony which has cumulative weight as well.

As an academic of sorts, I say that not all the answers can be found in the paperwork or the studies, but they can be indicative and provide instructive guidance. For example, the parliamentary librarian with the best will in the world provided us with references to research regarding the proximity of drinking establishments to fjords in Norway, which is not super useful in this context. However, there is a range of other materials that have been provided to us collectively as a legislature which everybody could have relied upon.

I brought some of it in for people to read casually in the lunchbreak if they want to be more informed of what people have to say in the real world in relation to regulating alcohol, evidence-based policy in social science, alcohol in relation to international evidence from the research and the public policy or even the Australian National Alcohol Strategy.

The reality is that lazy arguments are not winning me over. We have a thought-out considered package to try to deter and divert. We appreciate that will necessarily result in a potential increase in detention, which is why we also have an extremely well-considered plan for Corrections and correctional infrastructure. What I am drawing out is that it is easy for everyone to poke holes at problems; it is much more difficult to provide holistic solutions.

The last government had eight years to provide holistic solutions to a range of these issues. Sadly, for Territorians these were unable to get us any further than where we are now, which by many measures and accounts is a worse place than the Northern Territory was in some 20 years ago.

I do not want to conflate research that is not connected to the current debate, but an interesting bit I came across from Farmer, Miller and Taylor in 2024 is in relation to whether patron bans reduce crime, looking at assault offences in WA before and after empowering the police with the possibility of imposing barring notices. Let us be clear: this is an adjunct piece of research in a different polity, but there is something instructive there, because there is limited data about what can be done when we are connecting nuisance and intoxication. We are working specifically in the public space, not the private space. Notwithstanding, I quote from that paper:

There are a number of implications arising from this study and some notable limitations have been acknowledged. Nevertheless, the association between the introduction of barring notices and a reduction in alcohol-flagged violent offending appears to endorse the use of barring notices in WA.

Show me the same research from eight years of a Labor-controlled experiment that suggests all or any of what was passed in the last eight years has had a discernibly positive effect on the socioeconomic prospects of anyone in the Northern Territory. I do not see it. I am extremely grateful for the handful of researchers who turn their attention to examining what happens in the Northern Territory, but whilst we do not have a litany of subject-specific books and journals to rely on, empiric testimony on the ground is what we do have to work with.

If you can point to the stories and testimony of the Members for Fannie Bay, Drysdale, Karama, Blain or anyone else as being facetious, fictitious or fallacious, by all means do so. However, we are not trading in hyperbole. We are not exaggerating the scale of the problem; we are drawing out the worst instances of problems that are endemic and have spiralled out of control in this polity, and we all know that to be the case.

There is a concerning trend where the CLP is being charged with overlooking expert evidence. That is simply not the case. I have drawn upon a small sample of materials to simply make the point. In this place conflating expert testimony is likewise becoming commonplace. When experts speak on a matter, we listen to them on that matter, but their testimony in respect of X is not always applicable in respect of Y.

Nuisance and conflation with antisocial behaviour terminology is also a dangerous business, noting that evaluation of the consequences of antisocial behaviour orders and legislation to that effect have happened exhaustively across the world, notably in the United Kingdom under its ASBO experiment. If you want a bit of light reading *ASBO Nation* is not a bad place to look for what works and what does not. Notably, the UK's

ASBO legislation was ultimately upscaled in the direction that we are taking to move things towards a more punitive system where we provide the police with the capacity to make more direct interventions.

The suite of legislation we are promoting has a cumulative goal of deterrence and diversion. The community consultation has not been zero; it has been exhaustive and notably drew extensively on our police force which is advising us with modern testimony as to what it requires to do its job to keep Territorians safer. The specific constituent cases matter, and specific locations testify to the weight of evidence we are providing.

I therefore commend this Bill to the House.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

NOTICES

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I will propose a motion that the Legislative Assembly recommits to and affirms the objectives of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement that by 2027 the NT Government will:

1. reduce offending and imprisonment of Aboriginal Territorians
2. engage and support Aboriginal leadership
3. improve justice responses and services for Aboriginal Territorians.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall move that the NT Legislative Assembly:

- acknowledges the important and extensive work of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Independent Expert Advisory Panel in producing the Report into Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory
- recognises the right for Territorians to end their lives with dignity and the immense suffering that is caused for them and their families when this right is taken away from them
- recognises that the Northern Territory, the first jurisdiction in the world to legalise voluntary assisted dying, is now the last in Australia to pass this law
- urges the government to implement the 22 recommendations of the Report into Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory, acknowledging that many Territorians from all political persuasions want the right to die with dignity in the Territory.

PETITION

Petition No 2 – Bus Driver Protection Screens

Mr PATEL (Casuarina)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I present a petition not conforming with standing orders from 109 petitioners calling for the immediate installation of driver protection screens in all Darwin buses. I move that the petition be read.

Motion agreed to; petition read:

We, the undersigned, call on Darwin Bus Network stakeholders—the Government, CDC and NT WorkSafe—to immediately install fit-for-purpose driver protection screens in all Darwin buses.

Bus drivers and members of our community deserve to be safe on public transport.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I move that the petition be referred to the Public Accounts Committee to consider whether the petition should be debated.

Motion agreed to.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

DOMESTIC, FAMILY & SEXUAL
VIOLENCE

TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

If we want to solve homelessness we need to address domestic, family and sexual violence because this is the main reason that women and children leave their homes and the most common reason for seeking assistance from homelessness services in the Northern Territory.

If we want to reduce our prisoner numbers we need to address this because two-thirds of prisoners are held for domestic and family violence-related offences.

If we want to reduce the strain on our police officers we need to address this because police respond to more than 100 domestic, family and sexual violence incidents every day.

If we want to stop youth crime we need to address this because domestic and family violence is also a strong indicator for children entering the criminal justice system.

If we want to fix our economy we need to address this because domestic and family violence costs \$21.7bn in Australia every year. The cost of domestic, family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory has been calculated at close to \$600m a year. These are the costs of our police, prison system, courts, hospitals and children protection system which are spending most of their time responding to domestic, family and sexual violence.

If we want to close the gap we need to address this because it is the leading cause of Aboriginal children being placed in out-of-home care nationally.

I am heartened to hear the bipartisan commitment across this Chamber to address this issue that affects every one of us. Every life is a universe. Every woman killed is a universe lost to her friends, family and community. We cannot afford to ignore this.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I welcome the raising of this matter of public importance by the Leader of the Opposition. Domestic, family and sexual violence are matters of deep public importance across all electorates, including my electorate of Fong Lim.

I thank the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence for her contribution to this debate on behalf of the government and for clearly explaining the scope of the issues. There is a cost in every way to society, of course, but to the victims in the first instance when we are talking about these issues. As has been raised by other members, the social and economic costs are innumerable.

Our government is clearly committed to reduction and prevention. I thank the minister for articulating clearly in her statement that we acknowledge the scope of this problem, do not seek in any way to diminish it and are committed to the prevention of domestic violence.

This is a serendipitous and timely matter of public importance, given our discussions on alcohol policy today and the suite of legislation we are considering in this parliamentary sitting, last week and this week.

The proposer for this matter of public importance seeks a strong bipartisan approach to addressing these issues, a commitment reaffirmed by our minister and echoed by every voice in this Chamber in respect of the contributions that have been made to this debate. It is in that spirit that I am also participating in this debate to share with all of you as colleagues a small portion of what I learned in preparing for debate on the Bills under recent or current consideration.

You have all heard me raise the need to be mindful of expert evidence with specificity and not just motherhood statements or sweeping generalisations. I draw your attention to a couple of pieces of work that are salient to the debate and informative for everybody going forward. One is from the *International Journal of Drug Policy*; another is from *Drug and Alcohol Review*.

What is noticeable about these pieces of research is that they are both academic journal papers published this year; they are geographically specific to considering issues in the 25 electorates we represent; and their contributing authors are people invested in the Northern Territory and allied and associated to bodies like the Menzies School of Health Research. They are rigorous pieces of work that should inform why there is a connection between what we are seeking to do this week and the aspiration to reduce and, indeed, prevent domestic, family and sexual violence.

I will not cherry-pick data from these works. That has happened in lots of forms in this Chamber in recent years, but I am pleased to say less so in the first few days that I have been here. I do not want to distort the totality of the work, and I encourage people to make their own inquiries, but I will speak to the broad

parameters of these studies and their conclusions because they inform what everybody is calling for, which is evidence-based strategy.

Clifford, Wright, Miller, Coomber, Griffiths, Smith and Livingston produced a paper on the impacts of alcohol supply reduction measures on police-recorded adult domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory. Their work essentially looked at the Banned Drinker Register, the minimum unit price, police auxiliary liquor inspectors and daily purchase opening hours, examining data from January 2014 until February 2020.

I will quote specifically, so as not to distort their findings or put my own spin on it in any way. Their summary conclusion is as follows:

PALIs and DPOH were associated with some reductions in DFV; the BDR was associated with some increases. The upward trend commences prior to the BDR, so it is also plausible that the BDR had no effect on DFV outcomes. Although MUP was associated with reductions in the NT-wide model, there were no changes in sites without cooccurring PALIs.

This is rigorous, independent, academic research and is the kind of work we should be paying mind to. The conclusion of this body of work is:

This study provided evidence that two of the four alcohol policies assessed were associated with some reductions in DFV (PALIs and DPOH). It appears that MUP did not affect DFV outcomes. The BDR was associated with some increases, which could represent an actual increase or artificial increase. Given that the upward trend appears to commence prior to the BDR and continue after BDR, it is also possible that the BDR simply had no effect on population-level DFV outcomes. Future research should consider the impact of the BDR, as an individual ban, on individual outcomes rather than at the population level. Exploration of the impact of these policies on other alcohol-related harms would provide a more robust picture of the extent of the policies' impacts.

You can draw your own conclusions, but the most contemporaneous research produced by the people who are examining our polity suggests that there is a strong correlation between alcohol and this matter of public importance. That is why it is worth raising, not in the interest of politicising the debate but to provide context to the debate so that we are doing more than issuing motherhood statements and statements of lament and sadness.

I turn to the paper on police-recorded adult sexual assault in the Northern Territory involving alcohol and alcohol policy effects. A study done by Clifford et al examining data from 2014 to 2020 concluded:

The rate of adult sexual assaults in the NT is extremely high and many involve alcohol. Neither the Banned Drinker Register or Minimum Unit Price were associated with changes in police-recorded adult sexual assault in Greater Darwin or across the NT.

We have heard a range of statistics. These statistics are robust:

From January 2014 to December 2020 most police-recorded sexual assault victims were female (92%). Half (50%) were non-Aboriginal, 41% were Aboriginal and 9% were recorded as unknown. A large proportion of victims were assaulted by strangers (38%), followed by acquaintances (27%). Almost 1 in 4 adult sexual assaults (23%) included a domestic and family violence flag.

Drawing this back to where we are today:

Alcohol was involved in 40% of adult sexual assaults, including use by offenders, victims or both.

You cannot ignore the nexus between what we are trying to achieve and this matter of public importance.

This secondary piece of research also aimed to assess whether the introduction of two recent alcohol policies was associated with changes in police-recorded sexual assaults and concluded that neither the BDR nor MUP were associated with changes in police-recorded adult sexual assault across the NT or in greater Darwin.

The study's authors acknowledge the same limitations that have been acknowledged by others in relation to sexual assault being chronically under-reported, not least in the context of the additional challenges of remote and rural areas and alcohol being involved et cetera. They note:

While the underreporting of sexual assault is a significant limitation, provided a willingness to report has remained stable, the trends in this data will broadly represent the underlying trends in the incidence of sexual assault.

The sum of this is to carry weight in the debate that we are having more broadly. It states:

Despite the low counts, the rate of 105 adult sexual assaults per 100,000 people in the NT is extremely high, and even lower bound estimates of alcohol-involvement indicate that it is a notable factor.

Evidence-based strategies, if that is what we aspire to, will require us to acknowledge—with some degree of humility and calm—that what has been done in the last eight years in this space clearly does not have a strong evidentiary basis to support going forward in a similar direction, no matter what our intuitive or anecdotal feeling might be.

Labor raised the point, ‘What will it take to address DV?’ Addressing alcohol policy in new ways will do that, and that is precisely what this government is seeking to do in this first parliamentary sitting.

I have said a lot in defence of qualitative data collection and the body of collected testimony presented by members of this government in defence of the cohesive package we are providing to reduce crime. I have said far less about the weight of analysis of this kind.

The Member for Johnston asked, ‘What more do we need to be doing?’ We need to be paying attention to academic research. I have a small understanding of what it takes to produce content like this and the rigour that goes into this process. This work deserves to be read by everyone in this Chamber. It deserves to be respected in a distinctive way alongside the collected testimony that is presented in this House.

I therefore encourage all members to be as well informed as possible if we are of a collective mindset to address the prevention of the matter of public importance that has been raised today. That includes being mindful of research, the likes of which I have drawn attention to.

Mx McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am heartened to see this matter brought before the parliament, so I thank the Leader of the Opposition. I thank the Member for Johnston for the minute’s silence.

I briefly refer to my first speech, in which I spoke about this issue:

Throughout the election, if I ever heard mention of domestic, family and sexual violence it was often tacked onto the end, almost as an afterthought.

I have said this many times before and say it again: domestic, family and sexual violence is the largest social issue we face, whether that is a motherhood statement or not. It is the largest aspect and driver of crime. Over 60% of men incarcerated in our prisons are there for domestic violence-related offences. We must look at all crime through the lens of DFSV. Women and children are being turned away from shelters every day, and frontline services have cried out for adequate funding for decades from both sides of politics. I am an assault survivor, and I will fully and relentlessly force the spotlight onto properly addressing this violence once and for all. The safety of my community is of the utmost importance to me; we are not safe as a community until everyone is safe.

Over the past decade as domestic, family and sexual violence has been discussed more, it has always frustrated me that the word ‘men’ was glaringly absent. The headlines were always about domestic violence or violence against women, as though this violence is being committed by some faceless nameless entity. As the Member for Gwoja said, ‘Our words matter’. If we cannot name the problem, how will we ever fix it?

I know that men are also victims of family violence, as are children, but the perpetrators who commit violence against women, boys and girls and sometimes other men are overwhelmingly men. It brings me some sense of relief that as a society we are at a place where we can name the problem properly. I am finally seeing references to combating men’s violence, although it is still not present enough in the reporting.

I refer to Assistant Commissioner Wurst’s statements after the alleged murder of a Lajamanu woman this week. He said:

What we’re dealing with here is another tragedy, another tragedy for the Northern Territory, another tragedy for the community ...



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

TAFR – TREASURER’S ANNUAL
FINANCIAL REPORT

WEDNESDAY 23 OCTOBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

community of Alawa, Moil, Jingili and Millner is engaged. People have come to my electorate office—even though it is not an accessible place—to meet with me and tell me the things that they want to make sure I do for them in this parliament.

There are so many people in our community who are worth celebrating. Just to name a couple, there are two young people in the community who recently had amazing successes in the arts field. Omar Gad, who lives in Jingili, went all the way to Edinburgh to compete in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Ciella Williams, who lives in Alawa, just won an amazing award. What an incredible writer, playwright and artist. There are many people in our community, young people, who are doing incredible things, who I want to celebrate.

I give a special shout-out. Throughout my campaign and since I have won, I have been fuelled daily by the Greek men's club at Millner shops, where a group of old, retired men sit and have coffee every morning. I think I might be the first woman who has gone in there and sat down with them. They became my strongest supporters, and they watch me in parliament. They make great coffee, if anyone wants a Greek coffee or a frappe. I shout out to Stan, who is my coffee maker, thank you.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Johnston for her adjournment remarks. I think we all share a commitment to wanting to make things better. That is my aspiration in my electorate of Fong Lim. I believe that is the aspiration of everyone in this House in respect of the electorates they all individually represent and that we collectively represent in this great Northern Territory.

Utilising parliamentary mechanisms to their fullest is our obligation as members in this House. Wasting time, speaking superfluously or not utilising the mechanisms at our disposal makes a mockery of the excellent processes we have to work with. I believe there was a great amount of debate today about alternative processes, but it is important for us to acknowledge that there are processes at our disposal that we do not use to full effect, and information at our disposal which we do not use to full effect.

That includes, of course, understanding our economic position. It is difficult to do much without understanding our economic position. There is an enormous amount of debate in this place about how to spend money, without understanding how the money has been spent for a large period, and the economic position we all now collectively share responsibility for taking carriage of.

It has been duly pointed out that everything that happens in this House is the business of all in this House. There is no 'our time' or 'your time'; this is collectively the time of the House. With my brief time at the end of this long day, I will reflect briefly on the Treasurer's Annual Financial Report, which was tabled yesterday and which makes extremely important findings that are of significance to everything we have been discussing this week.

The headline, of course, as my learned friend the Treasurer pointed out, is that the net debt to revenue ratio is astronomically high. It is at a staggering 108% in 2023–24. That is 11 percentage points higher than even the absurd 97% that was recorded in the preceding financial year. That is a gross and disproportionate amount of debt, unless you can point to what it is you have to show for that debt.

Debt itself is not always a bad thing. We need lines of credit in order to buy, borrow, spend and create growth, but you must have something to show for it. In eight short years our latest debt position has gone from \$2bn to what we will soon find out is approaching \$12bn.

What do we have to show for it? Where could that money be collectively better spent? On education, we have heard plenty today. How could that money be more purposefully allocated towards education? Ask yourself those questions. Use your time in parliament wisely to ask those questions is my challenge to you.

We have borrowed beyond our means and have an Aa3 credit rating which has remained unchanged. If it continues that trajectory, good luck borrowing money to do anything useful in the Northern Territory. We are instigating reform to stabilise the Northern Territory. It begins with crime and social dysfunction but it will progress to economic reform. We are committed to rebuilding the economy because without that there will be little left to defend in this Chamber or elsewhere.

Non-financial public sector fiscal balance improvement, which is in the books, is primarily due to revised timing of expected government leases and lease renewals specifically. For the general government sector net operating balance there is a \$90m improvement. But what is that owing to? It is owing in no small part to \$59m of GST revenue which happened as a result of the upward revision of Commonwealth estimates of national GST collections from the May 2024 budget. I mention that because we did not make money through

judicious saving or by growing our population; we made it through accounting. It is only the tiniest bit of good news in a sea of what is otherwise a horror tale.

Learned colleagues, I implore you, please, before the next parliamentary sitting, learn a little about our financial position before you start beseeching the House for more money on all and everything, to try to improve our prospects collectively.

Bear in mind that GST revenue and Commonwealth grants comprise three-quarters of the money we collect in the Northern Territory to spend collectively on what we do in this place. It is incumbent on us to make judicious use of that money. I put it to you that we have not made judicious use of that money in the last 10 years and specifically in the last eight years of the Labor government.

I eagerly anticipate the opportunity and, more importantly, the necessity of being able to forensically deconstruct Labor's fiscal and economic mismanagement over the course of the last two terms of government. There will be plenty of time ahead to examine financial statements.

Regarding fiscal strategy and objectives, I draw attention to principle 1, sustainable service provision, in this document. As determined by Treasury, over this budget cycle we are not on track, in no small part owing to targets for growth being premised on population growth of 1.1% whereas we are tracking at 0.8%. We are in a state of demographic decline. Do not yawn on the other side of the House; this is the stuff that matters.

Health is the government's largest expenditure category and ideally illustrative of economic mismanagement. Former Health ministers should know well enough that the increased expenditure in hospital services is largely driven by skilled workforce shortages, requiring increased utilisation of high-cost agency labour and overtime. The quantum of that figure is \$228m as a result of Labor's mismanagement of the economy. These are failures of Labor's economic policy and it is important to recognise them as such.

How and why do we have this problem? It is because in Labor's relentless pursuit of financial capital and chasing vanity projects, what we have done is sold the farm. Where are the people to work the farm anymore? In the relentless pursuit of financial capital we stopped pursuing human capital. That is why I applaud our government for creating a new ministry for International Education, Migration and Population.

Our government will tackle these issues with gusto because as important as it is to call out to members of our community through adjournment speeches and to recognise the contributions that everybody makes at a granular level, it is also extremely important and incumbent on all of us to recognise what needs to be done at a macro-economic and collective level.

This is important stuff. What I came to fight for in this House—you should be fighting for this as well—is more money and a fairer deal for Northern Territorians so that we can spend that money on public health, housing, education and infrastructure that gets delivered.

Colleagues, at the end of a long day adjournment speeches are often an opportunity to reflect on some of the positives, but our time here is limited. As I said, from my maiden speech onwards, it is important we use our time wisely and the parliamentary mechanisms at our disposal, imperfect as they might be, to prosecute the cases that are required to improve the material conditions of existence for the people in each of our electorates and collectively across the Northern Territory.

Our demographic decline has not fostered economic development and it has had an attendant impact on the quality of life for all Territorians. It has diminished it, not improved it. It is a large part of why our 17-strong government has been given a mandate to act differently to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore lifestyle. We are working through those things collectively and we ask you to work on the journey with us. You can make a contribution with respect to the specifics, but it begins with having a better understanding of our financial position. I implore you to spend the time to get across that detail, interrogate us where possible and compel us to do better.

I am confident that this government will do better and make strides towards rebuilding the economy.

Mx McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the Member for Fong Lim's contribution to the adjournment debate. He is saying a lot about Labor, but all I can think is that he put his hand up for Labor first, so it is a bit confusing for me.

I am using this time to respond to some things that were said in the Chamber this week. Yesterday we had the chance to speak on a matter of public importance raised by the Leader of the Opposition on the scourge



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

DELIVERING FOR TERRITORIANS

THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

higher community standard. Territorians want to move freely around their communities, go to the shops and enjoy our parks and public spaces without being confronted by unacceptable alcohol-fuelled antisocial behaviour.

The CLP government's crime focus continues, with legislation targeted at minimum mandatory sentences for cowardly assaults on frontline workers on track to be finalised today. Assaults on police, paramedics, nurses, doctors, teachers, Corrections officers, retail and hospitality workers, bus and taxi drivers and any other NT worker are unacceptable.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, reducing crime, rebuilding the economy, restoring lifestyle—easy to say, but hard to do all of them.

We on this side of the Chamber acknowledge that, but we are genuinely following through on plans to realise those aspirations. They are not motherhood statements or political slogans; they are part of an actionable plan, and we are following through with legislative amendments to deliver that strategy.

My learned colleague, the Treasurer, has already articulated some of the first tranche measures we are employing in the economic space. I draw reference to a couple of those items, noting how significant they are. We have already discussed the home building scheme, which is critical to the Northern Territory's economic rebuild. We are in the middle of a housing crisis nationally, and the Northern Territory is not immune to these pressures.

The key factor is we are seeking to stimulate supply. Economists across the country will agree on little about what to do in dealing with the housing crisis, but they all agree that we must stimulate supply, which is why our grants are targeted at people building new homes.

It is also worth contrasting that when we came out at election time with a plan to stimulate supply, we were immediately followed by the Territory Labor government trying to up the ante on our plan. Has everyone forgotten that part? The difference was that where we were offering \$50,000 to build a new home, the opposition was offering \$60,000. They missed the fundamental point ...

Ms Uibo: Only for Territorians though.

Dr RAHMAN: That is right, Opposition Leader—for Territorians only. You missed the trick on the fact that it is about stimulating population growth. That is what we are doing. The eligibility on our side is for citizens and permanent residents to support population growth because over eight years you have overseen demographic decline; we have no workforce to build any of the houses. We will stimulate the population growth and workforce support.

The home building scheme is of great significance to my constituents at Northcrest in Berrimah. Northcrest is a place filled with potential. It reminds of the place I grew up in—Karama. Young, aspirational families trying to get a leg up and multigenerational families trying to create a space in a community from which to advance have been held back by Territory Labor's failure to support that development, so it does not have the number of houses that it needs to flourish. Instead, it has stagnated; there is no Australian mail service, council service, supermarket provision and no progress on the mere possibility of creating schools. Why is that? Is it because of a failure on the part of the residents? It is a failure on the part of the former government. Its economic policy was negligent and failed to support stimulating housing supply.

We are stimulating housing supply and population growth. We are supporting both in tandem. We know that remote housing is important, but so is urban housing stock which has dwindled under eight years of economic mismanagement.

The Treasurer will speak on our payroll tax initiatives today, the details of which will be elaborated later. I need not speak to the granular detail, but it is important for everyone to understand why we are taking the calculated risk to spend own-source revenue on cutting payroll tax and making ourselves a competitive place to run a business. It is because we are trying to stop businesses foreclosing, giving up, shutting down and leaving as they have been for years as the economic conditions were parlous because of Labor's negligence and mismanagement.

We are incentivising businesses to stick with us, hang in there and reinvest. We are asking you to reinvest in your businesses, staff, capital and plant, and we will stick with you to rebuild the economy along the way. Fong Lim is the industrial hub and engine of Darwin. I represent more active businesses in my electorate

than any other electorate in this House throughout Stuart Park, Winnellie, Berrimah and I hope increasingly through Wishart, East Arm and all the strategic industrial land we have that has not been capitalised upon.

I am urging those businesses in Fong Lim, which I will be spending more time with, to stick with us, reinvest in their businesses and have confidence that this CLP government will back them to restore integrity to the economy. We will ensure their businesses can flourish in a place that has a functioning, viable economy managed by people who are paying attention to the details and not just coasting on ventures of vanity and nonsense major projects that are reminiscent of an episode of *Utopia*.

Tangible achievements have been documented by my government colleagues. These include our delivery on legislative amendments. I am grateful for the contributions from everyone in this House, most recently the preceding contribution from my colleague, the Member for Casuarina.

I will reference what my colleague, the Member for Karama, pointed out because it is a critical thing that was overlooked in the last parliament—the CommSec State of the States reports. We reached the point with the former government being so filled with hubris that it would dismiss CommSec repeatedly and say, ‘It does not apply to us. It does not matter that we are last on seven out of eight metrics consistently over time.’

Will we suddenly come out of that and be first on every metric overnight? Of course we will not. We know that and are facing economic reality. Labor was in denial repeatedly on every economic metric. We were seen to be the most underperforming basket-case jurisdiction. It was not because we lack natural resources, gumption or the right people; it was because of policy failure in the economic space. The former government must take responsibility for that.

Part of what we are achieving in this government is facing economic reality. That is a tangible deliverable. You probably have to read between the lines in our plan to figure it out, but that is what we are doing. We are facing reality, as opposed to pretending there is nothing wrong and saying, ‘Nothing to see here; it is fine.’

Supporting mining, gas, agriculture, tourism and Defence will also require attendant workforce support, population growth and homes to house that population. We must engage with Southeast Asia to leverage our geographic proximity and cultivate better relationships to generate commercially viable investment options.

That is why we have delivered, in a short time, our promise to deliver the new ministries of Trade, Business and Asian Relations and of International Education, Migration and Population. Why did we do that? Because they are signals to the market and to Territorians. Aside from the granular detail, they signal that it is time for courage and that we are committed to being courageous.

In that spirit, I thank the Chief Minister for having the courage to embark on a package of bold reform. I thank her for her ministerial statement. I thank my colleagues for giving weight to her assertions that we are delivering. I look forward to our continued demonstration of courage from this strong, 17-person CLP government with a mandate to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, if there was an award equivalent to the Grammy or the Oscar the Member for Fong Lim would win it. The Member for Fong Lim only a few months ago was a member of Territory Labor and was rubbishing every current Cabinet minister for their poor performance as an opposition team.

The Member for Fannie Bay, during the election campaign, told people the opposite of what the CLP’s plan was. She was not telling people at their doors that she would put 10-year-old kids in prison; she said the opposite, as did the Member for Fong Lim.

Let us be clear: if we want to talk about delivering, then maybe every one of the CLP members who want to deliver something should deliver themselves to their cars and get their backsides to the bush where they will see what has been delivered. There were more roads sealed than by any other government in the history of the Northern Territory. There were more houses built in any remote community than in the history of the Northern Territory. That was delivered by us.

When the CLP was last in government, one brand-new house was built in the last two years of their term. It is nothing to be proud of. The only reason we continue to see record investment across the bush is Labor. Labor settled that agreement and got that investment into the remote communities. Labor’s legacy will continue when none of us are left in this place.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

POPULATION GROWTH &
DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE

THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Education is a pillar of anybody's success. Whether it is through school, training or adult education, the work our educators do day-in and day-out across Territory daycares, preschools, schools, middle schools and high schools and educators who work in the field of vocational education and training often create critical pathways for employment for our school leavers and trainees. We say a huge thank you.

I know that there is a lot of movement across the NT from school students who may move from school to school. Our educators are always flexible and adaptable in providing a student the best possible opportunity in education and always cater for the circumstances of the child in the school.

I remind the Assembly of wording that I shared yesterday through the General Business day motion on education: we must remember that the children and the young people who are going to our schools come with a rich diverse knowledge and experience to add value to that environment of learning and to thrive in that environment.

Our educators do a phenomenal amount of work to harness that. I know it is challenging at times. I have had the experience of being a teacher—a high school teacher at that—but the success at the end or that 'ah-ha' moment when they get it is invaluable and precious to see. When you see a young person sharing their moment, helping to support another young person's learning, it is an amazing thing to watch and know that you are creating this benefit of a journey and a cycle of lifelong learning.

I truly believe, even as adults, we should not forget that love of learning. There are a lot of people in here who have been learning a lot in the last two weeks as adult learners. We should not forget that our children need to flourish to truly ensure the Territory will be a strong and flourishing jurisdiction in this country. We cannot leave them behind or ever forget the importance of education.

The people who support that journey—our hardworking teachers, principals and, as we have seen in award categories, the school support staff—who also connect to the community provide another level of support that is not necessarily always classroom based. It is another level of support for our schools, staff and students so that our communities can engage in the best possible way, and when there are challenges and tricky points in someone's learning day, they get that extra support.

We thank, acknowledge and appreciate all our Territory educators across the NT. We do not just want to honour you tomorrow on World Teachers' Day; we honour you every day you work and particularly the days you are not supposed to be working, like your weekends or after hours. We know you are always thinking about those kids and often still putting in your own personal time and effort to make sure young people in your classroom have the best option for the most quality education you can offer. We thank you for that.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, many of the problems we seek to address in this House will take time and patience. They also require cooperation and a better shared understanding of the underlying dynamics of the problems. With that in mind, I will speak more about our population growth, demographic decline and loss of human capital in recent years.

When I grew up here and left for university interstate, I honestly believed that by the time I returned, there would be half a million people, we would be a state and there would be a David Jones and a Myer. That was what I had been told for time immemorial.

It is sad for all of us that things have gone backwards. One of the reasons things have gone backwards is that we have dropped the ball on cultivating, securing and prioritising our human capital. As I have said, this is part of the reason I have returned, to help us with skilled migration and population growth. I am encouraged that some of these bigger-picture issues may have the possibility of being addressed by the new government.

I am not here to politicise the facts tonight; I wish to put information on the record for the benefit of everyone because these are discussions we will return to in different ways, and it is useful for us to have a shared frame of reference.

Our population growth over the last 40 years is wildly differential. In the pre-2000 period, the Northern Territory used to outpace the rest of the country on population growth. From about 2012 onwards it starts to fall dramatically.

Years ago Arthur Calwell, an immigration minister, popularised the phrase 'populate or perish'. That is not dissimilar to where we are now. We are in real terms declining in population and viable workforce, and it affects all the areas we want to work in and all the services we want to provide. It matters because as the TERC report from 2020 stated:

Until such time there is a significantly larger base population, the Territory will continue to rely on interstate and overseas migration to fill ... jobs

Our overseas migration stocks over the last 40 years have also been wildly differential. Why it matters is that overseas migration has become very low, and if population growth is our goal we must start thinking about how to attract, retain and develop migrants from overseas because Australia's immigration policy is its de facto population policy, so the Productivity Commission has said for years.

What about the other components of population? They are natural increase, which is births minus deaths, and interstate migrants. There was a time in the last 20 years when everyone was growing less but still growing, but the most salient part of that picture is net interstate migration which has been negative for a long time in the Northern Territory; this is our resting state, essentially. We need to think about how to mitigate that because we cannot turn it around overnight, but if we want to populate the Northern Territory with a skilled workforce to support all the areas we want to support, we must understand that there is no other way to do that than to look to overseas skilled people. This requires the right conditions here for them to come back to.

People often think in the last 10 years things were significantly better in periods that correlated with our gas boom. However, what you will find—this is not drawing a causal relationship or a correlated one—is in that period our population stocks got even worse and our net interstate migration was even lower because we started to create substitute capacity in our economy by having so much FIFO work, agency workforce labour and reliance on temporary migration mechanisms in place of permanent migration mechanisms.

We need to band together to change that story. If we turn this into a political football as well, there will be no-one left to work, live or grow up in the Northern Territory. Treasury data shows that negative interstate migration has been our resting state and that our population growth is trending downwards on every metric.

Treasury was hoping it would be 1.1%, then it turned out to be 0.9%, and now it is 0.8% year on year. Deloitte Access Economics, which is the most bullish forecaster, will tell you it needs to be somewhere around 1.4%. For us to get anywhere near 300,000 people in this place, we must grow in excess of 2.5% population growth. That means we have to do things radically differently and will have to cooperate, or this will be gridlocked and there will not be enough Territorians to make the Territory realise its potential.

Charles Darwin University has done good work on this. I urge you to look at the work done by Professor Andrew Taylor, who has pointed out that our periods of positive interstate migration correlate with when we build things. In the early 1980s when we were building new suburbs like Karama and Palmerston and the then Northern Territory University; in the mid-1990s, when we were building Cullen Bay which created headroom in the market for people to move up and on; or again when we had projects like Conoco Phillips when we prioritised opex and capex in the same place, we grew our economy and population at the same time. Those are the periods we had positive interstate migration. The last time we had it was for a perverse reason—a bunch of Canberra bureaucrats here because of the Northern Territory intervention.

If we want to grow our population, we have to start thinking about how to make this an attractive place in every regard, and we are trying in different ways to create those conditions. We will need to work together on this. It is important to understand this is not how it always was, though. In the 1980s we were growing at 30% population growth, which elapsed over the decade. In the 1990s and 2000s, we had 20% population growth. These are rough figures.

It is only in the last decade that the economic policy choices made by both sides of government resulted in us having less than 5% population growth, and that is a failure of economic policy. I am genuinely proud to be part of this government, which is facing up to this reality at least, creating ministries to look at this seriously. These issues are being taken seriously. I do not want to politicise this, but the last government was not interested in facing the reality of our demographic decline. There was wilful blindness about it, and it was a serious problem. It is part of the reason none of these projects are off the ground, because we frankly do not have the workforce to support them.

Migration is not a substitute for investing in the skills of Australians, but the Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities said 10 times over that well-targeted migration can complement local skills while contributing to productivity growth. That is why it is important for us to have a sensible discussion in the Northern Territory—where we all love and care about Laksa festivals and multiculturalism—to genuinely invest in multiculturalism when it comes to migration. We need to be welcoming people, laying out the welcome mat, integrating and settling them and making them long-term Territorians.

Our plans to create new housing supply are important in that regard, because even if we can find all the people in the world, where will we put them? We need to create housing stock, and we are incentivising new supply. That is a critical part of this.

I could go on about this for a long time, but I wanted to put down foundational data tonight so that we might have a think about it collectively, going forward, noting that this discussion will come up in a lot of forums, I imagine, over the coming months.

We know that for overseas and interstate migrants and Territorians, different things have to be addressed when we diagnose the situation and look at what needs to be done to attract, retain and develop our population. The single most important metric when it comes to attracting overseas migrants is the lure of permanent residency. We want to get the right people here and then we want to make sure, to retain them, that we settle them. Then to develop them, we integrate them.

When it comes to interstate migrants, we know that liveability, opportunity and upward mobility are the most important things. If you cannot provide a better deal here than elsewhere, people will go back interstate.

Finally, for Territorians, we need to reinforce our existing population because, unless we can improve lifestyle and provide opportunities for growth, there are not salient reasons to stick around.

I appreciate your indulgence at the end of a long day and fortnight on these issues. I sincerely hope we can work together on sustainable population growth to underpin sustainable economic growth for the benefit of all Northern Territorians.

Mrs HERSEY (Katherine): Madam Speaker, it is the day before World Teachers' Day. Today I attended Darwin High School with the Member for Fannie Bay for a Year 12 high achievers' function. It was lovely to see about 60 kids were in the list of high achievers.

Thank you to Jill, the principal, for the invitation. Attendees also included the Year 12 Assistant Principal, Nick Ergos; Aaron Dalglish, Year 12 coordinator; Erin Jovanovich, Year 12 coordinator; and Sophie Butler, NT CET coordinator.

They had an amazing cake that was large, which a couple of the students helped to cut. We all gathered around for a photo. If anyone needs a cake, Jimjam's Cakes was amazing; they did a good job.

It is important to reward these high achiever students who are doing Year 12 and let the Assembly know who they are: Suzi Akumu; Lara Borbon; Kosta Chatzipapas; Feifan Chen; Jennifer Choi; Bill Cotter; Andrea Critchley; David Dela Vega-Dela Pena; Paris Diamandopoulos; Joel Durrheim; Rebekah Ebin; Raymond Eliorda; Nadishka Fernando; Gabriella Francis; Nathaniel Freeland; Tahlia Freijah; Abbey George; Mia Gilbert; Niyaz Hasan; Laura Henssen; Hyunwoo Jeong; Naomi Jia; Afiya Khan; Toby Koefoed; Tom Kuswadi; Cassia Latz; Mari-Dine Laubscher; Zoe Lim; Muxi Lin; Anna Lindsay; Lily Lewellyn; Pheebi Lockley; Taufiq Lubis; Rupendren Manimaran; Harriet Matthiesson; Vincent Mondol; Vic Nguyen; Gerome Nguyen; Svanik Pande; Larissa Pandey; Mahi Patel; Leo Perry; Aidan Pevely; Lily Purdon; Maaz Qasim; Atif Saeed; Pedro Sanches Luiz; Jorge Saroukos; Amby Shinmarh; Hrithik Singh; Panayioti Siskamanis; Myles Smith; Frencessca Sparrow; Gayatri Sureshbabu; Rangchak Tripura; Shane West; Phoebe Wiltshire; Jia You; Evelyn Zheng; Karis Zheng; and Haoyang Zheng.

All of those students were enjoying a lovely lunch that was put on by the school for them as high achievers for their year. I said to them, 'Remember it is World Teachers' Day tomorrow, so be nice to your teachers'.

I give a shout-out to and congratulate all of the amazing educators across the Territory. Happy World Teachers' Day for them tomorrow. In the next sittings I will go through those who won the awards

I will be back in Katherine dropping off goods to all of the schools in my community. I look forward to seeing them and being home after being here for a couple of weeks.

This year's theme is 'Valuing teachers' voices'. We value our teachers' voices. Our CLP government acknowledges the effort put in by teachers and supports them in a safe workplace. We will bring back school-based policing to intervene and stop crime.

I again thank all of the teachers and support staff across the Territory who work hard every day in shaping the minds of young people. Congratulations to all who were nominated for the awards tomorrow. I will be in



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

It is great to celebrate 50 years of the Legislative Assembly. I thank all those who came before us and took the reins to represent the people of the Northern Territory, including those who have passed and those who were in the Chamber on the weekend to speak about the last 50 years and where we have come to as a community over those years. These people have shaped the Northern Territory into what it is today. The people in this Legislative Assembly today are here to continue to shape it. I am proud to be part of a team which is making serious change to shape the Northern Territory, bring back that can-do attitude and work with our community on that resilience to bring the Territory back to the place it was.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, today we mark the 50th anniversary of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. It is a moment to celebrate our shared history and achievements, as others in the Chamber have noted. I recognise that we are meeting on unceded Larrakia country, and I acknowledge all Aboriginal peoples and thank them for their generosity and leadership.

This Chamber has been central to shaping the Territory's story, as we have heard, responding to Cyclone Tracy, championing the recognition of land rights and advancing our fight for self-determination. It has been a place of leadership during moments of profound change. We can be proud of the achievements that have defined this Assembly and the way it has evolved to better serve the people of the Territory. This is a legacy worth celebrating.

It is a time to reflect on how far we have come, and we have heard wonderful stories, as people shared at the celebration on Saturday. We also heard, as noted by the Member for Gwoja, reflections and language that should be deeply troubling to all of us that should have no place in this Chamber.

Milestones like this are not just about looking back; they are also about looking forward. As we stand at these crossroads, we must ask: what do we want the next 50 years to represent?

This is our opportunity to move into the future with renewed purpose and commitment. The foundations that we lay now in this Chamber will determine whether this Assembly continues to earn the trust and confidence of the people we represent. This demands integrity, accountability and a genuine connection to the lives of Territorians. This is the people's House, and the people look to it. What we do here matters in not only the law we make but also the way we work together to make those laws.

We must recommit to building an Assembly that reflects the Territory's diversity, a place where all voices—particularly those from First Nations communities, women and young leaders—are heard and respected. Our decisions must not only reflect our values but also the liberalities of the people we serve.

Accountability must remain at the heart of everything we do, including transparency in how we govern through open ministerial diaries, lobbyist registers and clear reporting. Honest communication strengthens trust. When Territorians see how decisions are made and resources are allocated, they see a government that is working for them.

We must work with courage and urgency to tackle the pressing challenges of our time: the housing crisis; domestic and family violence; community safety; and creating opportunities for the next generation. These issues demand bold action informed by working together and the insights of those most affected.

The next 50 years are ours to shape. I believe that we can and must work together in this Chamber as the people entrusted by our communities to make good law for 100% of the people we represent by working together, listening to each other and making wise decisions based on the best information we have. If we lead with integrity, act with accountability and stay grounded in the needs of all Territorians we can make sure that this Assembly is a place of progress, innovation, compassion, justice and hope. Let us honour this milestone by committing ourselves to the work ahead so that when we mark future anniversaries, we can do so with pride in what we have achieved together.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, in the spirit of the levity brought to this Chamber by Mick Palmer on the weekend, I begin by noting that I am a journeyman cricketer. My ambitions have always far exceeded my abilities on the cricketing field, much to my chagrin. I was primarily a wicketkeeper but also an attritional batsman, not one of these dashers of the modern day who can score 100s in Twenty20s, but somebody who had to grind out every run. Cobbling together a 50 in cricket is hard. Getting off the mark is tough enough, as the long litany of ducks that I have to my record will attest.

As most of you know, this weekend marked the start of the Australian summer of cricket. As I caught a bit of the Australia v India test match in the background—in which unfortunately Australia was humbled to a 295 defeat in Perth—it caught my attention that Virat Kohli, the former Indian captain, turned that game on

the tea session of the third afternoon by converting a 50 into 100. It is hard to do that. That is why statisticians and aficionados of cricket will look at conversion rates for how people can go the distance, not just get off the mark, not just survive but then build and turn it into something substantial and match-winning.

What then did cobbling together 50 for this jurisdiction look like? This past Saturday, as those on both sides of the House have noted, many of us were fortunate to attend an event in this Chamber commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Legislative Assembly. We have reflected upon some of the contributions made by the guest speakers on that day. Without repeating any of them, it is worth noting a couple of additional reflections I jotted down.

We were lucky to have the former Administrator Hon Vicki O'Halloran remind us of the fact that the Northern Territory is the only Assembly to have had continuous Indigenous representation from the get-go.

She was followed by Hon Roger Steele, who made a lot of the reflections on the post-Tracy period that we have heard a little about today. The one that caught my ear was the sentiment regarding the threat and real fear of the possibility of the Commonwealth disbanding this legislature in the wake of Cyclone Tracy, such was the level of dysfunction and chaos here at the time. As was pointed out by the learned Member for Namatjira, resilience is what saw the Northern Territory through that period.

Dawn Lawrie, a former member of the inaugural Legislative Assembly, reflected on that Legislative Assembly and its predecessor, the Legislative Council, and the fact that there were five members from that Legislative Council who fought their case over many years to then earn a seat in the Legislative Assembly.

That First Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, much like the one we sit in, had 17 CLP members and two Independents. Dawn Lawrie reflected on the fact that it was a great aspiration of the people at the time to ensure that we remained masters of our own destiny. That phrase struck me because we are again having conversations about our capacity to exist—existential questions about how to be a self-governing polity, be responsible, have a future and convert 50s into 100s.

I particularly enjoyed Ms Lawrie's anecdote about Hon Bernie Kilgariff. It spoke volumes about the manner in which that first legislature was conducted. Ms Lawrie noted that although she represented an Independent voice, she was given ample opportunity to present her case in this Chamber, and her dissent or minority opinion was duly recorded.

It gives me great comfort to know that in the first few sittings and months of this government of which I am a part that we are also affording all members of the House the opportunity to prosecute their case, be heard and provide robust opposition and democracy.

Stephen Hatton spoke after Dawn Lawrie. Amongst the many things he said, the one that caught my ear was how much time and effort he and his colleagues put into being MLAs. He talked about coming in two hours early to sittings to sit in the reading rooms of the Parliamentary Library to read *Hansard* to get across his brief and know what it was to be a representative here, understand the history of the place and be able to make a meaningful contribution.

The depth of what he spoke about—not just him, but all the others—showed that the history of this place was long. Institutional memory existed as a function of people putting the time and effort into understanding the history of this place, not just at moments of celebration but as part of every day being a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Daryl Manzie, in his witty and loquacious way, reflected on the building of Parliament House and moving from one side to the other. He also weaved in noteworthy remarks regarding the foundations upon which our economic growth was predicated, including laying the preconditions for sustainable resource development and mining, that being in gas and coal, and providing the regulatory framework that has ensured that we have to date been blessed with being able to create economic growth using mining and resource extraction without compromising our lifestyle and environmental protections.

Mick Palmer, with all the levity in the world, noted that being in parliament was ostensibly a boring matter but went on to note—of all the things that I thought Mick Palmer would have pointed out in this House—the significance and the importance of the library. I was dumbfounded. Mick Palmer pointed out the great contribution of having the Parliamentary Library and the Territory Library in this place in what it has offered by providing everyone in this House and members of the public the ability to use the facilities and feel connected to the place where laws are made. As we know, the library will be moving shortly; questions remain as to what will replace it and how we will replace the services that it provides.

Hon Clare Martin spoke pointedly about how the change of government in 2001 marked an important maturing point in our democracy. Indeed, that is the case. A robust viable opposition is important in any democratic polity. She duly noted some of the achievements of that period in providing balance and maturity to our legislature, including freedom of information laws, a revised Estimates process and the FITA.

She reflected on her conversation with Malcolm Fraser in relation to statehood and the offer that was made in the first five years to the Legislative Assembly to realise aspirations for statehood and bemoaned the fact that opportunity was not realised at that point.

We heard you, Madam Speaker, speaking about the decade between 2010 and 2020. Might I say it was delicately put that it was a period of turmoil, which we did not dig into but we recognised was a period of great highs and great lows. I think implicit in that message was the hope that we would experience more stability in the years forward, dare I say it.

The Chief Minister spoke eloquently at the end to bring it all together and to lay an agenda for the future. She duly recognised all the speakers before her.

It was a great occasion to be part of and to get a sense of history for this place.

A notable feature across all the speakers and the political spectrum was statehood. I must confess that I did not expect it to be reflected on by everyone in that Chamber on that day in quite the vociferous terms that it was. I grew up here at a time when statehood was expected, not hoped for. It was a matter of when not if, and it was a great shock to me in 1998 when the referendum was lost. It is encouraging to see both sides of the House again recognising that an aspiration for statehood remains. I think we can build upon that shared aspiration.

The final question, coming back to where I started is: how do you convert 50 into 100? Let me freely say that I am a man who scored a lot of 50s and very few 100s of consequence, so I do not have a monopoly on the wisdom to articulate a vision for how to get a ton on the board. However, from the first day that I came into this place I have maintained that in order to provide longevity it remains incumbent on all of us in this House to protect, promote and advance the aspirations of self-governance, and that necessarily includes a commitment to fiscal responsibility.

I am pleased to be a part of a government that is demonstrating greater fiscal responsibility and laying the foundations to create opportunity for new generations ahead, specifically seeking to raise investor confidence, stimulate population growth, re-imagine revenue models, ensure energy security, target industry support, reduce government wastage, promote market competition and deliver efficient services for all Northern Territorians.

I acknowledge all the past members of this House, and I thank them for their contributions. They have provided the platform upon which all of us will seek to build using our finite time in this place. I highly doubt I will be around to see the Northern Territory reach its ton. The Member for Goyder, with youth on his side, stands the best possible chance. With youth on their side, I hope that the generations of tomorrow will live to see the Northern Territory reach its maiden century.

VISITORS
Dundee Beach School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of students from the Dundee Beach School, accompanied by their teacher. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I welcome the students and teachers from Dundee in the gallery.

It gives me great pleasure to contribute to the motion on 50 years of the Legislative Assembly in the Northern Territory. This marks a special opportunity to celebrate the Territory's shared achievements. A lot has changed over the last 50 years. In the First Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, two of the 19 members



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

FIRST HOMEOWNERS GRANTS

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

There is also a homelessness crisis. The NT has 12 times the national rate of homelessness, with 16.5% of all Territorians under the age of 18 experiencing homelessness, and 39% of people are being turned away from homelessness services due to a lack of resources.

This Bill offers nothing to those across the Territory who are already doing it hard as far as housing is concerned. Many who are renting cannot imagine accumulating the capital required to pay a deposit on the purchase of a house. Many who are homeless cannot imagine having the right amount of regular income to afford paying rent.

We want affordable housing for all Territorians and for our community and economy to sustainably grow, but first homebuyer grants are not the answer; they are a failed experiment. Australia's leading economists have consistently emphasised what works, and first homebuyer grants are not on that list.

For more than 40 years first homebuyer grants have been rolled out across Australia. They have faced considerable criticism from economic experts at universities and independent think tanks. Over the last decade Australia has thrown more than \$20bn at these failed schemes, only to have affordability worsen.

These grants do not help people into homes; they inflate housing prices and funnel public money into the pockets of property sellers. This is because first homebuyer grants simply speed up the purchase and increase the price of purchase for those who are already about to buy, benefiting sellers and driving up prices. This has led economist Saul Eslake to suggest that they are more accurately described as second-home vendors' grants.

As noted by the Reserve Bank of Australia Head of Economic Analysis:

It is now widely accepted that policies that simply give people more money to spend on housing are likely to be capitalised into higher housing prices.

Dr Chris Martin of UNSW City Futures Research Centre puts it bluntly, 'First home buyer assistance measures add to demand, inflate prices and cost taxpayers billions'.

The CLP government has a choice: double down on a tired ineffective strategy or take bold decisive action to improve housing accessibility and affordability in the Territory. One option is to end stamp duty and introduce a fair property tax. The Grattan Institute has shown that replacing stamp duties with a broad-based property tax could save Northern Territorians up to \$85m every year. Unlike stamp duties, which discourage home purchases and lock people out of the market, property taxes are efficient, equitable and stable—exactly what our housing market needs.

The CLP government must abandon ineffective outdated policies and embrace evidence-based solutions. First homebuyer grants are an expensive mistake that fails Territorians; instead, focus on long-term structural changes that tackle affordability at its core. We need more truly affordable housing, not just giving money to those who can already afford it or to people who want to add to their property portfolios.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, first home owner grants have a long and complex history in Australia. It is useful to look at what has been done historically to give context to what this government is seeking to do and, indeed, what it is not seeking to do. There has been a great deal of misunderstanding of the scheme we are putting forward, as is evident from some of the contributions made by members on the other side. Indulge me while we work through what this scheme is about and what it is not about.

First home owner grants started in 1964 under the Menzies government, which offered home savings grants of up to \$500 for married and engaged couples under the age of 36. It was a co-contribution scheme providing \$1 for every \$3 that had been saved in an approved form in the three years prior to purchasing a home, with a \$14,000 cap on the home.

Whitlam abolished that scheme in 1973 in favour of a tax deduction for interest for anyone earning less than \$14,000. The scheme was then reintroduced in 1976 by the Fraser government, without a price cap, age cap or marriage requirements, and it was expanded to \$2,500.

That was again replaced, after a long stint, by the Hawke government, with the first home owners grant assistance scheme. It had a maximum of \$7,000, but it was income tested. That reform was implemented by the then federal Treasurer Paul Keating, who in 1990 scrapped the scheme. It was abolished, and it stayed so for another decade.

A decade later the Howard government introduced the first home owner grant, which is perhaps no surprise because John Howard, when he was a young solicitor, was the person who advised the Fraser government and lobbied in the first instance for the introduction of stimulus in this space. There was no income test or cap on that scheme. It proved to be successful, relative to some of its peers, based on the yardstick used to measure it.

In 2008 the Rudd government continued the scheme but rebranded it as the First Home Owners Boost. It was the global financial crisis, so the government expanded the system to boost construction at a time when construction was depressed, as was consumer demand.

We went from having a \$7,000 scheme that had been around for a long time to \$7,000 plus \$7,000 (\$14,000) for existing homes. The new and novel part was the addition of another \$7,000 if people were to build a new home, making it \$21,000.

If you include all state and territory schemes, the Member for Nightcliff is in fact being generous in suggesting that all the schemes over time is \$20bn; over history there has probably been closer to a \$25bn outlay.

Why am I raising this history beyond the facts and figures? It is obvious that the systems have chopped and changed. There is no straightforward pattern where it is a Labor government program or a Liberal government program. I raise this history because different times and conditions warranted different economic responses. They also produced different results at different times. It is lazy—as has become the order of things in this House—to assume that everything we do is cookie cutter and to assume that all first home owner grant schemes have been the same or, indeed, will produce the same results.

What, then, is our NT situation? Why are we looking into this at the moment?

First of all, everyone agrees that there is a rental crisis across the country. Relative to other jurisdictions, though, there is more headroom in the rental market here than there is anywhere else in the country. A buoyant rental market might have 3% headroom. Some other states and territories have had less than 1% for a period, and it is seriously nigh on impossible to try to rent somewhere. Our market is smaller and fluctuates, but we have still been hovering above 1%.

We have people who are trapped in a cycle of being unable to own and so have been renting. We are trying in the first instance to help some of those people out of the rental cycle, knowing that people who buy are more likely to stay put.

The second part is the absence of supply. Even Saul Eslake—whom I am glad the Member for Nightcliff referenced—who is one of the most vociferous critics of first home owner grants, and has been for many years, will tell you that if you are to do something in this space do what you can to stimulate supply.

I read a submission by Saul Eslake—it is 10 years old, so it is slightly out of date—to a Senate Economic References Committee inquiry into affordable housing. He lambasted first home owner grants that had been targeted specifically to create affordable housing. That is not what we are seeking to do here. We appreciate there is an issue but read the details in the explanatory memorandum and the second reading speech.

Due credit to the Member for Nightcliff; at least she has done some homework. The Leader of the Opposition failed to do any, as far as I can tell, and is not even here to be lectured by me. The fact of the matter is ...

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! The Member for Fong Lim referred to a member being out of the Chamber. He cannot do that. I ask that he withdraws that comment.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Point taken.

Mr YOUNG: He needs to withdraw the comment, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Dr RAHMAN: I withdraw the statement.

The key is that my learned colleague the Treasurer clearly articulated the parameters of this scheme. We have had a month to process the details in the explanatory statement and the second reading speech.

There are no caps on the purchase or build price of a home or on the income of applicants. It is a time-limited scheme for 12 months. It provides the best possible chances of allowing people to capitalise on a stimulus project.

What is our NT situation? First, we have a rental market that is bad, but it is not as bad as it could be. We are trying to do something about it through this scheme by incentivising people to purchase their homes.

Second, there is an absence of supply. Even the most ardent critics of first home owner grant schemes will say that if you are to do something in this space, then do something to stimulate supply.

Third—I turn to the Rudd government’s efforts at the time of the global financial crisis—the Northern Territory has a sluggish construction industry because consumer, retail, investor and unit confidence are all down. We are seeking to stimulate that sector by providing people the incentive to build and put skin in the game. It is a generous scheme, and we are a generous government in that regard. We are advisedly taking a calculated risk to generate stimulus, and that is why it is a generous scheme.

Perhaps the most important factor in understanding our NT situation is appreciating where our population is at. I have spoken ad nauseam in this House about how our population growth is at an all-time low; we are in a state of demographic decline. We have 250,000 people and population growth is declining in real terms because of the failure to provide the economic preconditions to allow people to succeed here over a long period. Much of what we discuss in this House is the downstream consequences of the poor economic choices that have been made by governments over a decade and perhaps longer.

We are trying to appreciate our specific situation—rentals, stimulating supply, sluggish construction and low population. In the context of all those factors, it makes a lot of sense to think about what we might do to mitigate our demographic decline and our faltering economy by utilising a mechanism that will have a material impact if we can keep some people from leaving.

Where might those people go? One of the places that is on the cards, which is extremely important to me, is Berrimah Northcrest. Berrimah Northcrest is a faltering development—not through any fault of the population there—because growth in that precinct has stagnated on the basis of a lack of economic policy stimulus. Berrimah Northcrest needs a bus service, shops, a postal service and to have schools on the horizon, but it will get none of that unless we build more houses there. That is why we are seeking to stimulate supply.

It will not happen overnight. The government is trying to be sensible and weighing its risks by making sure that this is not an infinite program; it is a time-limited program. Over 12 months we will try to stimulate the construction sector and supply. Is there the possibility of overheating the market? Of course there is. Any time you inject a new input into the system that is a possibility, but at the same time activity is being generated.

There is a large amount of interest in this scheme. All members will be aware of the number of people in their electorates who have been saying that they are interested in the uptake of this. We hope that this interest will translate into uptake, and the signs are promising.

There is a misunderstanding about who is eligible for our scheme and why they are eligible. Permanent residents as well as citizens are eligible for our scheme. That is a good thing, not a bad thing, contrary to what is being insinuated by those on the other side. We are not the first jurisdiction to allow permanent residents to access first home owner grants, but we offer the most generous grants. We are the first jurisdiction to be in such dire straits when it comes to population growth. By offering the opportunity to put down roots we open new significant possibilities for permanent residents.

Who are those permanent residents, statistically speaking, who might not yet have become citizens? They are the young and aspirational families. They are the people who came here to study and have tried to make a go of it in this place and perhaps are not doing as well in the labour market as they want to because conditions have been economically depressed. These are the people to whom we now say, ‘Hang on, do not go to Sydney or Melbourne. Hold your horses. Here is a reason to stick around. If you can scratch together your end, we will offer you a generous grant to put down roots, build a house and make a real go of it.’

The fact that we are offering such generous grants to permanent residents is not cavalier or trotting out a system that has not worked elsewhere; it is a specific policy response to our conditions. To the point raised about assisting Territorians, here is a tip: those permanent residents are Territorians. They are the kind of Territorians we are trying to incentivise to stick around.

I addressed this Assembly on 24 October 2024 on the topic of demographic decline and spelt out some of the nuts and bolts of our situation. The fundamental reason I support this Bill is that unless we do something to mitigate negative net interstate migration we will not have a workforce or the population to support our aspirations in any industry. This Bill provides the preconditions and incentives to try to mitigate some of that net interstate migration.

We are talking about permanent residents who have transitioned from temporary visas to permanent visas, who are looking to put down roots and who have been struggling in this marketplace and might be thinking about going to a bigger one. This is an excellent idea to try to tempt them not to pack up. It is not just my opinion. I have a professional opinion in this area, but the fact is that the academic evidence is on our side in this regard. It suggests that there is a strong correlation between housing availability and population retention.

A couple of things I dug up are worth speaking about because they are produced by local researchers. They are not about random places and far-flung jurisdictions disconnected from our reality. There are a couple of recent papers produced by people based at the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University who are studying our polity and providing us with the best information they can to help guide our decision-making.

One of those pieces of work is by Dyrting, Taylor and Shalley from 2020. It is a paper entitled 'A Life-stage approach for understanding population retention in sparsely populated areas' in the *Journal of Rural Studies*. That is specifically what we are—a sparsely populated area—which we are trying to turn around. I encourage you all to track down these resources because they are wildly instructive. In the abstract of the paper those authors make the observation that their results:

... highlight the importance of overseas born residents for their high retention rates across all life-stages, home ownership and having children resident in the Northern Territory.

This is not research about Timbuktu; it is about the Northern Territory.

A second one worth looking at is Baggen et al from 2023. The paper is entitled 'The application of machine learning to rural population migration research'. It is a novel and interesting work. I point out that it was published in a serious journal that I have never managed to be published in and have been rejected by about 100 times—*Population, Space and Place*. This research points to the importance, using Spearman correlations, of the factors in people choosing to stick around or go. The researchers tested housing affordability and availability, alongside other factors like Darwin's unique lifestyle, opportunities, cost of living, infrastructure and so forth. The key point is that if you are having a crack at it, look at the research.

We are not just shooting from the hip and coming up with ideas on the basis of it having worked once before somewhere else or being something we could do; it is a specific, considered policy response to the situation we face in the Northern Territory.

If you do not have the stomach for academic research—I appreciate not everyone does—an excellent piece of work that everybody in this House should look at, produced by the Australian Housing Urban Research Institute, is entitled 'Financing first home ownership: opportunities and challenges'. As an independent think tank, AHURI advises governments across the country on all matters housing related. AHURI will be referred to by other academic entities. Page 31 of that AHURI final report notes:

Government-instigated supply-side measures to promote home ownership were instrumental in supporting postwar growth of owner-occupation, but have since become far less common. Some innovative schemes have been initiated, though in general they remain relatively small-scale and are generally targeted at specific groups with bespoke needs.

Ours is a novel and generous scheme at a time when fewer of them exist, when it is worth taking a chance on economically, when we are in a state of terminal demographic decline and when we do not have the capacity to broker new migration arrangements with the Commonwealth Government, having demonstrated nothing but fiscal negligence for eight years.

On this side of the House we are doing what we can to demonstrate to the marketplace, media and public that grown-ups are in charge of the economy. We are spending money prudently to try to invigorate the economy in the right places.

What is the intention of our HomeGrown Territory Grant? It is clear. As I said, if members had referred to any of the explanatory materials, it would be clear to them as well. Our grants are designed to assist people to get out of the rental cycle and into home ownership, increase the supply of new dwellings, stimulate the residential construction industry and retain population by encouraging people to put down roots in the Territory.

I applaud the courage of this government in being bold on these matters. The truth is that there has been risk-averse policymaking in this place on a range of social and economic issues for a long time. The lack of imagination and courage, the failure to consult the data and the inability to treat this place with the reverence

it deserves—we are a place of lawmaking and decision-making for the citizenry of the Northern Territory—has gotten us to the point we are at.

I specifically applaud the courage of the Chief Minister in this regard, noting the contrast with her immediate predecessors and the former government's total unwillingness to face economic reality and/or demographic decline. I say that not just as theatrics, but from my personal learned and lived professional experience. My previous guise was as a public servant, trying to help the government of the day with population growth, migration and talent acquisition. I can attest to the former government's wilful blindness to our demographic decline and its inability to understand that you must stimulate residential construction, create houses and broker arrangements with the Commonwealth on migration if you do not want the Northern Territory to demographically and economically collapse.

On that basis, I am extremely grateful for the courage of the Chief Minister and this government in being willing to offer a generous scheme. Is risk attached to it? Of course it is, but have we considered that risk? Yes. That is why we are all united in pushing for this scheme.

It is early days, but there has been an encouraging amount of interest in all the categories of the HomeGrown scheme.

It has been documented but is worth reiterating that the HomeGrown Territory program provides first homebuyers with grants of \$50,000 to build or purchase a new home or \$10,000 to purchase an established home. This Bill makes legislative amendments to the 2000 Act to put those measures into effect. Additionally by administrative workaround, we have the FreshStart program that provides grants of \$30,000 for non-first homebuyers, who have already owned property, to construct or purchase a new home.

The aspiration is to stimulate supply and growth. Our hope is that by 30 September next year the considerable interest we have seen in the scheme will translate to a commensurate uptake and the purchase and/or building of new dwellings. In the first instance, given that we have only just announced the scheme and are in the midst of debating the legislation, you would not expect for there to have been a massive uptake in the construction of new houses; you would expect most movement to be in transfers on existing properties. That is the case, but there is encouraging movement in that space for first homebuyers. We are creating headroom in the market and stimulating supply in modest but important ways.

My area of professional expertise is not as an economist but a migration and population specialist, so I am comfortable saying that it is my belief that a small improvement to our net negative interstate migration would have the capacity to have a disproportionately large and positive impact on an economy of our size. Therefore, this is a worthwhile bet.

If the numbers alluded to by previous speakers manifest and we create hundreds of new houses, there will be an enormous effect. However, even if the numbers are relatively modest this will not be a policy failure; this will be a policy success. It will have been a mitigation strategy to stop people who would otherwise leave from leaving. It will compel them to stay, put their kids in school here and reinvest in our economy. It will help consumer demand.

We need people in the Northern Territory. There are lots of ways to try to attract people to the Northern Territory, and this is just one of them. More will be on their way, but for present purposes I agree with my learned colleague the Treasurer when he suggests that enabling more people to enter the housing market increases the likelihood of them staying in the Territory.

On the basis of that assertion I am pleased to commend this Bill to the Assembly.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Mr Deputy Speaker, although I understand the intent behind the First Home Owner Grant Amendment Bill and share the commitment to improving housing affordability, our economy and our population, this policy fails to address the real housing crisis in the Northern Territory—homelessness, lack of affordable rental options and limited social and public housing. This Assembly must prioritise sustainable and effective solutions over quick fixes. Although the first home owner grant seeks to provide relief, we must ask ourselves whether it will achieve its intended outcome or simply push home ownership further out of reach for the very people it aims to help.

We have heard a lot of information from the Member for Fong Lim about research and some research from the Member for Nightcliff. I agree with the Member for Fong Lim that we do not need cookie-cutter solutions; we need to do what will work for our economy and our community. However—in your own words—calculated risk and hope do not fill me with confidence. I applaud your commitment to research, but we heard in this



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

MUSICAL INSTITUTIONS &
CONTRIBUTORS

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

I acknowledge the volunteer playgroups and community services that help parents, from the creche in the West Daly region to the FaFT groups in Pine Creek and Belyuen to the newly formed playgroup in Southport. I know often you are a small group of dedicated people who go above and beyond to ensure parents of newborn babies have access to health professionals and a friendly welcoming space to visit. I thoroughly enjoy visiting and listening to the FaFT groups and the playgroups in the region, so thank you for always making me feel welcome. I wish you all a merry Christmas.

Thank you to all the staff, parents and councils of the 12 schools in the Daly electorate. I will not name them all tonight. They know who they are, and I visit them on a regular basis. I will visit them over the coming weeks leading into Christmas to thank the staff, principals and groundskeepers of the schools who do all the hard work. Thank you, and I look forward to seeing you in the next couple of weeks.

I acknowledge all the Aboriginal corporations and the hardworking ranger groups in the Daly region. A lot of work goes into protecting country and managing our environment, be it on the land or in the water. Thank you for all the work you do. I and the three other bush members on this side and the Members for Barkly and Namatjira appreciate the work that rangers do in our electorates. We know how hard and tough it can be out there, especially at this time of year with the Build-Up when it can be hot and sticky.

To all the businesses, community stores, art galleries, cafes, restaurants and tourism operators, thank you for your service to our communities and the many tourists who visit our beautiful region.

To our frontline workers—the police, fire, emergency service workers and remote clinic staff—thank you for all your work over the past year and in the upcoming holiday season. Many of you give up time with your families and loved ones to serve the community. Let us hope for an incident-free Christmas holiday period.

To my family, my partner, friends, electorate staff, the Leader of the Opposition and her staff and my colleagues in the Chamber, I wish you all a merry Christmas, a safe holiday period and a happy new year.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and merry Christmas to you. The role can be difficult, getting your head around all the standing orders, but you have done a wonderful job over the last two sittings. I will see you tomorrow, but merry Christmas.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to some musical institutions of the Northern Territory and the people who contribute to them. These people are often unrecognised; they are largely volunteers who operate in the background. They are all the people who spend so much time at the events we take for granted, making them possible, with tireless hours of rehearsals, work and practice.

I have relatively few schools in my electorate of Fong Lim, but I am fortunate that one of them is Haileybury Rendall School. I had the good fortune to attend its production of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the Willy Wonka production. I went along to it for a bit of a laugh and because I thought I should show my face, but I have to be honest with you; it was amazing. I sat there thinking that things have changed a lot since I was at school. It was a high-quality, high-calibre production.

Hats off to everyone who was involved. Specifically, I note the production team was: Ilona Martin; Felicity Pearson; Weike Li; Emma McDonald; Rebecca Thomas; Chloe Warthold; Elissa Unwin; Tineale Browne; Rebecca Adams; John Robbins; Robert Barker; Rhett Jennings; Marianne Foster; Anne McMaster; Karen Archibald; Christian Kundig; Nick Eddy; Matt McKenna; Lisa Cadd; Eva Susanto; Arabella Free; and Vicki Tilbrook.

A lot of people were involved in this production, and I would not dare try to name everybody in the cast, company and backstage crew. To the young man who played Grandpa Joe, just quietly, you stole the show. It was fantastic.

Nine young student musicians played in the pit orchestra with a bunch of professional musicians. That is seriously heavy lifting. It was quality stuff. To the nine young members of the pit orchestra, I thought you were superb and I enjoyed the music.

On a larger scale I had the opportunity to attend the BEAT Festival in September. I have a weak spot for these things; I was involved in about 10 of them when I was a kid. I would name all the schools that were involved but for the fact that I would be naming every public school in the Northern Territory—all the schools that all of you will name on this fine evening.

So much work goes into school productions. I make note of the production team: Bill Grose; Wanita McNeill; Jillian Sommerville; Angelina Tam; Jade Tiedeman; Natalie Chin; Matthew Sutton; Lyndsay Sealey; Megan Atfield; Elspeth Carnegie; Todd Williams; Bryn Wackett; Josh Grant; Rod Balaam; Samuel Gulliver; Helene Sweatman; Ben Salandan; Keefir Lewis; Brian Cullen; Dan Davies; Josh Batten; Iona Francis; Tomm Lydiard; Peter Colautti; Brian West; Niko Wajont; Neil Macknight; Tiffany Jansen; Julianne Osbourne; Nicholas Yates; Jack Tinapple; David Stephens; Sue Auld; Alisha Chen; and Jessie Aguilando.

There are so many people involved in these productions. There were four amazing hosts and a great number of phenomenal soloists. Simply shouting out to the choreography teams would take up most of my time, to say nothing of naming every school.

It is worth reflecting that the BEAT Festival has run for 45 years, and now is running also in Alice Springs and Katherine. That is amazing, and it is worth supporting, acknowledging and recognising.

The choral teachers who teach the kids all that music never get a shout-out, and they spend a billion hours getting everybody up to speed. Thank you to those choral teachers: Jennifer Putland; Peta Bartley; Martha Tozer; Sharna Crocket; Kayti Denham; Alex Bowers; Kylie Flanders; Rebecca Clarke; Nicolle Gadd; Darroch Robinson; Natalie Jacobs; Amelia Barling; Sarah Mckeiver; Leila Beale; Jordana Jack; Kris Wahlqvist; Catherine Gray; Laren Hofmeyer; Francesca Massey; Alisa Guo; Bridget Donnell; Petrina Doyle; Cecily Gregory; Sian Edeson; Leta Smith; Liz Latimer; Rachel Birkin; Matthew Lotherington; Andrew King; Michelle Allnut; Jonathan Graham; Judy Morgan; Caoimhe Dorrian; Sarah Behan; Xanthe Fowler; Kylie Worthy; Roula Thomas; Fiona Wulf; Rhiannon Horne; Yvette Aralar; Trisha Gilbert; Penthea Carmichael; Nicole Robson; and Megan Atfield.

That is just the teachers. Think about how many kids were taught to sing those songs. I am grateful to all the people who put on the BEAT production and continue to give it all the time in the day. The original choral teacher for all of them was Nora Lewis AM, whom I mention because she is such a dear mentor to me.

I thank all the people in the Darwin Chorale without whom we would have no national anthems on Remembrance Day and no carols at Carols by Candlelight at the end of this week. These are the people in the background who do a lot of the heavy lifting. To Angelina Aquino, Debbie Barnett, Kate Bedard, Trish Chin, Kelly Carne, Andrew Edwards, Pam Hibberd, David Hibbert, Michelle Jarrett, Vivienne Kleeman, Nora Lewis AM, Robin McGillivray, Chris Obst, Michael Quyn, Kathy Stoll, Caroline Thompson and Kill Williams, thank you for making that possible for us on Remembrance Day.

I will duly run out of time trying to cover all of what I wanted to cover tonight, but I point out that the Darwin Symphony Orchestra worked with the Darwin Chorale in the not-too-recent past on the Heroes concert, doing a whole lot of film score music. They are taking the music to the people. Imagine what our Northern Territory would be without the orchestra. Next year it will be on the road touring throughout—Darwin, Alice, Katherine and Tennant—as it did for years in the past. I would love to shout out to the entire orchestra, but I will not get the opportunity today and stay within time.

I point out that Jethro Llewellyn, who is an example of a young man in the Darwin Symphony Orchestra, is still at school but recently made it into the Australian Youth Orchestra. That is a real achievement; it does not happen often. The Darwin Symphony Orchestra gives people the opportunity to cut their teeth at a high level when they are young. Those opportunities are invaluable.

Another person from the Darwin Symphony Orchestra in the past and who now runs the Arafura Music Collective is Claire Kilgariff, who recently took what is ostensibly real art music to the people, playing in the Gray Community Hall and the NT Supreme Court.

It is amazing that we have these musicians who are willing to put in their time to provide the backdrop to all the events we attend.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Martin Jarvis, Darwin's original maestro who set up the Darwin Symphony Orchestra and under whose auspices I played a long time ago. I congratulate him on his screening of *Mozart's Sister*, the documentary built on his research regarding the work of Mozart's sister.

I had the good fortune of being on the Territory Muster Tour with the Darwin Symphony Orchestra back in 1994 when Martin Jarvis was conducting. One of the other people on that tour was a guy called Mark Smith who is a phenomenal percussionist and drummer whom you see around town. He was my roommate on that tour, and all these years later he is the head of Music NT.

I mention that because no speech of mine goes without mentioning something economic. I encourage you all to look at the work Music NT commissioned through the University of Tasmania which looks at the economic and cultural value of live music in the Northern Territory. It is phenomenal. We get an enormous amount of economic return on our investment for having live music to support all our festivals and programs.

The Northern Territory Music School, under the auspices of Bill Grose, does phenomenal work. From the fledgling days of the Darwin Combined Schools Concert Band, it now runs multiple orchestras. Last week I had the good fortune to watch the end-of-year concerts for the Da Capo, Con Moto and Apogee ensembles. I cannot overstate the value of public music education to create not just musicians but also people who perform better academically. It was one of the real jewels in the crown of the Northern Territory education system. I hope with time that we can polish that jewel to be what it should be.

I will probably have the highlight of my week tomorrow when at lunchtime I get to join in the Stuart Park Primary School Band and do what I can in the trombone section under the baton of Natalie Chin and Genevieve Meehan and under the auspices of Sylvia Siskamanis and Principal Leisha Crompton, who bizarrely enough I also went to a music camp with about a billion years ago.

There are so many musical institutions that I would love to shout out to if I could that provide life and vitality to our city year-round. The Hot and Cold Big Band plays every week at the Darwin Railway Club with all the dancers.

I could pick from a million quotes, but in the words of Plato:

Music is a moral law. It gives a soul to the Universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, a charm to sadness, gaiety and life to everything.

I thank all the hardworking musicians and musical institutions of the Northern Territory that provide life, colour, gaiety and the backdrop to all the events that we can participate in.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I have wonderful news of a Northern Territory award winner from the Arnhem electorate; the 2025 Northern Territory Australian of the Year, Grant Ngulmiya Nundhirribala. I was proud to see Grant win that award just a few weeks ago. I spoke about him in the October sittings, and I must fully declare that Grant is my cousin.

I am proud that Grant will go to Canberra on 25 January to be part of the national Australian of the Year Awards as the Northern Territory's Australian of the Year candidate, with three other amazing Territorians who will represent the Northern Territory at those prestigious awards.

I am proud of the work that Grant has done, doing amazing tours of his solo album and in his career as a musician, but he also gives so much of his personal time to be one of our cultural songmen and leaders not just in the Numbulwar south-east Arnhem pocket but also across East Arnhem. It is a huge commitment to have a musical career and be touring from a very remote part of Australia, going Territory-wide, Australia-wide and international. He has been to amazing countries recently, touring and working with international orchestras and producing amazing and unique sounds that a lot of Australians and international audiences are captivated by when they hear Grant's music.

We were fortunate to hear Grant sing here when he and other family members from the Nundhirribala Red Flag Clan, my mum's clan of Numbulwar, sung me into the Chamber for this seat here at the opening of parliament for the 15th Legislative Assembly.

Congratulations, Grant, on being the category winner. All the best for January, but I am sure I will see you before then. I place that on the formal record not just on behalf of the electorate as a proud local member but also as a proud family member.

There are many people to thank towards the end of this year. I was fortunate in the redistribution of electorate boundaries to pick up new areas, which I am learning about and look forward to being a dedicated and present local member for. I am learning about their needs and concerns and getting ideas of how to make the different areas I now represent in the Arnhem electorate even better. I retained some amazing parts of the Territory that I am fortunate and honoured to represent in this place.

I give a big shout-out to the whole of the Arnhem electorate, which has expanded: Manyallaluk community; Barunga; Wugularr; Bulman; Weemol; Gapuwiyak; Tindal RAAF base; Mataranka; Mulgan town camp; Jilkminggan; Minyerri; Urapunga; Ngukurr; Numbulwar; Milyakburra on Bickerton Island; the Groote Eylandt



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS

WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

I have seen some of these notices, and they boggle the mind of any long-term Territorian. They were expecting landholders to do compliance to eradicate all gamba plants within 10 or 15 metres of the boundary by the end of February.

Some of those listening to or reading this may not be aware, but February in the NT is the middle of the monsoon. I do not know how they were expecting landholders to get out, because if you drove a tractor onto that land at that time of year, you would be bogged to the axles. You would not be going anywhere. You would be walking around pulling it out. You cannot drive a LandCruiser, as it would get bogged. Unless you had a hose about three kilometres long for some of these properties, good luck. That is what they were doing.

Instead of helping landholders and supporting them to manage gamba in a productive way, they went around using the big hand of government to whack them and say, 'Here is a fine. You must do the impossible; walk around in the middle of the monsoon and try to pull out the big clumps by hand, or we will fine you. We will use the big stick of government to perform enforcement. We will not look at helping you by increasing the budget for this useful program.'

I wanted to bring that to the attention of the Assembly because many people in the Litchfield area I spoke to were so disappointed. In 2020 the former Chief Minister was going around making such a big song and dance—Boundless Possible, the comeback capital of the Territory. He said the Gamba Army would save us from the green bulldozer of gamba grass. All we got was a few public servants in a shiny car driving around writing tickets, which was not useful.

I thank the Member for Gwoja for bringing this motion to the House. We are all Territorians who love and support our environment. It is one of the great things about the Territory. We all love fishing and getting away on the weekend for a camp. We need the environment, and we need it to be maintained for future generations but also need to balance that with sustainable development.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, it has been a great day for bipartisanship. What a pleasure to be in the Chamber on a day when we have been able to work constructively across the floor to try to execute a positive outcome for the Northern Territory in relation to the preceding motion.

I welcome the motion and thank the mover for giving us the opportunity to think about environmental protections, specifically recognising the importance of safeguarding the Territory environment for future generations and in support of our Territory lifestyle. We can all agree we want to live in a Northern Territory where we can enjoy our natural environment. There is nobody here who wants to wantonly destroy what we have in terms of landscape and amenity.

We are pleased to reaffirm support for our critical environmental protections. What is there to say? We are not seeking to tamper with our protections; we are seeking to maintain our environmental status quo. We are seeking to break the status quo in relation to our economic malaise. The two can happen at the same time. There is no reason for us to fear sustainable, economic development under the auspices of all or any of what we have been proposing to this point—likewise, that this motion seeks to have us commit not to undermine our strong legislative and regulatory framework to environmental protections is a welcome development.

The question of my political leanings is a recurrent fixation of the opposition, so let me deal with it for the benefit of contextualising my contribution to this debate. Let me freely declare that whilst I was a member of the World Wildlife Fund at age 10, I am not a member of the Greens Party. I do, however, applaud the sole member of the crossbench who has consistently provided evidence relying on actual data and research as opposed to the opposition who thus far demonstrated no such attention to detail in any regard. There has been lots of talk about evidence and data well into our second sittings day. Having beseeched opposition members to look into something in practical terms, there still is not a fact or figure of substance, just obfuscation, motherhood statements and grandstanding. I find it flabbergasting that opposition members could get to this point with so little information to rely upon in building all or any of their arguments.

Meanwhile, the Member for Nightcliff has logical consistency to her arguments with what she provides by way of evidence and data. That said, the key is that I respectfully agree to disagree with the Member for Nightcliff's conclusions and her substantive assessment of a range of issues. It is possible to look at the same set of information and respectfully disagree.

We are looking at the information and data, whereas the entirety of the opposition chooses to be wantonly blind to the reality of our demographic and economic decline and, indeed, the details of what we are putting forward in relation to our legislation on improving economic prospects.

This year would have marked the 20th year of my association with the Oxford University Centre for the Environment. That is where I was based before I came here. I mention it because it is relevant to establishing bona fides on this debate. The insinuation and assertion is consistently that we are all pro-development monsters over here who are out for all our monopoly money buddies, desperately trying to dig up every tree with every bulldozer at our disposal.

The fact is I was based at a place which is one of the world centres for research on climate change, carbon capture and storage and climate modelling. Even prior to my association with that place I was based—fortuitously, on the basis of the excellent public schooling education I received under a strong and stable CLP government for 27 years—at the University of Sydney in the school of geography where, again, sustainable economic development, mining sustainably, protecting our waterways, looking after our built environment and urban planning are matters of deep consideration and have been of great interest to me over many years.

One of the places associated with that School of Geosciences at the University of Sydney was the Australian Mekong Resource Centre which is renowned as a place of research, discussion and debate on development and environmental issues in the Mekong Delta region. Why do I mention the Mekong Delta? Because we are talking about water and rivers which we are all concerned about.

It is not just me who wants to protect our waterways; it is our many members who would be devastated at the loss of the capacity to catch a fish in the Northern Territory. We are not looking to exploit our natural resources to the detriment of the Northern Territory; we are looking to sustainably develop our economy and provide the regulatory frameworks with which to do so.

The point is that opposition members have no unique claim to being defenders of the environment, nor can they assume any specific moral high ground on issues pertaining to environmental protection. It is a shared and common aspiration for us to sustainably develop the Northern Territory whilst not damaging our environment. For that reason I reiterate that I welcome the motion and opportunity to debate it.

As I pointed out only yesterday in the reflections that this House had on the 50th anniversary of this Legislative Assembly, one of the ministers who spoke to provide context on our history was Hon Daryl Manzie. He weaved in noteworthy remarks regarding the foundations upon which our economic growth was predicated, including laying the preconditions for sustainable resource development, being in gas and mining generally, and providing the regulatory frameworks that have to date ensured we have been blessed to create economic growth using mining and resource extraction without compromising our lifestyle and environmental protections.

We are fortunate to have had virtually no incidents of catastrophe in the Northern Territory over our period of development. People have fought for protections and for development, and they had the opportunity to have their say. People will continue to have the opportunity to have their say under the auspices of this government and the frameworks we provide.

There have been developments since the 1980s, including many positive ones provided by both sides of government in the Northern Territory. That is great and how it should be. Frankly, I am delighted that Labor did useful work in this regard, alongside driving the economy into the ground over the last eight years. It is fortuitous that we have accelerated an agenda that may have been dated in some regard and that we have a foundation upon which to sustainably develop the economy.

I have personal experiences in and around decision-making in the major project space in the Northern Territory. This is key because it is clear that the opposition and the crossbench to a large extent have a real lack of understanding of what came out of the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission report about the creation of the commission structures, under its auspices to streamline and fast-track major projects within a regulatory environment that was still robust, to provide major project delivery on any front.

The reason we have had such poor execution and delivery on major projects is that, undoubtedly, duplication exists, as does a lack of clarity on decision-making authority. We have a series of public service structures that were put in place over the eight years of the last government which resulted in nobody being able to make a decision definitively or pick up the ball to try to run it into the tryline. That is part of the reason we do not have any major projects to show for ourselves, other than works in progress.

The Territory Coordinator proposal is genuinely a sensible, good-faith, well-foreshadowed attempt to address a large part of this. The now Chief Minister introduced a private member's Bill in relation to the Territory Coordinator more than four years ago. There have been two parliaments' worth of discussion in this area,

and a great deal of thought has been put into this. I believe it to be a sensible good-faith attempt to address a lot of these issues.

One of the great concerns in the House is about gas. We are talking about the gas industry in broad terms without much reference to detail. I implore you to read the document in my hand, which is the October 2017 ACIL Allen Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory, otherwise known as 'The Economic Impacts of a Potential Shale Gas Development in the Northern Territory'. I bring this up because lots of people have an opinion that they are positive about this document, but I am not convinced many people have read it cover to cover. I will be honest with you, I have not read it cover to cover yet either, but on the basis of the decisions that we have to make in this place it is incumbent on everyone in this House to know the detail. It is clear that people are picking bits out of it as and when it suits them to try to defend or discredit the idea of sustainable economic development in the Northern Territory.

The contrast of opinions on it reflects that it has been poorly read, but I confess that I am not the person who sourced this document. I took the opportunity to meet with people from Frack Free NT, because they wanted to voice their concerns in relation to a range of these matters. I am not the only one; many of my colleagues are making time to consult and hear a diversity of opinions. Sometimes we agree; sometimes we disagree, but we are trying to respectfully take on all the opinions and assuage reasonable concerns.

I met with Frack Free NT, in good faith, which provided me this document, which has provided me something to do over Christmas. It is disappointing that other institutional advocates for the environment have clearly compromised their own integrity in recent times by trying to fudge the facts and figures and/or the narrative. It is timely and serendipitous that today in the *Australian* there is an article titled, 'Serpent and a total Croc: emails expose collusion'.

I have friends who are anthropologists and scientists who work in related fields. When people fudge the figures, it discredits their work as well. It is about making sure we look at robust work, read it, take it on board and can balance sustainable economic development with environmental protections.

I confess that the other favour Frack Free NT did for me the other day was drawing to my attention this briefing note produced by none other than the Environmental Defenders Office. This briefing note on the role of the Territory Coordinator, dated 31 October 2024, is a great piece of work.

Interestingly, by the time I finished reading it I was much more comforted by the idea of the direction we are taking and the Territory Coordinator model. It points out a range of things that do not seem to be coming up in this debate at all in relation to the real scope of the Territory Coordinator's powers and the fact that it is not a superhuman Wizard of Oz but a statutory body that will be informed by other arms of government. We are vesting in a statutory body the capacity to finally make a decision to move things forward. I read nothing in this that suddenly horrified me and made me think we are dismantling democracy. We are trying to streamline a process and create efficiencies in a system that clearly is gridlocked and replete with inefficiencies.

A key thing to note is how the Territory Coordinator model will work with federal laws. It is clear that the Northern Territory Government does not have the power to modify, exclude or override Commonwealth laws which apply to projects. These include approvals under a range of Commonwealth legislation.

We are seeking to do our part of the heavy lifting of promoting sustainable economic development whilst protecting our environment. We are not seeking to autocratically dictate what should happen, where it should happen and why it should happen or to discredit any subject matter expert who contributes information.

I encourage you all to look at this document. By the end of reading it, I thought, 'This is great; these guys are on the right track.' We can respectfully agree to disagree, but we need to be looking at the same information. It is not possible to have these debates meaningfully unless we are willing to hear a plurality of voices and respectfully debate the issues.

In relation to the Territory Coordinator, the Chief Minister has been fair in providing opportunity for people to express concern, dissent or offer support. The consultation and review process has been clearly and publicly articulated, and there is every reason to believe if we follow that process, everyone will have the opportunity to contribute to the debate and these matters will come before this parliament again.

I am supportive of the proposition and motion put forward, and I see no logical inconsistencies with being supportive of this government's efforts to try to streamline economic activity in this polity.

My position on energy security is in the public domain. As far as I am concerned, we have an abundance of sun and gas, and we should seek to make the best possible use of both of those things.

Recent announcements by our Deputy Chief Minister point to our commitment to continuing to support solar technologies as part of a holistic approach to ensuring energy security. We recognise that large-scale solar generation supported by adequate battery storage is an important component of a stable and cost-efficient electricity system.

I am especially encouraged by the detail provided by the minister in recent weeks on our renewable energy hub. Our commitment to that renewable energy hub involves the co-location of up to six large-scale solar farms. Those farms would be capable of generating 200-odd megawatts of renewable energy alongside a battery energy storage system.

Mr CHARLS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move that an extension of time be granted to the member.

Motion agreed to.

Dr RAHMAN: The renewable energy hub will be capable of generating 180 to 210 megawatts of renewable energy, alongside a battery energy storage system, all on a single site. This is proximate to existing network infrastructure. That site is 940 hectares of Crown land located on the west side of Finn Road, just 19 kilometres south of Palmerston and four kilometres north of Berry Springs. The electricity produced in that hub will be fed directly into the Darwin–Katherine grid, supplying clean and renewable power to Territory households and businesses.

We are trying to balance things without turning this into an ideological stomping ground. We are utilising our natural resources, which are sun and gas in abundance. It makes good sense for us to have mature debates about utilising all of these in pursuit of energy security for the Northern Territory.

I am saddened by suggestions that we are all climate denialists and haters over here. To hear the word ‘hate’ is frankly nonsense and unfair. The reality and the rhetoric of climate change decision-making is different.

The fact of the matter is that the 1.5-degree targets on climate change and temperature change were long ago abandoned by the real decision-makers globally and top-tier scientists involved in those processes. I have not been to every COP, but I have been to climate change forums where these matters are discussed openly, frankly and transparently with a view of ensuring we do not destroy our planet while trying to do the right thing by future generations.

Multilateral spaces within which we have these discussions about trying to mitigate global climate change are the forums where these meaningful conversations should be had. You will find increasingly in multilateral spaces that the conversations are leaning towards pragmatism. It is not the overarching statements or headlines coming out at the end of COP summits that are of most interest to people; it is the important sidebar discussions where pragmatic solutions are made to try to mitigate climate change and create sustainable economic growth.

It is a reality that this government has chosen to no longer have a specific climate change portfolio. I do not think there is anything problematic in that decision insofar as the last climate change portfolio was not making great leaps and bounds in mitigating climate change in any practical way on any scale.

To what effect do we have a ministry—to what end and purpose? It makes no sense to create unnecessary administration and bureaucracy. We have not dispensed with caring about the environment or wanting to protect the Northern Territory’s natural resources simply because we have organisationally restructured the public service to ensure that there are better reporting lines and greater clarity for decision-making.

The Territory Coordinator model is an expansion of precisely that. It is the continuation of a model that has been in play from a time when we had ministers with high-level subject matter expertise surrounded by advisers with even greater expertise to the devolution of that model, creating greater powers in the public service and greater layers within the system to speed up processes whilst adding people to the equation, like commissioners. It is a model now where we are trying to put everything in a one-stop shop to make sensible decisions about cutting through paperwork and tape of all forms.

Climate refugees were referred to as well. As someone who has worked in both the climate and refugee space, we are playing pretty fast and loose with some of those terms. Yes, I am concerned about climate

refugees. However, I will be honest with you: I am concerned about them in Bangladesh, not the Barkly. Those are the places that will have people who are imminently facing loss of life and livelihood because of the downstream consequences of global climate change.

We have much more pressing socioeconomic matters to address in our remote and country areas of Australia and the Northern Territory specifically before we start worrying about creating climate refugees from south of the Berrimah Line. A modicum of perspective is warranted. What we have had to a large extent today—not entirely but to a large extent—is a bit of activism for activism’s sake. We have had grandstanding; a lazy conflation of issues—specifically by the Labor opposition—fearmongering and an extremely lazy, if well-intentioned, voicing of concern.

I note that other members of the House on the crossbench raised some valid and well-informed concerns. I respectfully disagree with some of their conclusion. However, I find it galling that we keep hearing this nonsense from the Labor opposition about the model we are putting forward trampling democracy and ensuring that nobody can make a decision or be heard, with all-powerful Wizard of Oz-like figures who will determine the fate of the entire jurisdiction.

The Territory Coordinator is a statutory office, not a person who will singularly make decisions. The sad reality is within government there is considerable red, green and, probably most importantly, beige tape. The proof of those obstructions existing is work previously conducted within NTG. My Cabinet colleagues and former Labor members can dig up that work if they so choose. They will find that work on all the regulatory hurdles in this place has been buried, as with a range of other problematic information produced by good public servants in large numbers over the last eight years.

We will ensure that the gas industry is safe and strongly regulated as its presence grows in the Northern Territory. The onshore petroleum industry is regulated under Territory and Commonwealth laws, and we will ensure that continues to happen in line with community expectations. Do not forget just how many regulators are involved in the safe regulation of the industry. We have the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, the independent Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority, the Environment Regulation Division, the Water Resources Division, NT Bushfires, the weeds unit and the Heritage branch.

The reality is we have a regulatory framework to govern the onshore gas industry, and it is designed to ensure that petroleum activities are carried out in a way that reduces risks to a minimum. Through a combination of risk assessments and safety standards, environmental management and community engagement, those regulations will minimise potential hazards to the environment, public health and workers whilst allowing for responsible development of the petroleum industry.

We are here to talk about the environment writ large, which is bigger than just one industry, person or set of laws. You must look at the entire landscape, and there is a lack of faith in or appreciation for Commonwealth environmental legislation and oversight.

I return to where I started in noting that it has been a great day for bipartisanship, in my opinion. Therefore, I welcome the motion. Further to that, I, along with my CLP colleagues, look forward to continuing to support the NT’s framework for environmental protections and promote models for sustainable development.

Mr MALEY (Agriculture and Fisheries): Madam Speaker, before I get started I pick up on one point that the Member for Fong Lim forgot when he was talking about the government regulating the gas industry.

The gas industry will regulate the gas industry because it has big companies, and they have an environmental licence—a social licence—to look after the environment and their workers. They know if there is an environmental issue they will be held to account by the government and their investors. Their investors are looking for companies that will have a well-managed corporate structure that will look after the environment and, of course, make money.

The gas industry occurs not only in the Northern Territory but also across Australia and the globe. Investors in this industry are looking for investment across the globe, so we are in a competitive global market. I have been to the Beetaloo and spoken to general managers and major investors in the gas and mining industry, and they all raise the same thing with me. They care about the environment. They want to make sure their industry moves forward while looking after the environment and their assets because—I am not sure if you have seen a fracking fleet, but it is a lot—there is a lot of money and technology involved in that fleet. The industry looks after itself.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

CYCLONE TRACY 50TH ANNIVERSARY

THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

From this destruction arose a story of resilience and renewal. On 28 February 1975 the Darwin Reconstruction Commission was established, and by mid-1978 Darwin's population returned to pre-cyclone levels.

Importantly, we have learnt much from what Cyclone Tracy has taught us. We have improved building codes, and Tracy led to the introduction of more stringent building standards across Australia resulting in structures that are better equipped to withstand extreme weather events. These changes have made buildings more resilient, potentially reducing damage by up to 85% in the event of a similar cyclone.

We have enhanced disaster management. The cyclone highlighted the need for improved emergency management processes, leading to increased public awareness and preparedness measures. This resulted in better warning systems, response strategies and recovery efforts.

Our engineering standards have improved. Cyclone Tracy demonstrated that buildings with engineering input into the design and construction performed considerably better. This led to the incorporation of engineering principles in housing design and construction, improving overall resilience. There is ongoing research and analysis.

The disaster sparked continuous research into wind engineering and building performance during extreme events. Regular reanalysis of design and wind speeds in cyclone-prone regions using up-to-date information and techniques continues to improve our understanding and preparedness.

The experience of Cyclone Tracy has changed how Australians handle disasters together, fostering a stronger sense of community support and unity in the face of natural disasters. These lessons from Cyclone Tracy have saved lives in subsequent cyclones and continue to shape Australia's approach to disaster preparedness and response.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of this catastrophic event, we remember not only the devastation but also the indomitable spirit of Territorians and all Australians who came together to rebuild. Cyclone Tracy remains a powerful reminder of our vulnerability to nature's forces and our capacity for resilience in the face of adversity. Today Darwin stands as a modern city, its buildings designed to endure the harsh climate of northern Australia. It is a living testament to human perseverance and ingenuity.

As we move forward let us carry the lessons of Cyclone Tracy with us, ensuring we remain prepared, resilient and united in the face of future challenges.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I thank everyone in the House for their heartfelt reflections on Cyclone Tracy.

My reflection is a personal one. My family originally came to Australia in 1968 and emigrated permanently in 1971. This was my maternal grandparents, mum, aunt and Uncle Nazmul—N-A-Z-M-U-L. I spell my uncle's name because I will tell his story, and he recounted to me the other day, 'If you say anything, get my name spelt right, because on every memorial it is spelt Maznul'. I said, 'All right; I will see what I can do.'

For the first time since coming here after escaping war, my family decided to make a return journey to Bangladesh to visit other family members. Fortuitously, my maternal grandparents, my mum and my aunt went to Bangladesh for Christmas 1974, leaving behind my Uncle Nazmul to hold the fort—a 17-year-old kid to mow the lawn and look after the house, who was told it would probably be fairly uneventful and all would be well.

He continued to go from their place in Nakara to work at Bunnings. He said that he had no plans for Christmas Eve, so a mate of his, Alan Morris, said to him, 'There's a birthday party on. Let's go there tonight.' Because they were young, cavalier and did not know what cyclone warnings were about, they thought that sounded like a reasonably good idea.

They headed off to what was then the Berrimah Tavern, now the Hidden Valley Tavern, for a birthday do. All through the night cyclone warnings kept coming through, and they continued not to take them seriously until events wrapped up around midnight and the wind was starting to howl. He recalls the story of them both being in a car, driving towards the house in Nakara and suddenly realising the car was moving sideways and not forward. The winds were so strong even at that time that they were being dragged onto the median strip. That is when they got a sense that something serious was happening.

From 1 am through 2 am the wind howled, and people started to worry in a serious way. The family of six, the Morris family, kindly took in my uncle that night. They all huddled together, initially in the bathroom until that blew apart, at which point they all shifted. I remember him saying that they thought they were safe and secure in the bathroom with everything set up and then the roof blew off, so they were sitting there literally watching the sky fall in from around the four walls. They had to evacuate from the bathroom.

All seven of them ended up in a single toilet holding the walls together all night with their backs to the wall—a la Star Wars—trying to keep them from caving in. He said it was a long and surreal night. The presiding memory he has in terms of audio landscape was of car horns going crazy because houses and other things were falling on the cars. There were alarms and sirens going off all night long.

Finally, at about 5 am, my uncle recalls walking out with his hosts onto the streets. He said it was like an episode of one of those television shows where they walk out after an apocalypse wondering whether they are the last people left on Earth. Everyone started slowly creeping out at 5 am, and it was still muggy and spitting with rain. Suddenly, they heard small pockets of people coming out saying, 'Now what?'

They were proximate to the area of Jingili, Nakara and the Airport Hotel, so they decided, en masse, to wander to the Airport Hotel because that was the best bet they had. A bit like those episodes where you find other survivors of some apocalyptic fate, there were people standing at the door ready to welcome them with open arms, saying, 'Come in. There's food and shelter.' The Salvation Army was doing its bit.

They ended up staying there for three days and two nights. In amongst it all, people forget that when disasters like this happen there is all manner of knock-on effects. There was a mass outbreak of food poisoning at the time, which people forget. When there is not a lot of sanitation, that is a real challenge.

Other than trips to the old Darwin hospital at Myilly Point, there was not much movement happening while people tried to find their feet again. Eventually they made their way from the Airport Hotel to the actual airport, because by this stage the dictate was out that able-bodied men should stick around to help rebuild and younger people under 18, as well as women and children, should evacuate and get on planes to wherever they could go.

My family had arrived only a few years earlier; they did not know anyone anywhere else. My 17-year-old uncle did not know anyone in the rest of the country, so he arbitrarily picked Brisbane. Before he knew it, he was on a plane to Brisbane, having vaguely heard in the past from my grandfather that we knew somebody in Brisbane. Before he had gotten on the plane he wandered back to the house in Nakara. The house was long gone, but he could identify it from the curtains. Somehow some curtains had survived and from those curtains he could piece together a few bits of clothes. With \$50 in his pocket, some mismatched clothing and a curtain, he made his way to Brisbane.

Communication was not what it is now, so for a good period of time my grandparents did not know whether he was dead or alive because they were on the other side of the planet. My uncle was able to connect with the local refugee centre in Brisbane and then with the local mosque. It was a reminder for me that there are so many people around Australia who contributed to helping Territorians in the wake of the disaster, and we should be grateful for their contribution.

My grandparents, mum and aunt eventually worked out that my uncle was alive and in Brisbane, so when they returned from Bangladesh they immediately went there. They then wanted to come straight back to Darwin but unfortunately had nothing to come back to, so they had to detour via Canberra, which is why I have to keep confessing to being born in Canberra, rather than in Darwin which was probably how it should have been.

They eventually returned to Darwin for opportunity, not least because this was a place willing to offer them a housing commission home, work and an opportunity to rebuild and make a contribution enduringly and permanently. That is why my family came back and stayed for the long haul.

It is wonderful to hear all the stories, and it is difficult to hear a lot of the stories of hardship at that time. I know it is still a triggering and traumatising event for a lot of people still 50 years later. I would say this as a glimmer of hope: my uncle's presiding recollection of the whole thing was of the strength, courage and good humour of a lot of Territorians who, having survived that night, all banded together and said, 'Well, that probably will not happen again, will it?'

It is important to know the laconic wit, humour and Territorian character shone through at a time of crisis. I hope that we will be prepared in future and resilient in the face of adversity. I am grateful for the fact that

we have a legislature that is also 50 years old to ensure we have the resilient community and structures in place to look after the Northern Territory should anything of that scale ever befall us again.

Thank you for the opportunity to share that small anecdote, and thank you to everyone who has contributed with anecdotes of their own in relation to Cyclone Tracy.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge 50 years since Cyclone Tracy and acknowledge the survivors.

In 1974 I was coming home from a boarding school in Nhulunbuy, Dhupuma College. I remember being out in the bush with my family on country at Mirrngatja on the edge of the eastern end of the Arafura Swamp. I had flown home for the holidays, and we were living in a paperbark hut. Every season we would move around country from higher hills where we have a bark hut and towards the swamp, an area where we created paperbark huts. In some areas during the Wet Season we would go back to higher hills and find shelters that we could live around, and that is how we survived—by preparing. Our elders and leaders knew what to expect during those times.

At Mirrngatja on Christmas Eve the sky was clear, and the weather had been sucked into Darwin towards the west. It was beautiful dry weather, and it was a surprise to hear that a cyclone had hit Darwin. On Christmas Day we were working on the airstrip, and I turned on the radio. There were no phones and no communications, but we had a radio to listen to music while I was working, helping to clear the airstrip for a missionary to come over to bring in rations. During that time people were hunting crocodiles and we were trading.

I turned on the radio to listen to music. The ABC news came on to announce that Darwin had been flattened by a cyclone. I turned around to my father and said, 'Dad, Darwin has been flattened'. He and a lot of people used to walk from Milingimbi and Galiwinku towards Darwin and back again, so they knew where the places were. They lived in Bagot community and used to walk back and forth, so he knew. It was surprising to hear what had happened. It was a shock for them, and they were worried for all the people in Darwin. At that time, I vaguely remember turning on the radio again and hearing there were 45 lives lost. It was serious, and we started to worry about people from our communities, especially in Bagot and other areas.

Later we heard there was family living in Darwin, which was another worry; would there be bad news from Darwin for our community? As there was no communication, we had to wait to hear what had happened. Later we heard lots of people had stayed in Bagot. People told stories afterwards about how frightening it was. Sometime later I heard the story of a fridge being found on the Winnellie water tank, which told us how powerful it was. When I drove past Winnellie and saw the height of the water tower, which is still there, they said that is where a big fridge from a house had been blown to. That was a serious matter.

My wife said her family was in Darwin at the hospital at Myilly Point. There were many women brought to Darwin to deliver babies when the cyclone hit. They were frightened and did not know what was happening.

When people lived in the bush most cyclones and heavy storms that came through were not seen as a threat because often they brought good hunting and places where we could gather food. We knew there was shelter close by in the caves. There are gaps between houses. The trees and hills are not as bulky, big and dangerous like we saw with iron and bits of timber flying around here, which was life-threatening. Even cars can be flying around as debris.

People used to know where we could go to shelter in strong weather. There was not much debris that could fly around. People gathered wild honey from cracks of fallen tree branches. There were berries and other stuff that we lived on. As I said, it was not as hazardous as the cars and other heavy material. Before housing we could find shelters in the rocks and stuff on Earth.

Today we need to make sure that we have safe shelters when this happens. We need to be prepared, as the ancestors were, and look after our community. In remote communities we need proper permanent shelters. Preparation steps include our community leaders being ready for storm surges and cyclones. In places like Nhulunbuy we need the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) to have manned weather stations so we can be prepared.

The experience of those who survived Tracy has informed the protections we now have. It caused great devastation and tragedy, so it is important that we learn from that experience so that our communities are protected and made safe into the future.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
of **AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

**TREASURY MID YEAR REPORT &
AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT TO
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

As I mentioned in my maiden speech, I was born on Christmas Day. Therefore, it is fitting that I close my speech with some inspiring words of optimism from someone else born on this day:

*If life seems jolly rotten
There's something you've forgotten
And that's to laugh and smile and dance and sing
When you're feeling in the dumps
Don't be silly chumps
Just purse your lips and whistle, that's the thing
And
Always look on the bright side of life*

I wish all members and staff of the Legislative Assembly a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, what a fantastic segue to come from the Member for Karama's reflection of always looking on the bright side of life because I will speak to you about looking on the bright side of our financial fortunes.

Today a couple of pieces of important financial reporting came out. While many of my hardworking colleagues were being accessible to people in the mall at lunchtime, I am pleased to note that members of our government also made time to hear the Auditor-General's report to the Legislative Assembly explained in detail.

The 2024–25 Mid-Year Report reinforces and reiterates a lot of what was foreshadowed in the Treasurer's Annual Financial Report in October. I am sorry to say that there is not particularly good news in it for any of us. Over the Christmas break if you are looking for light reading, I encourage you to take a bit of time to work through this because it will give you a good picture of where things are at.

One figure I draw out of this new information is that our population growth in the year ending June this year has become even worse. Of all the facts and figures that I have given you, I hate to report that it is still getting worse. It is now a 0.7% year-on-year change at a time when we have been spruiking that we will have 1.1% population growth. In fact, we need 2.5% year-on-year population growth to support any of our economic aspirations.

It is a serious issue. What is even more serious is that this document, the 2024–25 Mid-Year Report, will confirm that net interstate migration is this year at a historic low; it is the worst it has ever been at this point.

Mrs Carlson: Why is that?

Dr RAHMAN: Why is that? I take the interjection from the Member from Wanguri.

In truth, it may correlate with the economic policy choices of the last government—the last remnants of the last government period are covered in this data. It is time for us to draw a line in the sand, move forward and do what we can on this side to improve those figures. I will not speak any further about that report today; I will let you look at it in your own time.

I want to spend a bit more time on the Auditor-General's Report to the Legislative Assembly November 2024. This is important because it is an independent assessment of what our public service does. This independent assessment goes above and beyond, is not politicised and makes important observations that I think are worth looking at for everyone.

This report has the results of audits, key findings and financial performance of various entities for the year ending 30 June 2024 and entities, mainly in the education sector, for the preceding calendar year. The scope of the efforts in this report are confined to what we can do under auspices of the *Audit Act*, and that may be something worth reviewing in the future, noting that there is significant disparity between what the NT Auditor-General can do and what Auditors-General can do in just about every other state and territory.

Audit coverage of general government sector revenue covers only 34% of what we do in revenue; it is only \$2.6bn of \$7.7bn that the Auditor-General looks at in terms of whether it has been well allocated and well earned. Likewise, coverage of general government expenditure is only 32%—\$2.7bn of \$8.3bn.

What then of our operating performance? What is the assessment by the Auditor-General? The first thing to note is that our net operating balance in 2022–23 was a modest surplus, but again it was attributable to GST recalculations—basically a rising national pool and the Northern Territory share improving.

In 2023–24 there was a \$638m deficit, and that is about employee expenses, back payments in enterprise agreements and specifically the cost of agency and medical staff and overtime costs—things that I have drawn attention to before that are bankrupting our system. It is stuff we cannot ignore for much longer; that is the brutal truth of it.

In revenue and expenditure there is a growing gap. The important thing to understand is that the linear extrapolations of the lines between revenue and expenditure are getting wider and have been since 2016, which probably speaks for itself. Revenue year on year is at 4%, whereas expenditure grows at 5% annually. We must bring those lines closer together. There was a point where they intersected, and that was a long time ago.

Public sector staffing has grown by 12% over the last decade, which is not commensurate with population growth, even remotely. Our population growth has been less than 4%, and our public sector growth has been in excess of 12%. Employee expenditure went up by 50% from 2014 to 2024. Of greatest concern to me—I believe it should be of great concern to all of you—is the consistent gaps in that period between the budgeted and the actual and the one, two and three-year forward estimates.

Every year we say that we will fix it next year, the year after or the year after that. Then we come back and say, 'We blew the ceiling off it again'. Something is not right there, and the Auditor-General is asking us to take that seriously and look at it.

Our total cash deficit is \$771m, and our liabilities are a staggering \$9bn in borrowings in the general government sector, but the real travesty is that interest on loans and advances is now \$328m. That is up from \$290m last year; that is a lot of interest. Honestly, unless we tackle it headfirst, we will be in real trouble soon.

I will not say more about these facts and figures; I simply implore all of you to please take the time to look at these documents, which take a lot of time, effort and energy to produce and to communicate. They are frequently not looked at with any real effort.

One of the reasons we have such a large amount of interest payable is that over time we have focused on spending on infrastructure, some of which clearly has not manifested and has not been necessary. It is the source of a lot of our financial woes. The pursuit of ventures of vanity rather than essential and critical infrastructure in some places is why we are having conversations about where we will find the money to underground powerlines or rebuild suburban infrastructure.

In addition to essential and critical infrastructure it is important to think about enabling infrastructure, which is the stuff we need to get a leg up to the next level. In the interests of it being the last sitting day, I will not cite literature. However, the urban planning literature will tell you that if you want a strong head on a body, you need a strong neck. The metaphor is one in relation to Darwin CBD, Darwin itself and what leads into it. Fortuitously, I am the member for the neck; Fong Lim and the Stuart Highway corridor leading into the city, even on the Tiger Brennan side, is an area that has fallen apart in terms of investment in enabling infrastructure over a long period. I commit to you that I will be fighting for that in the year coming. Unless we stabilise and strengthen the neck, we will not be able to prop up the head or the body of the Northern Territory.

I look forward to us working collectively in the year ahead towards rebuilding the economy over the coming years. I see glimmers of hope in this place about the capacity to collaborate. I am heartened by the manner in which proceedings have been conducted under the auspices of an Independent Speaker. Everybody has been given ample opportunity to express themselves in this space. I implore all of us to make the best use of the time we have.

I promise at this time next year I will wear one of my many Santa suits and not speak about the economy at this time. I hope that when I do so I will be spreading jovial joyful news about how the economic prospects of the Northern Territory have improved and that there is hope on the horizon.

I wish all of you a merry Christmas and happy new year. I hope you and all your families will be safe and have a prosperous new year and a relaxing break ahead of you.

There are numerous people to thank. I simply say to all the people of Fong Lim, thank you for entrusting me with the opportunity to represent you. I shall do my best for you in the coming year.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Mr Deputy Speaker, it is nice to be on the floor of the Chamber; I have missed it. It has been a big year. The election brought big changes, and it is great to have so many new members in the Chamber. I have enjoyed meeting you all, getting to know you and hearing your different perspectives. I have thoroughly enjoyed that over the last two sittings. It is great to have familiar faces here, too. The people who have been returned to parliament are now seasoned performers, and most of them are ministers. It is wonderful to see people develop in their roles.

I miss some of my former colleagues who did not make it. It is a strange and weird experience to work in this place. The new members will be getting a feel for that. You form peculiar relationships; some of them turn out to be enduring and enriching, and others are not.

It is the silly season, the festive season, and a time to celebrate everything that is positive in our communities and electorates. Like a few others have said already, I do not intend to list many people's names. It has always been my privilege to be the Member for Araluen, the Independent voice in Alice Springs. I feel like I represent all people in Alice Springs, not just the people of Araluen. It continues to be an incredible honour.

I thank the people of this Chamber for electing me as their new Speaker. I am enjoying it; it is a thrill. It is so different and a more positive role than I ever imagined. People are nice and polite to you, not that I have had much of the opposite. It is a thrill, so I thank you for voting me in.

I lost Jo and David from my electorate office straight after the election. David worked for me for five years, and Jo had been there for donkey's years—probably close to 10 or at least eight. They both left town straight after the election.

I have two new wonderful staff members in the Araluen electorate office, Holly and Ashleigh. We are getting to know each other and are settling in. David has become my executive assistant in the Office of the Speaker, so that is lovely. We are like two peas in a pod; he knows what I am thinking and what I need, and I think I know what he is thinking and needs.

That is what happens when you work with staff so closely in your electorate offices and other parts of your duties as a member of parliament. You must have people you trust, like and know. You come to love them. They are an implicit part of how you function, who you are and how to represent yourself in the community. I have been fortunate to have great people around me, as other people have also expressed.

To the DLA staff, who I am getting to know well in my new role, thank you.

It is standard to thank the lovely people who work in Hansard, who are almost faceless as we do not see them, but their job is incredible. They listen to every cough, stutter and fabulous speech we give, and I thank them.

To the cleaners who empty our bins and make everything nice in our suites, thank you so much. They slip in and out and help us in incredible ways.

The DLA staff we do see in the Chamber, working in committees and throughout parliament are incredibly competent and smart people. I thank them again.

It has been a great week in parliament. Sitting here this week has been incredible. I mention the contributions made by you all in the 50th anniversary of the Legislative Assembly motion, the motion this morning on the 50th anniversary of Cyclone Tracy, the condolence for Nick Dondas, the condolence the Member for Mulka initiated for Ms Yanthalawuy—what a week. It has been terrific. It has been full of emotion and people being honest, frank, lovely, caring and empathetic. That is what we are about in this Chamber.

At the end of the day, we are a group of people, half of us not ever expecting to end up in a position like this. We are in such a fortunate position to acknowledge, help and do positive things. This week has been incredible. I thank you for the honour and dignity that we have shown towards our fellow Territorians.

We all need a break at this time of year. It is a difficult job. A lot of it is thankless and unseen. A lot of assumptions are made about who we are and how we use our time, but it is 24/7. Listening to the Member for Karama telling us what he is doing over the next couple of weeks exemplifies what we do and how we go above and beyond almost daily.