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Mr SPEAKER (Mr Neil Andrew) took the chair at 12.30 p.m., and read prayers.

CONDOLENCES

Wilton, Mr Gregory Stuart

Mr SPEAKER (12.30 p.m.)—It is my sad duty to inform the House of the death on Wednesday, 14 June 2000, of Gregory Stuart Wilton, member for the division of Isaacs.

Mr HOWARD (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (12.31 p.m.)—I move:

That this House records its deep regret at the tragic death on 14 June 2000 of Gregory Stuart Wilton, member for Isaacs, Victoria since 1996; places on record its appreciation of his parliamentary service, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

This is a particularly sad occasion. The loss of a colleague is always an occasion of sadness. The loss of a colleague in such tragic and stressful circumstances adds a very special sadness. Naturally, I did not know Greg as well as many others in the House. I know in the course of this condolence motion there will an opportunity for his colleagues, particularly those in the Australian Labor Party, to say something of his life and his contribution to the Labor movement, particularly in Victoria. As a fellow member of parliament, I feel affected by what has happened. It is an opportunity for all of us collectively to reflect upon the difficulty of life for so many people. We are all born to different circumstances. We all respond in a different fashion to challenges and sadness, to the ending of relationships and to the difficulties of life. Some cope better than others. Some are luckier than others. Some have more comfort, love and support from people in the community and from those around them than do others. It is very important at a time like this, particularly carrying as we do the collective leadership responsibilities of the country, to try to understand the forces in our community and in our society that would lead somebody to take their own life. I do not have an enduring answer to that and I do not think any of you do either. It is something unutterably sad when a person decides that life has become so difficult and so overwhelming that there is no alternative other than to end it by his or her own hand.

In a situation such as this, we think immediately of Greg’s children and of those whose lives he touched. Greg lived most of his life in his electorate of Isaacs. As you all know, he gained a Bachelor of Science from Monash University and later studied at the London School of Economics. Like many of his colleagues, his background was in the union movement. He worked for 12 years with the Australian Services Union from 1985 to 1988 and for the National Union of Workers from 1988 to 1993. Greg joined the Australian Labor Party from 1982 and was elected to the seat of Isaacs, winning it from Rod Atkinson in 1996. He held it with an increased majority at the 1998 election. He served on many committees and was passionate about young people within his electorate. He made significant and numerous donations of money and sporting equipment through local schools to assist in their welfare.

My personal contact with him was such that I found him to be a courteous, conscientious and dedicated member of parliament. Like most people who enter the national parliament, when he believed in something, he fought for what he felt was right. He held his views strongly and put them well. I think sometimes the quiet service that is rendered by members of parliament in their early years is often overlooked both by their colleagues who rise to more prominent positions and by other people in the community.

On an occasion like this, particularly for somebody whose association with Greg was necessarily fairly brief and formal—which I hope not lacking in genuine courtesy when the occasion demanded it—it is not possible for me to speak as well of him as will others. I do think whenever we are confronted with the grim reality of someone we know taking their own life, we have to ask something of ourselves and of our society. We have to say to the young of our community that the threat of suicide is more present and more real than it was some generations ago.

It is a rather sad fact that Australia has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the Western world, particularly amongst men. It
is particularly prevalent in the regional areas of this country. I think it encourages all of us, particularly us males, to put aside as best we can for all time that old and rather old-fashioned notion that there is something unmanly about externalising your deepest emotions. Men in Australian society have suffered from that stereotype for too long. The externalisation of emotions is increasingly not being seen as unmanly, and that is a wholly healthy development and something that should certainly be encouraged. I do not pretend for a moment that, if we had had a different mindset within our community or if we had had a different mood or a different attitude, that may have worked in some way to reduce the possibility that Greg would have felt that he should take his own life. But it is so horrible when somebody does that, and so sad. There are so many disappointed hopes and expectations, and wounded feelings; there is a sense of betrayal and failure. We have all experienced it as local members when we have sat down and talked to parents whose children have taken their lives or been affected by drug overdose—their sense of failure; that maybe if they had done this or that things would have been different. They have been the hardest interviews I have had in the 27 years that I have been a member of parliament. I have not found an answer. I do not think any of us have.

This parliament is a pretty freewheeling place. We give and take a lot. We do not expect any quarter, and in a sense neither we should. But it is also a place made up of men and women who experience all of the emotions and challenges of the men and women of the Australian community. We are weak and frail like the rest of them. We have strengths and we have weaknesses. I am terribly sad about whatever it was that consumed Greg’s feelings that led him to take his life. I can only say that it makes me feel very sad. I feel for his kids very, very deeply. I hope that those around them, including many of his Labor colleagues from Victoria, will give them all the love, support and affection that they can possibly muster. I say to the House, on behalf of all the members of the government, that I am deeply saddened by what has happened. I hope that whatever forces of love, compassion, support and comfort that are available will be given to Greg’s children and to those whom he loved most, and who loved him most, in the days ahead.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (12.40 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I rise to support the Prime Minister’s motion. I thank the Prime Minister for his very nice words, the emotional way he expressed them, and the care and concern that he obviously has for us on this side of the House and for all of us in this place at this moment of very great sadness. This is a very difficult condolence motion, probably the hardest that anyone in this chamber can speak to. It is not as though we do not have condolence motions in this chamber; we often do but, generally speaking, the condolence motion is about a life that has been lived to the full, about a parliamentary career that was complete, about a national record which has been created. The condolence motion, therefore, is often the celebration in this chamber of a life greatly lived. If it is somebody amongst our number who has died in the current parliament, it is generally very close to that anyway. It is usually a person who has served out a substantial number of years and who has come to a point in their life when perhaps it is an early death but not too early, and the same considerations apply. It is a death which has occurred in what would be described as being in the most normal of circumstances. Whilst it triggers all our emotions, it nevertheless is one which is easy to live with, easy to contemplate, a career easy to regard and sum up.

This is a death in the worst of all possible circumstances. I think the consequences of it were, oddly, well summed up by a journalist who wrote an article on it. He was writing an article about the death of Greg but he was also writing it on the effect of suicide, a mode of death that afflicts some 2,600 Australians, or seven a day. It is a terrible problem in our society and one that we have not come to grips with. Governments of both political hues have struggled with it. Because of the terribly individual nature of suicide, as the Prime Minister pointed out, it is an extraordinarily difficult one on which to find a public policy that adequately addresses it. We try—and maybe we will get better at it. But
suffice to say that we have a very long way to go. The effect of it was well expressed by this journalist, who talked about suicide constituting only two per cent of deaths. He went on:

Yet multiply this figure by the parents, spouses, children and friends of those who have chosen oblivion, and multiply it again by all the unanswerable questions that haunt those people left behind—could we have done more, could we have listened more closely, how did we fail?—and it is patently clear this is a continuing tragedy of dreadful proportions.

It is like dropping a life into an ocean and watching the ripples spread until it covers us all. The questions that will be asked by those closest to him on our side of the House will also be asked by those most distant as we seek to contemplate this most horrible of events. The concerns that we feel for the children of Greg and for his family will be profound and long lasting. The Prime Minister effectively issued a challenge on that front which I am sure many of us will be able to meet.

How do we sum up Greg's life? How do we go through a life incomplete, a life that actually held more promise than he clearly understood himself—a life that many in this country aspire to lead, that many in the Australian Labor Party have aspired to lead and at which few actually succeed? I was thinking the other day of the hundreds of thousands of people who have been in the Labor Party since we were founded in 1891 and of the millions who have been affiliated to the Labor Party since we were founded in 1891. Of those hundreds of thousands on one criterion and millions on another, 560 people have been members of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party—560 only. On our side of politics, to make it through to here is to have succeeded massively, to have succeeded beyond the dreams of most who have been dutiful followers of our persuasion in politics for a hundred years. To be unable to get satisfaction in that is a terribly difficult thing to contemplate.

As the Prime Minister said, Greg joined the Labor Party in 1982 and worked hard in party forums for many years. He was a branch president and secretary from 1982 to 1984, an electorate secretary in 1984 and again in 1993, a delegate to ALP state conferences in Victoria from 1984 to 1992, and a member of the rules revision committee and the economics policy committees of the Victorian ALP. He was deeply embedded in Labor politics—branch politics, federal electorate politics and state politics for the Australian Labor Party. He served on policy committees and did diligent work night after night to get policies together, put them in place, defend them and be proud of them. He entered parliament in March 1996 but before that he worked for the trade union movement for nearly 12 years. He was replete in the two strands that bring people into federal politics in the Australian Labor Party. He worked for the Australian Services Union from 1995 to 1998, the National Union of Workers from 1998 to 1993 and the Association of Professional Engineers and Scientists from 1993 to 1996.

On achieving election to parliament, he also demonstrated an enormous capacity for hard work here. He was a very talented member, serving most recently as deputy chairman of the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Economics, Finance and Public Administration. In his first term he served as a member of the Standing Committee on Financial Institutions and Public Administration. He was on a parliamentary delegation to the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum executive committee meeting in Ottawa, Canada, in September 1996. Inside our caucus, he was an active member of the Living Standards and Economic Development Committee and the Infrastructure, Regional and Rural Development Committee.

He did incredibly well to be here at all. I have vivid memories of the 1996 election—they have not yet been successfully encapsulated in my mind and put to one side. To win a marginal seat in the 1996 election for the Labor Party was a demonstration of extraordinary political skill. We were very close to being annihilated as a parliamentary entity. To win against the break at that point in time was an outstanding achievement. I have some of my most vivid memories of Greg in that campaign. I was Deputy Prime Minister at
that time and assigned to various tasks. They were generally efforts at achieving survival of the unsurvivable, but every now and then we were deputed to operate on what we thought was the fiction that we could actually win a marginal seat back in that particular environment. I can recollect turning up at Greg’s office and Greg saying to me, ‘We are going to do a street walk, and the media is here.’ I said, ‘Greg, are you completely mad? Out there they are waiting for us with baseball bats and you want me to walk down the main street in Isaacs, with the media and cameras behind me, so that they have an opportunity to comment on what they think about us?’ He said, ‘Don’t worry. You’ll notice when you come out of the door that there will be a lot of people with white plastic bags. Those are the only people that you should talk to on the way down the road. Don’t worry about it. Go out and do that.’ So we went out the door. It was then that I realised that though Greg had enormous political talents, as demonstrated by the fact that he ultimately won that seat, there were still certain areas of inexperience in his campaigning technique: on a Thursday afternoon in Isaacs, in the main street everybody is carrying a white plastic bag. So we started, and I could see the look of fear pass across Greg’s face at every point we came to where I was talking to somebody who was, shall we say, unplugged. That, in the end, was just about everybody. Such, however, had been his propaganda skills that, though we talked to absolutely nobody we were supposed to talk to on that entire walk, none of them saw fit to tell us at that time exactly what large numbers of other people thought about us. Therefore that particular walk was a success, and ultimately his campaign for parliament was a success too.

He is clearly remembered with great affection by huge numbers of people in his electorate. That has been evident from what has been said of him in the various newspapers, where commentaries have been sought, and the bereavement notices that have been placed. The Prime Minister mentioned Greg’s charitable instincts and his diligent hard work, of which he was aware, for the many clubs and societies and groups who sought his assistance in an electorate where there are large numbers of people who need the special care and attention of members of parliament. Note after note has come through from groups that meant so much to him; for example, the Chelsea RSL, the Chelsea Football Club, the Chelsea Heights Community Centre, the Carrum Downs Over 55 Club, the Mordialloc schools and the Peninsula Health Care Network, from his old union colleagues in the Municipal Officers Association and the Labor Party branches, subbranches and committees, and from others who have worked with him and for him and have had work done on their behalf by him over the short, few years that he has been a member of parliament.

He was so proud of the fact that he was born and bred in his electorate and so proud of the fact that his family was associated with that electorate. It was indicated in his maiden speech to parliament when he said:

I am proud to rise in this place today as the new member for Isaacs. I take the opportunity to thank the people of Isaacs for their support and, indeed, trust. You welcomed me into your homes and shared with me a part of your lives. That experience certainly shapes my own internal directions and the aspirations that I hold as the member for Isaacs. To you, the people of Isaacs, I make this commitment: I will work hard for you, listen to your opinions and actively represent your views in this place.

My family and friends well know how moved I am to realise my longstanding goal to represent the people of Isaacs and, of course, how proud I am to represent the great Australian Labor Party in this place. I was born and went to school in Isaacs. It is where my family has lived for almost 50 years and where we choose to live today. I think those two paragraphs of his maiden speech adequately sum up the pride that he had so few years ago in what he had achieved at that point and the determination that he had. He indicated at that point that he would be a good and faithful servant of the people who had elected him to this place. I do not think anyone on this side of the House who knew him well, as we all did, would have had the view that he displayed anything other than a very faithful commitment to those undertakings that he made nearly five years ago when elected to this place.
As I said, only 560 have made it here as members of the federal parliamentary Labor Party. I cannot begin to contemplate the various forces that led him to take the action that he did. Of all that I know that went on in his personal life, of the ups and downs that he experienced in this parliament and inside the parliamentary Labor Party, none that I have known about were any different from those that many of us have experienced and that all of us are thoroughly familiar with. Why did the combination of those factors operate in such a way and resonate so individually for him that he felt it necessary to do what he ultimately did to himself?

None of us have answers to those questions. Suicide is a terribly individual act, based on a logic that only one person can understand. Some notice of it was given, but all the best efforts of his friends to convince him that life held out hopes, opportunities and responsibilities and that he had a wonderful part to play in it and to partake of it seemed to have no effect in terms of the determination on a course of action at which he himself arrived. Suffice it to say that his departure has seen an outpouring of affection and love from all those who have had anything to do with him over the years in the community and of course in his family, whom, above all, we must remember here today.

This condolence motion mentions his family. He leaves behind a grieving mother—a mother enormously proud of the achievements of her two children—and a sister, who is a medical scientist. His mother told me that it was often a source of friendly but intense competition between Greg and his sister, Leeanda, as to who would make minister or who would make professor first. She, Joy, is a mother of two wonderful children. Our thoughts also go out to his wife, Maria, and his two children, Lachlan and Eliza, who will, along with his mother and sister, understand this decision probably least of all and who are, in that ripple effect, those most affected by the wash of it.

I thank the parliament and the government for making this opportunity available—in the substantial changes that they have made to the order of business in this place over the course of the next couple of days and, in particular, the substantial changes that they have made to it this afternoon—so that we can properly remember Greg and properly express our condolences to his family in particular and to his very wide circle of friends.

Mr Anderson (Gwydir—Deputy Prime Minister) (12.58 p.m.)—In addressing this condolence motion I acknowledge that the previous speakers—the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition—have outlined sufficiently Greg Wilton’s life. I see no point in my tracking over that again, but I certainly offer my sincere sympathies to his family, to his friends and to those who worked with him and who will miss him. I am no stranger to family loss. The circumstances of this loss, however, will be especially difficult for Greg’s family to work through. My prayers—and I know the prayers of many others—will be with them as they face it.

It is very easy for us to concentrate on the perceived differences between us in a modern, competitive, image conscious and, dare I say it, sometimes even image driven age like ours. But in reality death makes us deeply conscious of our shared humanity. Materialism alone, bread alone, will never sustain us. All of us, I think, need to feel deeply loved and unconditionally accepted by others, by at least some in our lives. We also need to feel hope in the future. I remember some of my colleagues meeting a very interesting gentleman whom I had not previously met—the Rev. John Smith—in the dining room one night. He was talking about despair amongst youth, youth homelessness and youth suicide.

I was asked to join them for a cup of coffee. He had been preparing material for the Victorian state government on some of the difficult dilemmas that young people face. I said to him, ‘We face a sense of helplessness amongst too many of our young people in an age when people are doing well; give me three broad pointers that I might be able to comprehend as to how you see we might best tackle this problem.’ The first two did not surprise me. He said that young people need as functional and operative a home environment as possible and, secondly, that you need to encourage them to operate in an appropri-
ate peer group environment. But the third one was very interesting. He said that young people need hope. I said, ‘What do you mean?’ He said, ‘For all of our wellbeing in our modern nation and our modern age, we often talk ourselves down too much. We talk about how if a bomb does not get us, unemployment or environmental degradation will. Too often we do not realise the damage we do to hope in the lives of young people in particular.’ That has always stayed with me and it has given me an appreciation of how important hope is to all of us.

All of us need to feel deeply loved and unconditionally accepted by at least some, and we need to feel that hope. Yet we all feel on both scores from time to time that we are out in the cold. That is part of our shared humanity. There is no-one in this place and no-one listening who does not know how lonely that can be and how isolated at times that can make you feel. It applies in the end, death being a great leveller—whether we are out in the bush and a kid is feeling robbed of life because all the bright kids are doing something brighter or whether it is a member of parliament in this place under enormous pressure and pretending that everything is okay when Saturday mornings twice monthly, was at various parts of his electorate, he having letterboxed its location and invited people to attend and meet him. He went to the electorate. That effectiveness was reflected in private polling which showed him to be one of the most recognised backbench Labor members of parliament. It was not just his availability and preparedness to listen and to consult; he also pursued the issues that mattered in his constituency such as child care, nursing homes, the Moorabbin Airport and the implications of that, the issue of train crossings and the schools in his electorate which he made constant visits to. He had a deep commitment to disadvantaged kids. We know of the commitment he made to help them by making available gifts of bicycles. The Cranbourne Park and the environmental issues associated there were also matters that he involved himself in. He was the sort of member—and I shared a border with him—who was always at the functions. He was never not at them. So he was the sort of representative and member who showed a local activism that will be missed by that community.

Mr CREAN (Hotham) (1.01 p.m.)—I join in support of this condolence motion moved by the Prime Minister and supported by the Leader of the Opposition. These are tragic circumstances in which we find ourselves talking about Greg today. The last few days I think have seen many of us reflect a lot about him and the circumstances that led to his tragic death. He does leave a huge gap in this House and in our lives. The gym this morning, quite frankly, did not seem the same without him there. It is one of those things that is not easy to deal with, his absence, particularly the circumstances that led to it. But the truth of it is that he was a person who had so much to offer—to his family, his friends and to his community.

We know that he won Isaacs against the trend. Labor’s was a massive loss in 1996. Had the national swing, even the state swing, reflected against Labor been carried forward in Isaacs, he would not have been the member. Not only did he win it then, he went on to increase his margin. He did it essentially on both occasions because he was more than just carrying the Labor Party endorsement in his constituency. He was indeed a champion for his community. He was born and grew up in the area. He attended the Bonbeach High School. He knew the area backwards. He was a great marginal seat campaigner and he developed to an art form that mobile office which, on Saturday mornings twice monthly, was at various parts of his electorate, he having letterboxed its location and invited people to attend and meet him. He went to the electorate. That effectiveness was reflected in private polling which showed him to be one of the most recognised backbench Labor members of parliament. It was not just his availability and preparedness to listen and to consult; he also pursued the issues that mattered in his constituency such as child care, nursing homes, the Moorabbin Airport and the implications of that, the issue of train crossings and the schools in his electorate which he made constant visits to. He had a deep commitment to disadvantaged kids. We know of the commitment he made to help them by making available gifts of bicycles. The Cranbourne Park and the environmental issues associated there were also matters that he involved himself in. He was the sort of member—and I shared a border with him—who was always at the functions. He was never not at them. It was only because of the circumstances of this place sitting that he was not there. So he was the sort of representative and member who showed a local activism that will be missed by that community.

He will also be missed as a friend—and he had many; I count myself as one of them. We used to go to the football together—I must say it was pretty hard to find in this place, on this side of the House, too many North Melbourne supporters, but he was one of them. On occasions he would bring his father while
he was still alive. He was very close to his dad. Greg was also a great source of relaxation to us around this place when he would get together with others and play the guitar. There was also his sharpness and insight that were very helpful in terms of making judgments about issues that we had to deliberate on at different levels. A loner he may have been, but he had many friends and I do not know of any enemies. As difficult as it is to lose him as a colleague and as a friend and as that local champion, I think there is no greater loss than that to his family. He was a devoted family man. He loved his wife and his kids. He was always happy talking with his kids and then coming back and telling us about the exchanges. Our thoughts are with Maria, they are with Lachlan and they are with Eliza. They are also with his mother, Joy, and his sister, Leeanda. He was very close to his late father, Allen, and that loss also affected him deeply.

I join with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Deputy Prime Minister in expressing our sympathy to Greg’s family. Greg Wilton was a man of integrity, a man of principle, and a man of deep love for the country he loved so much. He was a true servant of the people, and we will remember him not only for the contributions he made to our country but also for the example he set for us all.

Mr HAWKER (Wannon) (1.07 p.m.)—I would like to join with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in saying that these are difficult circumstances to comprehend. I am one of those who, like many on our side, pose the question: ‘What more could we have done?’ I guess we will be left with that thought for some considerable time. They are tragic circumstances. There was clearly impact from the pressure of the job. We will miss him. We will remember him not only for his contribution but also for what he could have been.
touching comments among the many tributes that were published in the Melbourne papers probably summed up many things when it said, ‘Greg, you achieved so much in so little time and will be missed by so many’. That came from the Cranbourne branch of the ALP, but I think it certainly adds to what has already been said by some of his colleagues. So I join with colleagues and staff on the Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee, and indeed all colleagues here today, in extending our profound sympathy to the family of the late Greg Wilton.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (1.12 p.m.)—I have had the opportunity, the privilege really, to talk with Greg’s sister over the last few days. I know that she would want me on behalf of all the family to extend their thanks to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and indeed all those from both this side and the government side who I know will contribute to this condolence motion. I know that the family also appreciates the fact that the government has accepted quite a disruption to its legislative program over the next couple of days to facilitate this process and those that will follow it. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition mentioned the gymnasium. Most people in this place will—well, maybe not an ideal number—know Greg was a regular there. I do not know what time Greg got to the gym—Mr Snowdon interjecting—Mr Martin—Before you, brother; I’ll tell you that.

Mr FITZGIBBON—The member for the Northern Territory and others make the point for me; he was always there when I arrived. Come to think of it, he was always still there when I departed. When I arrived we always had a little ritual to undertake—I would always identify him by his seat: ‘Member for Isaacs,’ I would politely acknowledge, and he would always respond in the same way by saying, ‘Brother Hunter,’ and we would go on with our business—he, again I acknowledge, more actively than I.

I understand that Greg Wilton has always been a bit of a fitness fanatic, but I think it is true to say that, in the cold confines of this building, he was happiest when he was in the gymnasium. You see, the gym is a great leveller; it is a place where only ability matters, where hard work and commitment count for more than allegiances and loyalties. It is also one of the few rooms in this building—a building in which all of us have many friends but probably even more potential enemies, on both sides—where a true sense of camaraderie exists. As the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said, Greg Wilton was not at the gym when we arrived this morning, and of course none of us can be sure why.

No doubt the reasons he decided he must leave us early were many and complex, but I do know three basic things without any doubt at all. First, once he was over the initial euphoria that election to this place brings, Greg never really enjoyed the Canberra end of the job. Sure, he liked the work, but he did not deal well with the dislocation from the family that the Canberra end of the job brings. In short, he missed his family very much. Second, both the breakdown of his second marriage and the consequent further separation from his children cut very deep. Third, it became increasingly obvious to Greg, in his final days, that the one important thing he had left in his life—that is, his position here—was about to be taken from him. No event would have made that more clear to Greg than an article which appeared in the Herald Sun last Tuesday, which treated his political demise as a fait accompli. Greg understood the challenge he faced in retaining his preselection, but he was ready to take up that fight. Yet there were some, it seems, who were unwilling to allow him to continue his good work in the current parliament, let alone afford him the opportunity to consider another term.

Greg Wilton worked hard to become a member of this place. Most members, particularly those on this side, know that only too well. They know he worked very hard initially to secure preselection for the seat of Holt but was persuaded to move aside to accommodate Gareth Evans. But Greg, typically, did not take his bat and go home. Instead, he turned his efforts to the marginal Liberal held seat of Isaacs, a seat he knew he could win if he put in the hard yards, and, of course, that is exactly what he did. It is now
Monday, 19 June 2000

Represents

History shows that Greg Wilton did win Isaacs and was subsequently rewarded for his hard work and effective representation with a significantly increased electoral margin at the 1998 poll.

Isaacs was a good move for Greg. He was born in Chelsea hospital, attended kindergarten and primary school in Edithvale and gained his secondary education at Bonbeach. All of those institutions are in the electorate of Isaacs. Indeed, Greg lived in the Isaacs electorate for 42 of his 44 short years. Greg was not only a good local member but also a good parliamentarian. He was a good and persuasive orator and had a passion for his committee work. Underpinning all he did in this place were his commitment, true sense of social justice and his fight for a better Australia.

His commitment to the labour movement was a longstanding one. He was heavily involved in student politics at Monash University, and he became a member of the Australian Labor Party at a relatively young age. After enjoying the mandatory extended overseas experience, he worked for a number of trade unions, as has been mentioned. But in between that, and lesser known, he had a taste of life as a blue-collar worker, taking a number of labouring jobs within a number of organisations, including the railways. Greg loved the labour movement and, more importantly, he was proud to be part of it. In his first speech in this place, he said:

There is no greater institution for improving the lives of Australians than the Commonwealth parliament. There is no greater forum for debating national issues than the Commonwealth parliament. Nevertheless, I am mindful that the House of Representatives is the house where governments are both made and unmade. If this House is to be more than simply a house of debate and a forum for debate, the Australian Labor Party must once again assume the mantle of government. I dedicate my entire efforts in this parliament to achieving that goal.

At the risk of politicising the debate, I say to Greg, 'Mate, you may have had only 18 more months to wait.'

For recreation, Greg loved to surf, but even more he loved bushwalking. Probably one of the lesser-known facts about Greg is that the science graduate could cite the botanical name of just about every Australian native plant. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition mentioned that he began taking guitar lessons soon after his arrival in this place, and I know that was in part motivated by the infamous Tuesday night drinks sessions the Labor Party has. Some may have, but I have to say that I never really saw him put those talents into effect. His sister tells me that he wasn’t very good.

Greg’s dad, Allen, died a few years ago, and I know that loss cut very deeply. As has been mentioned by previous speakers, he is survived by his mum, Joy, who of course has had a torrid time, and his sister, Leeanda, who are both devastated by the events of the last week or more. Greg told me that, following an earlier incident, his dad remained very strong until the age of 81, and stood by him. He also leaves behind his wife, Maria, and two beautiful and very young children, Lachlan and Eliza. Unfortunately they may never fully appreciate how much he loved them.

On the subject of the children, I want to say this: Greg assured me that he did not attempt to harm them in any way. While he readily conceded there was an incident, I believed him when he told me that in his own mind he knew he would never have proceeded with any action that would have brought any harm to them. I believe that the police may have a statement from a third party which will confirm this to be the case, and I only hope that legal procedure allows them to make those facts known to the family at some point. Anyone who knew Greg Wilton well knows that he was a very gentle, humane and loving person. Greg Wilton was a mate of mine, and I am very proud to be able to say that. The class of 96 has suffered a great loss.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (1.24 p.m.)—Greg Wilton was an electoral neighbour, a colleague and a friend. Both of us came into this place in the class of 96 and shared discussions about how, as young men and young parents, we would cope with the strains of the role. We shared many stories about our families: about how our kids—we both had one of each—were developing, and how difficult it
was to miss some of those moments that most people take for granted.

Just under 10 weeks ago he saw me rushing around, and he inquired how Tina was going with the pregnancy. I said, ‘Mate, I’ve got to get out of here. I’ve got to catch a plane, I’ve got to get home. If I miss the birth I’ll be in all sorts of trouble.’ He said, ‘Mate, there is nothing more important in your life than your family. Good luck, and send my love to Tina.’ That was the sort of guy he was. We talked about our kids, how we were going and what we were missing sometimes in not being around when they were learning to talk and learning to walk, and we talked about how we kept in touch. Not only did we share stories of our families, we shared local newspapers. We had a common boundary between our electorates, which occasionally meant there was friendly and spirited banter between us about issues of the day, but what I remember most about Greg was that we worked alongside and with one another when it was in the interests of our local community. My comments today are to pass on the appreciation and the thanks and the respect of the community organisations we both had a stake in representing—the Peninsula Health Care Network, Frankston Community Health Service, Bayside Veterans Centre, Peninsula Community Legal Service and a number of transport and infrastructure projects where we put politics aside to do what was best for the shared community that we represented.

There was never an ill word said about Greg by anybody. He was admired for his work ethic and his preparedness to go out and meet people. At Carrum Downs Shopping Centre, Greg’s smiling face was there, and people really warmed to him in the mobile van that was spoken about earlier. He was admired for that work. He had great affection for and commitment to the local community, and there is a genuine sense of loss in the community we represent. I know his supporters had a real stake in him and, for his Labor colleagues in particular, this is a tragic time. I hope people who feel there are dark clouds over their lives reach out for help to get them through that stage and give Lifeline a call on 13 1114—or somebody—so that people like Greg can make their full contribution to our country. He is gone too soon.

Mr LATHAM (Werriwa) (1.27 p.m.)—A good person and a good life should not end this way. Greg was a close colleague but, more than that, he was my mate. I know everyone here comes to this place to do great things for the nation, but I have always thought that to come away from this place with a few good mates is just as important. I will always value the four years of very close friendship and mateship that I had with Greg.

I speak here today, along with so many other members, with strong but mixed feelings. I have long thought that to be too depressed about someone’s passing is to downplay the achievements of their life. I remember my old nanna once saying to me, shortly before she passed away, ‘Why are we so scared of talking about people when they’re gone?’ She said, ‘When I’m gone, talk about me all the time.’ That is how I feel about my mate Greg. Let me talk about him.

It is a great achievement for anyone to be elected to the House of Representatives, but for Greg it was doubly special. He came here to represent an electorate he had always known. He grew up in the place, and I know how special it can be to know every street, every issue, every concern; to walk through the shopping centre and run into friends—people you went to school with, their parents and people you played footy with. They were all part of Greg’s experience in his own electorate and the reason why he was here.

It is very special to represent an electorate you grew up in—it is your whole life, it is your passion, it is your commitment. That is how Greg felt about the electorate of Isaacs. He was a very hard worker for his seat, recognised in this place as one of our very best campaigners and best local members. Of course, he would come back to Canberra and tell us all about it. He lived and breathed that electorate but, if that was not enough, he would come back here and make sure that we did too. He would tell us about his mobile office in the shopping centres and what the locals were saying about national issues. He would tell us about his bicycle presentations and his scholarships for needy students, and of course he would use the 90-second state-
ment segment here to mention those children and their achievements and to write on to them. I remember one day that he said to me, ‘Isn’t it great. We’ve got this new format up in the Main Committee where you can make a private member’s statement for a longer period of time. I can mention more kids and send out more notes of congratulations to them.’ That was his great enthusiasm and love for his electorate.

He came here and told us about his constituent cases and his community events, and it was a great achievement and a great contribution. But I know that for the member for Hunter and for me it was more than that, it was more than the work of a practising politician—it was a close mateship. I have always thought that one of the very best things about our country is that you can have mates. I do not think it happens in other nations. Here you can share experiences, share values and share an ethos that go well beyond your background, questions of class, location or your job. I know that what Joel, Greg and I shared went well beyond politics, and it is something that we will always treasure and value.

Some have said that Greg was a loner. I often think, ‘From time to time, why wouldn’t you be in this place?’ It can be a cold place, built on ambition and authority. I know that Greg was always much more at home with genuine Australian values about mateship and mutual respect, and he always found those things back in Isaacs; he always found those things back in his own electorate. In Isaacs he was never alone. He was never alone in the seat that he represented. The number of community groups and people who have contacted his family and his office to express that just proves the point that he was never alone with the people whom he represented. Some have said that Greg was a complex character. But which interesting and endearing person is without their complexities? Sure he was intense, but he had a larrikin streak that I loved about him. He had that sort of knock-around way that is uniquely Australian and to be appreciated in every sense. Sure he had his anxieties, and in the end did not cope. But he had that wry sense of humour. Joel and I have a lifetime of stories and memories that go to Greg’s sense of humour—the very, very funny things he said and did in our company.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr LATHAM—No, we cannot say them here, but in other forums and other quarters we will treasure them and remember them. He was a uniquely Australian character. But, as with every other person in this country of course, life relies on growth: you have to grow and to keep on doing things that give you the richness, the confidence and the self-esteem of a full life. Unhappily, in the end, particularly in this place, Greg had a lot of trouble growing.

I often think about politics and the uniqueness of our work. I always imagine that in other jobs it is sort of a 10-80-10 situation, where 10 per cent of the time you would be in love with your job, 80 per cent of the time it is pretty well neutral and 10 per cent of the time you probably do not like it that much. In politics we have an 80-20 life. For 80 per cent of the time politics is something to love and something to enjoy to the full. A chance to contribute in this place to the wellbeing of our country and our communities is a rare privilege. But, for the 20 per cent of the time when you think, ‘There is nothing in between, this has got me down; this has got me worried and this has got me saddened by something that has been said or done,’ it is a tough job—a tough job indeed. Unfortunately for Greg, that 20 per cent period grew as a proportion in his life, and he found it really tough.

It is often said that, because of our public role, we are the common property of the country—and we would not have it any other way. Of course, that means exposure and analysis in the media—pressures that people would not have in other vocations. We are the common property of the country. But I know that Greg was happiest when he was the property of his family. I stayed with the Wiltons often when I was travelling through Melbourne. Whenever I was at their place, which backed onto the beach at Port Phillip Bay, it always seemed to be raining, and I would say to Greg, ‘You’ve got to be joking, haven’t you? You’ve got to come and live in Sydney. How can you put up with this?’ So
there was the Sydney-Melbourne rivalry that in many ways defines why we are actually in this location, and it goes on today. Greg would respond by telling me about the sunny days on Port Phillip Bay, walking along the beach with Maria and the kids. It sounded like paradise, and for Greg it was a paradise, but once he lost that paradise he thought that he had lost everything.

It is true, as the member for Hunter was saying, that Greg came under pressure in the media which contributed to this tragedy. He came under pressure from the legal system in the way in which it handles people with depressive illnesses. He came under pressure from some parts of the political system. I always thought we came here to halt man’s inhumanity to man, not to add to it. But this is not the time to apportion blame. It is not the time to give the details of these matters. There will be enough time later on to talk about them, and I hope we can learn. I hope we can learn as an institution, that we can learn as friends and colleagues and that we can learn as a country from Greg’s experiences. His death has given a higher profile to the issue of mental illness and depression. It has made people think that, if it can happen to a politician, it can happen to anyone. Some of our media image is based on being tough and uncompromising. Some of our self-image as a group is based on a feeling of invincibility. But in the end we hurt, we suffer and we can be depressed just like anyone else. I truly hope that, as members gather here, if we can make one contribution and learn lessons from Greg’s passing, it will be to give stronger, more intense and more fruitful attention to this crisis in our society of depressive illness and suicide.

As a man of politics, Greg knew both the achievements and the frustrations of a public life. Greg knew what it was like to triumph and he knew what it was like to be betrayed. As a man of politics, he knew how to count and he knew whom to count on. But most of all he counted to us. He counted for the love of his family and his friends. He counted in the service of his community and his nation. Let us honour his memory, treasure his humanity and always celebrate his achievements. I offer my sympathy and condolences to Greg’s mum, Mrs Wilton, his wonderful sister Leeanda and her family, and also to Maria and the children Greg loved so much—as I used to call them at their place, the big fella Lachlan and the little sheila Eliza. I say this to his children: when you grow up some years from now and read the words spoken today in the House of Representatives, always know in your heart that your dad was a good man. He was a good man who loved you so much. You should always be proud to tell people that Greg Wilton was your dad.

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (1.37 p.m.)—I would like to add to the words of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and many others who have spoken about Greg Wilton. I probably did not know Greg as well as many of you in the House, but I want to add to the words of the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration. It was through that committee that I got to know Greg really well. After the initial sadness of Greg’s death hit me, I thought of one very happy occasion. When I was listening to the member for Dunkley speak about the class of 1996, I remembered that the first person I met on that particular day was Greg Wilton, the member for Isaacs, and then I met the member for Grayndler, who is sitting opposite, and there was such hope and expectation from the member for Isaacs amid the exhilaration of being elected. One should never underestimate that great honour to sit in this House, and many of you here today have spoken about that. He had such expectation, hope and determination for the future. On that particular day we all went out and had our happy shots taken. I will never forget this occasion because we were outside the House and Greg, who was standing in the front, was rather tall and the photographer said, ‘Look, you’re going to have to crouch down,’ or whatever and he knelt down in a very euphoric sort of way on one knee and leapt out with his hands. I will never forget that photograph of his enthusiasm and his willingness to embrace life and parliamentary life. It was published in most of the papers; it was even published in the Financial Review, if I remember correctly. So they are the im-
ages that come back to me. Working on the economics committee with him, I knew him to be a very diligent and hardworking member; he was always there. Today we on the committee celebrated our own moment of silence and acknowledged the sad passing of Greg. We have all been touched by him.

I know he loved his family enormously. When we did speak about our families and our children, his face would light up. He was just so proud of his children. There was no doubt by all on the committee that he intensely loved those children. I remember giving an adjournment debate speech in the Main Committee one day and speaking about the fishing industry and recreational fishing, which is a subject that is very dear to me, speaking about the fact that I had taken my son fishing and Greg yelling out to me about his son and chuckling in the back of the room as I gave that particular speech. He was an enormously proud family man.

I know that he contributed a great deal to his electorate. After the Thursday economics committee meetings we would share our weekend horror timetable, as one would call it, and I, as a marginal seat holder, and he, as a holder of one as well, knew the intense pressure to get out there and work on the weekends and attend the many, many functions that we all have to attend. I would just like to say that many people might listen to the speeches today and say that political life is no different to any other life and ask why politicians should be given greater leniency or be treated differently—but it is different. A number of the speakers here, including the previous speaker, have said that in a nine to five job, when one is suffering from some sort of depression, one can go home and nurse one’s sorrow or one’s way through the grief process but in this job it is not like that at all: you have to go out, you have to attend functions seven days a week, 24 hours a day. You have to put on the bravest of faces when you are going through the most intense personal grief sometimes. There are times when it is very, very difficult to walk into a room with 500 people and change into that public person. I know that lots of us have gone through periods like that where we have had our highs and we have had our lows in this House, and it is the hardest thing in the world that you have to do. For that I admire Greg too, for keeping up the functions that he attended, particularly in those deepest, darkest moments. We can all learn from this—and I guess it is a very sad day to learn from a tragedy like this—to look after the ones that are closest to us, our colleagues, and to recognise the symptoms so that, if someone is not feeling 100 per cent or is feeling a little down, we reach out and give them that extra love and support.

Greg, I will remember you for your frivolity in the committee, for making it a very, very interesting place. I thank you for your humour in those very long economics committee meetings—and many of them did go for quite a long while—and I know that you made a tremendous contribution to your electorate and your party, and that you loved your family intensely and dearly. I would like to also add my condolences to Greg’s mum, his wife, Maria, and his two children, Eliza and Lachlan. Yes, you will be able to remember your dad always. You will be able to read about him in Hansard and you will be able to have an incredible memory of him that so few in Australia will have had.

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (1.43 p.m.)—Condolence motions are for those figures I am embarrassed to admit I did not know or did not even know of their records or achievements. Such a motion is not for a contemporary. It is not for a friend. A condolence motion is a time to speak of some of the joys and achievements of a long life. It is not for someone you are going to hope will be miraculously in the seat behind you, looking for that silence to ring out a perfectly scripted interjection. No, it is not for that. It is not to fall into a pack of tears either, but never mind. I wish I did not have to speak in the House today about the death of my colleague Greg Wilton. Greg died at a tragically young age and the events leading up to his death were terribly sad. Greg was an intense, hardworking—perhaps driven—but sensitive, good hearted and decent man.

As many have said, Greg was born, raised and went to school in his beloved electorate of Isaacs. He was a bushwalker and a marvellous gym enthusiast. Greg had a well-
deserved reputation as an excellent marginal seat campaigner. He taught me a lot. He turned a safe Liberal seat into a Labor seat with a healthy margin, first winning the seat against the odds in 1996 and building upon that win with an increased margin in 1998. As has been said, the recognition of his name was one of the highest in this place for a first-time member. Greg said that being in the caucus in 1996 was personally fantastic for him but at the same time was miserable because everybody else was so down about losing government. He said that it was really tough to be there feeling ‘I’ve finally got here’ while everybody else was so miserable about the whole experience. But he did get here. He realised that dream. As many know, it was a dream that did not have a smooth ride into this place, but he got here and he deserved to be here.

Greg believed in making himself utterly accessible to his constituents, pioneering the idea of regular mobile offices in areas around his sprawling electorate. Mobile offices are now, of course, a must for many members of parliament; I know I have poached the idea shamelessly. So strong was Greg’s belief in reaching out to his electorate that he hired a second office to supplement the activities of his electorate office. Greg was the kind of member who would go the extra mile for his constituents. As has been documented in the papers, Greg bought bikes for local school kids out of his own electorate allowance. He told me, ‘Stick to two things, Anna. Do two things right, and you will go far.’ He did those two things: his mobile offices and his bikes. Greg was eager to help people. Once he even wrote to a manufacturer of vacuum cleaners for a constituent who complained that her vacuum cleaner would not suck hard enough! Other great local achievements include maintaining the name of the suburb of Bonbeach for local residents and raising the very serious issues surrounding the Riverside Nursing Home located in his electorate. Looking through the death notices, you get a sense of what an important role Greg played in the local community. There are messages of sympathy from a wide range of community organisations, including local schools, RSLs and sporting groups.

Greg was a politician totally without pretension. He even offered one of his former staff members the chance to take his business class seat as he was quite happy to sit in the economy section—a generous offer I am sure not too many people in this place would make. He was entirely without the hubris that is so often associated with this job. As anyone from Melbourne would remember, the night before the 1998 election it poured down with rain, yet Greg was out there putting up bunting, getting drenched alongside his staff and volunteers. It was this sort of generosity of spirit that all those who worked for him have reflected on in recent days. In turn, his staff showed him much loyalty over many years. Greg has been well served by excellent staff. Over time they have perfected the art of running an electorate office in the most smooth and efficient manner possible, attending to all queries in a timely and compassionate manner. They are a tight-knit group that is very upset by this tragic situation, and my thoughts go out to them also today.

I got to know Greg before entering this place, but I got to know him better through working together on the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration. His committee work was diligent, consistent and dedicated to the public good. His presence on the committee was a welcome one, and I shall miss him being there. Tragically, male suicide was an issue Greg felt particularly passionate about. He is on the record in this place lamenting the lack of support services for middle aged men in crisis, and I think it would be a fine legacy if this enormous issue were to be given some serious attention by this House. Greg was a thoughtful and loyal friend. As one of the last of Greg’s parliamentary colleagues to speak to him before his death, I know he was burdened by his circumstances and struggling with tremendous personal pain. I have wept over Greg’s death, but I know my sorrow is a small fraction of the anguish that must now be engulfing those closest to him, in particular his mother, Joy, his sister, Leeanda, her husband, Andre, and most particularly his beloved wife, Maria. There are not too many people who can speak so fondly and affectionately of their wife and at the same time also admire her brains, her intelligence and...
the fact that she was always going to earn more than they did. It was one of those things that I always admired in Greg.

I am angry and I am sad to be here today. I am angry at myself for not being a better friend. I am angry at those who play politics with human life. I am angry at the national press for, at best, their insincerity. And I am angry at you, Greg, for not having greater faith in those around you. But mostly I am sad—sad that Lachlan and Eliza will not know what a great, zany human being their father was. They will not know the man you could have been. My friend, rest in peace.

Mr GEORGIOU (Kooyong) (1.50 p.m.)—I wish to support the condolence motion moved by the Prime Minister and supported by the Leader of the Opposition. The death of any member of this chamber causes all sadness, but the death of a man as young and as promising as Greg Wilton in the tragic circumstances of his death is a matter for particular anguish. Greg has left behind him a young family. To them, to his mother, to his relatives and friends, I wish to take this opportunity to express my deep sorrow and condolences.

Greg and I were both members from Victoria, and on many occasions we would sit together on that exhilarating Sunday night flight between Melbourne and Canberra. Implicitly we agreed to stay away from the frictions of partisan politics, and we would talk about books, about marginal seat campaigning and about his electorate. Admittedly, the discussions about marginal seat campaigning were a little constrained, but I remember that he was very proud of the fact that in 1998 he took his seat out of the marginal classification. In our conversations, Greg came through as a very decent man who sought to improve the circumstances of those in the community that he had a very great affection for. He was a man of talent, capacity and a potential that will now not be realised. His early death is a loss to all of us.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (1.52 p.m.)—I cannot imagine anything I want to do less than to speak to a motion concerning the death of my friend Greg Wilton, and the speeches of the members for Werriwa and Chisholm do not make it any easier. Greg was born in 1955, like me. He was elected to the federal parliament in 1996, as I also was. As fellow Victorians and members of the same group from within the Labor Party, we had politically a lot in common. We also had some personal likes in common. I enjoy being in and am a great fan of the Australian bush, and so was Greg. When I drove down to Isaacs to address one of his branch meetings back in 1996, he gave me in response a cassette tape which he had purchased originally for himself of Australian bird calls. I want to say a little bit more about Greg’s environmental convictions later. I also enjoy playing music, or as close as I can get to it, on the guitar. Greg was the same. He confessed to me once that his attempts at becoming computer literate were being frustrated by the fact that in order to get to his home computer he had to go past his guitar and he often did not make it—a perfectly appropriate set of priorities, in my view. I did not talk to Greg every day, but when I did speak to him he was one of a handful of people around here that I felt I had instant rapport with. I felt instantly at ease with him and our conversations had the intimacy of people who understood and trusted each other. So I miss Greg and his passing leaves a gap in my life, and I am sure in the lives of others here.

Usually we can take something positive out of events, but on this occasion I cannot. I feel complete and utter desolation for Greg, for his wife, Maria, and for their two children, Lachlan and Eliza. What a terrible ordeal this is for all of them, and I do not think that it gets any easier to comprehend how it can be. I believe in personal responsibility, and ultimately we all take responsibility for the things that we do, including Greg. I also believe in collective responsibility, that we are all under an obligation to look after each other. In the Old Testament Cain says to the Lord, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ There can only be one answer to that. So we do ask ourselves questions about whether we could have looked after Greg better, whether we could have spotted the signs and given him more of a hand. We cannot help but feel, Greg, that we have let you down in some way.
We do ask questions about why he was able to get out of the hospital in Geelong that he checked himself into, how he was able to do that so readily. Like most people here, I am not qualified to comment on who should and who should not be in hospital on mental health grounds or in relation to mental illness issues, but I do wonder about how well this aspect of managing our society is going. We do ask questions about the media treatment of Greg's apparent attempted suicide and the consequences. This is a difficult area, I know. There are public interest considerations, and if the matter had become the subject of charges then of course it would have been a public matter, but we have a responsibility to Greg and to others in this situation as well. I should say at this point that I appreciate the comments that a number of people from the other side of politics have made about Greg's situation. During the last few weeks there has been nothing but compassion and goodwill coming from the other side towards Greg, and I want to say how much I appreciate that. But perhaps not everybody has acted so honourably, and I share with the member for Hunter a view about the Herald Sun article which appeared the day before Greg's death. We are under obligations to someone who was so obviously bleeding inside, and that article falls short of those obligations. Before I move on to some happier reflections, let me make this observation: people can proclaim their compassion for humanity in the abstract as loudly as they like but there is no such thing as humanity in the abstract, there are only people. If you treat the people in your lives with contempt, then your great compassion for humanity in the abstract does not mean a lot.

Greg was someone who had a number of personal convictions that brought him to this place. One of those concerned the environment. I am someone who lays claim to some green instincts myself and I suspect, talking with colleagues, that there are not too many of us. The environment movement often displays a contempt for politics and politicians and I think over time that is being reciprocated. But Greg was someone who cared deeply about environmental issues and he raised them at every possible opportunity. I think it was no accident that he was found in the first place in the You Yangs state park and then in one of our beautiful Gippsland state parks. He was a person with a deep commitment to environmental things. He also had a background in the trade union movement. Whatever people might say about backgrounds in the trade union movement, the fact is that it gave him familiarity with the lives of ordinary workers and their concerns, and he brought that to the parliament and raised those issues frequently. He was also, being of a certain age, a child of the Whitlam area, and that is reflected in his first speech and everything he said and did as a member of parliament. He was a great believer in the things that Gough Whitlam stood for and that the Whitlam government brought to Australia's national political agenda. As others have said, he was a first-class local representative. It was, of course, a great feat to win the seat of Isaacs during what was for us a political meltdown, and he looked after the seat terribly well, having those Saturday morning mobile offices and the opportunity to talk with constituents and take their concerns very seriously.

I extend my condolences to his wife, Maria, his son, Lachlan, and daughter, Eliza, and to the other members of his family, for whom this is a terribly distressing experience. I know that he loved them dearly. The world is poorer for his passing and all the sadder for being conscious that the weeks and months before it must have been filled with unbearable pain. I said to my wife about suicide that whilst I could understand why someone would decide that their reputation was shot and they had no future with their family and friends and they might decide to disappear and go somewhere else—if you are from Melbourne you might bob up in Kalgoorlie or Darwin or even in another country—I found suicide very different to understand. She said, 'Perhaps it isn't about reputation or relationships; perhaps it's about pain.' Greg, if it was about pain, we hope that you are not suffering anymore.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (2.00 p.m.)—I rise to speak to this condolence motion with great sadness and with great sincerity. As the new member for Riverina in 1998, when I came here I was suffering with shin splints, having
been an avid road runner all my life. I decided to go to the gym to undertake a course to perhaps heal my shin splints and then move back out onto the road. I had not been a gym attender and Greg was at the gym. I stood in front of this machine trying to work out exactly what I was to do with it—there were all these flashing lights and buzzers. He came over and kindly offered to assist me and then proceeded to tell me that when I got on I had to hang on because I would go off the end of it if I did not. I thought that was pretty rude, because I had been running for years. I proceeded to jump on and I travelled off the back of it, as he said I would. He was very conscientious about enlisting my support in understanding these machines and everything that was in the gym. Then he offered kindly to go out on the road and run with me—he thought I must have a fairly difficult strike pattern if I was suffering from shin splints—to help enable me to get over this hurdle. I went out running with him and soon found that he ran even faster than he spoke—that was quite difficult because when I sat and looked at his lips I was a couple of sentences behind him.

It was a very good experience that I had with Greg. We had a real friendship which I certainly enjoyed. You could always have a wisecrack with him and he would always come back with one. One day when we were out trying to rectify the problem of shin splints, I was complaining that I was inundated with work in my office, that my appointments were every half-hour and that I could not possibly see a light at the end of the tunnel. He proceeded to tell me that he did not have any office appointments, that in fact he had nothing to do and so had a mobile office—he went out to try to find work. That was not the truth at all. Of course, he did have lots to do in his electorate office. He was having a little bit of a stab at me.

One of the things I remember as most endearing was one day when I was sitting in a particularly boring presentation in the Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee. They are not normally boring but this day it was a little boring. He was sitting next to me, looking so intense and concentrating. I really could not get a handle on what this particular person was speaking about and I leant over and said to him, ‘What does he mean?’ He said, ‘You don’t mean to tell me you are even trying to listen to this, do you?’ When I said yes, he said, ‘I gave up a few minutes ago. Think of things you have to do that are really important for a moment.’ So I said, ‘Okay.’ At the very next hearing we had, the chairman was not able to attend and Greg sat in as chairman. He showed me just how intently he listened. He was an excellent chairman of that meeting in the chairman’s absence and again he showed me that he was just having a lend of me in the previous hearing, because he was certainly on top of every question and all parts of that inquiry. As you walked past him in the corridor he would stick his finger out and flick you under the ear or flick the back of your head. You always ducked when you saw him coming. It was just one of those little flicks that said it was powerful being in the House and having friends in the House.

I say to those people who think that this person could ever have intended to harm his children that that is a fallacy beyond belief. I remember when the member for Chisholm brought her new baby into the first finance committee meeting after the birth of her little daughter. Greg was the first person there to hold the little fingers and the little hand of that little baby. He was the first person there to give support to the member for Chisholm and to discuss sleepless nights, babies’ haves and have-nots, dos and don’ts, and woes and wants. He was the first person to find out just exactly how she was. He was a genuine father who obviously had a genuine sincerity and love beyond belief for his children as he spoke to the member for Chisholm about parenthood.

As I said, it is with genuine sincerity that I wanted to stand in the House today to speak of Greg Wilton. Greg was an enormous tapestry of rich and royal hue. He is somebody we will sincerely miss. However, to Maria, Lachlan and Eliza, and to his family, he will never be gone. He will always linger on and always be with those people in his family who loved and cherished him most, because he loved and cherished them in return. You never lose something when you have let it go,
particularly when you have loved so much. To Greg and to all of the members of the opposition, I feel your pain. I am sure you will have many days when you will be weighing up exactly what may or may not have happened. As the member for Werriwa indicated, it is best and it is most fortunate that we have had such wonderful times and relationships with Greg in order that we can speak about him in sincere, genuine and warm ways.

Mr McMULLAN (Fraser) (2.07 p.m.)—I join in supporting the motion moved by the Prime Minister and spoken to by the Leader of the Opposition. I join with those of my colleagues who said that this is the sort of speech you wish you never had to give in circumstances which you wish never had to arise. I do not want to unduly repeat those things which have been said by others closer to Greg and more eloquent than I, but there are some things I wish to say that I think need to be said on this day, not just about Greg but about his place in this process and about the way in which the House is dealing with today’s events. Before I come to the personal side of speaking of Greg and his family, on behalf of the opposition I want to thank the government and in particular the Leader of the House for the way in which they went about making the arrangements for today and tomorrow. It is very difficult for a government. I can remember being on the parliamentary business committee of the previous government with schedules pressing and times tight. The arrangements for today and around the funeral tomorrow will disrupt significantly an already busy program. I was travelling in rural Victoria and the Leader of the House was on a plane, but he, his staff and his office were extremely cooperative and helpful in facilitating these arrangements. We are all grateful for that, as we are grateful for the sincere and warm words about our colleague from members of the government. It makes what is otherwise extremely difficult somewhat easier.

The member for Werriwa has said better than I could the thing which I mainly wanted to say, so I will be brief about that. I wanted to focus not on the loss of the wonderful things Greg might have been but on the outstanding achievements of his life and why his friends and his family should feel such pride about those. In some ways, we in Australia and even in this House undervalue the worthwhileness of the contribution of a career as a member of parliament. It is sometimes seen just as a training ground for the executive. Of course it is and should remain so; that is important. But the contribution of members of parliament is also simply about being here and representing the people who do them the great privilege of choosing them—because in a democracy what greater honour can people give you than choosing you to represent them? They chose Greg twice, and they chose wisely.

He was, as the Leader of the Opposition said, one of a small number of people in our great democracy who get that chance. He was one of an even smaller group of people who brought new seats into our caucus in 1996: the member for Bruce, the member for Wills, the now member for Canberra but then member for Namadgi, me then as member for Canberra, and Greg. It was not an easy task on that occasion. He performed wonderfully and did so again in 1998. He came as a new member in the office adjacent to that which I had in the corridor close to here. That is the other thing I wish to say on behalf of my staff here, who were very close to Greg. He came into my office often, particularly in the early period of his time in parliament. I reflect the excellent comments by the member for Wills that judgment of our broader, philosophical commitment to humanity is perhaps best made by the way in which we deal with the individuals with whom we come into contact. I, like everybody else, recognise how we sometimes fail that test. In the office, the special thing was that Greg always treated the staff—and they wanted me to make it very clear—as equals. He did not condescend. He did not come in as someone more important. He treated all of them, from the most senior to the most junior staff, as equals and as people with whom he built up a rapport and a friendship. He shared a house with one of the members of my office for some time. It has struck home to them as it has to many others.

I, like others, particularly the member for Wannon, gained an insight into Greg’s broader talent in the brief period in which I
served on what was then called the banking committee. It has now gone on to its broader title of the Economics Committee. I had seen him as a local campaigner and had not seen his broader insights into policy and public issues. I was impressed by his talent and his contribution. I know that having seen that, in some ways, make the loss seem greater because the talent could have contributed much more. But I hope that his friends and his family will be able to focus on what was a life of outstanding contribution rather than succumb to the temptation which we all suffer: to notice only the loss of what might have been—because what was was pretty terrific, both as a human being and as a person who made a contribution that any Australian would have been proud to have made. I hope that that is of some solace and comfort now and in the future to his friends and his family.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—Minister for Financial Services and Regulation) (2.13 p.m.)—As a relatively new member in this place and as a member of the class of 96, it is often the case when we are asked at the beginning of a sitting week to stand and remember someone who has passed away that we look up and try to think of what sort of contribution that person made to the parliament, and it is inevitably the case that they had a long life. It is also the case, when we have condolence motions, that we often think about long and distinguished careers and contributions in this place. As a member of the class of 96, I would never have envisaged that I would have been here to talk of another member of that class.

In the Old Parliament House there seemed to be a more jovial atmosphere and a more informal atmosphere in terms of the interaction between both sides. It seemed that when colleagues and friends on both sides of the House had a drink it would be kept in confidence. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case. In the new Parliament House, a much larger building, we find that the best interaction with the other side of the House is through the committee system or even at the gym.

I was a member of the Standing Committee on Financial Institutions and Public Administration in the last parliament with Greg. He and I shared a lot during that time, notwithstanding the fact that we were from different sides of the House. I quite vividly remember having a long conversation with him one night when we were up in the Kimberleys. Both his spouse and my spouse work in financial services in very high-powered jobs, and we discussed at length how we coped with the stresses of the job. Now, I suppose I feel guilty that I could not have reached out to him a bit more as a member and as a friend. I have been reflecting on that. Believe it or not, I too go to the gym each morning. I reflected to Greg once that perhaps we had different instructors, given that at 44 he had a body that I wished I had at 34. I would often look at Greg when he was picking up the free weights, and his face would be expressionless. He would walk in a deliberate way across to pick up a mat, go back, reload the weights, lift up those weights and again his face would be expressionless. I reflected to myself: how can that be; how can you have no expression? I reflected that this guy must be really burning inside. Like others in here, I probably reflect on that as well.

But the motion is really about the family and friends. I extend my love and support in particular to Joy, a mother who has suffered the awful fate of her son predeceasing her, and Leeanda. I also extend my love and support to Maria, who must be asking herself some terrible questions at the moment. It would be awfully hard for her. I have had four friends from my generation who have committed suicide and I know exactly what her family is going through. With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, may I for a moment in particular address my comments to Lachlan and Eliza? One day they will read this Hansard and they will ask the questions. I do not know if they will, but I cannot, forgive Greg for taking his own life. I cannot forgive him for doing that, because he has taken away from those kids one of the most precious things a human being can give: the love of a father. They will ask themselves the question: why? In circumstances such as this they need to have the courage to understand why and the courage to understand that, at that first moment a few weeks ago when he was at his darkest depths, the thought that was running
through his head was the interests of his children. At that moment of greatest despair, the lives of his children were what prevented him from going the extra step. I say to those children: you should be very proud of your father. I liked him a lot. A lot of what was said here is absolutely right. He was very fond of his electorate. He was passionate about his belief in the parliament, but most importantly of all he was a great family man. I pray to God that Greg rests in peace. I pray to God that his family and friends live their lives in peace.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton) (2.19 p.m.)—When down the track Greg’s family read this Hansard, what they will not see is the enthusiasm from both sides of the House to participate in this contribution to him. Like the member for North Sydney, I was also a member of the class of 96. I would like to make my contribution in terms of the character of Greg rather than necessarily the man as a politician, although it must be said that to win a seat against the political trend indicates respect for him as a human being rather than as a politician. I think that is probably the art of modern-day politics—having that respect within your electorate.

Greg as a man was a great bloke. Indeed, many have said he was a larrikin. He was all that. I still think he had the best knack of interjecting among our side. I will not politicise this by referring to longwinded answers, for instance, at question time. But he had the best response of all to them. When page after page was being read, Greg would invariably yell out, ‘Ah, just show us the pictures, will you?’ No doubt he got that from his little son, Lachlan, when he was reading to Lachlan. That was a great way to make a point.

On this side of the House—and I obviously cannot speak for the government benches—as well as a lot of tension we have moments of revelry. In the Labor caucus, that tends to degenerate to some form of karaoke. What has astounded me is the number of politicians with terrible voices who want to get up and sing. Nevertheless, it is to be encouraged. Greg, with the member for Cunningham, was invariably the highlight of those occasions with Wild Thing, a song of the Troggs, I think. Greg would get up and put his collar up, and put on dark sunglasses if he could grab hold of them, and he and the member for Cunningham would give a great rendition.

Mr Lee—And the member for Hunter.

Mr McCLELLAND—And the member for Hunter, if he could be found, as well. They are the moments to think of.

Being in this House one of the things that Greg and I mourned was, of course, being away from family. But both he and I were frustrated old surfers. Although he was a couple of years older than me, I must say that he looked a little younger. To break that distance from the coast that our constitutional founders selected with this site, I subscribe to an email service which tells me about the beach conditions of the Cronulla-Wanda coastline where I like to surf. I invariably forwarded those on to Greg and Greg would send back an email very smartly about how that was rubbish and how I really should be surfing at Bells Beach. I have ambitions in this place, I must say, but none to surf at Bells Beach. I suspect that might be a little beyond me. A few weeks ago I was talking to Greg, who had been surfing on the weekend, and he commented that he had bought a new surfboard and this board was 10 feet long. Whilst I have bigger and need bigger boards, he did not have that problem. I said, ‘Why have you bought that?’ He said, ‘The challenge, mate, on this one. You know how to turn? You walk back and you put your weight on the back?’ I said, ‘Yes,’ and he said, ‘Well, on this one you’ve got to go another three paces backwards.’

He was a very keen surfer and one got the impression that he loved life. However, he certainly missed his family. That came through very clearly. I think Maria should know how proud he was of her. He was very proud of what she had achieved. The member for North Sydney commented on her expertise. He missed his children desperately. That came through very clearly. I think ultimately that real and genuine love was perhaps part of how events panned out. I would like to say, as others have said, that Greg was clearly a great parliamentarian. Others have said generously that he was a great young Australian. I think that is true also. But, most
importantly, Greg was a great bloke. We are all proud of him. His children can be very proud of him as well.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (2.25 p.m.)—Today I would like to make some short remarks in order to give the members of the ALP as much opportunity as possible to speak in the debate. I would like to associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and many of the others who have also spoken today on what is a very sad occasion for the House of Representatives and an unprecedented one in this parliament since we moved to the new Parliament House in 1988. I express my own personal sorrow and sympathy to Greg’s family and friends. Whatever the desolation and desperate state that he was obviously in that drove him to end his own life I will never understand, and I am sure none of us will be able to. It is a very sad day for us and I extend my great sympathy to his wife, his children, his mother and his sister.

It is very hard in this House to establish close friendships across the chamber, with people on the other side of the House. Obviously, you are seeking to defeat them every three years: they are your natural opponents. But there is a certain camaraderie and almost boarding house attitude amongst members of parliament that we gain from shared experiences and shared desires. We all want to be in office. Over a period we actually do become quite good friends in a quirky sort of way. It is from that position that I would like to talk about Greg Wilton today. I was also on the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration with Greg Wilton, David Hawker and others who have spoken today. Mark Latham, a close friend of Greg, also served on the committee. Both he and I very much enjoyed the banter and the competitiveness that comes out on those backbench committees. We had members like Anthony Albanese pushing the Labor Party’s line on the economics committee, other members from the government trying to defend the government’s position and put us in the best light, and we had Greg Wilton, Mark Latham and Anthony Albanese trying to put us in the worst light. There is a certain banter and competitiveness that builds up on such committees and Greg enjoyed that very much.

I was very surprised when I was reading the press reports that Greg Wilton was described as a loner. I would have thought he was quite the opposite. We used to have our economics committee meetings on Thursday mornings and it was very rare that Greg Wilton did not come along feeling a little worse for wear, probably after a night out with the member for Hunter, or playing pool and so on with me and other members of the House. I would have thought that he was one of the fun people of the parliament, one of the more involved and active. He was very quick and very amusing. Kay Hull, I think, touched on that in her contribution. He used to tease me. Erroneously, he used to call me a tory and a silvertail. We all know on this side of the House that that is completely untrue! I used to tease him about his Labor Party roots.

One thing about the Labor Party is that it is very committed to defeating its opponents. He was very committed to defeating us. He wanted to take every opportunity to get Labor back into office. You have to admire that about him. He was very proud of the fact that he had won a seat from the Liberal Party. He thought that was much better than winning a seat from within the Labor Party. He loved the fact that he was part of the contest, part of the gladiatorial nature of this House. I guess that is why he used to get involved in interjections so much.

He was also a man of great humanity. I remember that on one long occasion when the economics committee was listening to a witness, who obviously was not as interesting as others that have appeared before the committee, I made some disparaging remark about this witness, saying I hoped they would finish soon. Greg Wilton turned to me and said, ‘Just remember, mate, not everyone’s had the opportunities that you have had.’ It was a put-down to me, no doubt—and perhaps I should not tell it—but the truth was that what it said about Greg Wilton was that he was a man who cared about people. He cared about every kind of person that he represented and that we all represent in this House.
I also used to go to the gym—in fact, I still do—and he used to get there about the same time in the morning, at half past six. At that time he had already arrived or was arriving. He was there every day. Even on Thursday mornings after a night out on the town in Canberra he would be there, struggling away sometimes on a Thursday morning, but he would never miss a day. He was far and away the best performer in the gym. He was well ahead of everybody else. Nobody could compete with Greg Wilton because of his fitness. Yet he was not competitive, or he did not seem to be competitive to me or to others. He seemed to be more concerned about whether we were all progressing and whether we were using the machines properly and so on. He was very solicitous of our welfare, and I appreciated that.

It must be a great blow to his colleagues in the Labor Party that this has happened. The Labor Party are a close family of people—we recognise that—and it must be a terrible blow to them. My heart goes out to them today as part of this condolence motion because they must be feeling it very much in their hearts that this has happened to a member of their party. I place on record my sincere sympathies, my condolences. I thank the House for the opportunity to speak today.

Mr LEE (Dobell) (2.30 p.m.)—Greg, the member for Melbourne and I had offices in the corridor which also includes the opposition party room. It is a pretty quiet and dark place at the moment, as you can imagine: his office is locked, the lights are out and his name has been taken down from the door. It is very different from my memories of Greg. He was a frequent visitor to my office. He would brighten the place up, he always loved a chat, and he would have any excuse to use the copier in our office just to come over and have a talk. He was clearly clever and bright, and he always had an interesting point of view. He was probably more in touch than most of us on either side of the House because of those many Saturday morning mobile offices that he used to hold regularly in his electorate.

This morning my office and I were remembering Greg’s great love of his family. We were talking in particular about him planning a trip and about his enjoyment of putting the plan together to take his wife and kids on a visit to the mountains near Canberra. I first had the chance to meet Greg and Maria at a political dinner in the lead-up to the 1996 election. We on the Labor side knew that that was going to be a very tough election for all of us. The odds were always against Greg defeating a sitting Liberal member of parliament. We all knew that Annette Ellis would reclaim Canberra for the ALP, and we were hopeful for Alan Griffin in Bruce; but, in many ways, Greg was never expected to win the seat of Isaacs. He surprised all of us with the great campaign he ran and the great victory he had on election night in 1996, due in no small part to the hard work of both him and Maria. He was certainly a very hardworking local member, as others have mentioned.

Given the incidence of mental illness in the wider community, it is probably no surprise that a member of this House has suffered from this illness, and from depression in particular. It can happen to any of us. We will never fully appreciate the struggle that he had in dealing with his own problems while working hard to solve his constituents’ problems. As we try to understand, perhaps we can learn from a quote from Dante, which my mate Steven Hutchins used in other circumstances recently. Dante said this: ‘In the middle of the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost.’ Greg’s death challenges us to work even harder to try to help the many members of our community still lost in those dark woods. My colleague the member for Werriwa has mentioned, and others have also commented on the fact, that one day Greg’s kids will read the condolence speeches made here today and that on that day they will understand how much Greg contributed, how much he was loved and how much he will be missed. All of us extend our deep sympathies to his family and friends. We hope and pray that Greg now rests in peace.

Mr RONALDSON (Ballarat) (2.33 p.m.)—I did not know Greg from the gym. I am not a regular gym goer—some will say that is quite obvious, and others will say that it is not necessary. I mainly knew Greg—as
the member for Kooyong said—from flight 654 on Sunday nights when a ragbag of members from all over Victoria would meet to come to Canberra. We would sometimes see Simon Crean there, especially after North Melbourne won; when they lost he tended to get the Ansett flight. I remember about three or four months ago Greg and I were talking about our children—my children, like Greg’s, were, when I first came to parliament 10½ years ago, I think four, three and three months—and about the sorts of strategies that you can use to try to balance what is an extraordinarily difficult family life. Today, the great tragedy is that we are doing something that I am afraid families right throughout Australia are also probably doing today and were probably doing yesterday. As the Minister for Financial Services and Regulation said, for those who have experienced the trauma of suicide in a close personal sense, there is nothing more dramatic. So we are not different from other members of the Australian community. I think we need to bear that in mind. The impact of today is that it has happened to one of our own. We have delusions in politics that the sorts of things that happen to other people cannot or will not happen to us. The realities are, as someone said earlier, that we are no different.

I remember Greg talking about his children and the way he expressed himself through those children; it was the talk of someone with young children. Our children are now 10-plus, but you can always pick fathers of young children because they tend to talk through their kids as they relate those experiences. There are a lot of other Australian children who will be growing up without being able to read about their dad in Hansard. I hope Greg’s kids do read Hansard, because my experience of him was as a good, honest and decent person. His children deserve to know that, especially with such a high-profile suicide as this one. There are many children whose parent’s suicide is not high profile, and the pain that we are experiencing is the same pain with which they will go through life. It is an incredible honour to be elected to this place, and none of us should ever forget that. I think the fact that Greg’s kids will be able to read about their dad is a reflection of that.

Mr Speaker, this place has changed since I first came here. I remember when Arch Bevis, Laurie Ferguson, Alex Somlyay, Peter Nugent, Chris Gallus, I and others came in here. There was that certain sense of naivety, I suppose, but we could do our politicking in here and we could go out of the chamber and do the things that normal people do. We could make friends; you could have friends outside of politics. I do not think we can afford not to do something to address what happened to Greg Wilton. If we do not do something about it individually and collectively, I think his loss will have been a waste of a fantastic life. The realities are that, in this place, the factions and the ambitions—and I am talking across the board here—tend to mean that you spend more time looking behind your back than you do looking to the front. In my position it is a bit different because I have only got the public gallery behind me, but those are the realities of life.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition; I think we do need someone whom members can go to in difficult situations. I do not think that Leo McLeay and I are in a position to do properly the sorts of things that we do every day of the week. You, Mr Speaker, have been a chief whip, as has Alan Cadman. You know what it is like when the door is closed and your colleagues come in to talk to you. Basically all you can do is relate your own experiences and try to assist your colleague in that regard. I do not think Leo and I—and we have discussed this—have the qualifications for that. I think that, in certain circumstances, we can lend an appropriate ear and give a bit of guidance, but I do not think we are properly qualified. The Leader of the Opposition has my support to put in place a more formal mechanism—not through the whips, because some of these things are very personal. The ability should be there for someone to get some counselling and to get some assistance.

Ultimately, the responsibility is ours. We must wear the responsibility for looking after each other. We are a political family, irrespective of our politics. In some respects I think we are a family that lets itself down. If we are not prepared to do something about it, no-one else will be prepared to do something about it. I look at Greg Wilton and I see...
someone who had absolutely everything to live for, but he is not here today. He is not here. His kids will not grow up with their father, and I think that is a great tragedy. If we do not look at the situation ourselves, assess it and act as any other family would act in this situation to avoid it happening to another member of our family, then, as I said before, we are letting ourselves down.

This is a job that is easy to attack. We have to roll with the punches. It is not a popular profession. I was having a chat to one of my colleagues last night; I think it was Harry Jenkins. I said to him that your own electorate thinks you are a hard worker and that the rest of them are hopeless. I am sure that is reflected right throughout our electorates. We are in an industry that is easy to attack. I do not think we should be afforded any special treatment because of what has happened, but I hope people will realise that we do have families, that we do have the frailties and weaknesses that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition referred to and that it is a job that takes you away from your family. It is a job that puts enormous pressure on our marriages and on our relationships with our children. I am not asking for sympathy; I do not think that any of us is asking for sympathy, but I think we do deserve a little understanding in that regard. As I said before, if we are not prepared to tackle this ourselves, Greg Wilton’s life will have been lost in vain.

We must collectively address what I think is a real issue in this place: that the relationships that were in the old House and the relationships that were in the new House, in my view, have sadly disappeared. If we cannot reinvent the sorts of relationships that the Arch Bevises, the Laurie Fergusons, the others whom I referred to before and I had and if we cannot have some mutual respect and understanding while playing the political game, I think we have lost something that is very dear to this place. It was something that was obviously dear to those who have gone before us. I feel desperately sorry for Greg Wilton’s family. I know the pain they are going through. There is not a one- or two-week barrier for overcoming the pain; it is a hell of a lot longer than that. We cannot afford to walk out of here this afternoon and feel a weight off our shoulders because we have spoken about a man whom we all had great respect for. We cannot afford to do that. We must walk out of this place this afternoon with a determination to do something about it.

Mr Leo McLeay (Watson) (2.43 p.m.)—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for the chance today to say something about Greg Wilton and his life. I have been here for a while and during that period there has only ever been one condolence motion for a person who died while still a member, and that was the then Minister for Finance in 1981. They were condolence speeches you could listen to. Even though those members of the government of the time knew Eric Robinson well, it was a life you could talk about; you could talk about how that man had lived a life. With Greg it is a condolence where you are only halfway there: you know half of Greg’s life, you know what potential he had and you know what a decent man he was, but you are not able to reflect on what it would have been. I think that is one of the very sad parts about today. Too often here we get overtaken by some of the things that the Chief Government Whip just spoke about.

I am about 10 years older than Greg, but I remember reading Bonfire of the Vanities when I was his age. I thought it was a fascinating, interesting and witty book, and I recognised in the book a lot of people I knew; many of them were my friends. They were all the masters of the universe. If you read Bonfire of the Vanities, you will recognise as masters of the universe many people in this house. The trouble is that we try to convince ourselves that we all have to become masters of the universe. As the Manager of Opposition Business said earlier, too often we see this place as the breeding ground of the executive. I think one of the mistakes we make is that we have forgotten about the role of the parliamentarian. There are things you can do here other than be a minister. Ministers come and ministers go, as the Public Service will tell you—and they live on forever; but who was the minister two back? If you are going to spend your life here, you can do other things. You do not have to get into the com-
petitive bind that is destroying a lot of people’s lives here.

We have heard a lot today about the potential of Greg Wilton. He was, I think, shaping up to be a good parliamentarian. The contribution of the member for Riverina, who talked about some of the things she found with Greg Wilton as a new member, was a very good one. I think nearly everyone who was on the economics committee with Greg who has spoken in this debate has told about a side of Greg Wilton that the rest of us may not have seen. I saw it, and the other whips in my office saw it: Greg was a bloke who had a great deal of ability.

We have seen some pretty terrible things in the newspapers recently about Greg—some by journalists and some by people who prompted journalists. But I think the one thing we should lay to rest today is the terrible canard that he was a loner. Greg Wilton was not a loner, and the people in his electorate office and the people in his electorate do not think Greg was a loner. The people who were on the parliamentary committee with him do not think he was a loner. The people whose offices are in the same corridor as his do not think he was a loner. The two other opposition whips and I, who used to go to the movies with him on Thursday nights, do not think he was a loner. Greg Wilton was not a loner. He was only as alone as any of us here. He had a life here, he did his job, and he got scared by some of the masters of the universe. He found that very hard to cope with sometimes. All of us have those ups and down, and as a surfer—I have not been a surfer but some of my friends have—

Mr Sawford interjecting—

Mr Leo McLeay—The opposition whip says he can understand my not being a surfer. I think Greg’s problem was that he hit a couple of bad waves together, and they became a dumper for him. As the Chief Government Whip has said, all of us who work here probably do not take enough care of each other. It is a competitive environment. I suppose that is the Westminster system of government. It is interesting to note that some of the European parliaments are less competitive, because they do not have a winner-takes-all system. People have to work with others rather than taking an ‘us and them’ approach.

At the end of today, we do not just need to discharge our sorrow, our obligation or whatever we think we have to Greg or to ourselves. We need to try to come to grips with some of the things that affected his life and caused him to take his life. I was interested to hear what the Minister for Financial Services and Regulation and the Chief Government Whip said about knowing people who have suicided. Greg Wilton is the only friend I have ever had who has suicided, so this is a frightening experience for me. My children have had friends who have suicided, and I have seen the effect that it has had on them. I suspect it is having that effect on me too.

There should not be enough drama in being a member of parliament to cause us to do that, but, if there is, we all have an obligation to put out a hand to try to help the person through it. One of the ways we can do that is to focus on the fact that there are a number of roles that we can have in this parliament. Sure, some of us can become ministers. The odd one or two—some would say that they have to be odd to do it—will become party leaders and prime ministers. But there is a role for all of us who have been so lucky and so smiled upon by our parties and our constituents that they have put us here. That is our role. I think if we concentrated on that a bit more, maybe the competitiveness might not be so overwhelming for some people.

I also take up the point of the government whip that we all do need some outside help from time to time. If you look at some of the things that have happened to some of us—with the massive marriage breakdowns that occur here, and things in extremis like that which happened to Greg—this industry has a pretty poor occupational health and safety record. Any other employer would probably end up in the courts for it, and we probably ought to do something seriously about it ourselves.

But condolence resolutions should also be a way of celebrating someone’s life, and today we are celebrating Greg’s life, cut short
as it was. Greg’s kids will be able to read this later on and know that the story in the paper about their father being a loner is a lie, because I have not seen so many people stand up here and say things so sincerely in a long, long while. They will also know that their father was someone who made a very considerable and interesting contribution in this place. I am a little deaf, but I used to hear his interjections down here. I used to have a bit of a rule when I was Speaker that all interjections are disorderly, but witty ones can be tolerated. A lot of Greg’s interjections were quite funny and more than tolerable.

The work he did on the finance committee was good and in Australia’s interest, and the work he did for his constituents was good and in their interests. Today we should celebrate Greg Wilton’s life and, to genuinely celebrate Greg Wilton’s life, we should try in his honour to be a little kinder to each other. That way, maybe we will not have any more Greg Wilton problems—although I do not mean any more Greg Wilton ‘problems’. I think Greg Wilton would never want the same thing to happen to anyone else here that happened to him. Let us try to do that for him.

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Minister for Employment Services) (2.55 p.m.)—The terrible tragedy which has befallen our late friend and colleague—the horror and mystery which we can hardly begin to comprehend—should force us to take stock of ourselves and our institution, as the Chief Opposition Whip and the Chief Government Whip have just suggested. It seems to me that, like so many, Greg Wilton came with high hopes to what he regarded as the greatest institution in the nation for helping people and the greatest forum in the nation for debating big issues, and yet, as his mother and sister said in his death notice, he died of a broken heart. The sad truth seems to be that this parliament, and politics generally, did not live up to his expectations as a place to build a better world. In this sense we have probably all badly let him down.

As many have said, he was a regular at the gym. It was pretty clear from the staccato conversations that you have between the chin-ups and the push-ups that he deeply lamented the mindless point scoring which so often passes for debate in here, and he deeply lamented the fact that so often what we were dealing with seemed essentially trivial. He hated the character assassination which sadly is so much a part of the public discourse and the private conversation here and for which all of us bear a heavy responsibility.

Of course, there are explanations for these things. A country which does not need to worry about comparatively big things will tend to worry, sometimes obsessively, about comparatively small things. People will always fight over who should exercise power, even such circumscribed power as we exercise in this place. But, Mr Speaker, at the heart of his lament I think there is a very valid point. Even when our opponents are doing their worst by our lights, by their own lights they are still doing their best. We often complain about the low public standing of politicians, but other people take us at our own estimation, and we are always running each other down. Of course, there is a place for judgment, and sometimes there is a place for furious denunciation, but I think Australia would be better off without the feral quality which so often contaminates our public lives.

Greg Wilton, like all of us, wanted to make a difference. Following on from the words of the Chief Opposition Whip and the Chief Government Whip, if in this place, from this time, those of us who knew him could try harder to give credit where it is due, I suspect that he might end up making the kind of mark he sought. We did not reach out to him enough in his life. None of us reaches out enough to any of our colleagues, and we should not wait until they have gone to appreciate them. Obviously Greg Wilton was not gentle on himself, and I think the best thing we could do would be to rededicate ourselves to being kinder and gentler to each other, as he would have wished. It is all very well to talk about outside help, but the best help is the help we can provide to each other. Had Greg been able to listen to this debate, I am sure he would have felt much more proud of the parliament that he has so tragically left.

Mr Melham (Banks) (2.59 p.m.)—I rise to support the condolence motion moved by the Prime Minister and seconded by the
Leader of the Opposition. I think it is appropriate that the House do set time aside to allow all members to speak to this condolence motion. It is a unique situation in the life of this parliament. I think the speeches from both sides of the House have come from the heart and have been very moving; none more moving than the two from Greg’s closest friends in this place, the member for Hunter and the member for Werriwa. That is not to detract from other speeches, but I think it is fair to say that those two members were Greg’s closest friends in this House and they did him well today. I know that Greg would be embarrassed listening from on high to what is being said about him today.

Greg first came to my attention before he came into the parliament, because the former member for Holt, Michael Duffy, said to me, ‘This bloke is coming to Canberra and you’ve got to look after him; he’s a good bloke.’ It was Greg Wilton. You do not have to be a minister or a frontbencher—merely getting to this place is an achievement in itself. As the Leader of the Opposition attested, there have been only 550 members on the Labor side since Federation. The testaments that have come forward today show the contribution that Greg made to this place. The Parliamentary Library has produced some biographical notes, and there are three pages which are indexed to speeches that he made from 1996 to 2000. They show that he was a dedicated local member, always up on his feet speaking about his local electorate and pushing local issues. I can remember sitting on a plane with him some six months ago and having a private discussion, and the love for his wife and children just came through on that flight.

Why are we setting aside time today? Because his death is a shock. It was unexpected. He was born on 6 November 1955. He will not see his 45th birthday. I do not feel guilt about what has happened and I do not feel personally responsible—I do not think any of us should; it is a part of life—but it did send a shiver down my spine when the news came through that he had been found dead. We expect normalcy in life. We expect to wake up tomorrow and to be able to participate in life. We do not expect someone in the prime of their life to be taken from us in such tragic circumstances. That is why I think it is important that we sit back and have a period of reflection, both as a tribute to his life and as a tribute to his family, and hopefully to learn some lessons from his death.

I think this place has changed in the last 10 years that I have been here. I came here in 1990 and, of the 148 members, there are only 30 more senior than I—the turnover has been large. When I first came here there was more comradeship on committees and within the parliamentary parties as well. I served on a number of committees with members opposite. Maybe as a result of going on the frontbench I am spending less time on the committees, but friendships across the political spectrum were formed. Too often the distorted view that is presented by the media—and I do not blame them for this—is that there is always combat between the opposite sides of the House. There is not. There are many things that unite us. There are many things that we agree on. Those reading the Hansard today will be staggered to see the warmth and affection with which Greg was held on both sides of the House. As someone on the other side rightly said, what Greg lived for was the return of a Labor government and he prided himself in taking a seat off the conservatives.

I want to adopt the words of his lawyer, Gerard Mullaly, who said, ‘He was fundamentally a really nice, decent fellow who was just overwhelmed by the circumstances he found himself in.’ I do not sit in judgment of Greg—I salute him; I pay tribute to him. I think he did make a contribution to public life. My thoughts and prayers are with his family.

Mr ANTHONY (Richmond—Minister for Community Services) (3.04 p.m.)—Greg has now put his hand in the hand of God. No one knows what would have gone through his mind. It would have burnt him up and maybe he felt as though he had no option, but that should not have been the case.

But I want to talk about Greg from when I met him on the first day of the class of 96, as other speakers have. There was a real enthusiasm that day. There were a lot of coalition people and there was the odd sprinkling of Labor Party individuals, and that was quite
I met Greg there, along with the member for Hunter and the member for Grayndler. My wife actually remembers Greg far better than I do—we were talking about it yesterday. The next time I got to know Greg was as a member of the financial institutions committee. It was to his credit that he was selected when there were many quite prominent members of the Labor Party on that committee—Bob McMullan, Ralph Willis, Mark Latham, Steve Martin and Anthony Albanese—and Greg was the deputy chair. As the chairman of that committee mentioned earlier, Greg did a good job.

I did not enjoy my next encounter with Greg so much. As the member for Sturt said, Greg used to regularly bait me. Greg was a good Labor man—I can assure the House of that. I remember one occasion when we were on a committee trip, as the Minister for Financial Services and Regulation said, to the Kimberleys and to the Northern Territory. On the flight up there, conversations were getting rather robust, ably assisted by the member for Grayndler, as they were taking on the National Party. I did not really enjoy Greg's company at all on that particular flight. After a few days with Greg Wilton and the other members, I found Greg to be an interesting man, particularly with respect to his knowledge of botany. We put aside our sparring swords and enjoyed each other's company immensely. I do remember more meetings of that committee when not only was there the sparring between each other but also we would often try to outfox, with limited success, the previous Governor of the Reserve Bank or the current Governor of the Reserve Bank.

Greg was a fine individual. Many people have mentioned the gym. I remember going down there in earlier days, but I gave up fairly quickly, as I felt very awkward with the many other members of the opposition and government, and I returned to the pool or running. Greg did talk about his family. I have a young family as well. There are enormous strains and demands, as those in the House who have a young family would appreciate, from the strange and weird life that we live. I just say to him that I hope he rests in peace. I hope that, as time moves on, for his children, his mother, his wife and others the wounds will heal. It is just tragic that he felt that he had to take his own life.

Mr SAWFORD (Port Adelaide) (3.08 p.m.)—I join with everyone in this House in expressing my great sadness at the tragic death of Greg Wilton. His death brings home to all of us our own vulnerability and, in fact, the vulnerability of all people who live in our society. It is a sad fact that depression has now overtaken cancer as the second most prevalent disease in this country. Perhaps all of us in the three parties here and the Independents as well will take health and education a little bit more seriously in the future after this sad event. I hope the fact that depression has become the second most prevalent disease shocks us all.

We are federal politicians but first and foremost we are very social beings, and all of us rely on the support of others when things go wrong or are perceived to go wrong. All of us live in at least three worlds—the world of family, the world of friends and the world of work. If relationships in one of those groups go wrong, usually the support from the other two groups carries us through a particular crisis. If two of those worlds break down, individuals, whether they be anyone in this House or not, are in some sort of severe crisis. If the three worlds break down, tragedy is often not far away. For federal politicians those three normal worlds that most people live in are further complicated by the addition of sometimes one or two more by the intricacies of this place and our factional alliances or not. This all adds up to the stress that complicates our lives, and we all understand that.

There is perhaps on all sides of parliament an increasing sameness and a lack of diversity in the people who come to this place. That can be regarded as a strength but, equally, it can be argued as a weakness. Questions about a member fitting in are no more valid than questions about members fitting out—and maybe it is in the fitting out in terms of the comments of the Chief Government Whip and the Chief Opposition Whip that we need to take some cognisance of. In all relationships, transmission of communications is no more important than re-
ceiving them—the very same sorts of communications. In all sorts of relationships, on too many occasions the basics of what ought to be everyday behaviour is forgotten, and we are all diminished by it. At stark times like this, such as the tragic loss of the member for Isaacs, we know in our hearts we are all diminished by it.

I recall three fond associations with Greg Wilton; there are many others. Greg assisted the member for Maribyrnong, me and the Chief Government Whip in our duties in the Main Committee. He did so conscientiously, cooperatively and with a sense of humour. He was known in this place on our side—and, I think, on the other side as well—as a smart, hardworking local member. That he certainly was, but he was much more than that. In fact, we shared a notoriety: he fell asleep on my shoulder at the pictures five minutes into the film.

Mr Leo McLeay—We didn’t tell.

Mr SAWFORD—I am grateful that the Chief Opposition Whip says that. I thank the member for Franklin, the member for Maribyrnong and the others who were there that night. On other occasions he attended, we sat with a seat between us. I also remember him at the MCG, along with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I am a rather pure partisan Port Adelaide supporter and I made a spectacle of myself that day—the umpires ‘cheated’ and we lost a close game—but the deputy opposition leader made an even bigger spectacle of himself. Greg—at the time I did not realise he was a North Melbourne supporter—just laughed at the behaviour of both of us. It is with these memories and others like them that I will forever remember with fondness Greg Wilton. My deepest sympathy goes to his mother, his sister, his wife and his children. I trust that in the future, for this sad loss and the sad loss of many other Australians every day, as has been mentioned in this condolence debate, all of us on all sides of parliament will do something positive and constructive about it.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (3.13 p.m.)—Greg Wilton was a member of the class of 96—a record group of 53 new members. This is the first condolence motion that I have spoken on and, Dame Roma Mitchell aside, it is the first condolence motion I can remember of someone I had met. As the Chief Opposition Whip said, Greg is the first sitting member of this House to die since 1981. We do not expect one of our colleagues to die. By and large, MPs now are younger, certainly in Greg’s case they are healthier, than they ever were. Greg is probably the first MP to have taken his life. As previous speakers have said, he was one of the smaller group of new Labor members who came in against the tide.

I want to talk about how I remember Greg and offer some things I remember about him. Like many others, I first met him at the new members’ induction. As the member for Petrie has said, a photo was taken of all the new members in the Senate courtyard. My memory of that is a little different from that of the member for Petrie, and it has been jogged by looking at some old clippings. I do remember that Greg and the member for Hunter were both hamming it up in the foreground. All of us got the official photo, which was quite posed, but I think ‘Melba’ in the Australian ran the photo of the member for Hunter and Greg Wilton hamming it up. It had the caption ‘Groucho or Karl?’ and accompanied an article talking about these new members of parliament.

I later got to know Greg as Deputy Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration. He was a conscientious deputy chair. He rarely missed a meeting and sometimes filled in for the member for Wannon when he was unable to be there. So I was surprised last month when the committee had its semi-annual meeting with the Reserve Bank governor in Melbourne that Greg Wilton was not there. I had no idea of the personal troubles that Greg was having at that time, although later we learnt about them. He worked hard on that committee and paid close attention to the questions all members asked. Once, after I questioned the Reserve Bank governor about the NAIRU, he came up to me in the break and said, ‘What’s the NAIRU?’ He wanted to know all about it, so we talked about that.

Previous speakers have touched on Greg’s interests. He told me that he loved surfing,
and when the committee met in Sydney he loved nothing more than staying at the Coogee Bay Hotel and waking up in the morning and going surfing in Coogee Bay before the committee met. He also loved working out in the gym. He used the free weights and he was an example to all of us as a strong and fit MP. I did not know him as well as some opposition members, but we did talk from time to time. One of the longest talks I had with him was in the week after the 6 November referendum on the republic. The committee was meeting in Sydney, and both Greg and I and perhaps the member for Petrie and the member for Wannon had a long talk over a coffee before the committee met. We were debriefing on the results of the referendum in our different electorates, analysing them and trying to determine what it all meant. As Liberal and Labor members are wont to do, we sparred on the committee and we sparred in the parliament. We had the sort of banter that Liberal and Labor MPs have.

As previous speakers have said, he grew up in the seat of Isaacs and he lived in the seat of Isaacs. In fact, his community involvement was perhaps even stronger than that because he told me last year that he had ended up buying a house in the street in which he had grown up—not the same house but another house in that street. So he really was part of the community in Isaacs.

In talking about the death of Greg Wilton, I would also like to touch on the way the media has reported this. In reporting attempted suicide and suicide, the media has an important responsibility to avoid making a situation worse and also to avoid provoking copycat suicides. Without wanting to go into the details, I will say that some of the coverage has been responsible and some has not. The media has a responsibility to look at their own ethics and the way in which they cover attempted suicides and suicides of public figures to see whether they are happy that their coverage over the last month conforms to their ethics.

The last issue I would like to mention is that of depression and its relationship to suicide. The most important thing for all of us as MPs to understand is that depression is a treatable illness. A Bureau of Statistics survey three years ago showed that only 25 per cent of males with depression were receiving adequate treatment. A recent pilot survey in my electorate called out of the blue supported this finding. Professor Graham Martin, who is a national authority on mental health and a constituent of mine, highlighted this in the Sydney Morning Herald this weekend. He said that depression is hard to diagnose in men and that men by and large are reluctant to seek treatment. As MPs we should all be aware of this and, for any proposal which is looking at addressing mental health and depression, this really should be the starting point.

As I said, I remember Greg in the parliament, I remember him on the committee and I remember him in the gym. The abiding memory I have of him is seeing him on a Tuesday lunchtime coming back from a run with the member for Werriwa. They had stopped to walk up Commonwealth Avenue after a two-bridges run. Afterwards I teased him because I thought he was pretty fit and I was wondering why he was walking up at the end of the run. Larry Anthony and I were going on a bike ride around the lake, and he came back with the riposte that he and the member for Werriwa had decided that the most appropriate mode of transport for us, being a Liberal and a National, would have been a tandem rather than two bikes. That really was a great day; it was great to be outside on a Tuesday afternoon, to be outside of parliament, and I am sure all of us really appreciated having an hour outside. I hope, like many other speakers, that later his children will be able to read this motion of condolence. The Hansard will not reflect it, but it is a mark of the respect that Greg was held in that almost three hours after we started debating this motion we still have almost a full complement of the House, which is very rare in this parliament. I think it is important that his family and his children know how highly his colleagues regarded him.

Mr TANNER (Melbourne) (3.21 p.m.)—Several years ago I stood in this spot to express my grief about the loss of a friend and colleague from my union. He was a man in his mid-40s with a couple of young kids who went to a lonely place in the bush outside
Melbourne and took his own life in the same way that Greg Wilton did. I little dreamed that one of the very people I spoke to about that then would be somebody from within the ranks of our own caucus who would take the same tragic action only a few years later, somebody who also got his grounding in the trade union movement—albeit in a different section—in what is now the Australian Services Union. Greg often reminded me of the first time we met, which was about 15 years ago outside a Labor Party state conference in Victoria. Apparently I was leaning up against my old Holden panel van, eating a meat pie. As a young bloke from the southeastern suburbs, I think he formed a fairly positive initial view of me as a result of that. Subsequently his attitude towards me deteriorated, I suspect, due to the fact that my cultural habits changed over time.

As the member for Dobell has indicated, one of the interesting points that arises out of our responses to this is that some of us got to know Greg pretty well because we were next door to him or in the same corridor. Over the past couple of years I got to know him pretty well because he would drop in and I would chat to him on the way to divisions, in the cafe or whatever. It really does illustrate the difference that has emerged in the social dynamics of the parliament as a result of the change from the old house to the new house that you get to know somebody pretty well, get pretty friendly with them and talk about a whole range of things purely because incidentally they happen to be a couple of doors down from you.

I obviously endorse the observations that have been made by many others in this discussion, but the characteristic of Greg that will live in my memory is his honesty. He was always honest. Whenever I talked with him about himself, about politics, about his colleagues or about his views about things, he was always open-minded and he was in some cases brutally honest about how he felt about things and how he saw others. He would often draw things to my attention. We would often talk about economic issues. His interest in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration has already been referred to. He always had a very refreshing, open and unassuming way of looking at things. Something by which I judge people in this place on both sides is people’s willingness to put aside their postures and their defences and talk about how they feel about things in ways that require some honesty and some openness. I will always remember Greg as somebody who had that basic honesty and decency. He was, as the member for Werriwa has said, ultimately a good man.

We have heard observations today about the strains of public life, and the difficulties that we all face we need to take on board and think quite deeply about. There has been quite a bit of discussion in the media over the past couple of weeks—particularly, of course, in the past few days—about the degree to which political life is different from other occupations. It is true at one level to point out that there are people in many other occupations, like pilots, air hostesses, traveling salespeople and the like, who suffer similar types of difficulties to those that we suffer—long separations from family, stressful work and the like—but I think there is one unique characteristic of our occupation which overwhelms these things, and that is the intense competitiveness on a one-on-one basis that characterises our occupation. Very few people have probably read it, but the former Liberal minister Neil Brown wrote quite an interesting autobiography where he said that one of the great sadnesses he had to deal with in his political career was that every time he made an advance, every time he achieved anything, it was always at the expense of a colleague. We have a unique occupation in that it is a competition of one against all and everybody against everybody else. That is an unavoidable aspect which you do not find in other occupations and which leads to a level of stress and difficulties in relationships that is hard to know how to deal with.

It is also worth contemplating some of the less edifying aspects of the events of the last few weeks, particularly not only the role of the media but some of the people who spoke to them, because there are not many media stories of this nature without people actually talking to the media. So we should not by any means just concentrate on the role of the me-
dia, reprehensible though it has been. I am reminded of circumstances that occurred a few years ago involving a person who has actually been quoted, quite properly, in a couple of those articles, a close friend of mine and former colleague from the state parliament, Neil Cole, who many of you will know suffered a serious problem in his political career a number of years ago when the fact that he was suffering from manic depression became public. I consider that it was to the great shame of many people in the Labor Party at that time that the response that came from many sections of the Labor Party to that was to try and de-preselect him, to take out his preselection which had already occurred for the forthcoming election. It was only due to the intervention of me and one or two other people that ultimately that did not happen. I think that illustrates the inherent viciousness that can be found in public life and that can be found in politics. There is a dynamic there which often overwhelms all of us. I think we have seen a little bit of that in some of the responses that have occurred in the last week or so with respect to Greg. The thing we need to think about is precisely how far we all are prepared to push the political contest and the individual battle for advancement in circumstances like this. It is one thing to have private conversations with people about things, but to have these things, albeit anonymously, reported in the media I think is a very different thing.

In conclusion, I would like to add my expression of profound grief and sorrow on the departure of somebody who was a good man and somebody who had a deep and genuine commitment to politics, to the Labor movement and to the union movement and in the sense of the warmth and respect that he evoked amongst his colleagues which is being expressed today. So, regardless of the circumstances of his death, regardless of the fact that you have lost a father, you should feel nothing but pride when you read these words spoken today.

Mr HARDGRAVE (Moreton) (3.29 p.m.)—I rise today to support the motion moved by the Prime Minister and supported by the Leader of the Opposition, and so well supported by all the speakers prior to me. I must say that I did not serve on a committee with Greg. I did not have an office next door to him and I did not have a plane ride with him, yet he was somebody whom I spoke to virtually every day in this place. I cannot claim him as a close mate but I can claim him as a constant friend in the sense that I saw him every morning at the gym. Like the member for North Sydney, it did not work as well for me either. Greg’s intensity and the vigour with which he approached his workouts each day were always a ready mark in the sand for us to aspire to.

Like the Prime Minister, I found in my dealings with Greg that he was always courteous. Jim Killen said to me before I first took my seat in this place in 1996—like Greg Wilton—that you should not try to find friends on only one side of the chamber. In the time I have been here, I have always tried and will continue to try to have an ongoing friendship and working relationship with men and women from the Australian Labor Party. One of the things that has come out of today’s almost cleansing debate is that there is a great sense of reflection and admiration for the importance each of us play in the national debate. Each of us comes here with something that we stand for and we attempt, in our best endeavours, to express that, to champion our cause and to advocate for those we represent. I suspect that there is something that comes out of today. It may not be in the short
term as substantial as the Chief Government Whip or the Chief Opposition Whip have suggested, but I think it has given each of us an opportunity to reflect upon ourselves, on each other and on our conduct towards each other.

Like just about everybody else—I listened to the members for Hunter, Werriwa and Chisholm and I will come back to their comments in a moment—I would never have known that Greg had the personal burdens he was carrying. He was not a stranger to those personal burdens and there are too many in this place who probably know some of those tensions and problems. One thing that sticks in my mind is a sense of frustration. When I heard about and read through the media—I will talk about the media in a moment—what had happened just a few weeks ago involving his own children, I did not know whatever was going on in his mind, but I felt a huge sense of frustration and disappointment. I did not feel a sense of resentment towards Greg. I remember commenting to the clerk to the Chief Government Whip, Geraldine Rath, that I was looking to the day when Greg came back to this place and I hoped that in this place, where friends seem hard to find and understanding even harder to find, everyone would in fact embrace him. The member for Wills talked about the fact that he might have been worried that his reputation was shot. I sincerely believe that most people did not see him in that light. I really hope that I am right, that most people in this place had some great empathy with and shared the hurt that was in Greg’s heart and mind. I think we all were hoping that Greg would come back amongst us and take his place in this parliament, to be the vigorous representative that he was, to be the good committee person he was and the mate he was to so many, particularly those opposite.

Like others who have spoken in this debate, I have also lost a friend to suicide. I do not want to dwell on that because I am afraid, as the Prime Minister suggests, that I will externalise my emotions more than I want to in this debate. I was never able to offer my sense of frustration to Greg because I never knew of his difficulties. I feel a sense of great frustration as a result. I can only say that we can all hope—and this is my own personal maxim—that no matter what is thrown up on any particular day, what keeps you going, as I guess we all know, is that tomorrow could be better if today is not so good. The pain and despair that he felt must have been immense, despite all the promise he showed in his professional career. The fact that members of parliament are no different, that in each of our electorates we are the first among equals, which we must keep in mind, still does not make us superhumans and does not protect us from human frailty.

As a former member of the media, I would like to comment about the role of the media. In a lot of the reporting on Greg Wilton’s attempt a few weeks ago and in the days leading up to his final successful attempt at suicide, the media breached what I have always believed was an undertaking which was reinforced only a couple of weeks ago in the form of their conduct. The member for Boothby talked about copycat suicides. The media had a clear understanding that they were not to report in detail matters such as suicides or attempts to suicide. We saw it a few years ago in the forests outside Perth where just a few days or a week or so after somebody did something to themselves and to their family it was repeated, primarily because it had been so extensively and clinically reported in the media. In the Brisbane Sunday Mail, trashy tabloid, dreadful rag that it is, the front-page headline that was afforded Greg Wilton—he may never have seen it; I do not know whether he did—a few Sundays ago was one of the most despicable things I have ever seen reported by a media outlet in this country. If the Herald Sun have similar amounts of guilt, then they also have a lot to answer for. Only a couple of months ago, I proposed that we needed some form of accountability for the media in the form of a media ombudsman. I am not going to use this particular debate to grandstand on that issue, but people in this country demand accountability from us for our actions, yet there is no accountability of the media for their actions or their treatment of people. For the media to then try to justify their coverage by calling him a loner, to try to typecast him as some sort of crazy person, to my mind further justifies the fact that the media in this country...
have a lot to answer for. They only have to look at the guidelines that were discussed with our health minister, they only have to look inside their hearts and at basic common decency, to realise that their style of reporting on this particular issue has a lot to answer for.

I raise these matters because, in the context of reflecting upon what has come before us, I think it is important to lay these matters on the record. I do not mean to demean or diminish the importance or the sombreness of this debate, but I think the opportunity to raise them is now. I feel for members opposite in particular. I do not know his family, but I can only offer my prayers and my concern for their welfare from this day forward.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (3.37 p.m.)—As another member of the small band from 1996, on our side at least, I recall the great euphoria felt by the group of us who came in 1996. There were not very many of us.

Mr Melham—You were shy and retiring then.

Ms MACKLIN—Greg and I were both shy and retiring. It was a strange sensation, I remember, particularly at the early caucus meetings, to be surrounded by so many miserable faces—the Leader of the Opposition and others who, of course, had been in government for so long and had suffered that terrible defeat. We, too, had been part of the party that lost the election, but to people like Greg, me, Robert McClelland, Joel Fitzgibbon and the few others who came in in 1996. There were not very many of us.

Mr Melham—You were shy and retiring then.

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The other thing that has been lovely about this debate is all the happy things that have been said about his life. As Mark Latham, Kay Hull and others have said, he really loved to laugh. I must say I was often the butt of those laughs. He, Steve Martin and Joel Fitzgibbon, as others have said, like to sing the song *Wild Thing*. Just so you all know now for the record, I am often the butt of that song. They took great delight—

Mr Anthony—Were you the singer?

Ms MACKLIN—No, I was not the singer, I was the wild thing. He always took great delight in that, and much frivolity was had in that regard. I think Mark’s expression of him as a great Australian—in that lovely sense of the way you put it, Mark—is so true. Many people over my life have called me Macka, but the only person in this parliament who ever called me Macka was Greg. It was just like him to do that. It was that lovely Australian way of shortening your name and putting an ‘a’ on it. He did it with great comradely affection. Like Greg, I am a mad surfer. We would often have many a serious discussion about the waves on Victoria’s beaches. I know you people from New South Wales think we do not have waves—

Mr Anthony—The best in the world.

Ms MACKLIN—that’s right, they are the best in the world.

Mr Anthony—They are the coldest.

Ms MACKLIN—And they are the coldest. I can remember many an occasion when Greg would tell me of shocking dumpers he had experienced—getting belted around the head by his surfboard. I will not tell any stories about my shocking experiences. I know how much he loved the surf and I cannot imagine what it will be without him.

Of course, what we think about the most today are not only the great things that he stood for, that he believed in and that he was here for, or the fun times that we had with him. He was a person who had a great time. I agree with everyone who has spoken today: he loved a laugh and he loved the good times...
that we had together. But we all think so much today about Maria, the children, his mother and his sister. I know Maria. I want to say very personally to you, Maria, that my heart goes out to you at this time of great pain that you will have to carry for such a long time. We all love you and I know you love Greg. You will remember, probably more than any of us, the wonderful person that he was.

Mr CHARLES (La Trobe) (3.43 p.m.)—I rise today to support the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister in this condolence motion. I was driving from my electorate office to a function in the afternoon that Greg left us when I heard the announcement on 3LO of his death. A huge wave of depression went over me, and I had some difficulty controlling my car. I was not in the best of shape for some hours that evening.

I did not know Greg well, because we were not on the same committees and because he came in in 1996 and I came in in 1990, but I knew him because Isaacs is a near neighbour to La Trobe and I join in the remarks of the member for Dunkley and many others that in his time here Greg became a well-respected local federal member of parliament. His community did respect him. He clearly did work hard and I know that, despite the intense rivalry between the two major sides of politics, he was willing to work across borders and work with other members in order to achieve positive outcomes for his constituents.

The public views this chamber as a ‘lions den’. It is a combative area. We come here not just to debate but to confront. As the Chief Opposition Whip said, that is the nature of the Westminster system of this place. It is combative in more ways than one. Not only do we compete across the chamber but on each side of the chamber we compete with each other for jobs, for position, for policy positions and for ideas. We compete constantly. This is a hothouse of competition and so it should be, but I must say that it is not a very user-friendly place. I have said this before both in here and outside. I think this chamber is too large. The chamber in the old place was much more conducive to active, positive kinds of debate than is this cold, rather sterile chamber. As for this house, it is a great tourism venture. Millions of tourists come here every year. People say how marvellous and how beautiful it is. It is a beautiful building. It was well conceived. But for us, who are the real users of the place, it is not user friendly at all. Our offices are very large. It is sometimes said that you could go into your office and stay there by yourself and not venture out except for question time and the chances are that maybe no-one would notice you were missing. I am not saying this with respect to Greg Wilton. I was disappointed to read in the press that he was a ‘loner’, because he certainly did not seem like a loner to me. Even though I did not know him well, he was warm, friendly and gregarious. He was always around the place and he was always speaking in the House. So much for the press.

As the member for Banks said, there is extremely high turnover in this House of Representatives. When the election was over in 1998, we were here to address new members, the class of 98, on what the committee system was all about, how it operates and how you should participate. He said to me, ‘Bob, there are only 30 members that have been in this House longer than the two of us.’ That is a mighty statement. The turnover is high. And what the Chief Government Whip said about the class of 1990 was correct. He said, ‘We used to go down to the non-members bar, didn’t we?’ We did, on the odd occasion.

Mr Melham—I didn’t.

Mr CHARLES—The member for Banks interjects, I think, fallaciously. We did go to the non-members bar and we did debate. We would have a beer and we would have a chat. We did meet outside of this place and we did develop relationships. I want to say something about the committee system that I talk about frequently, particularly in the community, because the public see only question time; they do not see the work that goes on behind the scenes in this place, particularly with the committees of the House of Representatives, the joint committees of this place and, I assume, the committees of the Senate as well. Not only do we work together on a day-to-day basis but we travel together. We
get to know each other and friendships develop. Notwithstanding the inimical atmosphere between the centre left parties and the centre right parties generally seen by the public, we are all human beings and we are all here for the good of Australia. We would not be here otherwise. You would not put up with this job—would you?—if you did not want the country to be a better place for your contribution to it. I know that is why Greg Wilton was here. He was here because he had a contribution to make, and he made it. His participation—with members of the political party that I happen to belong to as well as his own colleagues—served him well and many have spoken of that here today.

Depression is a terrible disease. I doubt there is one of us in this chamber who has not experienced depression. It is not something that is the preserve of politicians or members of the House of Representatives, may I say. It is a condition which appears to be worsening across the community. I suspect that each of you have experienced some time of depression. I certainly have. Life is not always easy. It is bloody tough sometimes. You go through hard periods. The stress of this kind of job exacerbates those difficulties. Marriage breakdown is frequent in this place and sometimes has terrible consequences. We, as politicians, do not have a good record of having a warm and friendly, fuzzy workplace or work ethic. I do not know what we do about that. I listened carefully to the contribution by the Chief Government Whip, and I thought he had some very positive things to say. We should think carefully about how we can get back to a situation where we have better relationships around this place not just within our own political parties but across both sides of the chamber. We need to address seriously this issue of depression.

Finally, let me say to Greg Wilton’s family that I offer them my greatest sympathy. To his children, I say: may God bless you and may He take care of you. I am sure that many friends and other helpers will see that you grow up and remember your father as fondly as we in this place have done.

Mr QUICK (Franklin) (3.51 p.m.)—Getting up to speak on this condolence motion for Greg is the hardest thing I have ever done in this place. It is hard because we have lost one of our own in tragic circumstances, as people have mentioned. It is going to be the little things that are going to be hard, because I will never hear his, ‘G’day, H,’ which he used to say as he came into the ‘chairman’s lounge’ at Melbourne every Sunday as we were catching QF 654. It is hard also because I will never be able to discuss the thing that is really important to me, as I know it was to Greg, the electorate exploits. And it is hard because I have lost a friend and a colleague.

I had never met Greg before he became a member of this place in 1996, even though his wife came from Huonville, which is in my neck of the woods. Greg and I had one obvious connection when he became a member—the fact that he, like me and a few others in this place, had won a seat from those on the other side. We liked to think of ourselves as members of a special little club. It is okay to be preselected for safe seats, but you know you have done the hard yards when you have won them from those on the other side, especially in 1996, as people have mentioned, when Greg showed what a wonderful person he was and that he had that something special. As previous speakers have said, there were not many of us here in 1996—I think only 49 in number. The National Party were around this side and we were all shunted along the far end. One thing about that group was that we were a really close-knit and cohesive group. We had to be in order to survive, especially for the next three years. It was in this term that I got to know Greg. They were, I guess, the old school principal days of trying to take someone under your wing and steer them through the path and perhaps give them a few clues.

As people have mentioned, Greg had lots and lots of skills. He had to have, to have won the seat in 1996. Like I do with many people in this place, I talk about little things that I do in my electorate in the hope that perhaps some of them will rub off, and I might pick up a few. I am always looking for good angles. Greg often tried to come down to Huon in Tasmania to spend as much time with his in-laws, to develop the bond between his wife, their family and his kids. One of the things I said to Greg was, ‘I’ve got this
really great thing that I’ve done. From 1993 to 1996 I used to give out my electorate allowance and be as benevolent as possible with a view to helping as many people as possible, but then I thought that just giving out money was dead. So I came across the idea of going along to a cycle store in Lindisfarne and saying, “Over the next couple of years I want to buy about 100 bikes. It will be the best thing you’ve ever done. How about giving us a good deal?” This worked really well for me. Why don’t you try it? Obviously Greg had worked out some strategies—they had worked very well for him, for he had been elected in 1996—but I managed to convince him. I said, ‘Look, have a go, mate. It’ll work. Believe me.’

It was pretty hard to convince Greg because he knew where he was at. But he did that and it was an outstanding success. I remember him coming into the lounge room with little cuttings from the Herald Sun, the Australian or the Age when people from the Kennett government had had a bit of a go at him, saying perhaps he was doing the wrong thing. He was delighting in telling me and others in the lounge just how well it was working. Through that he expanded, extended and developed his relationship with his electorate. I remember that when Christian Zahra was running for the seat in Gippsland, along with Greg, Joel Fitzgibbon and, I think, Mark Latham, I spent a couple of days with Christian. I got to know Greg then. When we were having a beer at night we talked about the things we were doing in our electorate. He told me about his mobile office and his sandwich boards and just how well they worked. Greg was a great bloke. He was a dedicated member of this place. His enthusiasm and desire to look after his electorate came back in spades in 1998 when he increased his majority to almost seven per cent.

Greg, like all of us in this place, walked a fine line—as the member for Port Adelaide said—between doing the job for the party, doing the job for the electors and maintaining the links back to his family and friends. The media would have people believe that we are an amorphous mass of humanity chosen to grace this building for three years at a time. Whatever our varying degrees of responsibility in this place, and how we are pictured in the various media outlets, we are, after all, like every other member of the Australian community. We have our spouses, our partners, our kids, our extended family and our network of friends to support us. But, like Greg, everyone in this place is walking the same track. We all have our own individual pack on our back as we journey through life. Most of us exude a certain bravado in and around this place, but I know for a fact that many of us are scared. We are scared to let our real feelings out, even amongst our factions, in our caucus, and certainly to those opposite.

One of the things about today is that I have never heard such honesty in this place, and I have listened to debates for a long time. I have seen today the looks on people’s faces, the tears welling in people’s eyes as we talk about Greg and remember him, and the honesty and sincerity. The ‘there but for the grace of God go I’ feeling is amongst all of us. It is sad that Greg did not feel able to speak honestly about any of the hassles that were tormenting him. We have lost him forever as a consequence.

Not long before I became a member of this House I read a moving piece in a book on the life of Tip O’Neill, the famous Speaker of the House of Representatives in the United States. In the book he reminds all of us of the importance of keeping in touch with each other. Unless we do, the pressure of this place will see us lose more and more contact with those who are really important to us. The poem quoted in the book on Tip O’Neill is one by Charles Hanson Towne. It is a moving tribute to friendship and a vivid warning not to forget our comrades. I use that in the general sense—not in an ‘in our neck of the woods’ sense. I am not a great reader of poetry, but the poem goes:

Around the corner I have a friend, In this great city that has no end; Yet days go by, and weeks rush on, And before I know a year has gone, And I never see my old friend’s face, For life is a swift and terrible race. He knows I like him just as well.
As in the days when I rang his bell
And he rang mine. We were younger then,
And now we are busy, tired men:
Tired with playing a foolish game,
Tired with trying to make a name.
“Tomorrow,” I say, “I will call on Jim,
Just to show that I’m thinking of him”
But tomorrow comes—and tomorrow goes,
And the distance between us grows and grows.
Around the corner!—yet miles away ...
“Here’s a telegram, sir ...”
“Jim died today.”
And that’s what we get, and deserve in the end:
Around the corner, a vanished friend.
So long, Greg. It has been a real honour to
have known you. We have shared some of
your brief life here in the House. To his wife,
Maria, his two kids, his mum and sister and
other family members, I offer my sincere
condolences.
The saddest thing was that Greg helped so
many and yet he could not find the help that
he needed. I close with the thought, as we
gaze at the flowers that grace his desk today:
let us all take away from this day the beauty
that was Greg Wilton; never forget him, and
put in place some little things. People say,
‘What can we do?’ People are quoting 10s
and 20s and 80s. I would like to see the din-
ing room with an 80 and a 10 and a 10. You
may want to go away and talk about things
that do not concern each of us, but let us have
an 80 where we can all share things, where
what we say is not going to be used in evi-
dence against us and where we can develop
the friendship and humanity that this place
deserves and that I know is there bubbling
away underneath. I thank you, Mr Speaker,
for the opportunity to speak on the life of one
of our members, Greg Wilton.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (4.02 p.m.)—
From time to time we have heard on
occasions like this that line from John Donne
that no man is an island entire of himself—it
is a much hackneyed phrase. The poem goes
on to say that you never seek to know for
whom the bell tolls. I could not help
reflecting on that poem over the weekend,
and it really rammed home to me that this is a
very confined place. There are only a handful
of us here in the great scheme of things and
here in the great scheme of things and no one
of us is an island. So what happens to Greg
happens to all of us. We are all lesser for his
passing.

I did not know Greg in his electorate; I did
not know him on a committee; I did not
know him in the gym; and I did not know
him on the plane on Sunday night. In some
respects I feel a bit of an interloper in this
debate, but in other respects, if you are talk-
ing about islands, this place is very much a
confining space and one in which we all de-
develop finely tuned antennae to the people
around us—perhaps not finely tuned enough
in this circumstance—and you get to know,
even sometimes without speaking to people a
lot, what sort of people they are. If someone
is playing up on one or the other side of the
parliament, we just seem to know that that is
happening. I always found Greg Wilton a
very gentle person, an intense person, a very
decent person and invariably a very courte-
ous person. The sad irony of today is that we,
that is many of his colleagues, have only just
become aware of his many attributes—his
great humanity, his concern for his col-
leagues, his love of family and his passion
for the environment. His humanity was per-
haps the thing that marked him most. It is a
sad thing that we have not developed the
mechanisms in this house to recognise that
humanity and to recognise when it was per-
haps screaming out for help.

I want to echo what the previous speaker
said—he took the words right out of my
mouth. We talk about humanity and close-
ness and getting together, but for God’s sake
we eat at opposite ends of the same dining
room. I think the most penetrating and edu-
cative thing we have heard in this House to-
day came from the member for Wills. If I can
paraphrase him loosely, it was this: you can-
not hope to practise humanity in the abstract.
In politics, whether in ethnic affairs or Abo-
riginal affairs, there is a lot of breast-beating
but very little humanity practised in reality; it
is always practised in the abstract. I therefore
endorse the sentiment of the Chief Govern-
ment Whip and the Chief Opposition Whip
that we need to have a rethink about fellow-
ship, the need for advice, the need for coun-
selling and perhaps even the need for chap-
laynacy. But this is not the day to go into the detail of that.

We are singly fortunate in this place, as I think the Leader of the Opposition or the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said. Greg was only one of 560 people who have represented the Labor Party here over a century. It came home to us all too vividly at Tweed Heads only yesterday when someone reminded us in the National Party that we represent a group of only 111 who have served in this place over the 80 years that the National Party has been here. Yes, we are privileged, but we are also flesh and blood. We have the need for quiet time and we have the need for privacy. I think that, while we should not be immune from scrutiny, we should not be demonised either, and nor should the situations in which people might find themselves, like Greg did after that first incident, be demonised by the media. While we today have a lot to answer for as individuals, so too has the media.

As a person who lost his father when very young and whose mother was left with a very young family, I have some understanding—I suppose—although in this circumstance probably not enough understanding—of what his mother, sister and wife must be going through. I certainly remember that loss as a young person, but as I grew up I was also consoled I suppose by the fact that my father was a man of great humanity. He was well loved and he lived by his values. If I have a message for Greg’s children, though it may be many years before they will read it, it is this: their father was well loved, did have a great humanity and cared for people.

Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (4.08 p.m.)—Last week I was in Strasbourg on a parliamentary delegation to the European institutions when I received the news of Greg’s death. I mention that not by way of travelogue but because Greg Wilton was meant to be a member of that delegation and his recent illness meant that he withdrew. The last conversation I had with Greg was late in the budget week during a division. We were sitting up there where Stewie McArthur now sits. Greg was obviously very troubled but the fact that he had been such pleasant company for me before and the prospect that, within three or so weeks, I would be spending a week with him was something that I looked forward to. The fact that it was never to be is personally of deep regret.

Mention has been made, of course, that Greg was a great stalwart of the labour movement—a great stalwart of the Labor Party. He was a political warrior. He was a factional warrior. Mention has been made that he was a Chelsea lad but about 10 or 12 years ago I seem to remember that Greg Wilton bobbed up as the secretary of the Bundoora branch. The Bundoora branch of the ALP is the branch that I am a member of. Over the last couple of days I have been re-galing this as a fortress Scullin story but I have now remembered that it is actually a fortress Jagajaga story. The facts are, as I am not sure which factional war lord sent him to the northern suburbs—

Mr Lee interjecting—

Mr JENKINS—I thank the honourable member for Dobell, but I would have to defend our comrade Pete on this occasion. I can say that, fortunately, for various reasons, Greg returned to his home territory, which I think meant that we lost a few headaches because he was a formidable opponent—not that some of my factional colleagues would not have hoped that he could have stayed in the northern suburbs and they would have had fewer headaches. While Greg was the secretary of the Bundoora branch, my wife finally decided that she would join the party. She has Greg’s signature on her membership form.

Mr Griffin—Was it her signature, though?

Mr JENKINS—This is getting to be a very unfair contribution, Mr Speaker, and I might need your protection.

Mr SPEAKER—These are uncharted waters for the chair.

Mr JENKINS—Very uncharted. Another person who became a member of the Bundoora branch while Greg was the secretary is a young man who is on my staff at the moment. When Trent arrived, Greg, as a member of the Bundoora branch, decided that this was a fellow who was a target for the Right of Young Labor. They have a way of charm-
ing and regaling and trotting out a senior minister and they go and do a few things. But Trent rejected this and turned his back. But the element of this Bundoora branch side of the story is that we were very pleased when Greg finally arrived here. When Greg arrived he bumped into Trent in the passageway and he said, ‘Trent, you’re my greatest failure in politics. There you are, you’ve joined the Left.’ But it was said in such a friendly manner. I think, as Joel said, Greg was very much somebody who had many friends and no enemies.

I have listened to the condolences today and I have realised that, across the chamber, I am a member of a faction I did not realise I was a member of: the Greg Wilton faction. Even more exactly, I now realise that I am a member of the Friday night flight subfaction. It is true that, because of the vagaries of the computer system at Qantas, you never know who you are going to have to sit next to, but I say to you, Mr Speaker, that I was always very pleased to have Greg as company on the flight to Canberra. It is true that he sat there and talked about his campaigning. Some people realise that I do not get invited to the marginal seat members’ meetings, but I was always pleased to hear about the different campaign techniques that Greg had developed. Unashamedly, I indicate that I copied his notion of a mobile office because I believe that it is another tool, whether you are on a small margin or on a large margin, to use to actually reach out and get to know what people are thinking.

I am pleased that our comrade Petro Georgiou from Kooyong has indicated that Greg did not reveal all the trade secrets of marginal campaigning. On those flights Greg would always speak with great love about his family. He would speak about how he had taken up supporting North Melbourne so he could accompany his father to the football and how he always wanted to get back on a Friday morning so he could spend quality time reading books with his young family. When I reflected on these comments and stories, I thought about how well he coped and how well he managed. He could speak so spiritually about the experience of taking up surfing again, and again I thought, ‘If only I had that kind of coping mechanism.’ All I can think of is that, in my relationship with him, he seemed to give to me much more than I gave to him.

It is incongruous to think that his career here was only four years. I know that at times he wondered and worried about what he was doing here, but the point is that he was hard-working and he had a proper sense of what members of the Australian parliament should be on about. He was, as others have said, a polite, likeable and decent human being. Whilst I do not know the members of his family personally, I know the love and regard that Greg had for them. I reach out to them and hope that they can gain strength from the sincere comments that have been made today.

I am very proud to say that I knew Greg Wilton. I am very proud to say that I served in the House of Representatives with Greg Wilton.

Mr ROSS CAMERON (Parramatta) (4.16 p.m.)—I was interested in the observation made by the Leader of the Opposition at the start of the motion, when he said that Greg’s view of his future, his prospects and his ability was considerably less than that which was shared almost universally by his colleagues. I think the member for Melbourne made the same point. The Minister for Employment Services said he wondered what effect it would have had on Greg if he could have heard the contributions today. It is a fascinating, tragic question as to how a bloke could be so deeply despondent and so evacuated of any sort of hope as he moved among peers who universally regarded him with affection and respect and have a deep appreciation for the contribution he brought. It is a strange paradox, particularly since our own opinion of our value and prospects is usually much higher than our peers’ opinions of us. But not so with Greg.

I have had some fairly rich, if relatively short, contacts with Greg. Often, on both sides of the House, we find ourselves in a situation where we are engaged in some endeavour which will benefit from a bipartisan approach, clearly out of the realm of the day-to-day hurly-burly. So we sit and think, ‘Whom on the other side would I like to have at that lunch?’ ‘Whom on the other side
would I like to have on this committee?’ or ‘Whom would I like to have second this motion?’ I can say that Greg was the person who, almost invariably, came first to my mind. When I was engaged in work among students to encourage leadership, Greg was one of the first members of the ALP I asked to join me in that endeavour. When a few colleagues and I were thinking about raising money for the Paralympics by riding bikes around the place, again he was one of the first I asked. He said, ‘I think it is a great cause, and I will come so long as you come through Isaacs.’ If I were thinking about someone I would like to have a game of pool and a beer with, the member for Isaacs would come to mind.

I should also say that the bond that existed between the member for Werriwa, the member for Hunter and the member for Isaacs was unusual, and I think it did have an impact on us. So when I would be thinking about whom I would want to have in a room at the same time, I would think of those three guys because, clearly, there was what the member for Werriwa called a close mateship between them which was infectious. The reasons I would ask Greg for assistance are, firstly, that he would come. He was a person who was sufficiently his own man not to be apprehensive about being associated with the somewhat eccentric, questionable schemes of the member for Parramatta. Secondly, he was a person who clearly had something to contribute. He was a thoughtful, intelligent, reflective person who added to whatever discussion he joined. But, thirdly and fundamentally, I would ask him because he was good company.

Many have touched on this sense of Greg’s humanity. The member for Werriwa said he hoped that we in this chamber would learn something from this experience, so I am asking myself, ‘What do we learn from this life now no longer with us?’ I suppose, as the member for Hinkler said, I am learning a whole lot of things about Greg right now that I did not know before. In the interactions we have each day, we give and receive some small fraction of the totality of what we are. I think that is one of the sadnesses—that it takes an occasion such as this for us to learn a bit about who we are as human beings.

There has been discussion from both the Chief Government Whip and the Chief Opposition Whip about the response we institutionally make to this, I think motivated in part by the recent comments of the Leader of the Opposition. The question in my mind is not so much about the institutional response—because my apprehension is that we will not take personal responsibility for each other—but about what our individual and personal response ought to be. Like Harry Jenkins, I had a conversation with Greg in budget week. On the Thursday morning, we were at the cafeteria together ordering breakfast. I turned to him and asked, ‘How are you this morning?’ In one of those very rare moments of startling honesty such that we are experiencing today, he said, ‘I’m terrible.’ I asked, ‘Is it personal, or is it political?’ He said, ‘It’s personal.’ I could tell by his tone of voice that he was really in serious difficulty. He had ordered take-away and I had ordered eat-in, so I sat down, thinking at that moment that I should have walked with him back to his office, but I was hungry—preoccupied with my own interests—so I sat and had breakfast with another friend. Subsequently I went back to my office, and I was sufficiently concerned to ring him. I rang his office, and there was no answer. I rang his electorate office, and they said that they did not know where he was but that they would pass on the message. I rang his mobile phone and left a message. I was sufficiently disturbed by the exchange that I wondered whether I should page him but, knowing the frustration I feel when others page me, I decided not to. I came into the chamber for question time and he sent me a note from over there that said, ‘Look, thanks for your interest, but I really don’t want to discuss it,’ and I felt that I had discharged my obligations.

The Prime Minister said at the start that there is a sense of mystery about something like this. I do not presume—I have not walked in Greg’s shoes—but I think it probably is more about the pain that one man suffered rather than a question about self-image. I think he was a person in enormous pain. We are having this discussion about the
response we should make. One thing I do
share with Greg is that my political oblivion
has been recently prophesied by the metropo-
litan dailies. While I am happy to leave the
verdict to the people of Parramatta—and I am
not without hope on that front—rather than
that of the Daily Telegraph, it nonetheless
causes one to reflect about what is important
and what I would want to say if I had only
one speech left to make. I guess the thing that
I would say is that the response has to be
more than just a one-day wonder. For what-
ever reason, the spirit that is in the chamber
now is very rarely in the chamber. Somehow,
if we are to rehabilitate democracy, and if, as
the member for Werriwa suggested, we are to
learn something from Greg’s passing, then
we ought to seriously examine why it is that
we cannot more often draw out the best in
each other.

Mr KERR (Denison) (4.26 p.m.)—One of
the contributors said earlier today that no
man is an island, and the death of a single
person leaves us all diminished. Quite oddly
in this debate, it seems to be the case that the
death of Greg Wilton has left all of us in this
parliament slightly enhanced, at least in the
way we have responded to it. I think it has
forced us to reflect on some of the points that
the member for Melbourne has raised about
what is probably a uniquely cruel form of
public life. The member for Melbourne men-
tioned that the success that we each achieve
comes at the expense of others, even from
our own side, or opposite. There are very few
of us who have reached any position of emi-
nence—or, indeed, reached election to this
House—who, perhaps, have not at some
stage in the course of getting there done
things less than worthy. I suppose the death
of somebody in these circumstances forces us
to reflect on those choices that we have each
made along those paths.

Secondly, it is a fact that those of us who
are in public life are seen as fair game for
those in the media. There is a public interest
in our doings and our failures, but, as has
been said by many in this debate, there is a
responsibility of those in the media to reflect
on the way in which this matter was reported
and the extra burdens it placed on somebody
who was obviously in a position which was
already life-threatening when his first attempt
occurred. Perhaps, it is something for the
police to reflect upon also, because some of
the information that was in the papers could
not have come other than through leaks from
the police. That, it seems to me, raises some
issues not for detailed reflection today but
certainly to be taken on board for thinking
about later.

The third burden that we all have in this
place, and perhaps it is not common in the
larger environment, is that any failure we
have is not just a personal failure. All of us
wear the burden of the fact that if we make a
public mistake we damage not just ourselves
but our party and diminish its chance of
holding office. It can bring down those
around us. For somebody like Greg Wilton,
who believed so passionately in the Labor
Party, the idea that his conduct in some
way—even, as it might be seen by some, ex-
culpated by the fact he was suffering from
depression—could be seen as damaging to a
cause that he believed in so profoundly and
to the chances of his party in its elections, I
think would have weighed heavily on him.

In four years Greg spanned the complete
gamut of human emotion from exaltation
through to despair. I do not remember seeing
anybody who had more joy, passion and en-
thusiasm than he had in his eyes when he
first came into this place. And those conver-
sations on the plane about marginal seat
campaigning were not doleful conversations
about how hard it was to get out of bed on
Saturday morning to be out there in the elec-
torate; they were just full of the pleasure of
being a new member of parliament—serving
his constituency, enjoying it and getting out
there and doing a job that he was so commit-
ted to and which gave him so much pleasure.

We have heard a lot about his enthusiasm,
and Harry Jenkins has told us a lot about
Greg’s ambition. But there is another side
too, and that is the fact that Greg also had a
passion for a set of ideas. We have perhaps
not heard so much about that because that set
of ideas was not really given sufficient
chance to flower in this place. But one of the
underlying themes that came through in
every conversation I had with him was his
deep commitment to the environment, and
the member for Wills mentioned that. Greg was amongst those most committed to the environment. When I held the portfolio of shadow minister for the environment he sought me out and we would meet regularly—once a week or once a fortnight—and he would say, ‘Is there anything I can do to help you? Is there anything I can do to push this agenda?’ It was not an agenda at that time that was always at the top of the list, but Greg was always keen to see it given proper prominence. Greg also had a special place in his heart for Tasmania. The member for Franklin mentioned that Greg’s wife was born in the Huon. Part of Greg’s commitment to the environment was a real sense of love for the wilderness and for what was, in his view, one of the most untouched and beautiful places in the world. He received pleasure from having played a small part in the campaigns to save the Franklin and to have been elected to serve a party whose actions in government had been so responsible for that outcome.

Last weekend when I was in my electorate three people approached me to ask me about Greg Wilton, and I suspect that has occurred with other members. They wanted to know what happened, whether there was something we could have done, what the occasion was and how I felt about it. I do not think I have had that kind of spontaneous response before from the public. And another group of people have approached me, and they are the Comcar drivers. I always measure somebody by the way the Comcar drivers speak of them. They speak of Greg Wilton with great sadness. All who have driven him have indicated their hope that his first attempted suicide would be a passing event and that he would recover from the depression and return strengthened to this parliament. Those to whom I have spoken since his death are all very sad that that did not come to pass.

Greg’s is a life that has been cut short. But strangely in this debate it has prompted some reflections from all of us that may in fact say that was a life well lived, sadly brought to an end. We hope that this leaves us all slightly better able to deal with those circumstances that tear at all of us when we think of Greg, his family and his children. Like everyone else in this debate, I extend my own best wishes to them through the very traumatic and sad times they must be experiencing.

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro) (4.34 p.m.)—As a member of the class of 96, I would like to add a small contribution to this condolence motion. I was not on any committees with Greg and I did not go to the gym. I do not go to the gym because, as a member who lives nearby, it would mean even less time that I would have at home. I know Greg would understand that. I got to know Greg simply through many conversations in the corridors and around this place over the four-odd years that we have been here. Greg certainly was a bit of a larrikin. He always called me Gazza. Nobody had called me Gazza since I was in high school, and I took it very much as a compliment. People have commented on some of his witty interjections. I do not want to verbal you, Mr Speaker, but I was at a function where you were asked about witty interjections and I recall your mentioning the names of two people on the opposition side. I will not mention the first one because he might get a big head, but the member for Isaacs was one of those people whom you mentioned. In the position where I sit in this parliament it is often very difficult not to react to some of those interjections, because it may not look appropriate behind the Prime Minister or the relevant minister speaking at the time.

But I did get to know Greg as well as one could in the conversations we had around this place, and there were always two things that we tended to talk about. He tended to use me a bit to get information about the region and places that he might go. I knew that he had a love of the bush, but I was not sure to what extent until I heard the contributions here today. Greg asked about places in parts of my electorate—the Snowy Mountains and other areas and also around Queanbeyan. The last question he had of me was for a recommendation of a restaurant in Queanbeyan where he could take some special people. I gave him a recommendation. Unfortunately, I do not know to this day whether those special people came and he actually did have that meal in the restaurant that I suggested.
The other subject that we talked about I find a little bit tragic, given what had happened last week, because probably now I only fully understand what it was that he was talking about. He was insanely jealous of the fact that I could go home at night from here in parliament. I said, ‘Yes, I am one of the three in this place’—the member for Canberra and the member for Fraser are the other two—who actually live nearby.’ He asked me, ‘How long does it take you to get home?’ I said, ‘I can be home in 10 or 15 minutes.’ He would be so envious of that. I did not show him much sympathy, I am afraid, which I have to plead guilty to, because I used to say, ‘Well, I get home and my wife is usually asleep, the kids are already in bed and then I crawl into bed and then I crawl out again, often before they are awake. So, okay, I sleep in my own bed but there is not much beyond that. Anyway, when you go home after parliament finishes, you can drive around your electorate in a short period of time whereas that is the time that I am away from home. I spend my time away from home when parliament is not sitting, so it works both ways.’ But, after the tragic events of the last couple of weeks, it has certainly hit home, in those conversations that I had, that really what he was telling me was this difficulty that he was clearly having in coping with this separation and that he really did envy my circumstances of having a home nearby.

If Greg could have heard many of the things that have been said in this debate here today, possibly we would not be having this debate. I guess that is the tragedy of it. Part of the lesson that we can learn from this is that we should be much more open with ourselves and with our opponents in a more sensitive way. I think it is only natural that people ask what additional things could I have done. It is not necessarily said out of a sense of guilt; I think it is only natural to say that. Even though I cannot say that I was one of his closest friends, I find myself saying, ‘What could I have done if I had realised the extent of his love of the bush and things?’ I could have talked to him more about the little shack that I have in the Snowy Mountains which I find is a great escape when you are feeling those low depths. It is a great invigorator for me.

Only very occasionally, unfortunately, I have had colleagues home for dinner on a Wednesday night, because mine is one of the few houses that are nearby. I know that the colleagues that have been to dinner at my place have really enjoyed that rather than going off to restaurants. If only I could have invited him as one of those people to one of those nights; I regret that did not occur. So it is only natural to say those things, but I think we have to look at some of the many positives that can come out of a tragedy such as this. If nothing else, if the broader public understands some of the unreal expectations that are placed upon members of parliament, the incredible pressures that they do put on family life and that we are only human, that we are normal people and that there is behind the facade of question time a great cooperation and camaraderie that does exist between both sides—if those messages alone come out from this debate today—then I think that is at least a positive that we can take away and thank Greg for.

I did not know his family, although I met his wife briefly. Greg and Maria sat at the same table as I at the Irish Prime Minister’s lunch in the Great Hall, so I met her briefly at that. To the family I send my condolences on this absolutely tragic loss. Greg has been taken away from them, but they have his contribution in this great House, this great place, which cannot be taken away from them.
cats and dogs, but it does not matter because you do have that sense of community and camaraderie there in the gymnasium. If the walls of the gymnasium could be extended further and further into this House and into this chamber, perhaps we would all be the better for it. This is an intense place, it is a place of intense competition—and that is, by and large, our Westminster system—but it also can be a place of support. I believe that it is important that we are able to display our human frailties to each other without a fear of some sort of consequence that could be perhaps used against us at some time in the future. Personally, I do not think it would be used against us in the future, but—and maybe we all need to talk and be reassured about this—to show our hearts and to show our frailties would be terrific, and if anything is to come out of this exercise maybe that is one of the lessons for us.

As a parliamentarian with some experience in this House—he had been in the parliament for one term longer than I—Greg taught me a fair bit about the forms of the parliament and what you do and what you do not do. I recall one particularly rowdy day here in the parliament when, as happens occasionally, a number of people had brought in newspapers. I think they were probably just interested in the headlines—they were fairly large headlines. There was a lot of rowdiness—the issue was either the GST or nursing homes—and apparently, Mr Speaker, you had issued a general warning. A minister opposite was at the dispatch box and was making some sort of remark and I interjected. I had a newspaper on my lap and Greg said, ‘Hold it up, mate! Hold it up!’ And I held it up, and you threw me out of the parliament. As I turned, ashen-faced, to Greg, he looked down a bit sheepishly and said, ‘Sorry, mate.’ On numerous occasions after that, he said to me, ‘Mate, as soon as I said, “Hold it up!” I knew you were gone.’ We laughed and we had some good times together. As I will explain in a moment, I have known Maria, his wife, for a very long time. Whenever I asked about his family, Greg would tell me how terribly he missed them. He would say to me that he could not wait to get home on Friday morning to see them. For all his hard work and for all his effective work in the electorate—and we all know that he worked hard and effectively—he used to take some time out on Friday mornings to be with his kids. Sometimes he would say to me, ‘Mate, I hate it here because I really want to get home to my kids.’ I want them to know that, and I think other speakers have outlined that very well.

Maybe Greg’s death will, in some small way, help the community understand that politicians are people too. As a parliamentarian, I get some phone calls and a few letters—I think everyone probably does—about scumbag politicians and how politicians are atrocious people. Maybe Greg’s tragic death will put into the minds of some people in the community that politicians are loving fathers and mothers, they are loving husbands and wives and they are loved sons and daughters. A few months ago, in November last year, a White Wreath Day was held out on the front lawns of Parliament House. I know that the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and 20 to 30 parliamentarians went to that. Hundreds of white wreaths were laid out on the front lawns of Parliament House to raise community awareness about the problem of suicide. The outpouring of emotion at that ceremony revealed to me that many parliamentarians here have been touched personally by the suicide of a friend, of a member of their own families or of a friend of a friend, yet it is something that, as a society, we have not yet come to grips with at all. There are awareness campaigns about drug use, alcohol use, drink-driving and so on, but we do not seem to have really come to grips with this problem of suicide.

The movie M.A.S.H is fairly old now. In the theme song of the series that followed it, I suppose that most people realise that the lines of the chorus go like this:

... suicide is painless
It brings on many changes
And I can take or leave it as I please

Greg took it, because he was obviously very much in pain. It was a pain that I did not appreciate. It was a pain that obviously very few, if any, people here in the parliament appreciated. He went through enormous pain. As to Greg’s wife, Maria, I met Maria in 1986 or 1987. She was a Treasury official, and she was a friend of David Hudson, who
is the brother of my wife. Ainslie and Hugh Hudson lived in Yarralumla, and Maria would go to their house and we would have dinner together. She was, and is, such a lively, vivacious and intelligent person. So I say to Maria: cuddle your children and look to a brighter tomorrow, because you have got so much going for you. To Lachlan and Eliza, the children of Greg and Maria, I say: be proud of your dad because he had so much going for him, because he enjoyed so much respect from all his colleagues in this parliament and, above all, because he loved you very much.

Mrs Gallus (Hindmarsh) (4.50 p.m.)—I would like to pass on my condolences to Greg’s family and to his colleagues. I served on the Standing Committee on Financial Institutions and Public Administration with Greg from 1996 to 1998. However, my memory of Greg, like that of so many other people in this place, is not of him in the committee; it is of him in the gym. Every time that Greg and I saw each other, we wondered how often we both washed our gym clothes because he always wore the same top and I always wore the same top. Conferring on this one day, we decided that neither of us had washed our own tops and that, had we not gone to the gym in the clothes, they could have walked in by themselves. I have a particular memory of how fit Greg was. One day I was doing a stomach exercise in which you have to lie on the floor and support yourself on your own elbows and toes, which is actually a lot harder than it looks. Greg watched it and said, ‘What are you doing?’ I showed him, and Greg got down there and did it and lasted a lot longer than I did. The nice part of the story is that the member for Werriwa came in. In that delightful, lovable way that he has, he said, ‘What are you two doing—some far-eastern mystical meditation technique?’ Greg and I looked at him and said, ‘Well, why don’t you try it?’ The member for Werriwa will tell you how long he lasted, but I can say that it proved how much fitter Greg Wilton was compared with the member for Werriwa.

Three weeks ago I left this parliament to attend a funeral in Adelaide. The funeral was of my son-in-law’s only brother. He was 38, he had three small children and he committed suicide in a national park. Like Greg, he was a high achiever. He was a psychiatrist. I think we have to ask ourselves as a society what is happening when people who are the top achievers, psychiatrists, members of parliament—people with children—need to take their own lives. I think we have a responsibility as parliamentarians to ask that question and to look at this society and ask what is going wrong with it.

Having said that, I also think that we have to look at this place and say that perhaps it is not a surprise that Greg took his life but a surprise that more parliamentarians have not done so. We have referred today to the three cornerstones of any life being family, work and friends. I do not have to detail, because everyone else has mentioned it here, the stresses that this life places on family. You see your family much less than you do in other occupations. I must say I deem myself fortunate to have come to this place when my youngest son was 14, when he had passed those formative years, because I understand the pressures that are put on people with young children and I do not understand how they cope with those pressures of not seeing their children grow up in the most formative times of their lives. I think that in pursuing this career that we do we often lose so much more than we gain. There is our work, but that too has its problems that other work perhaps does not share. In this job, if you are not on the front bench you are a failure. Others in the community may not know, but we know that in this place amongst our colleagues one of the only measures of success here is whether you are on the front bench, and it is such a narrow measure.

The other measure we have is how the public perceive us. I do not need to tell the House that that perception is deteriorating day by day, much of it as a result of what goes on in the media and in talkback radio, with the talkback radio host telling everybody, ‘They are your members of parliament, you pay their wages, you go and tell them what to do,’ and slandering us for everything that goes wrong. I know that in my own electorate I can spend a lot of time working...
for people and put a lot of effort into it and see my staff put the same effort into it and then for our efforts we are denigrated and I will have a constituent for whom we have worked for three weeks saying, ‘Well, you people don’t care, it is not your problem.’ That has happened much more now than it ever happened when I first came to this place. There has been a change in attitude, and much of the change is being brought on by media denigrating us and the type of work we do.

The final cornerstone of our lives is our friends. I cannot speak for other members here but I know what has happened to me in the 11 years I have been here, and that is that the friends I had outside parliament have dropped away. This was brought home to me very clearly in my second term. We had friends that we went to the theatre with. We bought tickets together each year to go to the Playhouse, and after I had been here for two terms they rang up and said, ‘Look, please don’t go through the farce of getting the tickets again, you never come.’ And that was the truth—something always came up when we were supposed to go, so we had in fact in the end stopped going. I am reminded of what Melina Mercouri said when she was asked why the Greeks do not have psychiatrists. She said, ‘We don’t have psychiatrists. We don’t need them; we’ve got friends.’ I wonder how many of us have lost the friends and support we need in this place. I am not a religious person, but it has always occurred to me that it would be valuable here to have some sort of chaplaincy, whether it be a rabbi or a Catholic priest—someone you could actually go to when the pressures of this place became excessive. Because we cannot talk to our colleagues—we do not want to admit that sort of weakness—it would be some sort of relief to talk to someone who is outside the system, and perhaps the Prime Minister would consider that as one of the responses to this tragedy. Indeed, it is a tragedy that Greg Wilton took his life by his own hand. It is also a tragedy that if he had heard this condolence debate today he may have valued his life more highly.

Ms KERNOT (Dickson) (4.57 p.m.)—I would like to give notice that I would like to resist the convention of having a condolence motion moved and spoken about by people who did not know me, should I live long enough. But the reality today is that we do know Greg Wilton and I want to put on the record a short, affectionate memory of Greg. He was the first in our caucus to christen me Chezza. That adds to the Gazza, the Macca and the H, and it says something about him and his wonderful instant intimacy. He told me with a lot of mirth that our fates were colourfully connected, that he in fact lived at 1 Kernot Street, Dickson when he lived in Canberra. Dr Kemp and Mr Abbott might think that Shazza is a useful tool to denigrate the former President of the Australian Education Union, Sharan Burrow, but I want to put on the record that I actually love the way Greg called me Chezza. The broad smile, the loud voice and the sparkle in the eyes—and, when I think back on it now, I am absolutely certain that it was the sparkle in the eyes that was one of the first things to go and one of the first things we should have noticed, and we didn’t.

Many today have said, ‘Why couldn’t Greg have reached out more?’ I think one part of the answer is that in a parliament and in a press gallery that is still so largely, for historical and other reasons, dominated by masculine values, to have reached out more, to have challenged notions of success and contest, would have been seen as a weakness and as laying yourself open to exploitation by others. Others today have said, ‘Let’s take something constructive out of this discussion.’ I want to make the observation—constructively, I hope—that we seem to be living at a time when we are witnessing an all-time low in the level of personal denigration that passes for debate in this place. Whether it is character assassination, as one speaker referred to, which I have never thought was appropriate—think of the terminology, ‘character assassination’—or whether it is the contemporary version of spin, the reality is that its starting point and its motives are destructive at both a personal and a collective level. I think it is time we acknowledged that.

The other all-time low we are observing and living through is a low in the worst features of tabloidism. While they are no longer...
here, I want to mention by name Michelle Grattan, Karen Middleton and Ross Peake, and the duty reporters from AAP, who saw fit to sit through what is not a stag fight, what is not orchestrated ritual down here today. They sat up in the press gallery for a very long time. I ask myself why. I suspect it is because they thought what we on both sides had to say might matter and what we choose to do about it might matter even more. For too long, there has been too much of a tacit nod and a wink about how we practise politics, how we play the game. Note that it is always called a game, as though it is not about us as people. Those rules still have been ‘Don’t show human emotion, don’t ever talk about your personal struggle, don’t say you made a mistake, even if you are being honest, because it will be exploited’—not because it is the wrong thing to do, but because it will be exploited. I want to say today that I admire the way Kim Beazley and, on the other side—although this will not be a popular view—John Anderson seek to avoid this approach to politics. It is not the measure of their masculinity and it is not the measure of their success. These are outdated notions and they ought to be consigned to the old-politics bin.

Let us do two things today. Firstly, let us banish all this nonsense talk about ticker and fitness for office, as though it is some exclusive measurement, because I know that most of us would prefer a leader with humanity and emotional honesty. Secondly, let us make a more concerted effort to combat ignorance about depression and the stigma still associated with mental illness. In a bipartisan way, I think Jeff Kennett was very helpful last week when, as head of the National Depression Initiative, he made comments to the media about their role in adding to Greg’s level of anxiety.

Greg Wilton was hurting; he was really hurting, and enough of us did not know it. His family was hurting and it is still hurting very much. His choice of a political life contributed to that hurt. I personally hope that our families can be better protected from the worst aspects of our choosing to take part in this profession. I really appreciate that we have both had the time and have taken the opportunity today to reflect on the nature of politics. I know we would all conclude that it is not the centre of the universe; it is not all there is to life. We would like to think that it is something decent and useful that we are doing with our lives, but that it is not all we have. I am glad we have taken the time to reflect on the love and support of our families and the loss of hope that comes with constant negativity. I am glad that we have taken the time to reflect on the life and the uniqueness of Greg Wilton.

Other speakers have referred to John Donne. I was going to refer to him and to A.D. Hope, but I will simply paraphrase by saying that, if we do not do something, we will be diminished by Greg’s death and the circumstances which have led to his death. I really hope that we can do something about the balance of work and family life, not just for us but for all families struggling with these pressures. I hope that we can do something constructive in taking a long, hard look at the culture of negativity which surrounds us and destroys our faith and our hope in the things which used to buttress and unify us. I also hope that our reflection on Greg’s death may help to restore a better balance in our practice of politics in this country.

I join with others in expressing my sympathy to Greg’s family, to his staff and to his little children. My daughter was seven when I was first elected. I know what I have missed out on in her growing up. I regret that. I know what Greg’s kids will miss about not having him as a father. It is not really much of a fair trade-off we all sign up for, is it? I very much regret that for Greg it proved to be so hard.

Ms Worth (Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs) (5.07 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I have waited for some time before speaking briefly because I did not know Greg Wilton, other than that he was the man who beat my good friend Rod Atkinson and that nice, cheerful person who was always courteous and always greeted colleagues in the corridor. I would like to, as just another person in this chamber, put on the record the sympathy and the feelings that I have for his family and his children. As so many col-
leagues have said, one day, when his children read the _Hansard_ from today, they will feel very proud of their father, and I think that is very important. I would also like to express my sympathy to colleagues opposite who have been good friends of Greg and who feel his death very keenly.

There have been some good things said today and some things that should be reflected upon. As I think I said not so long ago to one of my daughters, every negative should always have some positive come out of it. Never accept something going wrong; just turn it into something that will be better. It would be good if that could be the outcome from today. Before I came into parliament I worked in a large and wonderful organisation where 110 people reported to me directly and about another 400 perhaps less directly. What I learned in that time was that you live the statistics. You see statistics now about the certain number that get breast cancer and the certain number that get prostate cancer and the certain number that die in accidents or commit suicide or have some mental illness or some tragedy in their life. Because I felt keenly and received from and gave loyalty to those employees, I lived those statistics. Before this unfortunate happening, I had said to some colleagues that there are 148 people in this chamber and that the statistics must be there—it is just that they do not get talked about.

For those who have expressed the difficulty, particularly those in marginal seats—and I can identify with that—of working hard here and working hard in the electorate, I have some sympathy because I think a lot is expected and a lot is not necessarily understood. I think psychiatrists would say that sleep deprivation and exhaustion can contribute to depression, and there is probably nobody here who would not fit into that category at some time. Earlier on when the things that Greg did were being spoken about in some detail—that he achieved, how he spent his time and how dedicated he was to his electorate—I was thinking: and when was the time that he had for himself? I am glad that he sometimes went surfing and I am glad that he could sometimes read to his children, but I suspect that, overall, that time was not enough. I was thinking, when the Chief Government Whip and Chief Opposition Whip were speaking—I spent some time as a whip and got to know colleagues better that way—what if something good could come out of today? I am not sure that it is just counselling, because I think that if one were to seek help and attention it would be available. It does not necessarily have to be in this place. But there has to be time for that. How many of you have found, when you have looked at your diaries, that you cannot take a sick day or you cannot take a holiday or even, if you plan a holiday, that something comes up? What do you do? You drop it and you go and do your work. I think those are the things that need to be looked at.

I am sure that everybody comes to this place wanting to do their best for their constituents, and most do. Some media attention—I do not say all because that is not the case—has not been helpful. I can think of colleagues who have had difficulties in the past. I have heard and read the cruel things and the inaccurate things that have been said and written. I would like to think that some good will come out of today. I am sure it will, but it will take us working together to achieve that. I have benefited from friendships on both sides of the chamber. I remember, particularly in my first term here, the closeness and the friendship from committee work. I was identifying with that today when some members were speaking. Of course, the busier one gets in other areas the less time one has and, in fact, one cannot serve on those committees. I think there is a lot more goodwill between people in this place than is ever recognised by the public or that they are ever able to know about through the media. That is something that we should work hard to see gets more attention. Again, I formally express my personal sympathy to Greg Wilson’s family and also to his colleagues.

**Mr O’Connor (Corio) (5.12 p.m.)—** Through this condolence motion I express my deepest sympathy to Greg’s wife and his children, and to his mother and his sister. Many members speaking here on this condolence motion have shared aspects of Greg’s life. I shared aspects of this political life with him, and I want to lay to rest that perception.
that seems to be out in the public domain—and it was one that was alluded to by the Chief Opposition Whip—that Greg Wilton was a loner. He was not. Greg Wilton sought me out when he came to this parliament. His wife was the best friend of my niece. Our family and my niece had gone through terrible sadness, she at a very young age, with the death of her mother at 42. I know quite personally of the care and concern that Greg Wilton had for my niece, Andrea. It was Greg Wilton who sought many of us out in the context of this political life that we lead here. I shared many other things with him, including a love of the surf. He was always talking about the waves along the Victorian coast. He went through my electorate as he went to experience his passion. I have been to football matches with Greg Wilton. Perhaps he was not as passionate as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and me at those matches, but he certainly had a love of the game. I met him in the gym, and we have heard a lot spoken about the experiences of people there.

I also met him through music. I was there the night that he did Wild Thing with the member for Cunningham and the member for Hunter. I think I was on guitar that night. It was not so much his rendition of Wild Thing that turned us on as his impersonation of Elvis Presley. Members who participated in those evenings in those early days understood that it was a wild time and to venture your talents was really to expose yourself and your political persona to your comrades. He entered the ring in a very funny and humorous way, and we loved him for it. He was so excited, as he got excited about his politics and—dare I say it?—life. He came up to me after he had ventured into the social musical ring and said to me—and I had never been called this—‘Gavvy, do you think you could teach me a few chords on the guitar?’ I said, ‘Well, it’s pretty easy, pal. There’s only three you need to know—G, C and D7. That bowls 60 per cent of the songs.’ So I taught him that, and I said, ‘When you’ve finished with that, I’ll teach you the E minor. That takes you up to 85. You’ll be ready to rock and roll.’

He was enthusiastic about taking on a new skill. Today, my remarks are directed to his children, although I do not know them very well. There are three certainties for politicians: taxes, death and the Hansard. One day in a quiet moment, I think his children will reflect on the great honour that has been bestowed today upon our comrade and their father, Greg. As they read the words of probably an old man and long forgotten politician in an aged care home, they will hear what I want to tell them about their father. He was a man of great passion and commitment. He was passionate about the Labor Party. He was consumed by passion but he was not diminished by hate. He had a very strong commitment to his family and he loved you dearly. Why do we know that? Because he told us. In a rather unusual way for a male, he told us of the great love that he had for his children. There is one other attribute of your father that you ought to take with you as you walk down the years: his great willingness to learn. He was prepared to take on any challenge in his electorate and take on new skills. He shared his life with us in so many ways that we remember here today. He was a funny man and he loved the company of his colleagues. I ask you as you read the pages to not try to fathom what cannot be fathomed nor try to explain what cannot be explained, because in that pursuit for you there is a darkness in itself. But reflect on the words of the comrades that came to know him well, because in that are the values and in that is the strength that will walk with you down the years as you remember your father. I pass my condolences on to the family.

Mr Griffin (Bruce) (5.19 p.m.)—I rise today on what is a very sad occasion but I would like to try and focus on some positive points and some celebration of the life of Greg Wilton. I knew three Greg Wiltons. I knew Greg Wilton the activist, Greg Wilton who pursued an ambition and Greg Wilton the servant of the people. It was over a 12-year period. The first one was the activist. About 11 years ago, I was on the rules revision committee with Greg. We spent a good deal of the time trying to sort out the party rules. Back in those days my little group was in charge of the party, so I was always more careful about what I proposed in terms of rules than I would be now. Now I have come to know them very well because I have to try
and use them to protect myself, very unsuccessfully. Greg was always committed; he was always there and he was always willing to engage in debate.

When he moved away from fortress Scullin and Jagajaga and came back out to my side of town, which was also his side of town, we got to know each other in that he was actually a volunteer in my campaign for election in 1993. Right through that period you saw a guy who was committed to the Labor Party, what it stood for and what he believed it to be. He saw it as a very important part of society in terms of trying to lead forward for democratic change. As often happens and has happened to all of us on this side of the chamber, he then took that a step further. That was the ambition period. This was when the relationship that I had with Greg went through a love-hate relationship. We went through a period when we came to love to hate each other. That was certainly the case around that ambition period because we had a situation where Greg was seeking to put himself forward in the local area. I was an incumbent concerned about boundary changes in the local area and was looking to do what I could to make sure that I and others would be protected in the way that it goes in the ALP. I remember an occasion when we were at a branch meeting and some 80 members of the Latin American community had come forth of their own volition, fully abreast of the important role they were playing and seeking to play an important role in a democratic organisation such as the Labor Party. As they filed through, I turned to Greg and said, 'You are not going to get it. Just back off, and maybe you’ll get a state seat.'

I came to rue the day that I said that, because, as Greg put to me, every 12 months he used to remember this anniversary by saying to people that it was the day when I told him he could not get it and he decided he would get me instead and make sure that I was proven to be wrong. Some four days after those 80 Latin American members had taken that position to join the Labor Party, I learned that some 120 in another branch in another part of the electorate had taken the same decision, at Greg’s instigation rather than mine. I realised that maybe he just was not going to get warned off that quickly. That led to a period of quite a bit of internal tension between the two of us. But it said something very important about Greg in that period before he became a member of parliament. The guy was driven and basically he was tough and he did not flinch. He was strong at what he did and he was effective at it.

I have had such stoushes with a few people in my time and I hope to have a few more in the years to come. The fact of the matter is that he was a very worthy opponent in that context, and I mean that in the most sincere, warrior-like way that you can put it. He was a worthy opponent in that situation, but the problem with worthy opponents is that you start to get a bit bitter and twisted, or certainly I did. I remember a conversation that I had in 1996 with the member for Werriwa when he said that he had an ambition for that term of parliament: basically, he thought Greg Wilton was a good bloke and he thought I was, so he was going to bring us back together. I will not jeopardise the question of parliamentary language by repeating my response at that time, other than to say that Mark achieved his ambition because, within about 12 months, Greg and I made peace and went forward together working, I think, in a much more constructive fashion.

That showed the servant aspect of what he did, because he certainly worked his electorate hard and it was something that came through. He actually inherited a fairly significant chunk of my first electorate in the Cranbourne area. As much as I would like to say it—and I am afraid I cannot—it was not that the good burghers of Cranbourne felt my loss to any great extent. They found themselves in a situation where they were probably tended better in a pastoral sense. That commitment that Greg showed in the electorate was something that I also think he brought here. Others have mentioned the way he spoke of his electorate on many occasions. That commitment that Greg showed in the electorate was something that I also think he brought here. Others have mentioned the way he spoke of his electorate on many occasions. That commitment showed a basic decency as a human being and also a concern for the common man and woman. It showed, very clearly, that he was a good bloke. There is probably no other fair way to put it. He was a very good bloke.
On the question of the problems that have occurred recently, when such a tragedy occurs we always spend a lot of time looking at why and at what really happened when, in fact, we will probably never really know. I would like to say to his family a couple of things in that respect. He was a very compassionate individual and he had a real concern for his family, as well as for others. I remember a time some years ago—I will not go into the details—when I was having a few problems. They have resolved themselves, thankfully. I remember speaking to Greg about this on one occasion and he was really upset about it. That said something about him as a man in terms of the way he felt about his colleagues—even colleagues like me that he had fought with like cat and dog over the years.

The tragedy of Greg in the context of this place was that he worked so hard to get here and then, having got here, he was consumed by a sadness about how he felt he was going. It is a problem with this place in some respects. It is an incredibly ambitious environment, but at the same time to have actually got here is a significant achievement in itself. Only a handful of those within our party or on the other side who strive to do so ever get the opportunity to stand in this place. I think of being careful about what you wish for because it might come true. I think that is what happened to Greg, to a degree, in terms of this place.

That he loved his family, that he loved his kids, has been commented on by so many people today. It is a fact. What I would say is that, in my experience, being a parent is probably one of the hardest jobs I have ever had, and I have had a few. The whole question of how you deal with children and how you act and react within a family environment is not something that his kids are going to know much about because of the fact that he has passed away while they are at a very young age. It is a question of knowing how to deal with problems and how you often make a mistake in dealing with problems, but you have to get up the next day and go on from there. I always say to my kids, ‘Even if I stuff it up, the fact of the matter is that I still love you no matter what.’ It is being able to get that point across. That is the point I would make to Lachlan and Eliza and to Greg’s whole family. To Maria, to his mother, Joy, and to his sister: it is a great loss. Obviously you are the ones feeling it more than we do, but we do feel it too. As a colleague, as a rival and as an antagonist, the fact is that Greg was a very worthy opponent, a very worthy friend, and a man that we can all be proud to have known.

Mr ZAHRA (McMillan) (5.28 p.m.)—I can hardly believe what has happened. I can hardly believe that our colleague, our brother and our friend, Greg Wilton, is dead. When I was elected to this place in October 1998 I would never have thought, and could never have imagined, that one of our colleagues would die under such tragic circumstances. If I had to guess, I could never have guessed that it would have been Greg Wilton. Greg Wilton set a very high standard. He set the high jump bar very high indeed. In many ways, he made it very hard for the rest of us. I remember speaking to a colleague of ours, who is an activist in the Victorian branch, after the 1996 election. I was the campaign manager for the McMillan ALP campaign in the 1996 election. It was a bad election for us right across Australia. People were waiting for the Labor Party with baseball bats. I said to this bloke, ‘You know, we got a two per cent swing against us in McMillan. It wasn’t too bad considering that we lost a fair few seats with a lot bigger swings than that throughout Queensland and New South Wales in particular.’ This bloke said to me, ‘But what about Greg Wilton in Victoria? He won that seat despite the fact that the swing was on and the swing was against us.’ He set the high jump bar very high for us, and that was the standard.

So it was in 1988 when we won McMillan back with a swing to us of about 2.8 per cent, which I thought was not a bad effort. Greg Wilton in Isaacs, because of his industry and his dint of application, got a swing of about six per cent. That was Greg—always working hard, always setting the standard for the rest of us. It is interesting to reflect now that, despite both Greg and me coming from Victoria and from the same bit of the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party, we never par-
ticularly talked a great deal about the fine points of public policy. I think there was a good reason for that, and it needs to be realised why that was. People have talked about Greg and his long association with the electorate he represented, how he went to kindergarten, primary school and secondary school there and how he lived there for 42 out of his 44 years. He was very much a product of that whole area; he had been shaped by that; and he had formed strong views as a result of his long association with his constituency. Most people in this place, certainly most people on our side of politics, know that I can say similar things about my long association with the Latrobe Valley and about the association that I have had with my electorate. The needs and aspirations of people in Greg’s electorate were, I suppose, a little different from the needs and aspirations of people in my constituency. I think there was a common understanding between us of some things that we should probably not get into discussion about because we would probably end up disagreeing—and disagreeing fairly strongly on those points. One of the joys that we have in this place is to regale each other with stories about our constituencies.

There is some real pleasure and joy in telling anecdotes about the various things that we have gotten up to in our constituencies. I remember sitting with Greg over at Aussie’s, having a cup of coffee and a bit of a yarn, and telling him about a particular timber mill in my electorate up in Noojee. I find a lot of joy in telling stories about the timber mills and different workplaces in my electorate. I think it has been commented on that Greg was well known as a fairly strong environmentalist. So I was telling him this story about this workplace that I had been to and I was describing it to him in terms of not only was it no ticket, no start but it was also no beard, no start. It was a pretty tough workplace. I was telling Greg a few stories about the hardness of the industry, the hardness of the workplace and about some of the stories that the men who worked there had told me. He shook his head and said, ‘Brother, I could never represent your seat.’ That truth can honestly be said of me as well: I could never have represented Greg’s seat. He was a perfect reflection of the needs, wants and aspirations of those people who lived in his area. He honestly was that.

There is a side to Greg which has been touched on by people in this condolence motion, but I want to add a little more to those remarks about Greg’s nurturing side and the fact that he was always prepared to spend a bit of time with people. There is a pecking order of sorts in this place. It is fairly clear. There is also a bit of a pecking order amongst backbenchers. I think I would find myself as probably one of the most junior of that lot. I have to say that Greg was always someone who had a bit of time for me. It is often difficult getting used to the forms of an institution—I think everyone would agree with that—and Greg took a bit of time to explain how it worked and where the opportunities lay. He was always someone who, in a very brotherly and caring way, would walk you through those processes. That is a side to Greg that I think people really need to be aware of. It is a side of him that I know that I really benefited from. He used to enjoy not only explaining the forms of the House—as had no doubt been explained to him previously and he was passing on the benefit of his knowledge—but also telling new members like me about some of the techniques that he used in his constituency to make sure he was aware of what the concerns were so that he could be effective as a local member of parliament. He used to tell me not out of a want to praise himself or to hold himself up as being the pre-eminent marginal seats campaigner or anything like that but because it had worked effectively for him; he had learnt more about his constituency; and he had been a better representative as a result of it. He was telling me, and no doubt other people in our caucus, because he wanted us to benefit from his experience. He did not want to grandstand; he wanted us to benefit from what he had learnt.

What has happened is a tragedy. I want to make very clear for the benefit of Greg’s children when they read this in due course that their father was a great man. Their father was a great Labor man who epitomised a lot of the things that we in the Labor Party hold dear. His humility, his commitment to helping ordinary working people and his dedica-
tion to his constituency can all be held up as examples for the rest of us to follow. On behalf of my constituency—I want to state very plainly our deepest sympathy for Greg’s family, particularly for his children.

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (5.37 p.m.)—I would like to support the Prime Minister’s motion of condolence as supported by the Leader of the Opposition and all members of this House. I would firstly like to extend my deepest sympathy and prayers to Greg’s mother, sister, wife and two children. I note that in the Prime Minister’s address he started by saying that he did not know Greg very well. As a member of the Labor Party, a member of the opposition and someone who sits one seat from where Greg used to sit, I did not know Greg very well either. Perhaps that says something about the sorts of lives that we live in this House, when we are all so self-consumed, we are all often neglectful of one another and, of course, many of us are separated from our families.

A number of questions have been posed here this afternoon about the decision Greg took to end his life. The Leader of the Opposition put it absolutely when he said that only Greg would know. I guess we will never know. What I do know about Greg Wilton is that, as mentioned first by the members for Chisholm, Barton and Watson, he was a prolific interjector. I happen to know something about interjections because sitting right in front of me is the member for the Northern Territory, sitting to my left is the member for Prospect, and sitting immediately to my left are the member for Burke, the member for Lyons and the member for Rankin, not to mention the member for Charlton—all of whom are well known to you, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER—All members of the House are well known to me.

Mr MURPHY—My eardrums can attest to the great capacity that Greg Wilton had to project his voice. He also possessed a very prodigious sense of humour, and I am going to miss him. I remember 5.55 p.m. on 3 April when Greg Wilton last rose to his feet in this House to speak up for his electorate. I had been the previous speaker in private members business and he started the grievance debate that day. For some reason, because of the manner that he came into the chamber and the way he started to speak, I stayed to listen for the whole of that speech. I am sure his family would be very proud that his last contribution in this House was one where he vigorously stood up for his electorate, particularly for the frail and the elderly. To his family listening, or when they read in the Hansard the magnificent tributes that have been paid to this great parliamentarian today, I am sure they will be very proud, because Greg was one of us and we are all going to miss him. One of the lovely things here in the chamber today is that the daffodils, Greg, are shining and smiling brightly in the place where you used to sit. We are all going to miss you so I say vale, Greg Wilton, may eternal light shine upon you and may you rest in peace. Amen.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (5.41 p.m.)—I rise to briefly add my comments in this condolence motion moved by the Prime Minister and supported by the Leader of the Opposition today. I was elected on 2 March 1996, along with Greg, to this place. There were not many of us on this side of the House elected on that day. A couple, Jenny and Martin, moved straight to the front bench so that the back bench team of the class of ’96 was pretty small indeed. I had not met Greg before but we met at the lunch for new members at the orientation week type seminar that we have here. We met up—Joel, myself and Mark Latham, who had come into parliament just prior to then, in 1995, so we incorporated him in the class of ’96 lunches and drinks that we had so that he would not be too lonely.

Generous is the word I would use to describe Greg—generous of spirit. There was not a time when he would not give you a word of encouragement—we sat up the back together during our first parliament—whether it was a word of encouragement to you as a colleague or whether it was the way that he spoke about, in particular, his family but also his electorate and the Labor movement. He loved all three, certainly his family being first in the order. A number of people have spoken about the economics committee. I think it says something about Greg and his contribu-
tion there that I am the last person from the former Standing Committee on Financial Institutions and Public Administration of the last parliament and the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, as it is now called in this parliament, to speak. Every single one of his colleagues on that committee on both sides of the House has made a contribution. That is because it is often through the committee processes that you really get to know people. I consider it an absolute privilege and an honour to have called him my friend.

As a member of that committee perhaps the inquiry that Greg enjoyed the most, and all of us enjoyed most and which was our most productive, was the inquiry into regional banking. I remember the quite obscure places—obscure for a committee made up largely of people from Sydney and Melbourne—we travelled to together, whether it was to Herberton, up in the Atherton Tablelands, to Fitzroy Crossing or to the Kimberley—all these places—and talking to people at these communities where none of us had been before.

My most lasting memory of Greg will be of the time we were up in the Kimberley, at Kununurra. Greg, a committed environmentalist, talked me into an ecotourism trip at night. I think the rest of the people were going off to a club for dinner and a few beers, but Greg talked me into going up to Lake Argyle. It was quite an amazing place for a boy from Marrickville to visit. The sky was fantastic and the stars were out. There was a tremendous amount of flora and fauna, and Greg was actually helping the guide to identify the birds and the flowers. It was a bit chilly on the lake and we were huddled together under a blanket—very cosy. Greg commented that he wished Maria were sitting next to him, and I said that I wished Carmel were sitting next to me; nonetheless, we were very much enjoying each other’s company and camaraderie. For me, memories of Greg will be very positive.

I have memories of him making an outstanding contribution as the deputy chair of that committee. Whether he was talking to punters in places like Herberton and the Kimberley or to Ian Macfarlane, the Governor of the Reserve Bank, he was a human being who could move comfortably between those worlds and communicate in a way which was absolutely real and honest.

I think that this place is diminished substantially by the loss of Greg Wilton. I would like to extend my condolences to his wife, Maria, and to his two children, Lachlan and Eliza, whom he talked about nonstop. All of us knew that he had two children and that he loved them very much. To his mother, Joy, and to his sister: my heartfelt condolences and sympathy for the loss of someone who was a very great human being and whom we are all proud to have called our friend.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (5.47 p.m.)—Greg came into the parliament a term after I arrived, and we got to sit together for a term. We had a lot of very interesting question times. We have heard about his interjections. I may have played a part in his becoming rather good at them, because I did tell him when he first arrived that if he did not learn to interject he would not go anywhere. I told him that Beazley’s office would be onto him and the Whip’s office and Leo would come down and have a talk to him, so he had better start interjecting. It was probably because I needed a bit of cover, but he did learn to interject and he did it with great wit, which has been talked about today.

The other thing he had a great concern about was the cameras. Occasionally he used to go to sleep, as we heard today. I think we all close our eyes occasionally, and he was a bit worried that he would go to sleep and the camera would pick him up. Once he did doze a bit. I gave him a shake and said that the Age camera had taken a photograph of him and that I looked forward to the next day’s paper. So we shared those fun times together.

I also go to the gym. The member for North Sydney usually feels a little smaller when I go to the gym. I usually do my exercises in the pool, and Greg was always there when I arrived. He would always take an interest in people. He used to come out and do a particular exercise with his shoulders which involved holding up one of his arms. He usually did that while walking around the end of the pool where I was doing my exercises, and he would ask me how I was going and so on.
He was somebody taking an interest in a friend, and that was the Greg that I knew.

He went through a difficult time during the illness and very slow death of his father from cancer. When we went into the debate on euthanasia I know that it was very difficult for him because of the personal experience that he had had with his father. We discussed issues of quality of life and those sorts of things. It is very hard to get your emotions out in this place. We have discussed that, and I do think we need to change the environment here so that we can be a bit freer.

Greg’s children can be very proud of their father. He spoke to me about them in glowing terms and with great love. I remember his excitement at the birth of his youngest child. His great feelings towards them should be remembered, and they should always remember that his love for them was very strong. His death is a great shock to us. He was always cheerful here. I remember asking him during the last session, when he looked a little off-colour, if he was all right, and he said to me, ‘I’m fine, mate, thanks.’ You always felt that you didn’t do enough by going to him and offering comfort or trying to draw him out about the troubles he had.

I think the difficulties that can be confronted by somebody in this place, especially mental illness and depression, are not helped by their being presented in newspapers in a prominent way. Talking to the party, to the leader’s office and to professional colleagues may have helped in another way. I know that Greg must have been terribly troubled, because he sought help himself after the first incident. It must have caused him great pain prior to that incident and from then on. A lot of caution has to be taken when dealing with these issues. I am not looking to lay any blame for this. What happens in public life and personal life can be magnified enormously out of proportion. I do not expect that we as politicians should be treated in any other way, but maybe there are issues that need to be treated slightly differently. How we treat each other is a difficult issue—if you show a weakness, it will be exploited. There are interpretations by the press on movements in the factions and some things that are not quite normal. We need to deal with issues such as the ridicule. We do not really know why people do get depressed—why issues compound on them—and how those stresses develop into very deep depression.

My feeling is that we need to be nicer to people within our workplaces, and that includes here in Parliament House. We should criticise policies and ideas, not individuals. This place can be a very isolating area, as we have learned today from what people have said. Along with others, I initiated the re-opening of the staff bar on a Tuesday night to try to break some of that. I hope colleagues will use that as a safety valve—as a place where they can let off a bit of steam and talk to each other and to friends. We may even get to know each other a little better.

I will miss Greg, and I wish he had not been so final in his actions. I will remember him with great pride and as a friend. My deepest sympathy goes to his mother, to his sister, to his wife and to his two children.

Mrs DRAPER (Makin) (5.56 p.m.)—I rise to support the condolence motion moved by the Prime Minister and supported by the Leader of the Opposition. I was in the class of ’96. In fact, the first day I met Greg Wilton, the member for Isaacs, it took me five minutes to learn of his commitment and passion for the Labor Party. The members for Grayndler, Hunter and Werriwa might remember we all had lunch together on the first day. I tried to challenge Greg Wilton’s passion and commitment to the Labor Party because I felt that my commitment to, and passion for, the Labor Party was greater. It was a humdinger of a lunch, I can tell you!

It has been said today on many occasions that Greg had a great love for the Labor Party and his electorate. I do not doubt that in any way. He was an absolute gentleman, although my partner, Paul, who was there with us at the lunch, kept tapping me gently under the table with his foot, saying, ‘Trish, please don’t say that to the member for Hunter. Please don’t say that to the member for Grayndler and the member for Isaacs.’ He actually went to tap me one time a little bit harder when Greg and I were having a heated discussion, and he missed me and kicked Greg right in the shin. I say to Kay Hull, the member for Riverina, that I certainly under-
stand his compassion and thoughtfulness for a new member with sore shins. In the end, Greg and I became good friends. He did come to me and talk about a few issues that were on his mind. I am just sorry that at the time I perhaps did not pay closer attention. Like many of us, I have some regrets.

There is something special that I want to say to Greg’s children tonight so that they can read it in the future: I am not angry at your dad; I can forgive him. There are some pressures that can become so crushing that they are too hard to bear. I want to say to Lachlan and Eliza: just forgive him. Love him, be happy for him and be proud of the great man he was.

Ms ELLIS (Canberra) (5.58 p.m.)—I will be very brief because I believe that virtually every line that I would like to use in a motion like this today has already been covered by many of my colleagues. Mr Speaker, Greg and I did in fact share one unique thing—being class of 96ers, Greg and I each shared in the delight of taking a seat off one of your honourable colleagues at that election. I know that he and I reflected to each other in glory over that, despite the misery and devastation around us at the time. It is true to say that the Wild Thing was a bit of a notorious exhibition, and I have to say very proudly that it actually began at one of my fundraising dinners, which also became a little notorious in a way. Being an opportunistic politician, I always made sure the dinners were held on sitting nights so that colleagues, like Greg, could come along and I could get as much financial support as possible from my colleagues.

With respect to interjections, the member for Lyons has stolen just a slight bit of my thunder. I would just say that I think I am the failure in the interjection class of ’96–’98. I was in fact seated in the front row with the member for Prospect, the professor of the school. I was surrounded by the member for Lyons, the member for Isaacs and the member for Grayndler who immediately came to mind, all of whom in their first qualification period have gone to the top of the class. Many of my colleagues actually take delight in reminding me that I am failing somewhat in that area. The member for Isaacs, Greg, certainly did me proud in representing me in that area. I want to endorse entirely the words of everybody today. Even though I did not know Greg’s family—I have met his wife briefly—it is very evident that all of our sympathies go with them and to all of us here too. It is a very difficult time.

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (6.00 p.m.)—While, like all members who have spoken on this motion, I find it hard to think of Greg Wilton without my thoughts being dominated by the circumstances of his tragic death, there are other ways in which I will remember him. When I came to this parliament in 1998 Greg Wilton was one of the first mates that I got to know here. Greg was always a friendly face to meet in the corridors or in this chamber. He always had a friendly quip or a joke to tell. In fact, my fondest memory of Greg is his love of a joke, particularly a practical joke. As one of his most recent victims, I can confirm his impish glee at seeing one of his colleagues made just a little uncomfortable by his antics. On that occasion I was just about to speak on a serious motion in the Main Committee. As I recall, the speaker before me had about one minute left of his time and I was getting ready to rise in the debate. Just then, Greg slipped into the seat next to me and said that he wanted to show me a copy of a pamphlet he had printed to go out to his electorate. He then proceeded to show me a very funny cartoon depicting government members—and I am sure a few of our colleagues here on the back bench and the front bench will know what I am talking about. I could not help but burst out laughing just as the Deputy Speaker called, ‘The honourable member for Fowler.’ It took me some time to compose myself before I could begin to speak, much to Greg’s amusement.

But, while I remember Greg as a joker, I cannot help but think that, like the circus clown, he too hid a broken heart behind a painted smile. And I cannot help but think that, if we had looked that little deeper, if we had not taken so much for granted, in some way we could have helped Greg. This parliament has lost a fine member. I and many others have lost a good mate. I for one will not look into the eyes of any member here and not think of Greg and wonder what lies
behind the smile, the joke or the friendly word. In the dog-eat-dog world of parliamentary politics, sometimes looking after and caring for each other is the last thing on our minds. For me, Greg Wilton will always be a reminder of someone who did care. In the midst of his own personal crisis, he was someone who took the time to share a smile, a friendly word or a joke.

To Greg Wilton, I say, ‘Farewell, comrade.’ I join with all members of this House in extending my condolences to his beloved family. He reminded us virtually daily of his family, especially those two beautiful children. He had photos of them in his wallet, and he was so proud of them.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (6.03 p.m.)—After the many things that have been said today, I do not think I can add anything to the profound, honest and, indeed, beautiful things that have been said about Greg Wilton. Despite coming from the same state and from the same side of the Labor Party, I did not know Greg all that well before coming up here. We had—through the good offices of my friend the member for Wills—worked together before Greg’s election on a project which I was very pleased to work with him on and from which he derived some satisfaction and which I believe was helpful in his rightful election here in 1996.

We got to know each other in the same way as the member for North Sydney and the member for Lyons did: it is hard to believe, but I too go to the gym. That is where Greg and I became very good friends in the first six months after my election. We became warmer and warmer towards each other, and Greg reached out to me and asked me down to the other side of Parliament House—down to the ground floor corridor. I am right up the other end near the dining room. Over the last six to eight months we had many intense discussions and meetings in his office as we became closer friends. His profound love of his family and his children were, I think, the common ground that we had together. He was a very intense father. Practically every discussion we had in his office would begin and end with some story about the children whose pictures I remember being very prominently displayed in his office.

Many of us have been aware of the difficulties that he experienced in the last months of his life, particularly the last few weeks. Many of us tried to do what we could to be of assistance to him. I, as a person who came late to the luck of his friendship, miss him as intensely as many of the people who have known him for a longer time. I say, particularly to his children, that he was a father who loved his children extremely deeply, at all times. There have been some—and I think the member for Hunter hinted at this—wrong and, indeed, infamous things said about Greg by some elements of the media, not all of them. But this is not the time or the place to address those. I know that, at all times, Greg loved his children. I want them to see that on the parliamentary record. All I can say on behalf of all of my colleagues is: Greg, we miss you.

Mr SERCOMBE (Maribyrnong) (6.07 p.m.)—The death of a colleague is always a very difficult time for all people in this House, and in my fairly lengthy time in both this and the Victorian state parliament I am reminded of only two other occasions when that has occurred. In the Victorian parliament the deaths of Pauline Toner and Beth Gleeson during my time there were very difficult times for us then. Both those fine women members died as a consequence of cancer. If anything, these circumstances of death at one’s own hand are even more traumatic for members.

Greg had a great zest for life and I think that is what makes this particular set of circumstances so very difficult for us. I had known Greg for at least 15 years. I first came across Greg when he was an organiser for what was then the Municipal Officers Association in Victoria. I was knocking around the Essendon City Council in those days and we occasionally came into some limited conflict over a few matters that were in our respective areas. As the member for Deakin would well know, Moonee Ponds, which was my ward in those days, had a very significant Italian population—still does but perhaps less so—and Italians always had great difficulty with the peculiar Anglo-Saxon pronunciation of my name, so I was always called ‘Councillor Ser-com-be’. Greg forever christened
me in this place with that name, so ‘Councillor Ser-com-be’ became one of Greg’s frequent jokes. Other members have commented on his capacity to very aptly provide nicknames. As other members have indicated, he was a great campaigner. He was a great stalwart of the Labor movement. He was a great family man. We are all going to miss him very deeply indeed and I would like very briefly to extend my condolences and those of my family to Maria, his children, his mother and his sister.

Mr RUDD (Griffith) (6.09 p.m.)—As one of the new chums in the class of 1998, I did not have the privilege of knowing Greg Wilton for as long as those who are members of the celebrated class of ’96. But by the end of last year he had become a good friend.

One of the interests that I shared with him was his longstanding and abiding interest in Asia. It seems there is practically no part of Asia that guy had not backpacked to at some point in his life. He knew more about that continent than I do. In fact, this year we were to travel to China and Korea together and it was only at the last minute that he had to withdraw from that particular visit in late April-early May.

What I remember most about Greg in the time that he became my friend was—a point about him which many other members have referred to—his simple generosity. In a place whose very definition is competition, he was a guy who actually would take time. He would give you the gift of his time and the benefit of his ideas in an age when it seems no-one has any time anymore, whether it was the stuff we have talked about here—how you run a mobile office, on which I now have the Queensland patent, or the question of bikes in schools, and the entire Queensland bike retailing industry now owes him a considerable debt. But beyond those things it was just simply having the time to stop in the corridor and not give you the impression that he had to rush by, a rare gift in this place where we are always too busy to stop.

The other thing I would like to mention in this debate—something which most other members have also referred to—is his extraordinary love for his children. You could not visit Greg’s office, that eyrie at the other end of the caucus room, without being taken on a tour of the photographs of the children. For me it is inconceivable—as others have said in this debate—that he could have had any idea in his head to have done those children any harm.

The last thing I would say is that after I returned from the visit to China and Korea on which he was supposed to accompany us—and I knew he had had some problems—I remember sitting down with him here and asking, in the usual Australian way, ‘How’s it going, mate?’ His response was, ‘Fine, fine, fine. Everything’s okay. Everything’s on the mend.’ But the thing I ask myself about that exchange is this: have we reached such a stage in our language and in our demeanour with people where, when we ask the question, ‘How are you, mate?’ anyone we are talking to actually believes that we are interested, wants to hear the answer and wants to hear that there may be pain and there may be difficulty? Have we reached such a stage in the economisation of our exchanges that, once again, time becomes all commanding and we are not seen as being interested in the wellbeing of another human being? I will miss him. He was not just a good bloke. He was not just a great mate. He was, as many others have said in this debate, a good man and a good representative of his community. He was one of us. He was our comrade and he was our friend, and we will miss him.

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (6.13 p.m.)—I want to briefly make a contribution to the condolence motion debate. Others have talked about the significant contribution that the class of ’96, of which Greg Wilton was a member, made to the morale of what was a remnant Labor Party after the defeat of 1996. But I think I have one distinction, and it is this. We have all heard of the determination of Greg to win at preselection and to get into parliament, but he could not wait to give me a spray when he had done so, which really came as a bit of a shock to me. It transpired that, in tabling a report on officer training, I had complimented the deputy chairman, Ian Sinclair, and another committee member, the member for Isaacs, who I had said did not talk a lot—this is Rod Atkinson—but that when he did make a contribution we needed
to listen. What I did not know was that Rod had used my remarks in his campaign advertising and hence Greg was very anxious to meet up with this Roger Price and just tell him what he really thought of those remarks. I made quite a number of efforts to placate Greg and finally, after a very long night over a bottle of Chivas Regal, I think I succeeded. I would like to say that in his time here Greg never denied me a smile or a twinkle in his eye. Occasionally he gave me a flick about that episode.

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I know we are honouring the substantial achievements that Greg Wilton accomplished in his life, but in his death he has allowed a discussion about suicide in a public way that we have not seen before. I think it is fair to say that all honourable members are now mindful of this issue and are motivated to change attitudes towards mental health problems and to do something significant about suicide, a national tragedy, and family breakdown. I, too, extend my sympathies to Greg’s family, who must be suffering the most from this sad loss.

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (6.15 p.m.)—Today is a day of ineffable sadness tinged with glimpses of joy—‘ineffable sadness’ because our colleague Greg Wilton, the member for Isaacs, is not with us here today to hear the tributes paid to him by both sides of the House, and ‘tiny glimpses of joy’ because we have had tiny glimpses of the complex mosaic of an individual and unique human being who has touched the lives of all of the people here. His wry smile, his cheekiness, his quickness, his passion, his intensity and his energy and drive were evident to everyone who knew him. If he had but known the esteem in which he was held by his colleagues, that may have kept him with us here today and made this day not the one it is. But unfortunately that was not to be. He has been ripped away from his family and their future—a seared wound that will take many years to heal. The human frailty that all of us are subject to is also demonstrated in this institution, because we have never had debates like this in this parliament. The debates we have are to a microphone, to a couple of people sitting near a table and to empty walls, and they run out to a radio shack. Greg felt that in his debating. He felt in this last year as he came under intense pressure that he could not see the way forward within the parliament. The purpose that he had had in his first parliament, which I saw when I joined in late 1996, the drive that he had had in his speech making, was dissipating with the corrosion and the alienation that he had felt for a period of time. We have an atomised parliament, and it would be better if more of our debates were collegiate in this sense.

Today is a day of homage and tribute to a friend, to a colleague and to—as many people have pointed out—a gladiator and an athlete-warrior. For my sense of closure, I would like to quote a great poem written 104 years ago by A.E. Housman which I think is appropriate to Greg today. It is titled ‘To an athlete dying young’: The time you won your town the race We chaired you through the market-place; Man and boy stood cheering by, And home we brought you shoulder-high. Today, the road all runners come, Shoulder-high we bring you home, And set you at your threshold down, Townsman of a stiller town. Smart lad, to slip betimes away From fields where glory does not stay And early though the laurel grows It withers quicker than the rose. Eyes the shady night has shut Cannot see the record cut, And silence sounds no worse than cheers After earth has stopped the ears: Now you will not swell the rout Of lads that wore their honours out, Runners whom renown outran And the name died before the man. So set, before its echoes fade, The fleet foot on the sill of shade, And hold to the low lintel up The still-defended challenge-cup, And round that early-laurelled head Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead, And find unwithered on its curls The garland briefer than a girl’s. Vale, Greg Wilton.
Mr HORNE (Paterson) (6.20 p.m.)—I feel rather presumptuous rising today because I did not know Greg Wilton well. I come from New South Wales; he came from Victoria. I am not a member of the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration—the Hawker committee—I am not a member of the Wednesday night musical group and I certainly do not go to the gym. But I would sincerely like to congratulate all the people who have contributed today, because I believe it has shown a side of this parliament that is very rarely shown to each of us on our different sides or to the people of Australia. I believe that every speaker today has spoken honestly and has not been afraid to speak with emotion, and that is something that is very rarely seen in this parliament. Today when one of the speakers was talking about how politicians are put down by the media, I was reminded of Paul Keating. I know that name does not elicit a very favourable response from many here, but he argued very strongly that question time should not be shown on television because it derided the parliamentary process. I believe, unfortunately, that what people think of parliamentarians is derived from question time and they think that that is the only process that goes on in this place. To listen to the contributions today on Greg Wilton, everyone knows differently: they know that the parliamentary process is far broader and includes all of us. The contributions show what a great man Greg was and that he truly was a person who understood the value of the processes and friendship that could take place here—and he mastered them. I envy all those people that had such a close relationship, regardless of politics, with Greg.

In my first term here between 1993 and 1996 I befriended a great parliamentarian who was much loved by many Australians, Fred Daly. We all know that Fred used to bring tours through this parliament and, since I knew his son Laurie, it was organised that Fred would always bring them to my office just to show some of these people what parliamentary offices were. He used to say, ‘You know, son, I couldn’t work in this place. When we worked down at the other place, it was crowded and the toilet facilities were bad, but at least when you had a leak you would be talking to someone. You could be dead in this place for three days and they wouldn’t know.’ Doesn’t that say something about modern society, that we build these bigger, better, more modern places and we take the humanity out of them. That is why not only Greg Wilton’s family is hurting today but we are all hurting, because the danger signals were there for a friend but we were too busy, too concerned, with our own problems, our own marginal electorates, our own advantage that we could make out of a situation to have observed what we should have been doing to help a friend and a colleague.

Like Greg Wilton, I studied science. I did not study history, but I understand that through history we should learn from our mistakes and we should ensure that an experience does not happen again if it is not worthy of happening again. We are debating a tragedy today, but the real tragedy will be if this parliament does not take heed of the sacrifice that Greg Wilton has made for all of us as his colleagues to say: get out there and change the process. Let’s take the process that he started of making friendship with everyone in this House, let’s expand it and let’s move on. Let’s get rid of that unnecessary adversarial process. I have participated in it, and I know I am as bad as anyone else, but I think today we should put the line in the sand and Greg Wilton should be known for what he encouraged to happen in this parliament. Like everyone else, I would like to express my condolences to a family that I do not know. I can only imagine the grief they bear.

Mr HOLLIS (Throsby) (6.25 p.m.)—I want to add a few brief words in support of the motion moved by the Prime Minister and supported by the Leader of the Opposition. Much of what I feel has already been said, and perhaps more adequately than I could say it, so I will not recap all those things. I want to give one example of the personal nature of Greg Wilton. When I first started going to the gym it was just at the time that he came in here. Much has been made today of the gym experience, and most of the people speaking have been very fit—much younger than me and much fitter than me. But Greg took a particular interest. I do not know whether he was surprised that I was there or at what I
was doing there, but he always used to come over to me and talk about the exercise I was doing and asking me why I was doing it. He always encouraged me. He even said things like, ‘For someone your age, it is really good you can do that much.’ It was not always so helpful, but he always encouraged me. Then I stopped going to the gym and he saw me a couple of times in the corridor and said, ‘I didn’t see you there this morning.’ I said, ‘No, I’ll be there.’ Then one day he came round my office and said, ‘You used to go there every morning. Why aren’t you going now?’ We had a long talk about it. It was great that he felt concerned enough for me and my health that he wanted to encourage me to go back there.

I was not close to Greg. I did not share plane flights or committee work with him, but he took enough interest in me to come along and see me. I think that is very much the nature of the person. As I said, other people have spoken of his many qualities. I will not rehash those but simply place on the public record my admiration for him and my appreciation for the support he gave me in the gym. My sympathy goes out to his wife, his mother and the family. He will be sorely missed in this place.

Mr SNOWDON (Northern Territory) (6.27 p.m.)—Like others, I shared the gym with our comrade Greg Wilton. I must say it was for me a very pleasant experience because Greg was always prepared to participate in banter, as we have heard, but also to offer words of encouragement. When you are ageing like me, you suffer from occasional injuries, and there were circumstances where we would discuss the remedies for those injuries. But I guess we did not learn to address the injuries of spirit. To me, there is a great lesson to be learnt out of the last few days, and indeed the last few weeks. I feel deeply, as I am sure we all do, about Greg’s family and in particular his children. Last Thursday I was at Borroloola in the Gulf country and I had not read a newspaper, listened to a radio or seen the news on television. It was only in the afternoon when I made a phone call that I learned of Greg’s passing. At that instant I was extremely sad. Borroloola is a long way from my home, and I arrived home on Friday night. I had discussed with Elizabeth the previous occurrence with Greg, and we had contemplated what this meant. We have got four young children, and it made us reflect upon the nature of this place. I think that those of us with young families and those of us who have been through the stage of having young families whilst we have been members of parliament need to do something about this place so that it actually recognises the role of our families in our lives.

This is not a family-friendly environment in any sense. We are isolated. We are often friendless. We have many people among us whom we might call mates, but we often live in our own cocoon. I was a beneficiary of being in the Old Parliament House where there is no doubt the ambience was a lot friendlier. We have to draw something from this experience which can provide us with the capacity to deal with this workplace—for that is what it is—so that being here is a humanising experience and so that we can understand the nature of our workplace relations.

We have a large interview panel. In my case, the last interview panel I confronted was 110,000 people. We do not have a single employer. We come into this place as individuals and then become part of a team. Yet that team does not have the wherewithal to acknowledge the difficulties that we confront as individuals in dealing with our daily lives as workers and dealing with the difficulties that we are confronted with by our isolation. People have said that we are not conscripts to this job. That is true, but we have a responsibility to each other and, most importantly, to our families to ensure that we have the support mechanisms around us to deal with issues of importance at the time they need to be dealt with. I want to support very strongly the words of our leader, Kim Beazley, the Chief Government Whip and the Chief Opposition Whip, wherever he is.

Mr Slipper—Whatever he is.

Mr SNOWDON—I know what he is. He is a very fine gentleman, some would say. I think we need to seriously address these issues. While it is easy for us to mouth the words and express our sincerity and our concern, we have to actually do something. I think we owe it to Greg and to his family, but
importantly we owe it to each other and to our families.

Greg’s children need to know that we thought a great deal of him. Recently, during one of these discussions in the gym, Greg asked me whether I could provide him with an opportunity to learn more about indigenous Australians and whether I could advise him on where he might go and if I would accompany him to a community or two in the Northern Territory where he could meet with and sit down and discuss issues with people—something I would have been only too happy to do. I think that demonstrated his sense of worth and his sense of concern about issues which are of importance to contemporary Australia but also of importance to him as a human being that he would want to understand what is of concern to people who are so impoverished. To Greg and to Greg’s family, I give them not only my condolences but the condolences of my family.

Mr NEHL (Cowper) (6.33 p.m.)—In rising to support the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in this condolence motion for Greg Wilton, I must say that we have had an amazing experience this afternoon. I am the 57th speaker and, apart from you, Mr Speaker, the last speaker in this condolence. It is quite extraordinary too and an enormous mark of respect from you, Mr Speaker, that this debate has gone on for over six hours and you have sat in that chair for the whole of those six hours, despite my availability to relieve you. I say that because this is indicative of the respect in which our late colleague was held.

Naturally, I am not going to speak at length after the time that has gone by, but there are one or two things that I want to say. I believe that, as this afternoon has unfolded, we have been provided with and left a legacy by Greg Wilton. As I said, I am the 57th speaker. A number of other people have spoken about the honesty and frankness that has been exchanged across this wonderful chamber of ours—not as good as the old one but still a wonderful chamber. The legacy of Greg Wilton is that there has been an exchange of warmth, affection and honesty from both sides which is rarely seen. As I said, I am very conscious of the time. There are other things I would like to say, but I will conclude by saying that the family, the children and the friends of Greg Wilton can always remember that he was greatly admired and was seen as an adornment of this parliament.

Mr SPEAKER (6.35 p.m.)—As the Speaker, may I associate myself and all of the many people who serve this House with the sentiments expressed and convey our deepest sympathy to the Wilton family.

Question resolved in the affirmative, honourable members standing in their places.

Mr SPEAKER—I thank the House.

Mr Howard—Mr Speaker, as a mark of respect, I suggest that the sitting be suspended until 8 o’clock this evening.

Mr SPEAKER—I feel sure the suggestion made by the Prime Minister meets with the concurrence of the House. As a mark of respect to the deceased member, the sitting is suspended.

Sitting suspended from 6.37 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Mr SPEAKER—I advise the House that the Deputy Speaker has fixed Monday, 19 June 2000, at 8.15 p.m. as the time for the next meeting of the Main Committee, unless an alternative day or hour is fixed.

BUSINESS

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration) (8.00 p.m.)—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent:

(a) the routine of business for the remainder of this sitting being as follows, unless otherwise ordered:

1. Presentation of, and statements on, the report from the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services for a period not exceeding 20 minutes, each member speaking five minutes;

2. Private members business accorded priority for this sitting as follows:

Notice No. 1—for a period not exceeding 25 minutes,
Notice No. 2—for a period not exceeding 30 minutes, and
Notice No. 3—for a period not exceeding 60 minutes;
with speech time limits on each item of business being as determined by the Selection Committee and shown on the report deemed to have been adopted by the House on 6 June 2000;
3. Presentation of petitions.
4. Notices and orders of the day, government business, and
   (b) The House, at its rising, adjourn until tomorrow at 4.30 p.m.
I will not detain the House. These arrangements have been agreed upon in relation to the condolence motion and the events of tomorrow.
Question resolved in the affirmative.

COMMITTEES
Primary Industries and Regional Services Committee
   Report
FRAN BAILEY (McEwen) (8.03 p.m.)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services, I present the committee’s report, incorporating a dissenting report, on primary producer access to gene technology, entitled Work in progress: proceed with caution, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee
Ordered that the report be printed.
FRAN BAILEY—The title of this report, Work in progress: proceed with caution, accurately encapsulates the view of the majority of this committee in regard to the continuing development of GMOs and their application to Australian agriculture. The committee has conducted this inquiry over the past 15 months in a changing environment of world opinion that has been reflected in Australia. The committee has examined 87 submissions, held nine public meetings, seven private meetings and even visited a laboratory to gain hands-on experience in order to have a better understanding of the process of genetic manipulation. At the end of this exhaustive inquiry, all but one member firmly believe that there should not be a moratorium on the development of GMOs. However, we strongly believe that a cautious approach is needed. The committee therefore recommends the continued use of gene technology but only with stringent regulation, constant and cautious monitoring, and public reporting.

According to information provided to the committee by the Interim Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, the new gene technology legislation that will set in place the regulatory system of GMOs will be independent, comprehensive, clear, rigorous, impartial, objective, transparent, accountable and supported by stiff penalties. The committee strongly supports the development of such legislation and further recommends that the gene technology regulator must be adequately funded, report to the parliament at least quarterly for the first three years of its existence and have access to expert advice.

The committee is of the view that recent alleged breaches of buffer zones and disposal of material from GM trials would have been less likely to have occurred if the stringent, transparent, independent and publicly accountable regulator had been in place. A number of the submissions we received raised the issues of the lack of trust by consumers in government agencies, the fear of monopoly and control by foreign multinational companies and in general a lack of balanced information about gene technology. For consumers—and it must be stressed that farmers are consumers also—these issues become a question of risk or at least the perceived risk of gene technology. As AFFA stated in its submission:

Scientific perceptions of risk are based on identifying and characterising hazards, and determining the probability of their occurrence and possible consequences. Consumers however, tend to focus on the consequences for them personally should the risk materialise and are less concerned with scientific perceptions of risk.

Perhaps the Australian United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association articulated consumers’ concerns best when it said to the committee:

It is not a scientific debate—it is an emotional one in which the consumer has genuine concerns. The fruit and vegetable industry has been through this debate with agricultural chemicals and residues. It was not until all consumer concerns were recog-
nised that any headway on solving the various issues could be made.

Public attitudes and values need to be respected and taken into account. The committee therefore recommends that all public education campaigns funded by the Commonwealth recognise and address the environmental, economic, cultural, ethical and social concerns of the consumer.

In dealing with the issue of lack of trust by consumers, the committee believes that the challenge for government in particular is to ensure that information is provided in an open manner and by a body which not only is independent but must be seen to be independent. The committee therefore recommends that Biotechnology Australia, which has responsibility for coordinating information about gene technology from government departments, should be made a statutory authority. This would place it at arm’s length from government, accountable to the parliament and subject to audit by the Auditor-General.

The report also deals with labelling. It deals with plant breeding programs, intellectual property and patent systems, and R&D investment. So that we do not lose a lot of our young, bright researchers overseas, one recommendation ensures that those institutions receiving Commonwealth funding acknowledge and reward the efforts of those researchers. This has been a very challenging inquiry and I place on record my thanks to my colleagues for their commitment. I want to thank the secretariat, in particular Dr Sarah Hnatiuk. I commend this report to the House.

(Time expired)

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (8.08 p.m.)—This report of the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services is probably one of the most important reports that has come before parliament in a long time. It is important not just because it is topical at the moment but also because what we decide now will have an effect that will reach long into the future. We are dealing with something that can change, maybe irreversibly, man’s relationship with the natural food chain. We know, and have known for some time, that food supplies are finite in many parts of the world and that it is up to the expertise of the scientist, the farmer and all those involved with the processing and distribution of food to ensure that we have a fair and even distribution of the world’s food wealth. Now we need to know how to increase yields, how to limit pests in our farming practices, how to fatten our animals and keep them reproducing in a healthy manner, and a host of other needs in farming. We also need to be aware that human health can be greatly improved or greatly harmed by changes in our foodstuffs. We commenced work on this report with an open mind but, by the same token, we wanted to treat the topic cautiously because of the implications it could have in the distant future.

The study of genetics is complex. We are dealing with the very essence of life. This report can only touch on the concerns of the general public: hence the title of the report. There is a lot more work to be done. The understanding and use of genetics in breeding has been known for some time. Man has been able to help natural selection by improving on nature’s ability to choose the appropriate strains of an animal or plant to make it stronger or healthier or longer or a particular colour by using natural breeding techniques. What is new about genetically modifying something is that we can reach into the genetic material, extract a single part of it and plant it in a completely different body—and that poses some really difficult questions for us to answer. Not every gene in an organism is active, and only the genes that are expressed are responsible for the characteristics of an organism. Much of the research undertaken in gene technology concentrates on activating or suppressing the expression of those genes that cause particular traits. However, it is the new gene that is transplanted into an animal or plant that is often the greatest cause for concern. I do not think this report can wholly deal with the ethics of this question, but it can point to what the government needs to be aware of and to do to ensure that we set the guidelines for further development.

Then there are the ethics of commerce involved in this issue—for example, the ownership of some of the biotechnology processes. How should they be regulated? Will
patents just entrench the rights of one company to limit others to improve or research a particular aspect of our technology? I am very conscious that this debate is very important to Tasmania from both sides of the argument. The Tasmanian state government want to have an ‘opt out’ clause as they believe that, by them participating in experimentation, the GMO product will pose an unacceptable risk within their territory. Yet one of our top employers, especially of professional scientists, Tasmanian Alkaloids, feels that, provided the right safeguards are there, GMO technology will help Tasmania be at the forefront of achieving competitive goals in agricultural production. It would be a pity to deny a good and locally run company the opportunity of developing its business and the jobs it already has. But I am very conscious of the difficulties of having some company with the reputation of Monsanto running unchecked through our island.

The committee’s inquiry was broad. Eighty-seven submissions were received. I have some sympathy with the views of Peter Andren, the lone dissenter, who prepared a report. I think we should have allowed more time to digest the information we collected. I am not convinced that we have completely protected Australia’s farming interests. However, I believe that sensible legislation can ensure that we will be able to monitor and review the process using the best minds available. As a small state, Tasmania is highly vulnerable. Both scientifically and economically, we must get this right. I would ask all members of the House to take this report seriously, endorse it and see that the recommendations are implemented in order to take the debate cautiously to the next stage.

Dr WASHER (Moore) (8.13 p.m.)—May I first say what pleasure I had in working with the members of the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services. All GM food released by the FDA in America and ANZFA in Australia has a proven, excellent safety record. Both the prestigious National Academy of Sciences and the US Senate have backed the current GM crops as being as safe as non-GM crops. GM crops continue to be exported successfully. The Canola Council in Canada continues to successfully export its GM canola to even the most vocal GM concerned markets, including Japan. No market pays a regular premium to non-GM commodities. GM does not reduce biodiversity. Agriculture has impacted on biodiversity for thousands of years. This is the trade-off that we have for producing food. Biodiversity is being improved with GM crops through reduced pesticide use and insect resistant crops, resulting in birds, mammals and non-target insects returning to the farmlands. So-called ‘green’ organic crop production could well decrease biodiversity as the proven lower yields of these crops would require the clearing of natural ecosystems for more farmland to produce the same amount of food.

Australia will fall behind if the federal government does not fully support biotechnology now. Already, with the paranoia and antibiotechnology sentiment being echoed by the Western Australian government, one local biotechnology company is looking to export its technology overseas in place of Australian application. This means that Australia not only loses this technology but is forced to compete with these overseas producers in the future. This export of technology and talent will continue unless the Australian government takes a strong stand in support of biotechnology, as the Canadian and US governments have already done. The benefits are and will be environmental, efficiency in nutrient uptake, disease and pest resistance, herbicide resistance, increased production of crops, improved keeping qualities, better processing qualities and more healthy products for the consumer. There are obvious economic benefits in more efficient land use for the farmer, with marked reduction in the usage of herbicides and pesticides, reducing the risk of a Silent Spring scenario. Resistance to, or tolerance of, drought, salt, acid and frost are all possible. Gene technology offers the possibility of novel new proteins being produced from existing crops. For example, low lignin timbers would be environmentally more suitable for use in paper making. We have a continent of very diverse endemic species, which can provide a rich source of genes for commercial usage. Because good herbicide usage would reduce the
release of CO₂ into the atmosphere, we have the potential of reduced tillage reducing the global warming problem. The more efficient use of crop land would reduce land clearing, thereby maintaining native vegetation and biodiversity.

For the consumer, we can improve the taste, texture, appearance, consistency, keeping qualities and nutritional value of crops. We can also produce pharmaceutical benefits from the crops in the way of vaccines, antibodies and protective protein products. Food processing to enhance characteristics can be achieved. For example, optimising appropriate high molecular weight gluten in wheat can improve noodle and bread quality. Animal feeds can be made more nutritional and digestible. Any buyer resistance that exists to GM food will be dramatically reduced by consumer benefits. This has been thoroughly demonstrated by the use of human insulin which is genetically engineered, most new vaccines that prove to be safer because of genetic modification, and hormones such as growth hormone. All these things should be achieved with the diligence of good science and environmental responsibility. There is no place in the evolution of any new science for emotional extremism to cloud the view of what is a responsible opportunity. The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator will be autonomously expected to adequately carry out the task of risk analysis. It is interesting that both the Victorian and Queensland state governments are investing heavily in agricultural biotechnology. I commend this report to the House.

Mr Griffin (Bruce) (8.18 p.m.)—As has probably been deduced by those listening to the debate tonight, there are a range of different views within the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services about aspects of the application of gene technology in the Australian scene in the years to come. Although there was, as has been mentioned earlier, only one dissenting report from one member and there was broad agreement around the recommendations, I think that we all recognised in the context of that report that there was then a range of further steps or applications that would need to be looked at. As has been said by my colleague the member for Moore, there are certainly a number of arguments that are in favour of developing gene technology matters at a rate of knots, under proper regulatory regimes. The alternative view, which I put, is that although I agree with the intention there the question is always a matter of at what pace and how we define those pace questions. On the issue of the front cover of the report, I think we would agree on proceeding with caution. We may just disagree on the definition of what ‘caution’ really means at the end of the day.

I would like to congratulate everyone associated with the report. The secretariat did a very fine job in what is a very complex area. It was a great pleasure for me to be on this committee. As a supplementary member, I had not been on this committee before and I certainly found it good to work with some members with whom I had not been on committees before as well as some old friends. I found it a very constructive committee. I think it has done a very good job with respect to the detail of what is a very complex area. However, we still come down to the question of where we go from here.

I would like to highlight a couple of points that concern me about the current state of play with respect to the application of gene technology in the agricultural scene in Australia. I quote a couple of paragraphs from chapter 7, which relates to the incident at Mount Gambier mentioned earlier and the role of the Interim Office of the Gene Technology Regulator. They read:

The committee was very concerned to hear allegations earlier this year that Aventis’ (formerly AgrEvo) trials of herbicide tolerant canola in the Mount Gambier area of South Australia had breached GMAC guidelines. It is even more worried by the manner in which the IOGTR has investigated the alleged breaches, in particular its tardiness in completing its investigation. The IOGTR began its examination of the allegations on 24 March 2000 and, as at 18 May, the results of this examination had not even been forwarded to the Minister for Health and Aged Care, let alone been publicly released.

The committee is of the view that the alleged breaches would have been much less likely to have occurred if stringent, transparent regulatory processes, such as those described in the next
sections of this chapter, had been in place. The committee is unanimous in believing that rigorous, independent regulatory processes must be instituted as quickly as possible. A more prompt, open, transparent approach must be taken to breaches of guidelines. It is essential that the OGTR act much more efficiently and effectively than the IOGTR has been able to if it is to reassure the Australian people that their interests are being strenuously protected. If this does not happen, public confidence in GMOs and their regulation will be badly prejudiced.

That is a very important part of this report. One thing that I think came through to all members is that there is a lot of public concern out there, some of it ill informed but some of it, I think, very poorly answered. This gets to the nub of this issue: not only is research needed but also proper education campaigns are required, to ensure people do understand what exactly is going on.

It also requires, I think much more importantly, a regulatory system that people have confidence in. When we see what has happened so far with the example of Mount Gambier, which I saw very much as being a case study in the operation of the current regulatory system and on from that something we can evaluate the coming gene tech regulation bill against, we find the IOGTR has dropped the ball, and that has been the unanimous view of the committee. The dissenting member clearly had that view also.

That is a very important consideration. We are now up to 19 June and I can report to the House that the circumstances are that, as far as I am aware, the report still has not got to the minister another month after the earlier point. There were reports in the newspaper, in the Age, late last week which showed that there is even a question mark as to whether that matter will be released publicly. I urge the minister to push the IOGTR to get its act together and get that report done. (Time expired)

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The time allotted for statements on the report has expired. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS BUSINESS
Ethiopia and Eritrea

Mr HARDGRAVE (Moreton) (8.24 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) expresses its concern for the return of hostilities between Ethiopia and the State of Eritrea;
(2) acknowledges attempts by the Organisation of African Unity, the United States, various African heads of state and the United Nations to restore peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea;
(3) expresses great concern for the reported deaths of thousands of people in the past eighteen months and for the suffering of tens of thousands more;
(4) acknowledges the need expressed by the Eritrean Government for the return of foreign humanitarian NGO groups to provide relief; and highlights the past efforts of Australians, such as Fred Hollows, to help the people of Eritrea.

I move the motion against the background of the happy news that a peace accord has been signed over the weekend between Eritrea and Ethiopia. I must say that it has not come too early for so many of us who have concerns, perhaps based—as in my case—on knowing directly people who have come from both of those nations to live in Australia and on understanding that this conflict has been pointless and unceasing in its slaughter of innocent people.

The conflict which has flared over the last two years between these two nations has been a case of brothers in arms but arms against each other. It has not been the people of these countries that have sought through any great philosophical reason to take on each other. It has simply been the governments of each country, and in particular the aggression that has been shown by Ethiopia in the invasion of and the reclaiming of lands that they say are theirs which have belonged to Eritrea.

It is not my intention in this debate to try to apportion blame or to pick one side against the other, but rather to remark on a number of things. One of them is this great body of people who have come from both of those countries to live here, to find peace and certainty and the prospects of their own families growing and building upon basic survival to make their way in this country. The second is perhaps the all too often forgotten attachment
that Australia has had with this region through the work of the Hollows Foundation, the work of the late Professor Fred Hollows. I know that the member for Farrer, who is involved with that foundation these days, will have a lot more to say about that.

The history of all of this does tend to go back a long way. It goes back to a time when Eritrea was created in its modern form along the southern Red Sea coastline between 1869 and 1890. The Italians were defeated in 1941. In fact, as an interesting anecdote, a former member for Moreton died in the conflict in September 1940 in the fight against the Italians in those days.

Mr Slipper—Who was it?

Mr HARDGRAVE—I knew you would ask me that. It was Arnold Wienholt. I can say without any doubt that what has happened as a result of British administration and a number of other changes, federations and phoney boundaries that have been con- fected along the way on the people in this region, has been at the heart of the issue behind this conflict that has already claimed tens of thousands of lives. By our own departmental estimations, over half a million people have been dislocated. The Eritreans themselves estimate up to a million of their countrymen—a third of their nation—have been displaced as a result of this conflict.

So there is this huge refugee dilemma that exists now in this region. Naturally enough, they would be turning to countries which already have a longstanding track record in this region, such as Australia, to try and play a part in assisting these displaced persons and in providing some direct assistance in trying to re-create homelands. But I suspect a lot of those aspirations are a little premature because it is very early days on in the signing of this peace accord. There is, naturally enough, a great deal of ongoing suspicion and concern.

I praise the efforts of the Organisation of African Unity which has been trying to bro- ker this peace, but I must say that I condemn the world community in the broad for its failure to fully highlight this conflict before this stage. That CNN did not broadcast this conflict, in fact, is at the heart of so many tens of thousands of people dying as a result. I guess the world was focused in on the Kosovo crisis and, more recently, matters in our own region. But, at the end of the day, the people of Eritrea in particular but also the people of Ethiopia have paid a high price for the world essentially turning its back. These are not nations that are rich in oil deposits, and I guess that is one of the reasons that nations such as America have been late in the game of advocating peace in the region. The fact that they are now I welcome. I also welcome the commitment of the Australian government for its care and concern in raising this issue. I look forward to the role we can play in highlighting this further and insisting that peace is not only simply pursued but also exacted and that it is a long lasting peace, so that the people of these nations can know the dignity and certainty of living in a peaceful environment. I raise this matter in the House because I think it is our role to raise these international conflicts and to ask for them to cease once and for all.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gash)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Tim Fischer—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (8.29 p.m.)—I associate myself not only with the wording of the motion but also the sentiments of the previous speaker, the member for Moreton. This is a war of wasted oppor- tunities. Essentially, from all of my reading, it is very hard to be convinced of the truth on either side. I was told by a Somali constituent who has some knowledge in this area, although I have not authenticated it, that the President of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, and the President of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki, are actu- ally the children of two sisters. So the irony of the situation is even greater.

Certainly the current Ethiopian government, in overthrowing the Mengistu regime, was supportive of the rights of the people in that region. Unfortunately, since then we have had a decline in the situation with Eri- trea’s decision in 1997 to have a separate currency, the insistence of the Ethiopian re- gime on dealing only in hard currency, issues concerning the trading of Eritreans who re- main in Ethiopia, the question of access to
the Red Sea, et cetera. The pointlessness of the whole conflict is perhaps displayed by the World Bank’s estimate that Ethiopia’s GNP was $100 per head two years ago while Eritrea’s was $210. We have a situation where there have been estimates of $US1 million a day being expended on this conflict. I think that puts in context the very serious waste that has occurred.

The previous speaker highlighted the very large displacement of people and the deaths of tens of thousands. In early June, a United Nations group went into the country and estimated that $378 million was needed for Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti essentially to look after the food and emergency needs of 13½ million people. At that stage in early June—I have not caught up with the latest figures—the total pledge worldwide was about $10 million on that figure of $378 million. The exacerbation of the situation through this war and through drought is quite pronounced. I note that there is reference in the final section of the motion to the Fred Hollows Foundation, and I note the activity of the former Deputy Prime Minister. In a letter to me, as a supporter of the organisation, the foundation highlighted the reality that there is no right on either side in this conflict. They talk about their own work, both in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the urgent need to protect the plant that they have in Asmara.

In my electorate of Reid, I have people who are very committed Eritreans. I have had to say to them that I do not think that I can associate myself fully with them in their extreme patriotism over this dispute. If you look back to May 1998, there were claims then that it was in fact Eritreans at that stage going onto land that was technically in Ethiopian control. The motion highlights the efforts of the Organisation of African Unity which have led to the Algiers agreement over the last few weeks and the conclusion of that agreement this weekend. I commend the motion. It essentially says that this dispute has been of no purpose and that the world should attempt to help with foreign aid to supply the requirements of the region. Australia has given $2 million in recent times; but we certainly have to look at that in the context of the length of time which this dispute has dragged on, the resulting suffering of people and the UN’s estimate of what is needed.

Mr TIM FISCHER (Farrer) (8.33 p.m.)—This is a forgotten war in relation to a forgotten set of colonies of a forgotten empire, namely the Italian empire, long since passed its zenith, a period of time when this part of the African continent was controlled by elements of the Italian government and from which a set of colonies sprang. It makes it no less acceptable that so many thousands of people have been killed in an almost nonchalant way over the course of the last couple of years. My colleagues have spoken strongly in support of the motion moved by the member for Moreton. A figure of 100,000 deaths is generally accepted in respect of the last two years of fighting between elements of Ethiopia and elements of Eritrea. This is four times greater than the number of Anzac diggers killed in one square kilometre on the Mouquet Farm in northern France. It is a figure which has been added to by the outbreak of fierce fighting that took place in May and in the first part of June between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In fact, on 6 June Ethiopian air raids and shelling killed some 68 people in and around Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, and wounded an additional 106 civilians. It was almost as if, in this conflict, nothing had been learned from World War I, as human wave after human wave was ordered out of the hills and out of the dry river beds—rather than trenches—to advance on fortified machine gun positions to be mowed down, just as happened, as we know from our history, some 90 years ago in the worst of World War I. Sadly, too many lives have been lost again.

The Australian parliament does itself proud for a number of reasons today. The presentation of this motion is another one by bringing to this forum—the most important forum of the Commonwealth of Australia—our very real concerns about the hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the loss of life that has occurred there. We urge that the peace accord, which has just been signed, might be purposeful, that it will in fact hold and will allow the rebuilding of Ethiopia and Eritrea.
There is a very good news aspect to Australia’s links with Eritrea. Fred Hollows was not everybody’s cup of tea but he was a fiercely determined person who cut through nonsense to get the job done and to help people, especially in relation to eyesight. Fred Hollows saw fit to launch one factory at Kathmandu, Nepal and a second factory at Asmara, Eritrea. These are not just any intra-ocular lens factories; they are so good that they have received certification—relevant IS2000 and other standards—and accreditation of world renown.

At one stage during this conflict there was a risk, given the sporadic bombing taking place, that the Fred Hollows factory at Asmara, Eritrea, might itself be bombed. I made an approach to Minister Alexander Downer, who in turn, through the Australian diplomatic representatives in northern Africa, made representations to the Ethiopian government. Subsequently, we received assurances that Ethiopia understood fully the role of that factory, that Ethiopia itself had benefited from that role and, therefore, it was in a very special category and would not be harmed. I am pleased to report, thanks to information from Mike Linsky and others, that that has been the case.

So we welcome the fact that a peace accord has been signed. I commend the work of people, including Fessehaie Abraham, who over the years both formally and informally has been a very dedicated representative of the people of Eritrea. I note that he is sitting in the gallery tonight. I know that mistakes have been made on both sides but we hope that this gesture, this night, with this private members business debate will highlight that it is just unacceptable in this 21st century to have a loss of life of around 100,000 people, several thousand in the last month or so, and that the devastation and destruction caused must come to an end. (Time expired)

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand) (8.38 p.m.)—I also would like to support this motion and the sentiments expressed by the earlier speakers. Like the member for Reid, my electorate is made up of a community that does have a large representation of people from the Horn of Africa communities. I think it interesting that previous speakers have expressed some concern that this has been a war that has essentially had no purpose. I think the term of the member for Farrer that the extraordinary number of deaths has occurred in an almost ‘nonchalant way’ is quite a moving description of this battle. What it means is that the many hundreds of people in my electorate from Eritrea and Ethiopia, but also from Somalia and the Sudan, for example, share and bring with them to this country the scars of this war, which essentially had no purpose and which was undertaken in such a traumatic way.

Recently, the Horn of Africa community in the western suburbs of Melbourne undertook a survey through the African Community Council and the City of Maribyrnong in which almost every single person indicated that they or their immediate family had been victims of torture. They regard themselves as the lucky ones. They were the ones who had survived this war, had made their way through our complex refugee process to be able to settle in electorates like Gellibrand and Reid—

Mr Hardgrave—And in Moreton.

Ms ROXON—And, of course, in the electorate of the member for Moreton as well—and who have become very peaceful and active members of the community. But it is a complex issue, and I know that those communities are always anxious to have their representatives understand the complexity of the battles they are still fighting for their own families and the way they would hope Australia would play some significant role in ensuring that this latest peace arrangement does actually hold. It was also interesting that the member for Reid indicated something that my research also showed up: the presidents of Ethiopia and Eritrea are in fact cousins. It seems to me that the war has that extra edge, as in the Vietnam War, in Korea and in the American Civil War, where families were really torn apart by divisions and where nobody really knows why those borders were put where they were and how it is that families have come to be torn apart.

I have a very amazing constituent whose name is Eleni Bered-Samuel. She is an activist in my community. She is a multicultural liaison officer with the Victorian Uni-
versity of Technology. She is also a representative of many community organisations. Her mother is from Tigre and her father has a background of both Oromo and Amhara. The reason I say that is an interesting thing is, of course, that many of us in this place have families that come from different backgrounds too. Eleni was born in Addis Ababa but she does not speak Oromo or Tigrean; she only speaks the national language of Amhara. I think her background is an example of that of many people from the Horn of Africa communities who are torn between different cultures, have not necessarily been brought up in one or the other, do not have the languages of each different tribal group and have settled now in Australia. She is an activist and leading community member in the western suburbs of Melbourne and is asked to represent all of the Horn of Africa communities, and I must say she does that in an amazingly successful way. I think people from these communities are very striking when they settle in our country. They are generally a beautiful race—tall and very dark with very beautiful, rich, colourful clothing but also with very different cultural backgrounds. We tend sometimes, because our lives are also complex and difficult, to group them together.

I support the motion before the House but I would like to add to this debate that I would also like to support as much as possible some understanding of the differences and the difficult circumstances that the people who come from the Horn of Africa have come from. They have different circumstances and different cultural groups that we should have some appreciation of, rather than grouping everyone together. I think that, when we call for the Australian government to play a role in supporting humanitarian objectives and keeping peace in those countries, we should not forget the support that is required for those communities already settled in Australia—support for the relationships they are trying to re-establish with their families, often through our embassies, and the great work that is done through our embassies in making sure that can happen—that we do truly appreciate them adding something extra to our community and that we in turn will recognise their difficulties overseas. (Time expired)

Mr NUGENT (Aston) (8.43 p.m.)—I rise to support this motion by the member for Moreton. Of course, the motion in some sense has been slightly overtaken by events in that it calls for a cease-fire. As the gentleman from Moreton mentioned, the good news is that, over this last weekend of 17 and 18 June, the foreign ministers of Ethiopia and Eritrea did in fact sign an agreement so that there will be a cease-fire in that troubled part of the world.

Unlike several of the previous speakers, I do not have a large component of people from that part of the world in my electorate. I have some, of course, but not a large number. When I came to this country 20-odd years ago, I came by boat and I actually sailed right past these two countries. I have to say, with the greatest respect to the gentleman in the gallery who comes from that part of the world, that it was not a part of the world that would have enticed me to migrate there. It seemed to me that the people who are born there live a pretty hard life. They have to carve out a life in a very difficult part of the world. It is not rich in natural resources; it is pretty much desert and so forth, unlike this country, where we really do have with the bad some very good bits as well.

We heard from the member for Reid about the GDP per head of those countries—$100 a head in one and about $200 in the other. We are talking about countries that are poor and people that are poor. To have overlaid on that the tragedy that has befallen those countries in the last two years is more than most of us can comprehend. Thousands have been killed. It has been a war in which it is difficult to allocate blame or responsibility one way or the other, and, as so often happens in war, the original cause has been forgotten and there are atrocities and problems on both sides.

Overlaying the war and what has happened in Ethiopia and Eritrea in that sense, there is a terrible humanitarian situation in terms of the drought enveloping that area, along with the rest of the Horn of Africa. Today the chamber spent most of the afternoon on a condolence motion for the late member for Isaacs, and a number of members drew at-
tention to the difficulty of helping people who have depression and may be contemplating suicide and the fact that we never know until it is almost too late. I am reminded that one of the tragedies with countries like Ethiopia and Eritrea is that when they are facing starvation and war, we often do not know about it until it is too late, unless the media take up the cry. People die in their thousands, and the rest of the world lets it go by. I think it is important that parliaments such as ours bring these matters to people’s attention so that we can focus on these terrible human tragedies that are occurring around the world. It is not only at an individual level that those tragedies occur; it is on a mass scale. And when it is on a mass scale, it is so much worse.

The drought in the Horn of Africa has caused tremendous problems. This country has provided a substantial amount of money to the World Food Program to assist drought-affected areas in northern Kenya and other parts of the Horn. In April this year we provided $1.5 million in food aid to be distributed throughout the Horn of Africa. In June, in recognition of the impact of both the conflict and the drought on the people of the Horn of Africa, we announced that we would provide a further $2 million for humanitarian assistance in the region. That is going to be channelled through NGOs, Community Aid Abroad and CARE Australia, and it will provide for health and water programs in the region as well as for emergency food. For that to be delivered, NGOs have to get into the area. One of the problems with the war has been that NGOs have not felt that they were able to operate in the area. So I think the really good news about this last weekend is that not only will the killing stop—and that is, of course, vitally important—but NGOs will, hopefully, be able to operate much more freely and we will be able to get assistance to all those innocent people who have been suffering because they have not been able to get assistance. (Time expired)

Mr TIM FISCHER (Farrer) (8.48 p.m.)—I seek the indulgence of the House. As a matter of courtesy to the House, I advise that I am a director, albeit honorary, on the Fred Hollows Foundation. I am sorry I did not mention that in my earlier remarks.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gash)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Telstra

Mr ANDREW THOMSON (Wentworth) (8.49 p.m.)—I move:

That the House:

(1) urges Telstra to pursue its obligations to Australia’s rural and regional dwellers with full vigour; and

(2) acknowledges that full privatisation of Telstra would:

(a) allow Telstra to pursue more valuable commercial opportunities to the benefit of its shareholders;

(b) deliver to the Government sufficient funds to pay off entirely Australia’s federal sovereign debt; and

(c) ease upward pressure on interest rates in a climate of rising oil prices.

This motion is about the consequences of the privatisation of Telstra. The second part of the motion deals with three things. First, it deals with the commercial opportunities that we owe the shareholders who bought shares in Telstra at the government’s suggestion, in good faith. There is something very important about what we did in offering just under half the corporation for sale to private ownership, and we have to be very careful about what we do henceforth, so that the opportunities for shareholders to earn dividends, hopefully for a long time to come, are not unfairly diminished.

Second, plainly the full privatisation of the corporation would earn the government, and hence the nation, an enormous sum of money. When you think about the expenditures that government, of whatever hue, will have to bear in the future in areas such as defence and aged care, there is not a lot of argument about the need for more funds. We are going to need an enormous sum of money to defend this nation in the next 20 to 30 years and to make sure that the bulge in our population curve is properly looked after when those people find themselves unable to do the task for themselves.
Third, the motion refers to the probable effect on interest rates of a large, if not total, reduction in the government’s debt. Another substantial reduction in real interest rates would put a lot of money into the pockets of a lot of very deserving Australians, and it would go a long way toward relieving the relentless burden on a lot of Australian families. However, there are other things that we have to bear in mind when approaching the task—the second half of what we started before. That really goes to the notion of what the Telstra debate means to Australians who live in distant places. Those places may not be particularly distant from the large metropolitan areas; they may be one or two hours away. But when you are there, in the middle of a forest or out on some bare plain, it can feel quite distant.

From that perspective, and even though I do not represent a geographical part of Australia that looks or feels anything like that, I appreciate that the debate is not about anything to do with technology or economics or the results of all the money that might flow into the Treasury. It is not really a debate at all; you might even describe it as a struggle—like a tug of war. The two sides of the so-called debate are disconnected. Plainly the reality of rural life in this country is that it is a lot more personally dangerous than is urban life. Driving on country roads is a much more dangerous proposition than travelling from one end of my electorate to the other, whether to frolic in the surf or to enjoy a cup of coffee in Double Bay. People who undertake occupations in distant parts of Australia find themselves in more danger physically, and that has consequences for their families.

Thirdly, nature is a much more visible and dangerous proposition in rural and regional Australia, with flood, famine, fire and so forth. It really does not mean a lot if you are living in the middle of Sydney, reading the Sydney Morning Herald, but in a matter of minutes it can matter to the livelihood of your family or even their physical safety in rural Australia. What matters then, plainly, is doctors and hospitals. If you are on a farm and you are suddenly in trouble—whether from an accident or some misfortune such as snakebite—it is the telephone, and technology with the mobile telephones, that really matters. That is quite clear. Too few people have been in a position to appreciate that.

The importance of a good telephone service and, more importantly still, an improving telephone service, reflects the degree to which all of us in Australia are willing to fairly share in the benefits of good government—a growing economy and companies that can develop new technology. When I say ‘fairly share’ I do not mean it as some sort of socialist notion. If you ask yourself whether urban Australia subsidising a service in distant rural Australia means that we are giving something from the cities to people in the country for nothing in return, clearly the answer is no. It could not possibly be so, because people who live there give something in a strange and maybe even abstract way. I suppose that they endure a burden. You have to ask yourself whether the burden is in the interests of all of us in Australia. I think it is. It may sound a bit pompous, but I think that by people voluntarily populating distant parts of Australia, somehow or other our soul as a nation is a bit fulfilled.

It really matters that people persevere in the bush—in the very far parts of Australia. It does something to bolster our character. If we know that people are still willing to do that—to practise the values by going out there, trying hard against all those elements and holding the ambitions that really for all of us sprang originally when we populated this country—there is something very satisfactory about that. The sad thing, perhaps, is that too few people in the cities appreciate that. It would be a very decent thing to see these people properly looked after—whether it be by providing doctors or mobile telephones, because the two things nowadays are very closely connected. It is something that we must bear in mind when we approach this large task of dealing with this corporation.

Over and above that is an even more difficult debate about how to adjust rural industries to the modern world. We are now asking people in the dairy industry—there are a lot of families with small herds of Holstein cattle—to adjust. That is a polite way of asking them to go out of business and disappear into some ether they do not know how to deal
with. Frankly, we do not know how to help them other than with a small cheque. We say, ‘Oh well, you’re practising agriculture in a vicious world, with protectionist governments and so forth, so we will pursue, at least on your behalf, a rigorous regime of support in the World Trade Organisation. Its rules protect our farmers from the tricks of protectionist governments.’ Yet, at the same time, these people in rural Australia see the Greens—these neopagans who hate private enterprise and despise the ordinary folk of Australia—funding the very people who would destroy the legal rigour that gives their products access to markets abroad. When you see that happen, and when you see some of their colleagues in this House, in the other place and even in the cabinet room doing things to support the activities of these Greens and their agenda to destroy the very thing that supports incomes of innocent Australian families, it is no damn wonder sometimes that they get a little ordinary about it, and that they feel a little resentment towards people who are seen at demonstrations outside party conventions on the mobile phone, having fun and enjoying the good urban life when, out there, there are these physical dangers to confront. The notion is that the corporation being privatised may deprive them of some of that service, so it is no damn wonder they get a little angry sometimes. I say on behalf of those folk who do something to serve that sort of need within us all, we ought to be a little careful about this.

(Time expired)

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gash)—Is the motion seconded?

Mrs Hull—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (8.59 p.m.)—This is quite an extraordinary motion in that it has two parts which are contradictory. The first part urges Telstra to pursue its obligations to Australia’s rural and regional dwellers with full vigour, but the second part speaks about full privatisation of Telstra. Why have the two parts been separated? Because privatisation is a disaster for regional Australia. That is why the two parts could not be put together. That is why there are two parts to this motion. It is almost an implicit acknowledgment by the member for Wentworth, the smallest electorate in Australia, that privatisation is bad for regional Australia.

The member for Wentworth also raised the question of people demonstrating outside party conventions. I was up in Tweed Heads at the National Party federal conference on Saturday, and I must say that it was quite an enjoyable place to be. What has occurred is that the National Party have abandoned any pretence of representing regional Australia. You have only to look at the issue of Telstra privatisation and the issue of the GST being applied to caravan parks. What occurred last week was quite extraordinary. In the history of the National Party, they have never stooped so low. The Minister for Community Services, the member for Richmond, was quoted on the AM program on 15 June as saying:

Well, they are fully aware of this issue, as indeed many other members of the government are—referring to the GST on caravan parks—but until this motion gets carried or if it is not, we will have to wait until this afternoon and then the party will be making certain decisions, and so will I.

Everyone thought he was going to take a stance.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gash)—Order! The motion is to do with Telstra. Please come back to the motion.

Mr ALBANESE—That is right: it is to do with regional services, and the member referred to party conventions. The member for Cowper actually said:

But what affects me personally is that my integrity and honour is impugned, as is John Anderson and Larry’s and Mark Vaile and the rest of us. Everyone . Because we went to the people of Australia at the last election and we said there’d be no GST on residential rents. It has an impact on John Howard’s integrity and honour, and that of the Liberal Party as well.

Mr Andrew Thomson—Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I cannot really let this continue without drawing your attention to the nature of the motion before the House.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER—The point of order has been taken. The member
for Wentworth will be seated. I call the member for Grayndler.

Mr ALBANESE—The fact is that this motion highlights the disparity between the rhetoric of the government with regard to regional services and what they are actually doing on the ground. Tonight Channel 9 raised the issue of an Econtech report which showed that boarding house residents will be worse off as a result of the GST—in direct contradiction to what the Prime Minister said.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Grayndler will refer to the motion, which is to do with Telstra.

Mr ALBANESE—With regard to the issue of regional services—and it is an interesting definition of private members business, because if we are going to have a tight definition of private members business then we on this side will exercise it across the board, and perhaps the member for Wentworth should bear that in mind—I am not surprised that they are running away from the debate about regional services with regard to Telstra and other business. I want to quote also Senator Ross Lightfoot, who today said:

These people are lucky. They are no more special than anyone else. It might be an incentive for them to get houses.

That is the attitude of this government towards regional services.

Mr Slipper—Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You have been fairly generous to the honourable member for Grayndler. You have drawn his attention to the relevance of the debate, and he just seems to be completely ignoring your ruling. I would ask you to bring him back to the matter at hand or, alternatively, sit him down and allow other people—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER—Please be seated. The member for Grayndler has the call.

Mr ALBANESE—I conclude by saying that, with regard to regional services, the National Party and the government are way behind, and the people of Australia have woken up. Privatisation of Telstra is something that they will not cop, as they will not cop the GST being applied to people in regional Australia in a way, Madam Deputy Speaker, I might remind you, that you yourself declared to be a ‘stuff-up’ and ‘discriminatory’. There is no other explanation for it.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Grayndler will return to the motion, which is to do with Telstra.

Mr ALBANESE—I have concluded.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (9.04 p.m.)—The National Party believes that Telstra must substantially improve its performance in rural, regional and remote Australia, and this is a view that I strongly support. Country Australians are rightly concerned about service levels that have been provided by Telstra. While telecommunications are far better than they used to be, and there has been some recent improvement, those service levels still have a long way to go before they reach what is achieved in metropolitan areas and service that has been promised from the past part sale. Can I assure you that I am not interested in Telstra’s service levels remaining just adequate within my electorate. Every Australian deserves a world-class service, and that is what I and the National Party will strive for as Telstra becomes more efficient through the uptake of new technology. Telstra now has many competitors, and this is benefiting all Australians through lower prices and a wider range of services. However, Telstra is a communications carrier of last resort in country areas, and it should provide the best possible technology, access, reliability and prices. Then and only then will we be prepared to even enter into a debate on any further sale of Telstra.

The member for Grayndler should talk—shame on you! To this government’s credit, until the coalition came to power there was never a guarantee of appropriate service levels. There is now because the coalition put them in place. For 13 years you never ever guaranteed any level of service for country or city people. But this is now, and the National Party and the citizens of Australia do expect an appropriate level of service not only in the city but also in rural, regional and remote areas, and we expect Telstra to fully meet those guarantees. The recent decision by the government to put the universal service obli-
gation out to tender may yield significant service benefits through increased competition. I eagerly await the outcome of the expressions of interest in order that we may find a position of power for those people who are currently receiving second-rate service and access.

The National Party and many people, including some of those in my electorate of Riverina, believe that the government should ensure the delivery of the past promised benefits of sales 1 and 2 of Telstra prior to any further consideration of a third tranche. This position has resulted in the current telecommunications service inquiry chaired by Mr Tim Besley. There is great interest in this inquiry, which is looking at service levels in both metropolitan and country areas. The inquiry is travelling throughout rural, regional and remote areas as part of its activities and I welcome the opportunity for country people to have an input into this assessment of telecommunication services.

My rural New South Wales electorate of Riverina has many communications issues to deal with, particularly in the more isolated areas towards Hay and Hillston. Hay is a relatively isolated rural community that has more than its share of telecommunications issues to deal with. Hay has only within the last six months or so gained local call Internet access and it experienced great problems in the transfer from analog to CDMA mobile phone coverage. Other issues from this region that have been brought to my attention include access to untimed local calls, the time frame for fault repairs, the inability to access the latest communication technologies and the inability to access mobile telephony. Hillston does not have any access to mobile telephony at all, yet it is one of the most progressive rural towns within Australia where there is an enormous level of production taking place. The list can go on and on and on. However, I am confident that the inquiry will identify the problems and that actions will be taken to provide an adequate level of service to all. In speaking to this private members business motion, I support the member for Wentworth in his call as I also urge Telstra to vigorously pursue and deliver its obligations to all Australians, particularly those people in rural, regional and remote areas. If Telstra delivers to Australians, then by goodness so will the government.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (9.09 p.m.)—I rise to support that part of the motion that ‘urges Telstra to pursue its obligations to Australia’s rural and regional dwellers with full vigour’. The rest of the motion is a dangerous nonsense. It is nothing but a contradiction in argument and substance. This motion—or indeed the notion—that telecommunications services to regional and rural areas will keep pace with the services that our metropolitan cousins—for instance, in Double Bay, Bellevue Hill, Bondi, Dover Heights, Randwick, Watsons Bay and Vaucluse—enjoy and take for granted, while advocating the full privatisation of Telstra is seriously flawed. People living in rural and regional Australia, such as the north-west coast of Tasmania, are very concerned that if Telstra is fully privatised services will decline and the disparity between services to the country and the city will become even larger. Telstra and this government are currently in the process of conducting various reports into the nature and extent of Telstra services throughout Australia, especially rural Australia. I can tell Telstra and the government that they will not hear a happy story in regional Australia.

Numerous negative comments from people I surveyed in a comprehensive telecommunications black spot audit of my electorate last year still ring loudly in my ears. Indeed, they are ringing a lot louder than the mobile phones in many parts of my electorate, where basic telecommunications services are more of a privilege than a right. It is not good enough. That is why Labor is committed to keeping Telstra in public hands. This is why regional Australians are suspicious of arguments touted by members for metropolitan seats, such as the member for Wentworth. This is why National Party members and Democrat senators are lobbied nervously by rural and regional organisations concerned over the privatisation plans of this coalition government. There is no gain for the bush. There is no advantage for the current shareholders of 51 per cent of Telstra in privatising it. It is not just the argument that Telstra
provides the government, its public shareholders, with a sizeable dividend that can be reinvested in our economic and social infrastructure. Telstra’s profits in the last financial year have been about $4 billion, yet the government got only $14 billion when it flogged off one-third of Telstra. Indeed, I noticed that a newly released book by the respected academic Professor Bob Walker and economist Betty Con Walker entitled *Privatisation: sell off or sell out?* awarded the current Minister for Finance and Administration the wooden spoon for the Telstra I privatisation saga.

It will not take too long before the money from a future sale of Telstra dries up. And what of this government’s so-called social bonus then? The social bonus for the bush is, in reality, nothing more than a bribe. What regional communities like my own need is for the remainder of Telstra to be kept in public hands to allow for an ongoing pool of funds to keep improving our information technology and telecommunications infrastructure long into the future, to assist in keeping pace with the new economy we hear so much about. Labor is committed to keeping Telstra in public hands because our telecommunications network is perhaps the most critical part of our nation’s infrastructure, one that we can use to help meet the needs and aspirations of all Australians. The best way of ensuring an equitable service that will allow people throughout Australia access to telecommunications in the new economy is to keep the public policy lever on Telstra in place. Like so much of what this government is doing, it is more concerned with its legislative agenda and ideology than with its implementation.

This motion calls for us to acknowledge that full privatisation of Telstra would allow Telstra to pursue more valuable commercial opportunities to the benefit of its shareholders. In light of concerns that Telstra has been undersold and the recent attempts by this government to talk down its value, paper shareholders would understandably be feeling a little nervous. Mind you, this has not stopped Telstra from engaging in valuable commercial opportunities in Asia nor wishing to enter the lucrative datacasting area so recently stymied by this government’s digital television and datacasting bill. But the shareholders I am most concerned about are the majority of Australians who have a stake in the Telstra that remains in public hands. Selling strategic public assets in the name of reducing debt or in a simplistic way to keep interest rates down is a tired argument used by free marketeers and is increasingly discredited in both economic and political terms.

Telstra, like Australia Post, is a key strategic, profitable public asset which should remain in public hands.

*(Time expired)*

**Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (9.14 p.m.)—**

Telecom and now Telstra have been a part of the Australian way of life for most of this century. Australia has grown with Telstra. Telstra has provided affordable services to most Australians and has put substantial profits back into governments for schools, hospitals and roads. The Prime Minister wants to end this valuable relationship by selling Telstra to foreign companies and the big end of town. Australian families will be left with higher costs, poorer service and less benefit from the profits that Telstra puts back into our community. If the Prime Minister is successful in selling all of Telstra, up to 35 per cent of our Australian owned asset will be owned and controlled by foreign interests, whose loyalty will be to their boardrooms in Tokyo, New York and London. Whether it be the lost jobs, decreasing services, increased costs or foreign ownership, the sale of the rest of Telstra just does not add up.

Telstra used to clear 74 per cent of faults in country areas within one working day. That has now dropped to as low as 61 per cent, leaving families and small businesses in the Bendigo region isolated with no phone, fax or Internet access for some days. That is very dangerous for families, and it is devastating for small businesses. There are many examples of Telstra continuing to ignore regional Australia. Late last year, Victoria’s emergency service organisations were informed by Telstra that the emergency service organisation paging service was to be discontinued. This put the effectiveness of these organisations at considerable risk. It was only after widespread community concern and pressure that Telstra leased its paging net-
work to a competitor, who will provide that service later this year.

The announcement to sell off the remaining parts of Telstra may have an adverse effect on those who have already purchased Telstra shares. Many people purchased shares on the basis that two-thirds of Telstra would remain in government ownership, because the Prime Minister stated emphatically prior to the last election that he would not sell the remaining shares. People have bought shares in the expectation that they would be secure because the remaining two-thirds would be government owned, and now there is evidence of a further fall in value because of the Prime Minister’s backflip. It is against the law to give misleading information on a share prospectus, but this is precisely what the Howard government has done. Apart from the obvious dishonesty of selling something to people who already own it, the Liberal-National coalition government has deliberately misled thousands of Australians who purchased Telstra shares in good faith on the basis of Telstra remaining in government ownership, because that is what the Prime Minister told them.

Many rural Australians are convinced that the telecommunications services in country areas will be worse under a fully privatised Telstra. Results of a poll published in the Land newspaper in May 1998—I suspect the figures would be worse now—reveal that country people are sceptical about the federal government’s claims that country Australians will not be disadvantaged by the sell-off. Of those surveyed, 49 per cent said they expected services to be worse under a fully privatised Telstra. Only eight per cent expected services to improve. As well, a large number of people—63 per cent—said that their concern about the sale of Telstra reflected an overall concern about the continuing deterioration of services in regional Australia. Many respondents said that the government should retain some stake in Telstra, claiming that this was a more effective protection of rural services than any fines or legal requirements; 27 per cent of respondents said that they did not take seriously the Prime Minister’s promise to impose a $10 million fine if a privatised Telstra failed to provide adequate rural services; and 35 per cent saw it as rhetoric designed to placate rural voters. It is about time the Prime Minister listened to the views of rural Australia, which has already suffered a serious deterioration in services, including Telstra. In terms of essential services, the divide between country and urban Australia is widening.

I often sit in this chamber in awe at some of the ‘courageous’ speeches—to use Sir Humphrey Appleby’s parlance—that the National Party in particular and conservative members in general use when they describe the privatisation of Telstra. They know deep within their hearts that this is a policy which spells doom for them in regional Australia. They should understand that, and I am sure they do understand that, but they are prepared to stand up in this place, beat their chests and give these ‘courageous’ speeches while all the time they are quivering in their gumboots. They know what is going to happen to them as a result of that policy, and I think they deserve what they get.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mossfield)—Order! The time allocated for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the next day of sitting.

Fiji

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (9.19 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the fact that a legitimate government, democratically elected, has been detained at gun point and thereafter removed from office by illegal means, in Fiji by a small band of armed terrorists;

(2) notes that the ethnic Indian communities in Fiji are being deprived from exercising their fundamental political and human rights;

(3) calls on the Australian Government to:

(a) recall Australia’s High Commissioner from Suva;

(b) suspend all Ministerial and high level official contacts;

(c) seek Fiji’s immediate suspension from the Commonwealth;

(d) suspend all non-humanitarian elements of Australia’s $22.3 million aid program;
(e) cancel all defence cooperation with Fiji’s armed forces;
(f) suspend the extension of the Import Credit Scheme in its application to Fiji;
(g) urge Australian tourists to favour other destinations instead of Fiji; and
(h) encourage other countries to adopt similar sanctions; and
(4) urges the Government to review the measures taken only upon full democratic rights being restored to each and every citizen of Fiji and a constitutional government being restored.

I can confidently say that all members of this House are appalled by what has occurred in Fiji and what has occurred in the Solomons since I placed that motion on the Notice Paper. It is a matter for regret that we seem to have had so little forewarning of the events in Fiji, although I notice that Duncan Kerr, the shadow minister for justice and customs, is at the table, and he can speak quite vigorously of his efforts some time ago to alert the Australian government to tensions in the Solomons. In moving this motion, I want to say that it fulfils a pledge that I made on Saturday, 27 May when approximately 150 constituents of Indian-Fijian background marched from the Rooty Hill RSL to my office—a very peaceful and orderly march. Clearly, they were very distressed about what was happening in their country of origin. They sought from me an assurance that the government, my party and I would do our utmost to bring some influence to bear on events in Fiji.

Let us not mince words: George Speight, whom I consider to be a terrorist, entered the parliament with armed members of his group and took hostage the democratically elected Prime Minister of the country, other members of his cabinet and also members of parliament. The president of the local group, Mr Uma Chand, and its secretary, Mr Satish Kumar, gave voice in their contributions to the demonstration outside my office to the dismay they felt that Fiji, having after 10 years successfully negotiated one coup and gone back to democracy with a multiracial constitution put in place, now saw all that progress being overturned. The group actually came to Canberra and, whilst because of other commitments I was unable to address them, Annette Ellis, Michael Danby and Kelvin Thomson were. But I was able to talk to the leaders in my office.

I passionately believe that, particularly in matters of defence and foreign affairs, we really should try to find a commonality of agreement in what is in the best interests of the country. I do not think anyone on either side can score points about the reception of the news, the horror they feel and the urgency they feel about the need to rectify the situation and return Fiji to constitutional government. But there are some differences, and I think it is important that we do not try to paper over those differences. For example, on this side we say—our leader really expanded on this—that in the Asia-Pacific Australia is not a middle ranking power. With New Zealand, we have a critical mass in the region. Our views count. We can make our concerns heard and usually, with a great deal of persuasion, acted upon. That is not to say that we want to improperly interfere in other countries, but when a terrorist has seized the parliament should neighbouring countries have their hands in their pockets? I think not.

The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister for foreign affairs, Laurie Brereton, were pretty quick off the blocks and have advocated at different points all the things that are contained in my motion. The motion calls for the recall of the Australian High Commissioner. It calls for Fiji’s suspension from the Commonwealth, and I notice that Fiji has now been suspended from the Commonwealth. It calls for the cessation of all ministerial and high-level official contacts. But we have not introduced sanctions. In fact, that body that is much criticised in this forum, the ACTU, has instituted sanctions. The now leader of the Great Council of Chiefs and former Prime Minister of Fiji has said that when sanctions were imposed on his government they hurt; they were effective. It is an awful thing to impose economic sanctions, because it may hurt the odd millionaire and it may squeeze the middle class, but the people who really suffer are the working class. At this very moment they are suffering and they will continue to suffer. The damage to Fiji’s reputation has been enormous. The
economic damage has started in Fiji, and I regret to say it will snowball. But it is the ordinary people of Fiji that really suffer; this hurt and suffering are not going to discriminate. But you have got to be firm on the side of democracy. You cannot give in to terrorists. I do not believe you can give in to them. Happily, in Australia we have not had to make an awful decision about terrorism, but perhaps—and I hope this day will never come—we will. We cannot agree to give in to a terrorist, and that is what George Speight is.

Fiji has a population of some 815,000 people, 51 per cent of whom are indigenous Fijians and 43 per cent of whom are of Indian origin. This coup has served to highlight the divisions within the Fijian community. If the indigenous Fijians are suffering and need to seek redress in the current situation, they should not look to the 12 months of the Labour government in Fiji but to the previous 30 years when the indigenous Fijians ran the country. Admittedly, inequality started with the British in one of their colonial practices that is not to be endorsed of dividing the country and favouring Indians. But for the last 30 years it has been the indigenous Fijians who have led the country. If there has been a malapportionment of wealth, of skills and of education, look not to the Indians, because they had not been running the country, nor had the Chaudhry government. It has been in for only 12 months.

I wanted to say many things, but the one thing I want to finish on is that, whatever we may say about Rabuka leading the first coup, at least he had the courage to introduce the new multiracial constitution that has currently been overturned. Fijians need to give democracy a further try. It is a difficult system, but I cannot think of a system—as Winston Churchill said—that is better. Australia is a good example of where people of not just two races but of many races can live together. (Time expired)

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (9.30 p.m.)—I am pleased to be able to speak on this motion, moved by my friend the member for Chifley, with respect to the crisis in Fiji. The government can support aspects of the motion. In particular, we acknowledge the fact that a legitimate democratically elected government in Fiji has been detained at gunpoint and thereafter removed from office by illegal means by a small band of armed terrorists. We note that the ethnic Indian communities in Fiji are being deprived of exercising their fundamental political and human rights. We can urge the government to review the measures taken against Fiji upon full democratic rights being restored to each and every citizen of Fiji and constitutional government being restored. But we cannot support the proposals by the Labor opposition which they believe would resolve the crisis in Fiji.

Specifically, the member for Chifley calls on the Australian government to recall Australia’s high commissioner from Suva, to suspend all ministerial and high-level official contacts, to seek Fiji’s immediate suspension from the Commonwealth, to suspend all non-humanitarian elements of Australia’s $22.3 million aid program, to cancel all defence cooperation with Fiji’s armed forces, to suspend the extension of the import credit scheme and its application to Fiji, to urge Australian tourists to favour other destinations instead of Fiji and to encourage other countries to adopt similar sanctions. Those are the proposals put forward by the opposition. In their entirety, we are unable to support them, and that is because you cannot take a simplistic attitude to foreign policy—as the ALP have on this issue—particularly foreign policy in the South Pacific. It is always of interest to me to see the Labor Party, hand on heart, demanding that the Australian government spend more time on, and that the Minister for Foreign Affairs travel more often to, the South Pacific, when in fact, when Gareth Evans was Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Labor government, he travelled less frequently to the South Pacific than our foreign minister, Alexander Downer, has travelled to the South Pacific in half the time of being foreign minister. As usual, the Labor Party’s rhetoric is not matched by their actions when they were in government.
I am sure the motion by the member for Chifley is put with the best of intentions. However, foreign policy is not about domestic audience; it is not about the effect that a motion will have in the parliament in terms of electoral support out in the electorate. Foreign policy is about the national interest. Foreign policy is about putting Australia in the best position possible to be able to run a foreign policy for Australia that serves the interests of its people and of Australian values around the world. Therefore, we need to ask: what best serves Australia’s national interest in all of our dealings in foreign policy? What is best for Australia in the South Pacific? It is not big brother. It is not taking final actions, which the Labor Party is proposing, that would hurt Australia’s national interests and not solve the problem that both the Labor Party and the government genuinely seek to solve. The best position for Australia’s national interest in the South Pacific is through constructive engagement in the South Pacific. It is through health programs, education programs, military support, and building civil society and democratic traditions in the long term.

In his address, the member for Chifley said that Australia was caught with its hands in its pockets when the crisis occurred in Fiji and he said that we cannot give in to terrorists. Who has given in to terrorists? Certainly not the Australian government. The Australian government’s position is very clear. We support the constitutionally and democratically elected Chaudhry government in Fiji and we believe that the release of the hostages is the most imperative action that needs to be taken. It remains our first priority. We should remember that we are not dealing with this issue in the abstract. There are 31 people still being held hostage by George Speight in the Fijian parliament, one of whom is the democratically elected Prime Minister. Australia is not in a position to be able to say simply that we are going to impose sanctions and make all these changes that the Labor Party suggest and that that is going to solve the problem. The first priority is to get the hostages out of the danger they are in currently and what seems to be becoming greater danger.

We have taken a very firm line against George Speight. We have taken some encouragement from the reports that the military has assumed control solely for the purpose of restoring law and order in Fiji and that it plans to return the country to civilian rule as soon as possible. We are glad that the military is now taking a firmer line with the hostage-takers than it has taken in the past. We have made it very clear that Australia will not accept a government in Fiji which includes George Speight or any of the hostage-takers. Otherwise, we believe that Australia will be in no position other than to impose the sanctions that Minister Downer announced on 29 May. What were they? He announced that, if constitutional government is not restored, we will take measures that include the suspension of the Australia-Fiji trade and economic relations agreement, the downgrading of the aid relationship, in particular the suspension of projects involving the Fijian public sector and the award of new scholarships, the suspension of forthcoming naval visits and joint military exercises and a thorough review of sporting contacts including in particular a possible ban on the Fiji national rugby union team visiting Australia.

On the latter point, Minister Downer announced on 13 June that any applications made by Fijian sporting teams to enter Australia would be considered in accordance with the power available to the minister under the Migration Act to review applications. These measures are intended to send a very strong signal to the authorities in Fiji, without doing long-term damage to our Pacific neighbour, that Australia will not tolerate hostages continuing to be held in the Fiji national parliament and that we will not tolerate a racially divided constitution or parliament in the future.

At the same time, we do not want to hurt the people in Fiji who are the most vulnerable and the Indian community in particular, who have done nothing to deserve being hurt in an economic sense. Economic sanctions, as proposed by the member for Chifley, would hurt most dramatically the Indian population, who are the business part of the Fijian population and who would therefore be the most affected. They would also affect the
most vulnerable Fijians, those who are working in businesses in the economy, who would lose their jobs and lose their livelihoods, quite possibly for very little gain, if George Speight continued to hold the hostages regardless of the action that Australia took.

We are also very mindful of the fact that Fiji is a hub for that part of the South Pacific. There are many nations surrounding Fiji that use it as a transport hub for their goods going to Australia and to the rest of the world. Most of their trade is with Australia. Almost all the exports of most of the South Pacific countries come to Australia. If we were to destroy the Fijian economy—and, make no mistake, that is exactly what would happen; the Fijian economy would be destroyed if Australia imposed sanctions against it—that would also quite possibly destroy the economies of the small island nations in the region. Our status in the South Pacific would plummet dramatically. So, far from being able to influence change in the future in the South Pacific and far from being able to play the role that I know the member for Chifley, the Labor Party and the government would like to— that is, one of an honest broker and a good friend—we would be the pariah of the South Pacific. They would blame us for the destruction of their economies.

The government has also decided not to reverse the decision to extend the import credits scheme, which the Labor Party proposed that we should do. Such a decision, and trade sanctions more generally, would have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable members of the community, as I have already discussed. The Labor Party also suggests that we should discourage Australians from travelling to Fiji. The government has taken action to warn Australian nationals in Fiji of the dangers there and has suggested that they should either move within Fiji or move out of Fiji. Australia has played a crucial role in the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group in London, where Minister Downer travelled to on 6 June. The group was convened to discuss the situation in Fiji and Fiji’s ongoing membership of the Commonwealth of Nations. We did suspend Fiji from the councils of the Commonwealth. A ministerial mission was sent to Fiji, including our Minister for Foreign Affairs, on 15 and 16 June. The mission delivered the very strong message to the Fijian people and government that the Commonwealth would not tolerate the ongoing situation in Fiji.

In conclusion, the government will not support the motion proposed by the member for Chifley because the government believes that we have to consider the national interest of Australia and the interests of Fiji and the entire South Pacific. We should not have a knee-jerk final reaction that would do us and the nations of the South Pacific damage, potentially for little gain. The government believes that the action that Minister Downer has taken has been the right action and that it will bear fruit in the long term. *(Time expired)*

Mr SERCOMBE *(Maribyrnong)* (9.40 p.m.)—Over three years ago, in February 1997, I moved a motion under private members business concerning Fiji. That motion was essentially to warmly welcome the report of Fiji’s Constitutional Review Commission. That commission, known as the Reeves committee, provided a great step forward in terms of ensuring a stable, prosperous Fiji coming as it did after the instability of the events of 1987 and the unacceptable constitution that was adopted in Fiji in 1990 on racial grounds. The events of May 2000 have created a terrible prospect for Fiji. The economy of Fiji has clearly been badly damaged. Fiji’s recent economic performance had been favourable, with growth of 7.8 per cent in 1999 and four per cent growth expected for 2000. However, the destruction and looting of many businesses in Suva and the political instability are likely to adversely affect Fiji’s key industries, including tourism, textiles and sugar. Many Fijians, particularly Fijians of Indian background, are now likely to leave the country. Fiji’s international and external relations have also been extremely adversely affected by these events, and this is really a source of great sadness for those of us who are familiar with Fiji, who love the place and its beauty, and who understand the potential of the place. We must now—and this motion is a good opportunity to do it—recommit ourselves to working to ensure that progress
is made. The criminal acts of Speight and his cronies are totally reprehensible. Australia, as a part of the international community and in fact as a leading nation of the South Pacific, has a special responsibility in this regard.

Fiji’s constitution has to embody objectives and instruments that are internationally acceptable. They cannot include provisions that systematically discriminate against one particular group. The motion before the House now, quite rightly, notes that Indian-Fijian rights are at great risk in the current situation. This is particularly regrettable because the Reeves formed constitution really provided a basis for good governance. In order not to condemn Fiji and particularly Fiji’s children to labouring under the same sorts of problems that their parents have inherited, and in order not to create fertile ground for further Speights, we really do need to create a climate in which the issues that gave sustenance to the extreme acts of the Speights of the world and the terrorism that they encompass are addressed.

This in no way suggests that the fundamental issues of restoring democratic rights are not the first priority, but I would like to alert the House to what I regard as an excellent paper by Professor John Davies, produced in the Pacific Islands Report of 25 May. That paper argues that, whilst the Reeves report was an outstanding document in terms of creating a basis for good governance, it did not adequately address the sources of political and cultural fear that underpin the sort of phenomenon we have seen give rise to Speight. The paper notes the importance of adequately taking initiatives, along with the pressures to restore democratic governance so that fundamental issues such as income distribution, language and media, discrimination against indigenous Fijians in private employment and housing are adequately addressed.

There can be no doubt that this parliament must at all times defend the constitution and democracy of Fiji as a fundamental principle, but this must be done in a context where serious, focused attention is given to some of the root causes of the racially divided issues there. That is going to require considerable focused attention on the issues of ensuring that cultural, language and economic equity issues are adequately addressed in developing Fiji’s future. Otherwise, after the experience of 1987 and the experience of May this year we are simply going to condemn future generations of Fijians to the ongoing instability that this reflects. (Time expired)

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (9.45 p.m.)—I welcome this motion from the member for Chifley, which gives us an important opportunity to debate events in Fiji and Australia’s response. The hostage crisis in Fiji is now over a month old and our first priority must be the release of the hostages and then the resumption of constitutional government. Any decision on general sanctions is premature and would decrease any leverage that we may have on what is an unfolding situation, which now appears to be approaching the end game, in Fiji. The foreign minister said in this place on 29 May that if George Speight or any others who have been involved in taking hostages were included in the government Australia would impose specific sanctions to suspend Australia-Fiji trade economic relations, to downgrade the aid relationship, to suspend naval visits and joint exercises, and to review sporting contacts including the proposed visit of the Fiji rugby team to Australia. The member for Chifley’s motion was submitted two days later and may have been overtaken by events. On 6 June, the Commonwealth action group suspended Fiji from the councils of the Commonwealth. On 15 and 16 June, this same delegation visited Fiji and gave them the message that they wanted to see a swift return to constitutional government and the release of the hostages. The problem with general sanctions is that they do harm the most vulnerable in Fiji and they may harm the other island.

I would like to speak a little bit on the issue of regional security. The coups in Fiji in 1987 and 1988, Prime Minister Lini’s request for Australian assistance to maintain internal law and order in Vanuatu in 1988, and the secessionist crisis in Bougainville in 1988 all prompted a rethink of how we viewed the South Pacific. The long time preoccupation of Australia had been to deny any foreign power access to the nations of the South Pa-
pecific: Germany in World War I, Japan in World War II and the Soviet Union especially in the 1980s. In the 1980s we saw problems with internal stability in these countries, which created a dilemma for our strategy. The Fijian coup, for example, in the 1980s showed that there were limitations to the Australian Defence Force’s deployment. The intimidating capabilities of the ADF were not well suited to a sensitive task which required ground troops to be deployed at a distance in the maritime environment and undertake civil law and order tasks. This led to a requirement for a paramilitary response force, perhaps police, to perform law and order tasks, a helicopter support ship—which we do not yet have—and also the acquisition of two heavy landing ships for amphibious operations. All of this has been instructive in the experience Australia has had in Bougainville and also in East Timor.

In 1989, Gareth Evans made an important ministerial statement on Australia’s regional security. He said:

The instruments of policy required to protect our security interests go well beyond those administered by the Minister for Defence, or ... the Minister for Foreign Affairs. They are: firstly, military capability; secondly, politico-military capability; thirdly, diplomacy; fourthly, economic links; fifthly, development assistance; sixthly, non-military threat assistance; and, lastly, exchanges of people and ideas. This statement defined the circumstances under which Australian military intervention might occur in the South Pacific. In view of the fact that we have had one defence white paper in 1997 and we will have another one this year and in view of the fact that we now see an inner arc of instability stretching from the Indonesian archipelago through East Timor, Irian Jaya, Bougainville, the Solomon Islands and Fiji, as well as looking at each issue on a case by case basis I would like to see a broader rethink of regional security. I think this goes beyond the defence white paper and may require a ministerial statement which incorporates those seven things and what we have learnt from our experience in East Timor, in Bougainville, from the evacuation of the Solomon Islands and also from this recent coup in Fiji.

Mr HOLLIS (Throsby) (9.50 p.m.)—I support the motion moved by the member for Chifley. In my short speaking time I will concentrate on part (1) and part (2) of the motion. All my life I have opposed racism and what has happened in Fiji, despite what many commentators say, is racist. I know that there are underlying conflicts there, but basically what we are talking about is a racist move. I have always opposed systems of apartheid. Indeed, I established within this parliament the Australian Parliamentarians Against Apartheid. How sad it is for me and many members in this place who have always opposed the apartheid system in South Africa to see that a black nation should be now so intent upon apartheid. I am not saying that racism never applies in black nations. I always think that the colour of skins has nothing to do with the racism or apartheid. But it really is appalling. It is also appalling and simply unacceptable that criminal thugs such as Speight can hold hostage a democratically elected government. It must be an accepted norm that you do not change governments by terrorist thuggery—by the power of the gun.

Last year while I was in Fiji I met many members of the government. I also was there with a parliamentary delegation and we looked at some of the aid projects that were going on there, especially projects to do with reproductive health. We visited hospitals and other areas. It is so sad for me to see the good work that was being achieved in Fiji, often with Australian and New Zealand assistance, now being cast aside.

Not only Australia but also the international community must bring pressure on Fiji. The Fiji episode has had a lot of publicity in Australia, but let us not kid ourselves. It has had very little publicity anywhere else. In the week after the Fiji coup I was at the United Nations in New York. It was not raised but, more importantly, it was not in the American newspapers. Every day I looked at the New York Times to see whether Fiji had rated a mention. I thought, in my naivety, that the whole thing had been solved until I rang home one night and they asked me what I thought of what was happening in Fiji where Speight still had those people held under hostage. It did not rate a mention with anyone I spoke to in New York and it did not rate a
mention in the *New York Times* or other American papers that I looked at. When we talk about bringing international pressure and saying that there should be acceptable international norms that these things do not happen, unless we can get a little basic interest in the media, what hope do we have of achieving any of these things?

I wonder what I would be like if I had been a fifth generation Fijian of Indian descent and I had aspired to enter parliament, to be the Prime Minister or to be a minister of that country or to hold any position. Their aspirations are being denied. I remember that in the big republican debate in this country the fundamental thing was that any Australian should be able to aspire to become head of state. In Fiji, one would think it would be an acceptable norm that any Fijian, no matter from what ethnic origin, should be able to aspire to become at least a member of parliament or a cabinet minister. On the two occasions there has been an Indian majority it has lasted a year or 18 months and then it has changed at the barrel of a gun. That is totally unacceptable. What would we as members of parliament think if gunmen came through that door—as has happened now twice in Fiji—bundled us all up and maybe stuck us in our office for five weeks? We were talking today about the stress of this place. What are our colleagues in Fiji who have been bundled up and held prisoner in their parliament for the last five weeks going through at this very moment? It is totally unacceptable and we as members of parliament should cry out about this—not only about the democratic situation and the aspirations of the Fijians but also about what is happening to our parliamentary colleagues in Fiji. We must make sure that we cry out loud and strong on this issue. *(Time expired)*

**Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (9.55 p.m.*)—**I agree with my colleague the member for Throsby that we should all stand in this place and speak out about the events that have unfolded in Fiji over these past weeks where a democratically elected government has been detained at gunpoint. It has to be said that this is another low point in the history of this Pacific island. Bold and outspoken at the end of a gun, Mr Speight represents everything that those of us who enjoy the privilege of living in a country governed on democratic principles abhor. We would abhor the action of someone like Speight who rules with a gun. One thing is clear: Fiji does have a problem of ethnic tension that has not gone away since the last coup. It is hardly surprising that those tensions were not eased by the previous coup and this kidnapping will not resolve the issues either.

I had the opportunity to address a Rotary conference in Perth last week. The theme was ‘new resolutions’. I spoke of the challenges of living in a modern world and of the additional tensions that are always there due to the man-made variables of war, born of baseless hatred and that in every walk of life we encounter the Hitlers, the Stallins and the Torquemadas great and small. We learn about these people first-hand in the innocent barbarities of the schoolyard and throughout life we are never free of them. These and other variables go to make up the daunting range of the unexpected against which we must every day put on the armour of new resolutions or else we are caught without defences. Our best defence—and I suspect that of the people of Fiji—rests in a free press, a free judiciary and a parliament based on democratic principles. And for all their faults, each deserves a fresh resolution from each of us to ensure that these institutions are upheld.

Having a free press, a free judiciary and a parliament does not relieve individuals from the responsibility to participate. In fact, a strong democracy depends on that participation. But, when corruption and cronism prevent the proper selection of candidates and proper policy and leave the government in the hands of a clique of people intent only on looking after their own interests, the rank and file members of the community are denied their rightful opportunity to participate. The tragedy is that in this situation it is the ordinary, law-abiding folk in Fiji who suffer when the great pillars of democracy crumble. Some of the action being asked of the Aus-
Australian government in this motion could only harm the people of Fiji—those rank and file citizens—and it still would not resolve the problem.

It is a dreadful thing to have to negotiate with a man whose only real power comes because he holds others captive at gunpoint. I am sure we are all horrified if we reflected for a moment and thought that was our mother, our sister, our husband or our wife being held at gunpoint. I think we would want to do everything in our power to make sure that this matter was resolved in the best possible way, not by threatening action and not by taking action that would further damage and cause pain to innocent people.

So I think our minister has taken a very responsible position. He has taken some steps which clearly signal Australia’s distaste for what has happened in Fiji and which will hopefully lead to that country being able to sort out this problem with help—not by Australia taking a policeman role or taking a superior role but by being prepared to work through the issues and the problems in the interests of all members of the Fijian population. (Time expired)

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (10.00 p.m.)—There are two reasons why I rise to support the motion moved by the honourable member for Chifley. The first is that, in my role as a member of parliament, the events which occurred in Fiji last month and which have taken place since then continue to shock and horrify me. As I stand here in this chamber, I would ask that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and other members present picture in your minds a gang of terrorists bursting through these doors, threatening with automatic weapons and taking all of us—the parliament, the Prime Minister and the members of the cabinet—hostage at gunpoint, demanding our resignations, demanding that the government be handed over to them, demanding an end to democracy and its replacement by the rule of a racist elite, and demanding that the Constitution be torn up and that the gang leaders be granted an amnesty for their crime. To those who believe in democracy and to those who cherish the system of government that so many Australians have given their lives to defend, there could be no greater crime than that committed by George Speight and his terrorist gang in Fiji.

Yet where will we find ourselves when all this is over and George Speight is sitting in government along with his thugs? If he has ever wondered what would happen to him after the coup, he has only to look back to 1987 at Ratu Mara and Sitiveni Rabuka to see how they profited from their crimes. And how did we treat them when they went legitimate? Who among us will be the first to declare their love of democracy one minute and sit down with its enemies the next? That must not happen. We must never again accept political criminals as the legitimate government of a nation.

You might say that some of Australia’s biggest trading partners have got a long way to go in improving human rights. What is so different about Fiji? For a start, Fiji is in our backyard. Fiji is a nation which we can influence. We can make a difference there. What gives Australia the right to dictate our values to a tiny island nation with a long established culture? I can tell you: a lot more right than a gang of gun-carrying criminals who want to impose racist rule against the wishes of the great majority of Fijians. As a government and as a nation we must oppose those who would use force to bring down a democratically elected government. We must show that we are not prepared to trade with, to play sport with or to visit as tourists countries which give amnesty to political criminals. And we must never again allow ourselves to treat armed thugs as elder statesmen. In showing no respect for their people’s elected governments, they do not deserve respect as their country’s self-appointed leaders.

I said at the start that there are two reasons why I am so concerned with the events in Fiji. The second, but by no means less important, is my concern for the more than 2,000 people of Fijian origin who today live in the electorate of Fowler. Many have family and friends in Fiji and all are concerned for the fate of their loved ones there. The actions of George Speight are those of a ter-
terrorist. Acts of violence are not uncommon in parts of the country. But in the longer term the prospect of a nation ruled by a group with a racist agenda who are prepared to stop at nothing to achieve its aims is a great worry to Fijian Australians. Fijian Australians have shown their concern at rallies in my electorate and they have sent representatives to this parliament to make us all aware of their concerns. We should listen carefully to what they have said. Australia must act to make our position crystal clear to those in positions of influence in Fiji. We must make it known to them that only by returning power to the elected government and abiding by the constitution can Fiji be accepted as a trading, sporting and social partner.

Mr ROSS CAMERON (Parramatta) (10.05 p.m.)—For the second time today I rise with a very profound sense of sadness at the unfolding of recent events—but I confess in this instance that I do not rise with the same sense of indignation which other members have expressed. Let me say categorically that what George Speight has done is reprehensible and deeply regrettable. It has set the nation of Fiji back by, probably, a generation. All of us who are attached to democracy and to the freedoms it brings with respect to individuals, regardless of their race or background, feel a sense of offence at what has taken place. Having said that, I do believe there is a great risk that from this comfortable distance we can adopt a simplistic position in relation to Fiji which involves a fair bit of presumption and which might be characterised as patronising.

It is difficult to imagine two cultures more different than those of the indigenous Fijians and the Indo-Fijians. Perhaps the only greater contrast that springs to mind is the difference between the early European settlers of Australia and the indigenous Australian Aborigines. From the earliest days, from about 1874 when Fiji was ceded to Great Britain, we have seen that colonial administrators, in particular Sir Arthur Gordon, governed Fiji in a manner that was far from conducive to building a unified multiracial community; it actually entrenched racial divisions. Queen Victoria instructed Governor Gordon to give indigenous Fijians a promise that their lands would never be alienated from them. Successive colonial administrations sought to uphold and preserve the traditional chief system, so that there was a completely separate development of the commercially oriented Indian expatriates from the traditional village chief culture of the indigenous Fijians. Australia played a significant role in that separate development through the involvement of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, which was most active in recruiting some 60,000 Indians to come and work on five-year indentured contracts between 1879 and 1916.

At the same time attitudes among the colonial administrators mirrored in some ways the experience here in Australia. Governor Gordon called the five paramount chiefs of Fiji to meet with him to discuss arrangements for the new government. They met together on board HMS *Dido*. All five of the paramount chiefs contracted measles and went back to their villages. In the following 12 months, 25 per cent of the population of the indigenous Fijians was wiped out in a measles epidemic. It led to the assumption among many European commentators that the entire indigenous population would eventually perish. It is not my purpose to lecture. I do want to see a restoration of constitutional government and I want to see the release of the hostages. I have no regard for George Speight. But I think we in Australia need to approach the problem in Fiji with, as the member for Maribyrnong said, a sustained commitment to engagement, to understanding and to walking as friends and partners rather than dictating from a great height, from our luxurious historical circumstances.

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (10.10 p.m.)—I rise tonight to agree in part with the motion by the honourable member for Chifley. In terms of the first part, I do not believe that too many of us have problems in decrying what has taken place in Fiji—the fact that there is a constitutionally elected government held at bay by none other than Mr Speight, whom we would regard as being a terrorist. He achieved his position by the power of a gun and therefore he does not earn from any of us the right to be recognised officially in that role. He has also made it one of his demands that government should be formed on racist
grounds alone, ignoring the Indian population and taking away their natural rights. Echoes of One Nation come to mind with a division on any grounds that recognises race, that would divide people according to religion or that on any basis would create the inequality and unfairness for which Australians are certainly not known and which we as a government would not support.

May I also say in relation to the other factors that it is simply inappropriate at this time. I believe that the Minister for Foreign Affairs has done an outstanding job in addressing this issue. Certainly, he has indicated that the government maintains its strong support for the return of a constitutional government. But we have been at the forefront of international calls for the constitutionally elected government to be returned. But we see as the first priority the release of the hostages who have been taken prisoner. Of course, the imposition of martial law has created significant difficulties for Fiji. Claims to bring in various sanctions against the government seem inappropriate because the very people we would want to help are those who would be most at risk. I note that today’s Australian talks about the tourism industry and that it is already very significantly affected. Tourism is Fiji’s number one income earner and their number one source of tourists is in fact Australia. What is the reality? The reality is that the Fiji tourism body advised yesterday that further harm to the country’s ailing economy is going to occur in the future as long as the government is held to ransom. The article in the Australian said:

Australia is Fiji’s biggest source of foreign tourism with 118,000 Australians visiting the island last year … Australian tourists had slowed to a trickle. Daily visitor arrivals had fallen by almost two-thirds in the first two weeks of June compared with the same period last year. This had seen foreign tourism earnings drop from $1.9 million a day to $700,000.

The article goes on:

“In the first fortnight of June, Fiji has averaged 450 arrivals each day when last year for the same period we averaged 1280 daily arrivals,” Mr Whiting said.

Air Pacific has reduced flights to the island from 18 a week to 11. And Ansett Airlines said that they have had a slump of over 50 per cent in the number of bookings. So the impact is there.

The Sydney Morning Herald today indicated that some 350 jobs have already gone. There is no need for sanctions in this environment; the actions taken by George Speight have created this problem. They have created a significant loss of confidence in the country’s number one export—tourism. There has been a dramatic drop in the number of employees in the industry and in the number of tourists going to Fiji, but, on every level, this government has taken appropriate action. George Speight and the actions he has taken have divided the country on racist grounds. He does not recognise the 40 per cent of the community who are Indian born and their importance to the economy. His resentment of their role in government and in the economy has led him to his actions. I think it behoves every one of us in this House to explore the actions taken by George Speight.

Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (10.15 p.m.)—I welcome the unexpected opportunity to speak on this motion, but I am saddened that this motion is being discussed in the context where not much progress has been made in Suva. We still have parliamentary colleagues in a Commonwealth country who find themselves being held hostage at the point of a gun. Much of what has been expressed in the debate has demonstrated the desire of members from both sides to have this situation brought to a resolution which would see Fiji returned as quickly as possible to a form of democratically elected government that we could admire and that could be sustained for the long term.

I have had the opportunity to speak on this over the several weeks since George Speight, the terrorist, took over the parliamentary precinct and took custody of the elected prime minister and a number of his colleagues. It truly saddens me that this situation continues. But, as we have heard from the thoughtful contributions that have been made on both sides, how we react to this situation is very difficult. I believe that it is now getting to the stage where the points outlined in the honourable member for Chifley’s motion are the
type of response that should be a minimum. They are the type of response that would be required for people in the Fijian community who can make decisions in progressing this situation.

I have reflected that, after the initial Rabuka coups, Rabuka himself played an active role in the development of a constitution that was welcomed by all sections of the Fijian community. I repeat: it was welcomed by all sections of the Fijian community. At the time the constitutional commission’s report was brought down, I reflected that there was still some indigenous Fijian concern but that those people had been called upon to give the constitution a go, to see what could come about. The frustrating thing about this is that the new constitution, whilst it gives the legal framework, has perhaps not given—and I choose these words carefully—a form of cultural context that supports the idea of parliamentary democracy as we know it.

As I said a couple of weeks ago, there was criticism of the Chaudhry government, but that criticism could have been manifested at the next election or through measures that were allowed under the constitution. The fact that a decision was made by a person who was confronting legal charges—and his supporters who decided that they would disrupt the peaceful nature of the Fijian islands at the point of a gun—is very sad indeed.

The honourable member for Cook and I have just returned from the European Parliament. These issues are looked upon with some degree of interest by the European Parliament, and they are very supportive of any action that we require. And I think that the members of the European Parliament whom we spoke to understand the great care that the honourable member for Cook has highlighted. Whilst I might not totally agree with his standpoint, I know that these are issues that have to be looked at very carefully. I hope that our colleagues in Suva are released and released soon.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.
Monday, 19 June 2000

And we, as in duty bound will ever pray.

by Mr Charles (from 21 citizens).

Kirkpatrick, Private John Simpson

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of Parliament of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

We the undersigned request that John Simpson Kirkpatrick, of Simpson and the donkey fame, be awarded a Victoria Cross of Australia.

Under the Imperial Award system, the award of the Victoria Cross was denied to ‘Simpson’ as the result of an error in the original application. A second application, in 1967, was also denied as the British Government claimed a dangerous precedent would be set, in spite of such a precedent already existing.

Your petitioners request that the House of Representatives do everything in their power to ensure the appropriate recognition of John Simpson Kirkpatrick.

by Mrs Crosio (from 91 citizens) and
by Ms Hall (from 170 citizens).

Roads: New England Highway Interchange

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

Residents of Thornton NSW, and surrounding areas, and regular users of this section of the Highway request the House to provide immediate funding for the Weakley’s Drive, New England Highway Interchange project at Thornton NSW.

by Mr Fitzgibbon (from 1,354 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Caravan Parks

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the inequitable treatment of long-term mobile home and caravan park residents under the GST.

We believe it is unfair that the government single out long-term residents of mobile homes and caravan parks by imposing the GST on behalf of the residents site fees while ordinary residential rents are not subject to GST.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House condemn the government for its actions and amend the GST legislation so mobile home and caravan park residents are treated in the same way as ordinary residential renters.

by Ms Hall (from 76 citizens).

Genetically Modified Food: Labelling

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

The undersigned citizens and residents of Australia call on you to:

. Label all Genetically Engineered foods that may be approved for sale;
. Ensure pies contain meat and jam contains fruit;
. Make food labels reflect the true nature of the contents;
. Ensure that the Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) - the food safety watchdog - is adequately resourced to protect our food.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

by Ms Hall (from 53 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Dockets and Receipts

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of Parliament of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

We the undersigned believe that the GST should be legally required to be shown as a separate item on all receipts.

We do not believe the GST should be allowed to become a hidden tax, Australian people have a right to know exactly what GST they are paying.

Your petitioners request that the House of Representatives do everything in their power to ensure the GST is shown on receipts.
by Ms Hall (from 13 citizens).

Aged Care: Funding

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

The Petition of certain residents of the State of Queensland draws to the attention of the House that, under the Aged Care Act 1997, basic Commonwealth subsidies for providing high level care to residents of Residential Aged Care Facilities are paid at a different daily rate according to the State in which care is provided. The rate of funding for the highest level of care varies from a high of $111.17 per day in Tasmania to a low of $91.47 per day in Queensland. The Government’s own agency, the Productivity Commission, has stated that this situation particularly disadvantages Queensland.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to:
Immediately act to remove the inequities between the States and introduce national rates of funding.
Adopt the recommendations of The Productivity Commission and immediately provide additional funding for high level care in Queensland Residential Aged Care Facilities.

by Mr Macfarlane (from 102 citizens).

Banking: Branch Closures

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

We, the residents of Homebush, draw the attention of the House to the imminent closure of the Westpac Bank Branch in Rochester Street, Homebush. We ask the House to protect the right of all Australians to have access to bank branches in their local area.

by Mr Murphy (from 254 citizens).

Banking: Branch Closures

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

We, the residents of Concord, draw the attention of the House to the imminent closure of the Concord Westpac Bank Branch in Majors Bay Road, Concord. We ask the House to protect the right of all Australians to have access to bank branches in their local area.

by Mr Murphy (from six citizens).

Queanbeyan: Centenary of Federation

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

The petition of the twelve members of the Queanbeyan Centenary of Federation Committee, draws to the attention of the House that this month on Sunday June 11, 2000 it is exactly 100 years since John Gale, known as the Father of Canberra, and eleven other witnesses gave evidence in the old Queanbeyan Courthouse in favour of the Canberra Plains being the site for the National Capital, to the NSW Royal Commissioner Mr Alexander Oliver, who was appointed to examine and report on proposed sites.

This is one of the many hundred year landmarks and century celebrations that the citizens of Queanbeyan are chalking up in the lead up to the Centenary of Federation Celebrations in 2001 and the opening of the Bronze over life size Federation Memorial to John Gale, the Father of Canberra, on Sunday March 11, 2001.

As the nation focuses on Canberra, preceding and during the Centenary of Federation, Queanbeyan’s nurturing role as the birthplace of the Federal Capital should not be forgotten for when Dalgety was chosen as the site for the Federal City, John Gale wrote a pamphlet called Dalgety or Canberra – Which? and at a Public Meeting the residents of the Queanbeyan District dissented from the Federal Government’s decision on Dalgety and voted to publish and send the pamphlet, to all members of the Parliaments, as well as to other prominent citizens.

A.K. Murray wrote in the Introduction to the book Canberra: Its History and Legends, that ‘The late Sir John Forrest, representing Western Australia in those days, opposed the choice of Canberra; but when chosen he wrote and acknowledged that it was mainly Mr Gale’s famous pamphlet on Dalgety or Canberra: Which? a brochure published in 1907 and distributed to every member of the Commonwealth’s seven Parliaments, and amongst other prominent members of the community – that won the day for Canberra.’

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House will recognise and remember John Gale, and Queanbeyan’s central and enthusiastic role in the search for a site for the Federal Capital, and especially remember and recognise the one hundredth anniversary when John Gale, known locally as the Father of Canberra, gave evidence to the NSW Royal Commissioner Mr Alexander Oliver in favour of the Canberra Plains as the site for the Federal Capital on June 11, 1900, in the old Queanbeyan Courthouse.
by Mr Nairn (from 12 citizens).

Workers’ Entitlements: South Burnett Meatworks
To the Parliament of Australia assembled:
We, the undersigned, being former employees of South Burnett Meat Works Co-operative Association Limited (SBMW), wish to draw to the attention of the Parliament that:
SBMW employees were made redundant on 6th February 2000;
SBMW employees are likely to receive only 50 cents in the dollar for redundancy payments;
SBMW employees feel that the ‘special package’ which was made available to the National Textiles employees with regard to their unpaid entitlements should also be made available to SBMW employees because of the current condition of the meat processing industry and SBMW’s location in a disadvantaged regional area.
Your petitioners therefore request the House to grant the same ‘special package’ to them as the National Textile employees received.

by Mr Reith (from 110 citizens).

Aboriginals: Reconciliation
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
The petition of the undersigned shows:
We firmly believe that indigenous Australians have experienced enormous injustice, humiliation and disadvantage as a result of dispossession and the discriminatory policies and actions of successive governments.
Genuine reconciliation is only possible when our nation acknowledges this fundamental reality and when our Parliament acts to restore the human rights of indigenous Australians and to eliminate the disadvantages they face.
Your petitioners request that the House of Representatives should do all within its power to ensure that:
A formal apology is made to the stolen generation of indigenous Australians;
The recommendations of the HREOC report Bringing Them Home are implemented in full;
Mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia are overturned;
The concerns of the United Nations’ Committee for the Elimination of the Racial Discrimination are responded to with a constructive review of Australia’s native title legislation.

by Mr Ripoll (from 343 citizens).

Petitions received.

ASSENT TO BILLS
Message from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the following bills:
Fuel Sales Grants Bill 2000
Fuel Sales Grants (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2000
Product Grants and Benefits Administration Bill 2000

NEW BUSINESS TAX SYSTEM (INTEGRITY MEASURES) LEGISLATION
Mr BROUGH (Longman—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business) (10.23 p.m.)—by leave—I table the supplementary explanatory memorandum to the New Business Tax System (Integrity Measures) Bill 2000.

Motion (by Mr Brough) proposed:
That the House do now adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT
National Indigenous Broadcasting Service
Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (10.23 p.m.)—Broadcasting is the most powerful means of communicating—of understanding each other better in the 21st century. Without it, we are locked into the age of Gutenberg. We would communicate but only if we read and read well. The government has recently tabled the final Productivity Commission report on broadcasting. If honourable members care to refer to this publication, they will find the commission’s usual analysis. They will also find that it runs to some 500 pages and weighs two kilograms—useful as a doorstop but not what you would call an easy read—but buried within it is one of the most innovative and exciting ideas yet put forward to help the cause of reconciliation. I am referring to a national indigenous broadcasting service.

The broadcasting of culturally and linguistically relevant programs on Australian radio and television will inevitably reinforce a sense of self-worth of Australia’s indigenous peoples. There is simply no substitute for a community’s own language in identifying suitable role models, identities and val-
ues. To quote from a previous ATSIC report into broadcasting, entitled *Digital Dreaming*:

If we lose our language, if we lose our culture ... we become lost ourselves.

Since most Australians will never meet an indigenous person, let alone get to know them well, this is a matter for serious public concern. The broadcasting system must play its part by informing mainstream Australians about our indigenous peoples and their cultures. Even a government hypnotised by the almighty dollar should see the sense of marketing indigenous Australia. There is worldwide interest in indigenous Australian art and culture, especially the art of Arnhem Land and Central Australia. In fact, exports now reach at least 75 countries.

In 1997 ATSIC estimated that the market for indigenous arts and crafts was worth some $200 million per year. Commercial galleries operate not only in Alice Springs, Darwin, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne but also in Amsterdam, Tokyo and San Francisco. Collector interest has been so great that rare items such as rock paintings are now specified in legislation to protect cultural heritage. In the decade 1987 to 1998, exports of Australian film and television program material doubled from $50 million to $100 million. An indigenous broadcasting service would regularly commission programs with indigenous themes, thereby increasing the supply of program material attractive to overseas broadcasters and pay TV operators—for example, documentaries, serials and feature films.

This country’s 386,000 indigenous Australians have an ever pressing need for special services. Many indigenous people live in remote communities. Many speak English only as a second, third or fourth language. Loss of their own languages exacerbates their cultural dislocation, yet the services provided for them remain inadequate. Indigenous access to a national broadcasting service could substantially improve the delivery and exchange of vital information on education, health, child welfare, substance abuse, domestic violence and possible business opportunities. Governments need to talk to our indigenous peoples and to tell them how we can help. Moreover, a national service will provide indigenous communities with a means to recognise and preserve their languages as important means of communication, to produce linguistically and culturally relevant programs, to reinforce and promote their cultural identities through recording oral histories and ceremonial activities, to disseminate indigenous news and current affairs and to foster general community awareness of indigenous cultures through production of material for use by mainstream media.

More generally, a national indigenous broadcasting service will be an instrument of reconciliation. At present, indigenous people are largely represented to the Australian community through non-indigenous reporters with a poor understanding of indigenous perspectives. A national network will enable indigenous people to present their own version of events, and of themselves, to the wider Australian community. A national indigenous broadcasting service will provide significant training for mainstream employment. It will alert indigenous communities to the services available to them, and it will improve their confidence as well as enhancing their standing in the general community. It will provide opportunities for increasing our trade with the outside world. It is essential that the broadcasting system provide a primary service to our indigenous peoples, but it can do much more than that—it can also increase our mutual understanding. It can provide a true cultural and economic bridge across which all Australians can walk towards reconciliation.

**Roads: F6 Link Road**

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (10.28 p.m.)—I rise tonight to urge a formal assessment by the New South Wales state government of the construction of the long planned link road between Rockdale and Loftus, otherwise known as the F6 link road. I received a letter from the NRMA’s Manager of Policy, Planning and Economics, which supports my call for such a formal government review to take place.

A corridor of land has been set aside for the last 30 years, part of the old 1948 plan for Sydney overall. The long-term need for an express road has been there for some time. The link road will join the Wollongong-
Loftus expressway with the newly completed Eastern Distributor. It is ironic that $100 million has been spent on the Eastern Distributor, with benefits negated by bottlenecks down the road. The people of the Sutherland shire deserve to know what Labor’s solution is to worsening traffic in the Sydney southern region. What we have got is not just frustrating but downright dangerous, particularly in wet weather.

The Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales conduct regular travel time surveys in the Sydney metropolitan area. The NRMA’s letter highlighted local traffic problems shown up in the RTA’s 1997 survey, which indicated some congested sections of road in the Sutherland shire. In the morning peak times, these included the Princes Highway and Port Hacking Road intersection, Sylvania, and Acacia Road, Kirrawee. In the evening peak, congested sections included Acacia Road, Kirrawee, and Taren Point Road. The RTA’s most recent travel time survey of October 1999 is an indictment of the state government’s contempt for the people of southern Sydney. The state Labor government’s focus on the west is clearly at the expense of southern Sydney. From the 1999 survey, data is available indicating various roads and their mean travel times at different times of the day—morning and afternoon peak periods as well as off-peak times. The RTA’s Traffic Technology Branch feels that travel which is restricted to 25 kilometres per hour or less in both directions is too slow and needs to be addressed. I point out that 25 kilometres is a very low benchmark.

At the northern end of the proposed link road in the member for Barton’s electorate, the Grand Parade resembles a parking lot in peak times, particularly in the morning when, according to the official statistics, the average speed is eight kilometres an hour. Some people are abandoning the Grand Parade for other rat runs in sheer desperation at the situation. Unlike in Robert Frost’s poem, taking the road less travelled does not make all the difference, as eventually everyone is funnelled through to the airport tunnel and onto the Eastern Distributor. People sitting on the Grand Parade contemplating the road not taken will be more familiar with Frost’s imagining ‘somewhere ages and ages hence’.

Further south on Taren Point Road in my electorate, driving between the Kingsway and the Boulevarde, traffic is bad in both directions—between 18 kilometres and 23 kilometres an hour in morning peak times. In the afternoon this improves marginally to between 21 kilometres an hour and 26 kilometres an hour. Other sections of this road hover around the low RTA benchmark. From my home in Cronulla, it often takes an eternity to reach the Princes Highway in the west of my electorate or major intersecting roads, with sections of the Kingsway hovering around the RTA benchmark region also. Even driving along the Princes Highway from Bay Street to President Avenue and vice versa, speeds are 23 kilometres an hour and 25 kilometres an hour respectively and 20 kilometres an hour and 26 kilometres an hour in the afternoon peak. Off-peak periods are no more enjoyable, with speeds of 24 kilometres an hour and 30 kilometres an hour, depending on the direction being travelled.

Therefore, recognising the need for a solution, the F6 link road proposal should receive urgent attention. Tackling this issue would be a better way of spending transport finances in the area. A link road would provide a traffic cure in the long term. Addressing individual intersections seems to be focusing on the symptoms. The NRMA suggests the study could address the projected level of traffic usage, the estimated travel time saving and reduced traffic congestion as a result of the road’s construction, the cost/benefit of the road, the priority of the road as compared with other roads yet to be constructed in Sydney from a cost/benefit perspective, the benefit of the road in encouraging local land use development, the potential environmental impacts of a surface route versus an underground option and the combination of the two and the value of building the road compared to small scale improvements to the existing road network.

The NRMA states that an extensive public consultation program would be required to be initiated. While not wishing to be overly prescriptive, the consultation program could include wide consultation with the commu-
Rural and Regional Australia:

Government Support

Mr ZAHRA (McMillan) (10.33 p.m.)—Tonight I want to make some comments on the farce that is the National Party. In particular, I want to talk about the $90 million federal funding for regional solutions, which was announced at the circus which disguised itself as the National Party convention over the last couple of days. It sounds all right—$90 million for regional solutions. I will quote briefly from the media release issued by John Anderson on 18 June because it might paint a picture as to why it sounds all right:

Regional and rural communities experiencing economic and social disadvantage, including high levels of unemployment and inadequate services, are the key targets of a major new $90 million Federal Government grants programme.

Fantastic. I have to say that my heart leapt for joy when I read that first paragraph. I thought that finally something is going to come to regions like Gippsland which have suffered so much in terms of carrying an unfair unemployment burden and suffering social disadvantage. Unfortunately, I think that first paragraph really does not give the impression of what the program really is. If you read further, it says:

Some $90 million will be provided over four years to allow communities to undertake projects that will lead to economic diversification and strengthen their social structures by improving access to and filling gaps in services.

The caveat there: ‘over four years’. It does not sound like it is going to go too far. After all, Australia is a pretty big place and there is a lot of need around. If you read on a little bit further, the picture gets a little bit more stark. Further down on Fact Sheet 1 it says:

Communities will have the opportunity to develop their projects by selecting from a menu of activities eligible for funding. These activities can be small scale (such as developing community plans) through to large scale (such as community infrastructure projects), with grants available of between—wait for it—$1000 and $500,000.

I do not think $500,000 is what anyone in this place would call ‘large scale’, and I do not think it would go anywhere near solving any of the significant problems which so many regional areas in Australia currently face—largely caused by the massive cuts which have been delivered by this government to people who live in rural and regional Australia. I think it is worth while reflecting on the weakness of the amount of money that has been allocated. When you consider the exact size of the problem and the smallness of the amount of money, it makes you really ask the question: how serious are the National Party about representing the needs and aspirations of people who live in rural and regional Australia?

They talk about how you can develop a community based plan, how you can undertake a community development program and how you can get $50,000 towards the cost of resourcing regionally based people to help implement local projects—whatever that means. We know what the problems are in our region. We understand very plainly that, with 17 per cent and 18 per cent unemployment burden in Morwell—two very large towns in our electorate—we do not need $5,000 to develop a community based plan. We do not think that is going to solve any of the problems that our community faces.

As for some of the media coverage which has been given to this $90 million, the Herald Sun talk about a ‘$90 million boost for country areas’. They could not have got it more wrong. It is a $90 million hoodwink and nothing more. It is nothing more than a hoodwink that the National Party is trying to perpetrate on the people who live in rural and regional Australia. As for what the coalition government have done in my electorate, I think it is an absolute insult to the people I represent that they can think that such a poor amount of money can go anywhere towards dealing with the crisis which they have cre-
ated in terms of services and employment. The Commonwealth, the coalition government, cut funding to the Family Research Action Centre, which cost 30 jobs. They cut 120 jobs from Monash University, cut 150 jobs from local CES offices and cut 60 jobs from Telstra—and I could go on. What we need to solve the problems which have been created by the coalition government is a scud missile. What this government have given us in this weak, good-for-nothing $90 million program is a popgun. We deserve better than this in regional and rural Australia. In particular, areas which have been very hard hit, like Gippsland, deserve a fair dinkum approach. We deserve a proper solution to the problems which this government have created. (Time expired)

Queensland: Petrol Tax

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (10.38 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I would welcome some of that $90 million coming into my electorate, I can assure you. As a member who works very hard for his electorate, I certainly have not had any cuts in Telstra, CES or whatever else it is. We have done very well in the seat of Herbert.

Last week Queenslanders were shocked by the unexpected announcement by the Beattie Labor government of the introduction of the first ever state petrol tax in Queensland. There was just absolute outrage across all sectors of the community, from the truckers to the RACQ to local government and so on. Some very great concern was expressed. Despite a signed agreement back in 1977 between the Queensland government and the federal government in relation to this collection of excise on fuel and the returning of that excise to the fuel companies, the Beattie government was prepared to tear that up and do its own thing. Also it was despite Peter Beattie’s own support for the then coalition government implementing that to make sure that Queensland stayed a low tax state. Premier Beattie learned the hard way. He learned very quickly that the hip pocket nerve is very much connected to the petrol bowser, as we all know. We all know how price sensitive petrol is. In fact, I have seen many an occasion when the price of petrol might increase by just one cent and World War III breaks out in the electorate it is that price sensitive.

There was indeed outrage across the community. I asked members of my community to tell me what they thought. I have brought into the parliament some indicative material. All of these faxes that I received through the fax machine are from community individuals in all walks of life just indicating how they felt. Typical of them is the Mayor of Thuringowa, Councillor Les Tyrell, who wrote a note back saying: I think this is a monumental blunder and the savings on rego will quickly get eaten up. If they are intent on moving forward with it, then I would much prefer to see the $500 million a year spent on roads.

I could certainly understand the mayor’s feelings on that. An advertising agency said: Businesses will be affected by this increase in fuel costs. After allowing for reductions in vehicle registration, it will cost our company approximately $200 per annum per vehicle extra.

A person who lives at Blue Water, a little bit north of Townsville, took the trouble to do the calculation of the actual extra cost per year that they would be able to pocket as a private person even though there were to be registration remissions. Then I had a company that just simply said: This is of great concern to us both from a company and personal view. This will change how many vehicles we have on the road.

That is the kind of reaction I have had to this. I had a service company who looked at the cost to their service industry—and it was something like $3,000 a year. I had the Northern Carer Respite Centre fax me back indicating that they were trying to keep ‘our fees for the elderly to a minimum’ and that this was certainly going to increase their running costs. I had a fisherman indicate to me that it would cost him about an extra $12,000 a year because of the usage of fuel on his boat. Finally, from RSL Care: The effects on people in our aged community will be devastating. Most of our residents are just scraping by as it is. The effects will also be felt by the residents in our hostel as they pay for fuel for our buses and so on.

There is certainly no doubt that there was outrage in the community. I note that in fact Premier Beattie has since changed his mind. He has put the plan back in the bottom
drawer, but I am certainly very concerned that it may well come out again. Residents of Queensland are certainly very well aware of that and they will be very careful when it comes to the next election as to how they consider what the Labor state government might be doing in the future in relation to petrol tax. My advice to the government is to stay well clear of it.

Dairy Industry: Deregulation

Mr HORNE (Paterson) (10.43 p.m.)—At the weekend I visited Tweed Heads to attend a rally of about 500 angry dairy farmers. They were there to protest against the National Party members of the coalition because, as the House knows, the National Party conference was being held there. The dairy industry knows that it has been sold down the drain by the Truss plan. The Truss plan is not going to work. This is a government that claims to be opposed to a wholesale sales tax, but in the fiasco that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Warren Truss, has imposed on the dairy industry we see in the order of a 15 per cent wholesale sales tax being imposed on milk. And for what? To destroy an industry that has been the mainstay of many communities in the Hunter region, on the North Coast of New South Wales and in Queensland for 150 years. The National Party can deny it as much as it likes, but the only initiator of this process was the minister when he came to the box and announced a $1.74 billion plan to save the dairy industry.

I can tell the House what this means to New South Wales, for it is in New South Wales that the devastation will be greatest. Over the next eight years the taxpayers of New South Wales will contribute $520 million through the levy of 11c a litre. The dairy farmers of New South Wales will receive about $340 million. Of the money paid by the taxpayers of New South Wales, $180 million will go to Victoria and will subsidise the milk industry in the state that is going to be the big improver. A similar situation exists in Queensland, where more money will be collected from the taxpayers of Queensland than will be distributed to the dairy farmers of Queensland. They also will be subsidising the Victorian industry while their own industry is destroyed.

The point is this: towns such as Dungog will be greatly affected by this plan. Dungog is a town that supports a shire of about 5,000 people and about 70 dairy farms. I know the results of financial counselling for the first 20 families that have been counselled. Of these 20 families that have dairy farms, only four have been told that their farms will be viable after deregulation. Eighty per cent of the farms in that area will be destroyed by deregulation. And what does Minister Truss say is going to replace the income? Over the weekend we saw the Deputy Prime Minister come forward with a plan for $90 million over four years and a maximum grant of $500,000. Let us assume the hypothetical situation that Dungog Shire Council can apply for a maximum grant of $500,000 for planning to develop new industry. Let us suppose that it gets it. Let us just say that the average income per dairy farm that is going to be lost to that community is about $250,000—that would be the income, not the outgoing amount. The effect on the economy of losing 80 per cent of the dairy farms around that town is going to be measured in the tens of millions per annum. But over the weekend the Deputy Prime Minister presented a grand plan to his conference with a maximum grant of half a million dollars per annum. It has got to be a joke. It has got to be the crudest farce I have ever seen played on rural towns in my electorate. It has got to be something that people over on that side find absolutely shameful, because the people on the government’s side know that this act is going to destroy a rural industry for which there is no alternative. (Time expired)

Dairy Industry: Deregulation

Groom Electorate: Historical Events

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom) (10.48 p.m.)—I had come here to speak of far more positive things, but I cannot allow the speech of the member for Paterson to pass without comment. If there is anything that is shameful, it is the misrepresentation of this situation to innocent people so that they become so confused that they do not know what is happening in their industry. It is an absolute shame. I would have expected better
from the member opposite, who has a better understanding of agriculture than he portrayed in this House tonight. He knows full well that in Queensland and New South Wales state Labor governments are sitting by and doing absolutely nothing. The only government that has done something, where there are milk quotas, is the Liberal government in Western Australia, which has contributed $38 million to the restructure of dairy farming in that state. Deregulation is not a Truss plan; it is the dairy industry’s plan. The speaker opposite should realise that all he is doing is confusing innocent people who have spent all their lives trying to make an honest living, only to have this whole issue misrepresented by people trying to get political gain.

The coalition government and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry have done a fine job in an extraordinarily difficult situation. This is not the federal government’s doing; it is the dairy industry’s decision to move forward. Where were the Labor Party members when the wheat industry was deregulated? No compensation. Where were the Labor Party members when the wool industry’s floor price was pulled out? No compensation. They stand here in sheer hypocrisy, trying to make political points out of misleading and confusing innocent people who really need to understand the basic fact. The basic fact is that it is a decision of the dairy industry: 87 per cent of farmers, who produce 63 per cent of the milk in Australia, made the decision to deregulate. No compensation. Where were the Labor Party members when the wool industry’s floor price was pulled out? No compensation. They stand here in sheer hypocrisy, trying to make political points out of misleading and confusing innocent people who really need to understand the basic fact. The basic fact is that it is a decision of the dairy industry: 87 per cent of farmers, who produce 63 per cent of the milk in Australia, made the decision to deregulate. That was their decision. The federal government has done nothing but what the dairy industry has asked, and it has done it in spades. The sorts of comments that come from the other side do not do credit to the people who say them—people who I know understand rural industry better than they appear to.

Let me move to what I came to speak about: some historic moments in my electorate of Groom. Three weeks ago I had the pleasure of going to the Emu Creek State School’s celebration of 125 years as a state school. It was one of the first schools funded by the state’s education centre, and it is a school which to this day is still going proudly. I can only wish them well again, as I did on that day, and join the sentiments of the many speakers there in saying that that school has a long and prosperous future before it as it has a long and proud history behind it.

One of the more notable students of that school was a gentleman called Steele Rudd. Perhaps if I used his proper name, which was Arthur Hoey Davis, people may become confused. People certainly remember Steele Rudd as the author of On Our Selection. It was Steele Rudd who actually wrote those stories. As fate would have it, last Thursday I had the honour of being part of a ceremony which led to a further upgrading of Arthur Hoey Davis’s original home near the Emu Creek State School, where the federal government had supplied a grant of some $32,000 to further upgrade the facility for the comfort of visitors. It is another excellent example of the federal government’s commitment to our heritage and part of some $60 million in grants that have been handed out across Australia to in excess of 50 successful applicants.

While in the region last week, and I do spend a lot of time out in the bush, unlike my colleagues opposite, I also had the pleasure of being present at the rededication of the Nobby State School memorial gates, attended by the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Bruce Scott. I pay tribute to Graham Ferguson, who did a great deal of work in restoring those gates, again with a government grant. I also pay tribute to Julie Farlow, the school principal, who has built the numbers substantially in that school to give it a new vibrancy and life. I finally pay tribute to John Savage, who was involved in all three processes and is an excellent chairman of the local shire. (Time expired)

Dunkley Electorate: Suicide Prevention and Resilience Promotion Community Forum

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (10.53 p.m.)—The tragedy that we were discussing earlier in the day provided an unfortunate backdrop to a community forum that had commenced being organised in the middle of March. That was a community forum to discuss suicide prevention and resilience promotion in the Greater Frankston and Mornington Peninsula
area that I undertook to organise in response to some local community concerns about the number of people in our area that had taken their life in the first few months of the year. We brought together some local organisations, the Frankston Community Health Centre, the Peninsula Health Care Network, the Frankston Standard newspaper, Monash University, Southern Health Care Network and the Mornington Peninsula Division of General Practice to put on this forum. We invited experts, community representatives and concerned citizens to participate. Dr Sandra Hacker, the former vice-president of the AMA, provided an opening address. Rob Macindoe from the Peninsula Health Care Network, and Dr Nikki Martin, Mornington Peninsula Division of GPs, gave addresses. We also were fortunate to have Dr Michael Gordon of Frankston Child and Adolescent Health Service, Steve McFarlane, Senior Registrar of Aged Psychiatry at Frankston Hospital, and Professor George Patton, Director of the Centre for Adolescent Health, all addressing the gathering of around 100 people, talking about current information in suicide prevention and resilience promotion.

Once those presentations were completed, we tried something quite different. We broke the audience up into work groups to look at particular themes that were of concern to our local community. We had a support services and systems area, where the providers of some of the mental health services in our area came together to see how those services were interacting, whether they were providing the appropriate level of support for the community and how well they were known. We had an adolescence workshop theme, a family care and support theme, a mid-life and manhood theme and an aged isolation theme. Those workshops looked at the services that were available, gaps that we could identify, whether there was adequate communication about their availability and whether people could access them when and how they needed, whether there was support in the community for preventive programs, and what we were doing for those who were near people suffering from a depressive illness—whether we were also looking after them to make sure they were best placed to support their loved ones.

Thankfully, after discussion of the region’s risk and resilience profile, the recognition was there that there was an impressive range of local services targeting at-risk individuals, but not enough, in our view, was being done in a preventive way to deal with the broader community where episodes in our lives may lead people to think about harming themselves. And not enough was being done to connect people to their communities so that the support infrastructure that we all draw from and all rely on was being renewed and looked after so that we could take care of those people during their darkest moments. The terrific thing was that everyone approached this in a positive, meaningful way and all contributions were welcomed. It was one of the most satisfying and worthwhile things I have been associated with. The key messages to emerge from the forum were that we need to embrace depression as an illness that has to be treated, that we need to destigmatise mental illness, that social disconnection is a key risk factor, that help is available but that service awareness and accessibility needs to be improved, and that broader programs are needed to support the wellbeing and good mental health of the wider community so that all of us can be confident that that support and assistance is there.

Some really practical proposals for action were developed, and I will meet with those who helped me develop the program for the evening—Professor Bruce Tong, Dr John Reilly, Rob Macindoe and Marion Sharkey from the Division of General Practice—to look at how we can best move forward these ideas and pursue them and hope to see them implemented in our community. I have not in the time available the opportunity to outline them all, but some of the proposals that were developed were: the development of a local services guide, producing household brochures or fridge magnets with helpful support and contact information for families and parents; promoting general practitioners as a familiar and friendly source of help for people suffering from depression; improved training for doctors, teachers, carers, clergy, service receptionists and counsellors in recognising, working with and helping people with depression; a single 24-hour entry point or contact phone number for people seeking
help to make sure they get the help they need and are not given the runaround when they are least able to cope with it; and a 24-hour service of trained local people to talk with and visit people, linked to services in the area. *(Time expired)*

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**House adjourned at 10.59 p.m.**

**REQUEST FOR DETAILED INFORMATION**

**Parliament House: Western Formal Gardens**

Mr Emerson asked Mr Speaker, upon notice, on 6 April 2000:

1. What was the final cost of the refurbishment of the Western Formal Gardens at Parliament House completed under the supervision of the Joint House Department in 1999-2000.

2. What was the cost of the establishment of an amenities block adjacent to the Western Formal Gardens completed in recent years.

3. What was the total cost of works completed in and around the Western Formal Gardens since 1996.

Mr SPEAKER—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

1. The final construction cost of the Gardens was $543,340.

2. The final construction of the amenities block serving the Western Formal Gardens was $167,921.

3. The cost of works undertaken in and around the Western Formal Gardens since 1996 is $724,328, which is comprised of the above two projects plus a pro rata amount for the installation of three drinking fountains in this area, which were installed at various locations throughout the outer landscape associated with the exercise facilities.

**NOTICES**

The following notices were given:

**Mr Albanese**—to move:

That this House:

1. declares that it is crucial for our democratic system of Government that measures be pursued and implemented to improve the standing and integrity of politicians with the community;

2. notes the comments of the Member for Cowper referring to the application of the GST to permanent residents of mobile and manufactured home parks who said “what affects me personally is that my integrity and honour is impugned, as is John Anderson and Larry’s and Mark Vaile and the rest of us. Everybody. Because we went to the people of Australia at the last election and we said there’d be no GST on rents. It has an impact on John Howard’s integrity and honour, and that of the Liberal Party as well”;

3. notes that permanent residents of caravan parks and boarding houses were identified as being at high risk of homelessness in the Government’s National Homelessness Strategy; and

4. calls upon the Government to remove the discriminatory application of the GST against these Australians.

**Mr Beazley**—to present a bill for an act to amend the Workplace Relations Act 1996.

**Mr Kelvin Thomson**—to move:

That this House:

1. condemns the Australian Democrat, Liberal and National Senators for not proceeding with or supporting the following terms of reference for the Senate Select Committee on Superannuation and Financial Services proposed by Democrat Senator Lyn Allison on 9 March 1999:

   a. the adequacy of the tax system and related policy to address the retirement income and health care needs of Australians into the new millennium;

   b. strategies for building more effective national retirement income and long-term saving outcomes;

   c. reforms that could be implemented following completion of the Superannuation Guarantee Charge phase-in to 9 per cent; and

   d. the taxation of superannuation, particularly the Superannuation High Income Earners Tax Surcharge legislation and alternative payment mechanism; and

2. believes these to be important areas of inquiry for the Senate Select Committee on Superannuation and Financial Services.
Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl) took the chair at 8.15 p.m.

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2000-2001**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 8 June, on motion by Mr Costello:

That the bill be now read a second time.

upon which Mr Tanner moved by way of amendment:

“whilst not declining to give the Bill a second reading, the House condemns the Government for its:

(1) failure to address the significant investment needs in the areas of education, health and the provision of social services in the 2000-2001 Budget;

(2) wasteful and profligate spending on poor quality programs to buy Democrat support for its unfair GST;

(3) misuse of over $360 million of taxpayers’ money on its politically partisan GST advertising campaign;

(4) reduction of a potential Budget cash surplus in 2000-2001 of $11 billion, to a real Budget deficit of $2.1 billion;

(5) use of creative accounting techniques in an attempt to deceive the Australian public on the true state of the Budget;

(6) mishandling of the move to accrual accounting by providing complex, confusing and uninformative budget documents;

(7) failure to identify in the Budget papers the cost of GST collection and implementation; and

(8) failure to put in place arrangements that deliver its guarantee that no Australian will be worse off as a result of the GST package.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton) (8.15 p.m.)—In my contribution on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2000-2001, the first point that I want to make is the lost opportunity that is presented. That lost opportunity is that in its endeavour to introduce the goods and services tax and to provide in the vicinity of $20 billion worth of compensation by way of taxation relief, primarily to high income earners, the government has lost the opportunity for nation building. It has lost the opportunity in particular in the areas of education, research and development, and building this nation’s infrastructure. That is something that is regrettable. In terms of my own shadow portfolio, this bill represents nothing at all to improve access to justice, the efficiency of court administration generally in terms of services available to Australians, and in particular Australians in rural and regional Australia.

We are not only seeing this budget in the context of spending money on providing taxation relief by way of income tax relief, which ultimately is going to be sucked back into the system through the goods and services tax, we are also seeing a massive amount of money being spent on the government’s GST advertising campaign of some $431 million, as I understand it. That, again, represents a massive opportunity cost in terms of what could have been done with additional teachers, the police force and, in the hospital system, by increasing the number of available beds. All these things could have been done with that amount of money, rather
than spending it on the government’s propaganda, in effect, to promote its goods and services tax.

Mr Bartlett—It is information and education.

Mr McCLELLAND—It is far from being education or information. A constituent likened it to Hitler in the bunker in the last days of the Third Reich with the bombs falling all around and a massive amount of paper being distributed claiming victory. Certainly, it is a massive amount of money, far in excess of what could be justified as a reasonable amount to provide education and information to the Australian people.

Moving into my portfolio area, in terms of legal aid the government announced with the budget some $63 million over four years to state and territory legal aid commissions. That was effectively a reannouncement of an announcement made in December 1999. When you look at that allocation, and you look at it more closely and at the fine print, it works out to be an amount of about $43.6 million once the effects of indexation are taken into account. That is far too little and too late. It has to be seen in the context of the massive amount of money that has already come out of the legal aid system. For instance, if you compare it with the last year of the Labor government, 1995-96, the allocation was $160.2 million for legal aid, and at the time of the election $159.2 million had been spent.

If you compare that with what has been provided by the Howard government—$127.1 million in 1997-98, $133.6 million in 1998-99 and $103 million in 1999-2000—and actually project that difference over the period up to date and take it forward to the year 2003-04, the present allocation dealt with in the current bill, there is actually a $404 million deficit in legal aid funding based on a mere indexation of the last year of the Labor government. So $63 million or, more accurately, $45 million put back into the system in the context of that massive cut goes nowhere near what is required to address the situation. The government is putting forward proposals such as telephone advice services, Internet advice services and so forth, but the facts of the matter are that you can have all the technology attached to the legal aid pool that you like but if the cake itself is not adequate to discharge what it is required for, then all the technology and bells and whistles added to it are not going to get the job done. That is the situation we are now facing in respect of legal aid.

All the research suggests that it is very much penny-wise and pound-foolish not to properly fund legal aid, because it increases the number of unrepresented litigants. All the evidence shows that unrepresented litigants are less likely to settle their cases early in the piece and, indeed, when they litigate the matters in the court, the evidence shows that the court cases themselves take longer. This, of course, imposes an additional burden on our court system and an additional cost. As I said, it is very much penny-wise and pound-foolish not to provide proper legal aid—in particular, in the early part of the dispute process—with a view to resolving matters early in the course of a dispute.

The second issue in my portfolio responsibility that I want to touch on is the further cutting of resources to the Family Court. The resources to the Family Court are going to be reduced by more than 10 per cent from 1 July 2000. The Family Court is going to lose something like $15.4 million over the next four years. We do acknowledge that the government proposes to set up the Federal Magistrates Service, but we are convinced that, particularly in this period of time when the service is yet to be operational, this leaves a massive vacuum in the Family Court system and that is going to manifest itself down the line in additional delays and in the stress it places on people.

As a result of that cut, the Chief Executive of the Family Court has already issued a memorandum saying that the staff of some 800 or thereabouts in the Family Court will be reduced by 80 to 720 staff. It appears, regrettably, that most of those staff will go from the area of voluntary counselling and dispute resolution services. Again, returning to this theme...
of it being penny-wise but pound-foolish, to take money out of an area where counselling and dispute resolution services have a proven track record of effectiveness is simply foolish. In particular, again we are going to see costs blowing out further down the stream. We are going to see additional demands being placed on community services. As the stress, tension and anxiety remain in relationships, all the research suggests that they are going to be more fertile for domestic violence and aggression and, in particular, the consequences that that will have on children. In worst case scenarios, we are going to see a situation where more and more police are going to have to be called out to address domestic violence situations.

Indeed, the figures are already suggesting that there is a significant increase in the number of parents who, as reprehensible as it is, are taking the law into their own hands by literally taking children away from their former partner—to effectively kidnap their own children—rather than to confront the massive delays in the Family Court system. So, again, reducing Family Court resources is penny-wise and pound-foolish. In this area in particular it is going to affect regional Australia. It is likely that the registries which will suffer cutbacks will include Albury, Alice Springs, Cairns, Canberra, Coffs Harbour, Dandenong, Darwin, Dubbo, Geelong, the Gold Coast, Launceston, Lismore, Newcastle, Townsville and Wollongong. Again, this is an important area where resources are being taken away from regional Australia contrary to the undertaking that the Prime Minister made at Nyngan about no more services being taken away from regional or rural Australia.

The other matter I would like to raise in this bill is the government’s proposal to establish an Administrative Review Tribunal through the amalgamation of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal, the Migration Review Tribunal and the Refugee Review Tribunal. The first thing I would note is that by amalgamating the Social Security Appeals Tribunal they are effectively removing a level of appeal from that tribunal which previously could have gone to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. But there are other problems; in particular, there are questions arising in respect to the independence of the proposed Administrative Review Tribunal. For many years, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal has been funded by a single allocation from the Department of Finance and Administration. But it appears that this proposal being put forward by the government will change that, so that the Administrative Review Tribunal will receive funding from individual government departments whose decisions are going to be the subject of review. That in itself raises significant questions of independence.

There is also a significant issue of independence that arises in the context of appointment of tribunal members. Whereas the Administrative Review Council had recommended that the minister with portfolio responsibility—namely, the Attorney-General—or the Prime Minister should have primary responsibility for the appointment of tribunal members, as occurs in respect of the court system, it appears from the government’s proposal that in respect of the Administrative Review Tribunal the appointments will be made on the recommendations of the minister in charge of the specific departments whose decisions will be under review. Indeed, it appears that the people so appointed to the tribunal will be appointed under short-term contracts, rather than having security of tenure. So they will be receiving appointments on the recommendation of the minister involved. And they will be in a situation where, at the conclusion of their period of service with the tribunal, they will be returning to that department.

That in itself means that even if the person was of the utmost integrity—as we would expect they would be—they would still be compromised at least subconsciously, or, at least in the public’s eyes, the perception of their impartiality would be tainted because in all likelihood they would be returning to the department from whence they came. In those circumstances, members of the public could not be confident that their rights were going to be
adjudicated upon by an independent umpire. This is particularly regrettable because credit must be given to the Fraser government that introduced the concept of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and it is fair to say that, in the 20-odd years that the Administrative Appeals Tribunal structure has been operating, we have achieved one of the best administrative review arrangements in the world. That is fundamentally important to the Australian people.

We are in a country where we do not have an underlying Bill of Rights and the ability to challenge decisions by the executive arm of government has been vital to Australians having confidence that their rights, as against the executive, were going to be protected and that there was an effective review mechanism. I cannot state too highly the significant risk that tainting the perception of impartiality will have, and that is a substantial risk that is occurring because of the government’s proposed changes to the area of administrative review.

In this speech I have touched on several areas. The areas of concern are that under this government access to justice has unquestionably been diminished, the ability of the courts to efficiently administer justice has been diminished, and our prized system of administrative review looks like being substantially dismantled. They are all matters of regret.

Mr BARTLETT (Macquarie) (8.31 p.m.)—It has been fascinating throughout the course of this debate to follow the contributions of the members of the opposition. Not that I pretend for a moment that I have sat transfixed and listened to every speech, but a common theme seems to me, in the bits that I have noticed, to have run through those contributions.

On the one hand we have had member after member standing and suggesting how the budget fell short in not delivering increased spending in this area, that area or some other area where they would like to have seen an increased allocation of funds. I respect the member for Barton’s commitment to his own portfolio area but again we have had evidence tonight of that—an argument that more money needed to be spent on this program, more money on that program and more money on another program. On the other hand, we have heard contributions from the other side arguing that the surplus is not big enough; that a budget surplus of $2.8 billion is not enough and that, in fact, it ought to have been larger. In some cases we have had the same speaker arguing both in the same bracket of 15 to 20 minutes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you cannot have it both ways. You cannot increase your spending on every program that you would like to see further funded, and have a larger budget surplus—or at least not unless you resort, as the Labor Party frequently does, to its favourite approach, and that is raising taxes. You cannot increase spending and increase the size of your surplus without increasing taxes. Yet this is the contradiction we have had right the way through from day one in the response of the opposition to the government’s budget.

I would like, first of all, to make some general comments about this budget and then some more specific comments about some of the initiatives that I thought were extremely worth while. The first general comment I would like to make is that this budget is a sound and sensible one that carries with it a combination of strong economic management—that is, the right macro-economic settings continuing, in the way that we have for the last four years, to address the critical economic fundamentals—and some very specifically targeted initiatives to address a few areas of critical need.

In terms of addressing those economic fundamentals I would just like to again highlight a number that are detailed in the budget papers, but these are important. The first is, as I have already alluded to, the budget surplus of $2.8 billion. For the fourth year in a row, a budget surplus. A budget surplus for four years in a row in contrast to the last five years of the former government when we had five years of deficits totalling $75 billion to $80 billion. In the past five years, including this year’s budget, the government will have paid back $50 billion of Commonwealth debt. Of a total of $97 billion—almost $80 billion of which was run up in the last five years of the former government—$50 billion will have been paid back by the end of
this year by the time this year’s budget has been applied. The net Commonwealth debt to GDP ratio, which was 20 per cent when we came into office, is already below 10 per cent and, by the end of this year, will be down to an estimated 7.1 per cent.

This might be dismissed as economic theory or bottom line figures that do not mean anything, but the fact is that this does matter because the economic fundamentals do affect people’s lives. Unless we have these fundamentals right, people’s lives will be adversely affected. It is essential that we get our house in order and that we continue to do that. The Bankcard has to be paid off; eventually we have to pay for this debt or it will be left to our children.

Early in his contribution, the member for Barton mentioned the opportunity cost of spending on one thing rather than another. The critical point that needs to be made about opportunity cost is the incredible lost expenditure opportunities because of the massive interest payments on that accumulated debt. When this government came into office, $9 billion a year of taxpayers’ money was going not to fund any new program, not to help those in need, not to create any extra infrastructure, but simply to pay interest on the accumulated debt during those previous years of government. Already that $9 billion has been reduced to an annual debt of $6 billion. Already, because of responsible management over the last four years, we have saved taxpayers $3 billion a year that can more effectively go to other programs.

The second point that needs to be made about the economic fundamentals is the interest rate regime that prevails at the moment and the interest rate regime that will continue to prevail if we can continue to keep the budget situation under control. Home loan interest rates, as all would know, are currently at 7.8 per cent. We have had a fair bit of screaming from the newspapers over the past year as there has been a slight upward adjustment, but the point is that 7.8 per cent is still considerably lower than what the interest rate was four years ago. One of the reasons it is considerably lower is that, instead of running a $10 billion or $15 billion deficit, we are running a surplus and putting downward pressure on interest rates, rather than the upward pressure on rates that was being fuelled by the string of budget deficits. With interest rates of 7.8 per cent we are still running at 2.7 per cent less than we were four years ago. That is, the average mortgage holder is still saving $225 a month—they are paying less than they were four years ago. Tens of thousands of home buyers in my electorate of Macquarie have saved significant sums, some even saving several thousand dollars off their mortgage payments over those four years. That is several thousand dollars in their pockets that they would not have had if we had continued the policies of the former government. Some of them will have saved perhaps a couple of years off the life of their mortgages as a result of that.

The third point I wish to make in addressing those economic fundamentals is that the forecast growth rate in this budget is 3.75 per cent. That continues the strong performance of economic growth that we have had for the last four years. The figures that came out last week indicate an annualised growth rate of GDP in the last quarter of 4.3 per cent—the 12th consecutive quarter with high growth rates. It is the best string of high growth rates that we have had in 30 years—and, might I add, with low inflation. Again, this is not an accident; it is not something that was fuelled by massive growth in our region. In fact, it is quite the reverse; it is growth that has been maintained in spite of the collapse of many economies in our region. It is growth that has been achieved because of responsible economic management, lower interest rates, getting the budget back in order and providing incentives and confidence to business investment to fuel that growth.

The benefit of that growth is the fourth point I want to make—the growth in jobs and the reduction in unemployment that we have seen as part of that program of management over the
last four years. The jobs growth figure estimated in this budget is to have unemployment down to 6.25 per cent by the end of the year. It is already down to 6.7 per cent—700,000 jobs have already been created in the last four years. Youth unemployment is down to 21.5 per cent—the lowest level in 22 years. And this is in the context of increasing participation rates reducing unemployment.

The other point that needs to be made is that not only have we managed to reduce unemployment over the last four years but we have done that in a context of rising real wages, rising participation rates and reduced industrial unrest. We have had a growth in real wages of 2.5 per cent on average over the last four years compared with only 0.5 per cent under 13 years of the former government. We have had a growth in minimum award wages of 9.5 per cent over the last four years. Again, this is not by accident; this is by good planning and good management to achieve rising job creation and reducing unemployment in the context of rising participation rates and rising real wages, at both average and minimum levels.

In general terms, this is a responsible budget which continues to guarantee that those fundamentals are right, not for the sake of economic theory, not for some obsession with economic rationalism, but to ensure that a sound, strong economy continues to provide opportunities for everyone in our community, including the battlers. If the economy runs sick or turns sour, it is the vulnerable who are the first to be affected. It is the vulnerable who lose their jobs. By strengthening the economy, we strengthen the opportunities for all.

I want to turn now to a few specifics in this budget that are particularly good news—a few specifically targeted programs. The first is taxation reform. The tax system that has been the subject of so much debate over the past couple of years was introduced in this budget. The new tax system brings with it income tax cuts of $12 billion. Income tax cuts of $12,000 million from 1 July will put 80 per cent of Australian income earners on marginal income tax rates of 30 per cent or less. Along with that is the abolition of the wholesale sales tax, provisional tax, the PPS system, the RPS system, et cetera. With that, there will be increased family allowances, guaranteed pension rises and an up-front savings bonus for retirees, so that income earners, wage and salary earners, and families will be the big winners out of these tax changes.

There are other specific programs that I am pleased to see tackled in this budget, including, firstly, a program of recognition for veterans. Over the past years—and, I must say, under both governments—we have increasingly seen initiatives to tackle the needs of veterans and to target those areas that have previously been neglected. I am sure the member opposite would be pleased to see that, in this budget, we have again extended that process. Veterans who previously missed out are now catered for in this budget, particularly a key group who served in different capacities in the South-East Asian region between 1955 and 1975. That includes those who served in the Far Eastern Strategic Reserve as part of the Malayan Emergency, including 1,800 naval personnel, some of whom have been lobbying me for the last three or four years, saying, ‘Look, it is not fair that we have been overlooked. Why cannot those benefits be extended to us?’ I was delighted to see in this budget that finally they are catered for.

Others to benefit include those who served in Ubon in Thailand and in the Indonesian Confrontation, and the merchant marines who served with the Royal Australian Navy during the Vietnam War. It is tremendously heartening that these people, who had previously missed out, are now going to be looked after in terms of recognition for both medal entitlements and full repatriation benefits, including service pensions.

In this budget there is increased support for Vietnam veterans in the form of $32 million for veterans and their families as a result of applying some of the recommendations that came out of the Vietnam veterans’ health study, especially with regard to anxiety and depressive
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There will be more money allocated for the care of children suffering spina bifida and cleft palate, of which there seems to be a greater incidence amongst children of Vietnam veterans than in the population generally. There is an increased commitment to veterans' home care packages to assist quality home living and delay the need for veterans to access residential care. This budget really is another very positive step forward in the tradition of this government of increasing the recognition of veterans and looking after them.

The second initiative that also deserves special mention is the innovative and greatly needed rural health scheme to address the shortage of doctors and health services in country areas—a package of $562 million over the next few years. Included in that is the establishment of clinical schools, extra money for nursing psychologists, podiatry services for the bush, $48.4 million for a medical specialist outreach package, $41.6 million for a rural pharmacy maintenance allowance, $30.3 million to assist bush hospitals to provide community care to those in small country towns, and initiatives to attract new GPs and medical graduates to practise in rural areas. All of these are very valuable initiatives to raise the health standards of the people in the bush who have been neglected for so long. As the Advertiser said on 10 May following the announcement of this, 'It is the biggest boost to the health of people living in rural and remote areas since the advent of the Flying Doctor Service.' The coalition government is committed to ensuring that all Australians, regardless of where they live, have access to the highest level of health services and this is a very positive move in the right direction.

The third specific initiative that I want to refer to is what I see as very considerable improvements to child support arrangements. I know this is a difficult issue and it is one that requires a careful balancing of the needs of both custodial parents and non-custodial parents. We certainly need to look after the needs of custodial parents—usually the mothers—caring for the children, and the care of those children needs to be the highest priority. But balanced with that we also need to consider the needs of the non-custodial parents—generally the fathers—and the pressures that the child support system has put on those people. This budget goes a long way to addressing some of the shortcomings that we had there. It provides, as a pilot program, assistance for counselling to reduce the trauma associated with separation and to reduce especially the impact of that trauma on the children, but also on parents, and to assist them to improve their post-separation relationships and their parenting skills. It includes a provision for payers with subsequent families to claim 100 per cent of any support as a deduction from assessable household income used for determining the new family's entitlement to family tax benefit and child-care benefit. That is a very positive move because previously only half of that money could be traded off against a means test. This means a fairer deal for non-custodial parents who have a second family.

As well as that, there are extra provisions that allow for a second family. If the father gets a second job or does overtime to help support his second family, no longer will that be counted in the formula of support payments for his first family. If he decides that he wants to remarry and start another family, he will not be totally hamstrung and handcuffed by an unfair child support system. He can now get a second job or do overtime and that is exempted from the formula so that he can use it to support his new family. There are some other reductions and changes in the formula that go a long way to improving equity and providing the balance to address the needs of the custodial parent—the burdens on them in raising the children—but to allow the non-custodial parent, usually a male, to get on with his life.

There are other benefits in the budget as well, particularly an increase in foreign aid to East Timor of $150 million over the next four years—$100 million extra. That is a real increase of four per cent in our foreign aid budget. There is increased defence spending. For too long we have seen a slow but steady decrease in defence spending, perhaps over the last 20 years. You will remember that in 1996 this government quarantined defence from any budget cuts, and
we have been working at increasing defence spending. In this budget there is an increase of $304 million to $19.4 billion. I would argue, as many would, that the prime responsibility of any government is to protect its citizens and to guarantee, as far as it can, their security. I believe that we need to look hard at our defence needs and at a continued increase in the priority that we give to defence.

I was pleased to see that in this budget there has been a 3.4 per cent increase in spending on education—from $382 million to $11.6 billion—and a seven per cent increase in spending on schools to $5.2 billion. In spite of the rubbish we hear from the New South Wales Teachers Federation, there has been a large increase in spending on public schools as well as non-government schools. Spending on government schools in New South Wales this year is up by another $29 million. There will be an increase to $678 million in spending on public schools in New South Wales in the next year. This government is committed to ensuring a good chance for our children in public schools and in non-government schools.

Mr SCIACCA (Bowman) (9.51 p.m.)—This is the 11th budget that I have had the pleasure of listening to in this House and it is probably the worst one. I think it has actually sunk without trace. Those opposite talk about all these extra amounts of money they are putting into education and everything else, but what they do not tell you is that in 1996 they absolutely waged war on just about everything. They took billions of dollars out of the budget. I do not want to talk about that tonight. I want to simply talk about how the policies of this government are affecting real people out there in the community—people who are constituents of mine; no doubt constituents of the previous speaker, the member for Macquarie; and constituents of yours, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is affecting them in such a way that many of the things that they want to do they cannot, because this government is being very mean with the money.

I want to speak, first of all, about a constituent of mine. Mrs Joan Majewski, who resides at Wynnum West, recently approached me with what can only be described as another example of federal government cost cutting. Until recently, Mrs Majewski was in receipt of the widow allowance and the pensioner education supplement which she received as a financial supplement loan at the rate of $120 per fortnight. The education payment is made because Mrs Majewski has been studying part time for the last five years to become a minister of religion and has only three semesters to complete before she is able to practise as a minister. She studies at the Nazarene Theological College at Thornlands, in my electorate.

However, my constituent recently turned 61½ years of age and has been automatically transferred from the widow allowance to the age pension. Under the government’s current rules, recipients of age pensions do not qualify for the pensioner education supplement. My constituent has therefore been precluded from entitlement to the pensioner education benefit. Whilst the loss of $120 per fortnight may not mean much to a lot of people, Mrs Majewski has been dependent on this money to pay for college fees, books and other educational requirements. It will severely disadvantage her to the extent that she is now considering whether or not she can afford to continue with her study for the next three semesters.

If it were the case that Mrs Majewski was pursuing this study for no more than mere interest, I would be inclined to agree that this expense should not be picked up by the Australian taxpayer. But it is obvious that this woman has entered this study to become a minister and help benefit members of her religious community. This government policy is tantamount to discrimination on the basis of nothing more than age; in fact, I believe it is contrary to the spirit of the anti-discrimination legislation. Why must a woman of 61½ years of age forgo financial assistance for educational purposes as opposed to someone who is only 60 years of age? My constituent may have reached the age of retirement, but she still has a great deal to offer to people who require the sympathetic approach of her ministry and the life...
experience that she can offer. To make matters worse for Mrs Majewski, she was not told prior to the event that she would be transferred from the widow allowance to the age pension or that she would lose entitlement to the pensioner education supplement. There has been no time for her to prepare, but, given the mean spirited nature of this government, it comes as little surprise to her.

Last year was the International Year of Older Persons, and I remember well the many remarks made by those opposite about valuing the contribution of our older residents. But it is clear to me that the comments were nothing but rhetoric. It is this government that will bring in a GST on 1 July without providing adequate compensation for pensioners and self-funded retirees. It is this government that has botched the management of our aged care facilities which continue to go underfunded in Queensland. These are the real issues affecting older Australians. Within this context is it any wonder that Mrs Majewski has been denied her right to continue her education and to finalise her qualifications? I feel for her. Perhaps the government could look at individual cases like Mrs Majewski’s and see if they can do something to fix the matter.

The second person I want to talk about is Julie Deruiter, another victim of government policy. Julie Deruiter is a 45-year-old woman who lives at Wynnum. For the last seven years she has battled against the crippling effects of multiple sclerosis. Many members will be aware that this progressive disease is one which attacks the nervous system. I understand it results in plaques of demyelisation building up on the spinal cord and, in its most developed stages, renders a victim immobile and causes great pain. Fortunately for Ms Deruiter the MS has not progressed this far in her case. In fact, she has been coping quite well with the disease though she admits to feeling a little unsteady on her feet at times and cannot walk very far. Of great benefit to her recently has been a new treatment of vitamin injections, which have helped improve her mobility. The practice was that she would buy the vitamins herself and then visit her local GP who would administer the injections. This saved Ms Deruiter from having to inject these herself, something that causes her great distress— and I put it to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, it would give us all great distress to have to give ourselves injections, although I know a lot of people do, particularly diabetics.

Before she started vitamin injections, Ms Deruiter was taking Betainterferon, which I am informed is a new genetically engineered drug prescribed to many MS sufferers. It is also administered by injection but it can be administered by the patient—as diabetics do. The side effects of this drug, however, forced Ms Deruiter to abandon this treatment. She suffered from nausea and in the most extreme case it caused her to faint. As members might expect, she is not at all enthused by the prospect of beginning treatment on this drug again. I cannot offer a conclusive judgment on the medicinal value of the vitamin injections, but Ms Deruiter assures me that to date they have proved the most effective pharmaceutical treatment during her seven-year battle with MS. As she is the person who has had to deal with this disease on a daily basis, I believe she is well placed to make such a judgment.

Last week Ms Deruiter telephoned my office and spoke with members of my staff after her GP informed her that the federal government intended to end Medicare rebates for the administration of vitamin injections after 1 July 2000. That is, no Medicare item number will be provided to GPs for the performance of vitamin injections after 1 July. After this date Ms Deruiter will be charged $25 by her local GP for this service. She was understandably distressed to learn of this federal government decision because, compared with the alternative drug Betainterferon, she thought that these vitamin injections represented good value. Ms Deruiter’s Betainterferon treatment, which is subsidised for MS patients under the federal government’s Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, costs taxpayers approximately $1,200 per
month, or $14,400 per year. On the other hand, vitamin injections would cost just $1,430 per year.

No-one would argue that the drug should be taken off the PBS because, as I understand it, it is a very beneficial drug for many chronically ill people. But vitamin injections are equally important to my constituent, as indeed they are to many chronic fatigue victims. I am told, Ms Deruiter wants to persevere with the vitamin injections which, at a cost to government of $1,430 per year, offer a minimal expense, given their benefits. Having been forced into early retirement nearly one year ago as a result of her illness, the $1,430 needed to maintain this treatment is an expense that Ms Deruiter can ill afford. Hence my constituent is left in a very difficult position: she either accepts the expense of the vitamin injections or she administers them herself. Ms Deruiter cannot bring herself to administer the vitamin injections personally and, given her condition, I do not think this is unreasonable. I think you can appreciate that she had had enough unpleasantness to contend with as a victim of this disease. Furthermore, I am informed that an intramuscular injection is needed and that this is not all that easy to perform. The only other option would be to have her GP charge the costs under the guise of some other treatment description—that is, have him lie about the reason he is seeing her. Naturally her GP could not ethically entertain this option, although I am assured he would do all he could to ensure his patient’s health is not compromised.

Federal government attacks on the Medicare system are not new to members of my constituency. I have fought long and hard to have the Medicare office in Wynnum reopened, only to have my appeals fobbed off time and time again by the federal minister or his parliamentary secretary. As Ms Deruiter has remarked to me, it is easy to see why members of the public are increasingly cynical about the health care priorities of the federal government. While radiologists cash in on the irresponsible pre-budget remarks of the health minister—windfalls totalling millions and millions of dollars—people like Ms Deruiter go without. Ms Deruiter approached me only because these injections are absolutely vital to her quality of life. Without them, she and her doctor believe that she will begin to feel the progressive effects of MS—instability, numbness and eventually immobility. I am not suggesting that drugs like Betainterferon be taken off the PBS but rather that the federal government look more flexibly at individual cases like hers. If vitamin injections work for my constituent, then let her have the injections administered by her GP and at the same time save substantial amounts of taxpayers’ funds.

The third matter I want to refer to is the question of fuel prices, particularly for my constituents who reside on North Stradbroke Island, a wonderful part of my electorate—the sort of place, with its beautiful beaches, that it is great to be able to visit. The high price of unleaded fuel is what concerns my constituents there. Many members may be aware that in recent times Queensland fuel prices have been comparable with those of Sydney. This is despite the fact that the fuel excise is subsidised for Queensland motorists by approximately 8.3c per litre. This rebate is administered by the Queensland government in agreement with the federal government.

Mr Beattie recently decided that it was being rorted by the oil companies and that he might change it, but after listening to the people of Queensland he decided to change his mind. At least he is prepared to admit when he is wrong: I see that the Prime Minister is not prepared to back down on caravan park fees. If current Queensland fuel prices are any indication, it would seem the benefits of this rebate are not being passed on to consumers. I note that Queensland Premier Peter Beattie has been particularly vocal in his criticism of oil companies in relation to this issue. Most recently he has hinted at removing the rebate and refunding it to motorists via reduced vehicle registration costs, but of course he has now changed his mind, and I agree with him on his change of mind.
The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has announced it will begin a preliminary investigation into these abnormally high prices. I welcome this move. Comparatively speaking, North Stradbroke Islanders are among the hardest hit by Queensland’s high fuel prices. On Sunday 28 May, fuel prices in Brisbane fluctuated between 78.9c and 86.9c per litre. In Sydney the prices ranged between 84.9c and 91.9c per litre. On the same day, residents of North Stradbroke Island were paying as much as 93.1c per litre—nearly 2c dearer than the most expensive Sydney outlets.

Oil companies have cited a southern price war for the comparatively low fuel prices in Sydney, and maintain that they are passing on the benefits of the fuel excise rebate to Queensland consumers. There have also been wide reports of interstate fuel traders rorting the system and this is also thought to be playing some role in the increased fuel prices. I do acknowledge both of these factors, but I do not regard them as being solely responsible for the price increases, especially in the case of North Stradbroke Island. Consumers from the island have historically paid a much higher price for their fuel than consumers from other parts of my electorate. In some instances the cost of fuel on the island has been as much as 10c per litre more than in the bayside suburbs of Brisbane. Considering that transportation costs, based on 1997 figures, are estimated to add less than 1c per litre to the distributors’ overall costs, I think my constituents’ concerns in relation to this matter are well vindicated.

I must stress that I do not fall for one moment lay the blame at the feet of the local petrol retailers. I am conscious of the industry practices whereby oil companies dictate to retailers and distributors the price that they should charge. Normally this allows for only a very small profit margin for the retailer. I should inform the House that an independent fuel distributor services North Stradbroke Island and I am assured this operator is very robust in issuing pricing directives to the retailers. I welcome the ACCC’s preliminary investigation into this issue. I have written to ACCC Chairman, Professor Allan Fels, asking him to consider extending the scope of this investigation to allow for a specific examination of North Stradbroke’s fuel prices.

The current Queensland problem has also raised another important question: can the federal government be sure that the benefits of its national petrol rebate will be passed on to Australian consumers? The rebate is the mechanism that the federal government will rely on to prevent petrol prices rising under the GST. Like the Queensland rebate scheme, it will involve an excise reduction.

The ACCC has been charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the benefits do flow on and, given Queensland’s current problems, it appears a formidable task. With respect to this very point, the ACCC’s Deputy Chairman, Mr Allan Asher, offered some interesting advice in a Senate estimates hearing on 30 May. During the hearing, Mr Asher admitted that the ACCC would not be able to guarantee the full flow of the government’s rebate to consumers. Despite this admission, the Treasurer and many members of the current government continue to publicly state that petrol prices will not rise as a result of the GST. The Treasurer has repeatedly stated that he will ensure that the petrol rebate is passed on and, furthermore, that he is confident that the ACCC will do the same. But why should motorists believe the Treasurer’s promise that no petrol pump price will rise as a result of the GST when his own GST price watchdog cannot offer the same guarantee? Surely, as the body charged with this responsibility, the ACCC is in the best possible position to make this judgment.

If the Queensland experience has shown us anything, it is that all companies will use any leverage they can to argue the case for higher fuel prices. Moreover, they certainly appear reluctant to pass on the full benefits of government rebates. It is obvious to me that the ACCC has limited powers to ensure the benefit of government rebates. I believe the reality is that,
despite government statements to the contrary, there is no guarantee that fuel prices will not rise as a consequence of the GST. Hence, for my constituents on North Stradbroke Island, a long-term solution to the problem of high fuel prices does not appear in sight. I conclude by saying that, irrespective of the rhetoric we hear from those opposite, the reality is that this government likes to cut and does not take into account the effect that this has on the ordinary person on the street.

Mr BARRESI (Deakin) (9.06 p.m.)—When I was preparing for this speech I took the opportunity to reflect on all the previous budgets delivered by this government. It would be inappropriate to consider this budget in isolation and not to look at the achievements that this government has been able to bring about over the successive budgets it has delivered since 1996. I realised on reflection just how far we have come from the dark days of Labor. It is easy to forget that, under Labor, unemployment reached the highest level since the Great Depression—11.2 per cent. That is an undeniable fact. Inflation was averaging 5.2 per cent per annum and business interest rates climbed to over 20 per cent. That is undeniable, as much as the member for Throsby on the other side of the chamber may smirk. Even our standard of living compared with other OECD countries dropped during that time. When we were elected in 1996, we promised and delivered responsible economic management. It took us three budgets to get Australia back in the black. Five years on, we are soon to see the implementation of the new tax system which will help us to remain competitive in the 21st century.

When we look at budgets and economic performance we have to ask: what does a strong economy really mean? Is having a stronger economy an end in itself or is it a process that you have to move through in order to achieve other national reforms—be they social, health or education? What does it mean for ordinary Australians? What does it mean for the people in my electorate of Deakin? In the time I have available for this speech I would like to highlight some of the social initiatives that have been implemented by this government as a result of strong economic management, including some of the specific budgetary measures in that regard. I would also like to remind people that it is only through a strong economy that we have been able to provide funding for these initiatives which will help the more disadvantaged members of our community. After all, it is through such strong economic performance that we can provide better opportunities for all.

The coalition’s strong economic record has seen Australia go from strength to strength. Growth has increased dramatically and, as a result, unemployment has been reduced. We are now looking at 12 successive quarters when growth has been in excess of four per cent—once again, an undeniable fact. In the region that encompasses my electorate of Deakin unemployment has fallen from 6.5 per cent in March 1996 to the current 5.2 per cent, and even lower in some areas—around the very low four per cent mark. Youth unemployment has also fallen. The latter is a welcome aspect of our performance, as it means providing a real future for those kids. We are running surpluses and reducing our debt and, as I said, there is a stronger economy.

One of the untold economic stories through the last five budgets is the reduction of the debt where we have seen the $96 billion of debt that we inherited from the previous Labor government reduced to around $50 billion. Most people out there in the community will say, ‘Well, so what? Does this indicate that you are an economic rationalist, that your government is simply full of economic rationalists?’ The answer was pointed out to me the other day in terms which I think members of the community will be able to understand—when we reduced the national debt from $96 billion to $50 billion, we basically freed up more of the government’s revenue to be spent on social policies.
This point, which I believe is very salient, needs to be kept in mind by all of us. The first $9 billion of government revenue that is raised each year—from income tax, company tax and whatever other revenue the government receives—does not go to schools, does not go to the police, does not go to health, does not go to the defence department and does not go into funding programs which benefit the community. The first $9 billion of government revenue goes to pay off debt. As the member for Wannon reminds me, it goes to pay the interest on the debt, rather than going to pay for those much needed social programs which all of us, as members of parliament on behalf of our constituencies, would like to see in our communities. That is an extremely important point which anyone who tries to tarnish us as economic rationalists should keep in mind—that strong economic growth and strong economic performance will enable us to deliver on the social programs which all of us are after.

To go back to the theme of unemployment that I mentioned earlier, to keep unemployment levels low for a sustained period of time you do need to have high growth and you need to have high growth over a period of time. I am pleased to say that we have now experienced 12 successive quarters of growth in excess of four per cent, and next year it has been forecast to be around the 3.5 per cent mark. The younger generation needs to be given skills to be internationally competitive. They are seeing that, as the world is becoming more and more global and skills are becoming highly technical in nature and low to medium skilled positions are being restructured, if not made totally redundant, they also need to be competitive and need to have their skills up to date. Today’s world is more competitive than ever before and we recognise that to be successful in the long term we need to be able to provide education and training dollars to help these kids be competitive.

I am pleased to see that there has been a substantial amount of money put into this budget for programs dealing with training and for educational programs. It is a commitment which I know this government has through its various ministers responsible for aspects of the education, training, small business and workplace relations portfolios. Funding in training and education has been increased dramatically—$494 million was allocated this year to meet the demand for new apprenticeships and vocational education in our schools has been expanded with a $187 million package over four years. I know that secondary schools in Deakin will be benefiting in a very real sense from the money that has been put aside for programs in new apprenticeships and vocational training.

A number of programs have also been developed for more disadvantaged youth to get more out of the opportunities available, both in education and employment. This year $25 million was allocated to provide pre-apprenticeship and traineeship assistance for those young people who need preliminary training before they can successfully participate in apprenticeships or traineeships. Over $45 million has been allocated since 1997-98. I would like to talk about one specific program in my electorate. Hopefully, if I keep advocating for it, the program will be a recipient of this $25 million.

As the member for Deakin, I pride myself on the relationship I have developed with my electorate and I know this has been well accepted by my electorate. I work in partnership with the various local community organisations. I do not say that the programs that Deakin benefits from have been due to my efforts alone, or to anyone else’s effort. They have been a combination of efforts. They have been as a result of a partnership between organisations, government agencies and my office, as well as various ministers and community advocates. I am happy to say that this partnership has seen me participate in a real sense on the advisory boards or the committees of management of two particular programs. These programs deal with our youth. One is Reach Out for Kids—or ROK, as it is better known—and the other is a Jobs Pathway Program which is auspiced by the Maroondah, Box Hill and Knox career teachers, and KYM, the network provider.
In addition, I have been urging the federal government to get behind a community based program called Checkpoint as well as those other two programs. I know the minister for vocational education, Dr David Kemp, is seriously looking at this program at the moment. Over the last four years, there have been a number of initiatives to reduce youth unemployment. Youth often overlooked in our society are those that are tagged as being too hard to help or those that are at risk. This particular program, Checkpoint, the brainchild of the Maroondah City Church, an Assembly of God organisation, in conjunction with me, will provide new hope for these kids.

It is not a diversionary program but, hopefully, down the track we may be able to get it to be a diversionary program. It aims to help those kids who are at risk—at risk of offending, those who have offended or those who are deemed to be too hard to help—to go through a pre-apprenticeship program. Over an eight-week period, they will undergo various skills training and pastoral care which they often need because they do not have the necessary support structure. We have heard a lot today about the need for support structures for young kids. These kids will go through a self-esteem and self-worth experience. They will learn more about themselves and about their ability to handle life and the challenges that it throws up. As a former psychologist—being a member of parliament, I no longer have the opportunity to practise psychology—I understand the whole issue of self-esteem and self-worth. I understand how people can be deprived of a sense of hope. They see others grasp at opportunities and yet they are unable to grasp these themselves.

I look to Checkpoint to give kids who are at risk of slipping through the cracks and entering the justice system real life and communication skills. The money that is being put aside for pre-apprenticeship programs through this budget will help these young kids. A program will be put together through partnerships with bodies such as the police, the defence department, the Job Network provider, the church, the various service clubs and business groups, and the Swinburne College of TAFE. It will help these kids to get on their feet and participate in a meaningful way in our society.

The other program which I touched on was the Jobs Pathway Program. I am a staunch advocate of this program and I am pleased to see that Minister David Kemp has managed to ensure that there is continuing funding and more money available for the Jobs Pathway Program in this year’s budget. The JPP in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, I say with pride, is one of the most successful and one of the largest in the country. They were part of the initial pilot. They were then re-funded last year and they placed around 2,000 young kids in either training or employment situations, and this year they have once again been funded with exceptional support from the community.

It started off as just one careers group, the Maroondah Career Teachers, getting behind it with about a dozen schools. Now over 60 schools participate, with three careers groups. I am very proud to have been on their advisory board and to have provided whatever little assistance I could from time to time, although the nature of this job means that I miss more meetings than I participate in. It is a program that I know the schools have embraced because they have accepted, as we have, that over 70 per cent of all school leavers do not go on to university or further training. Yet we have, over time, abandoned these young kids rather than giving them real opportunities.

Our commitment to education and training, of course, is beyond that. Our commitment as members of parliament should also be to education and training starting in schools. Since 1998, schools in my electorate of Deakin have received over $3.3 million from the federal government. But despite all the good work by this government in improving the education of our kids, the students in Deakin are sometimes let down by my state Labor counterparts. I do not say this in a glib way but I will just cite two examples.
Labor criticises us in government federally. If the criticism is warranted then we should wear it. We may not like it but we should wear it. Similarly, if criticism is warranted at the state level then they should also wear it, even though they may not like it. It is easy to simply make promises. Words can be cheap in politics, particularly when they come at election time. I will cite two examples of where the ALP’s words in the last state election have proven to be cheap.

At the Laburnum primary school, families have discovered this the hard way. During the state election campaign last year the then Minister for Education and the Liberal candidate for Mitcham, announced a $600,000 capital upgrade for the school. The ALP, through the member for Mitcham, also assured the principal that the grant would be issued regardless of whichever side of politics was returned to government after the election. Since then the state Labor government has failed to deliver. The teachers and the school council are wondering where the money is. When questioned, the member for Mitcham claimed that it had just been an election tactic by the Liberal candidate and he denied his commitment and responsibility, yet we have his written word in a letter to the school declaring that Labor would match the funding if they won office.

State Labor’s hollow promises have also rung true at the Blackburn Lake primary school. Sadly, the school was destroyed by fire in September 1999, just prior to the state election. The then Liberal government promised to rebuild it by the beginning of the current school year. It is now June and the school has not been rebuilt at all and the kids are working out of portables. The best that Labor has been able to offer is to have it ready by 2001, 12 months late.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are accountable for our words and I know that this government, rather than making meaningless promises and assurances, has decided to get on with the job. It has decided that it needs to do the things that need to be done. For those people who have been unable to find work in our community we have been able to offer relevant training and experience through a number of programs. The Work for the Dole program, which I know members on the other side would jump up and deride, has been a success. With their strong support it could be an even greater success. The people out there have embraced it.

Whatever you may feel about the name itself is immaterial. The fact is it has proven to be successful. It has high levels of success in terms of people participating in the program going into work. It has a high level of credibility with those in the community. I am pleased to see that in the last round of offers a number of organisations will be offering Work for the Dole in my electorate. They include the Australian Education Industry Centre, Mission Australia, Echo Australia, Skillsplus Peninsula, the Russian Ethnic Representative Council of Victoria, and the Greek Welfare Centre. They are providing programs which go beyond the stereotype view that we have for Work for the Dole.

They are providing kids opportunities to work in child-care centres. They are providing kids opportunities in schools. They are going to be providing kids opportunities to work on rebuilding and recycling computer systems. These are meaningful skills that the participants will be involved in and I am pleased to see that my electorate, for one, has put its hand up and will be participating in a real way. Not for political reasons, but because it is the right thing to do for those who are looking for job opportunities and perhaps cannot get them through other ways. I look forward to reporting on there successes in subsequent speeches.

As always in these appropriation speeches one could go on and speak about a whole lot of other issues, but time will not permit. Needless to say, I will come back at another stage and keep advocating for the things that matter in Deakin. One of the things that matter to the people of Deakin is continuing spending on road infrastructure projects. I know that members
on my side probably get tired of certain members of the eastern suburbs who harp on about the Scoresby Transport Corridor. But I tell you the Scoresby Transport Corridor is much needed in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. I look forward to the state government proposing that the Scoresby Transport Corridor be made a road of national importance. Let us get on with it and advocate a meaningful project like this for our electorate.

Mr HOLLIS (Throsby) (9.26 p.m.)—One aspect of this budget funds the government’s guilt plagued conscience for consistently refusing to do anything to protect the entitlements of workers from corporate insolvency. The Employee Entitlement Support Scheme is provided with $55 million in an attempt to be seen to be doing something. The government announced the establishment of this program in early February and has yet to gain the agreement of most state and territory governments. They have been asked to match funding for the scheme.

The EESS is flawed by imposing a cap on the entitlements of workers. Workers will receive only $20,000 in entitlement payments under this scheme. In protecting workers’ entitlements there is one principle that must be applied: workers must have their entitlements protected in full—every single cent, no cap. It is their money we are talking about in the end. Why is it that the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business cannot bring himself to accept that employers have a legal obligation to ensure the ongoing funding of their workers’ full entitlements?

The Howard government instead clings to this notion that there is no international precedent showing that national insurance schemes for entitlements work. The argument is a cop-out. If Australia had to rely on this defence for doing nothing about serious problems, we would never have introduced a national social security system which, despite government attacks to undermine it, is the envy of the world. If Australia used this argument, we would never have introduced Medicare in 1984, an innovation of the Hawke Labor government. Such a health coverage scheme ensuring the health care of every Australian man, woman and child, was a first in the world. There was never an international precedent for such comprehensive health service protection. Australia did it, nevertheless, and the world still looks at the Medicare system with wonder. Indeed, other countries have sent streams of public officials to Australia to examine the Medicare system.

If we can devise, implement and administer such a neat Australian public policy cementing the overall protection of an entire population in social security and health, why is ensuring the protection of workers’ entitlements such an insurmountable challenge? The answer is simple and brutal. The Howard government does not care about workers or their entitlements. It would rather cop the critical headlines, the abusive editorials, than be seen to be doing anything that actually advantages workers or their families. As usual, the Labor opposition have a starkly different approach. We can protect workers’ entitlements. We can do it in full and when our program is implemented Australia will create the international precedent.

I have raised before in this place a situation of 120 meatworkers from Parrish Meat Supplies Pty Ltd at Yallah in my electorate. They were paid only 30 cents in every dollar of their entitlement. They are still owed over $600,000. I have placed a series of questions on the Notice Paper to the Treasurer, the minister for workplace relations and the Minister for Financial Services and Regulations. Responses to these questions are beginning to trickle in. The Treasurer relies on privacy provisions to dodge the question about the ATO involvement in this debacle. The minister for workplace relations pleads sympathy but passes the buck to the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs. At least the response from the Minister for Financial Services and Regulation offers a glimmer of hope that ASIC will investigate a series of alleged offences against the directors of Parrish Meat Supplies.

The opposition has clearly laid out its policy priorities for industrial relations policy. We intend to restore the balance to industrial relations in Australia. We intend to restore fairness
and job security. We intend to end confrontation for the sake of ideology. We intend to restore
the powers of the independent umpire, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. We
intend to ensure that bargaining between industrial parties is undertaken in good faith. We
intend to restore primacy to collective bargaining. Most importantly, we will abolish Peter
Reith’s Australian workplace agreements. These secretive documents, entered into with
coercion and which reduce wages and conditions of employment, will go. We will also
abolish the Office of the Employment Advocate.

Recently in this place I have raised the subject of an increasingly intractable dispute
involving workers at Joy Mining in the Illawarra. These workers are still locked out of their
workplace because they will not enter into an employer agenda for four separate bargaining
arrangements that cover just one site. Labor’s industrial relations policy will ensure that this
dispute is put before the independent umpire for settlement. We will ensure that it ends. We
will ensure that there is a balance and that negotiations take place between management, the
workers and their respective unions. The Joy Mining dispute can be resolved only if there is
some commonsense on the side of management. Instead of engaging as a cheer squad for
confrontational workplace relations, management should sit down and talk out this dispute.
This dispute already has the potential to generate a long legacy of bitterness.

I also wish to raise the issue of the crisis at HMAS Albatross and HMAS Creswell in the
electorate of my colleague the honourable member for Gilmore. Workers are in dispute
because of the awarding of a contract to a British company, Serco, for cleaning and hospitality
services at this Defence establishment. This dispute clearly shows the impact of AWAs.
Workers have effectively been sacked because they refused to sign AWAs. Workers were
provided with a choice by a new contractor—sign or lose your job. Even the member for
Gilmore, despite her chorus during the last sitting week in this place, actually heard those
words at a meeting called to brief the workers on their new employment choices. I am told she
was left dumbfounded after giving the workers a personal assurance in a prior meeting that
this dispute was the total responsibility of Illawarra unions. The AWAs on offer reduced
workers’ hours and pay. One worker’s story was published in the Illawarra Mercury. His
hours of work have been reduced from a full-time worker to an $11.95 an hour casual since
Serco won the contract. This is the bottom line with the Howard government AWAs—secret
documents which reduce pay and conditions between the boss and worker—and the member
for Gilmore actually continues to defend the government position.

Although there is much in this budget that I have been critical of, there are some aspects
which I welcome. The child support system reforms announced in the budget will make it
fairer and simpler. I am particularly pleased that the financial circumstances of second and
subsequent families are finally recognised. I am supportive of the changes announced by the
assessment procedure for overtime and second income jobs. There has also been a change
announced to the income cap, which I believe, despite receiving some criticism, will stop any
attempt by high income non-custodial parents to visit their accountants to deliberately
minimise child support obligations. The budget measure in this area provides recognition of
the cost associated with maintaining contact of children with non-custodial parents. There is
overwhelming international evidence that a child is always much better off if they have
regular contact with both parents in separation and divorce circumstances. I still believe that
there is a long way to go in reforming the child support scheme to make it fairer, simpler and
more transparent. But this measure, at least, begins that process.

The budget also provides overdue recognition of our Vietnam veterans. Measures
announced include the $32 million package of assistance to veterans and their families. This
assistance will mainly focus on illnesses that Vietnam veterans are particularly susceptible to.
Alan Ramsey, political commentator for the Sydney Morning Herald, has published a series of
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articles on Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War in his regular Saturday column. I cannot help but agree with his views. History has proven that our involvement in Vietnam was wrong and a series of great mistakes which were based only on the assumption that this was a communist takeover rather than a civil conflict that could be resolved only by the Vietnamese people. Nevertheless, Australia sent young men to that troubled country to fight on orders by politicians made in this parliament. As the war became more unpopular and images flashed before us as it had in no other armed conflict we have known, our soldiers were treated disgracefully upon their return from active service.

For too long we conveniently forgot about them, their problems, their illnesses and their families. They are forgotten no longer. I similarly welcome the grant of entitlement to full repatriation benefits to nearly 3,000 veterans for their service during the Malayan Emergency and other South-East Asian conflicts in the long decades between 1955 and 1975. I do have concerns about the transfer of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs to Home and Community Care for veterans because there was a funding cut evident in that transfer of services.

This has been the Howard government’s fifth budget, another in the long line that delivers very little for the people in my region of the Illawarra. This is the first budget of a new decade but one that wastes opportunities. It is a budget with the GST at its heart, but the budget papers make no mention of this huge imposing tax. The budget, more than its predecessors, will raise prices, taxes and interest rates. Financial commentators are already saying that their money is on yet another rise in rates by the Reserve Bank. If it happens, and I suspect it will, interest rates will have risen for the fifth time since November of last year. The government’s huge tax bribe of personal income tax that too many people fell for in the 1998 election is an illusion. Already the rises in interest rates and the rises in prices at the shopping centre have eaten into this proposed tax cut. It was a great fraud on the Australian people.

Ms GERICK (Canning) (9.36 p.m.)—I rise tonight to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2000-2001 and I want to draw to the attention of this place the effect that this bill is going to have on the people living in my electorate of Canning and in the regional areas in particular. This government has consistently assured the people of rural Australia that it will take action on the serious infrastructure and service needs that hinder the country now and threaten their future and the future of their communities.

Many of these Australians knew that the government had been considering three widely publicised reports which had all concluded that rural infrastructures, especially transport and communication infrastructures, urgently needed upgrading. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services report titled *Time running out: shaping regional Australia’s future* made 92 recommendations mostly relating to the need to improve rural transport and communications infrastructure.

The Institute of Engineers report titled *Infrastructure scorecard* stated that the government needed to vastly increase spending on rural roads, bridges and rail networks. The government’s own regional Australia summit highlighted the link between upgrading infrastructure and regional development. People in rural Australia were also well aware of the visits to their areas made by members of the government and the promises that had been made during those visits. It is to be expected then that many Australians living in rural areas were waiting for this budget with some sense of expectation, perhaps even some hope. They must have been very disappointed. After all the reports and visits by members of government this budget does not make any serious attempt to address the infrastructure needs of regional Australia. The government has made it clear that there will be no more funds for rural development until July of next year at the earliest.
The government has failed to provide adequate funding for essential upgrading of rural infrastructure in the budget. The government has not listened to the vitally important messages of those three reports and has not listened to the very people that are most affected by these issues: the people who live and work in country Australia. If the government were prepared to listen to farmers and other business people in country Australia, it would hear them say that the very viability of their farm businesses and the economic future of their communities depend on the quality of their road, rail and port links to markets and the quality of their communication links to their customers.

But this government does not listen to country Australia. This government does go out there to visit occasionally. It talks, it tells country people what it is going to do for them and, of course, it makes promises, the kinds of promises for which this government is becoming famous—empty ones. I know how cynical country people are becoming about promises made by this government: they tell me about it. Country Australia does not need promises; it needs decent bridges, roads and communication services. In fact, funding for spending on roads either directly by the Commonwealth or through the states has been cut.

In my area of Pinjarra, 12 months ago last week a truck drove through the railings on a bridge and we are still waiting today for those railings to be rebuilt. When I visited on Friday, the plastic barricades up there were not even filled with water any more, so there is no real security either for pedestrians using the bridge or in respect of another accident. These are issues where country people know they are being ignored and you cannot con them with empty promises.

The Agriculture Advancing Australia package has been cut by over $200 million. This package is intended to increase the profitability, competitiveness and sustainability of the farm sector and to encourage communities and farmers to be more innovative and financially self-reliant. The package, if properly and effectively delivered, assists farmers to respond rapidly and flexibly to the vagaries of marketplace economic conditions and climates. Regional Australia needs programs like this and the need for them grows stronger all the time. The competitive environment in which our farmers have to operate just gets tougher all the time.

When it comes to communications, the government has let this sector down again. Rural and regional Australia have poorer communication services and higher communication costs than urban Australia. Internet charges are a good example of this. Only 15 per cent of non-metropolitan Australians have Internet access compared with 26 per cent in metropolitan areas. If our rural and regional businesses are to have a hope of being competitive in this millennium, they must be able to access the Internet as easily and cheaply as city businesses.

This government is not interested in giving rural businesses a fair go. This government has shown no concern about the communication needs of regional Australia. In this budget the government has done little or nothing to meet the infrastructure needs of country Australia. What has it done? It has added enormously to the costs faced by the rural sector by loading them with a largely unfair share of its tax burden through the imposition of the GST. Like my colleagues, I was shocked to hear that the government had done no analysis of the impact of the GST in rural and regional areas and that it has no intention of doing so.

Here are a few things they would find out if they did do such an analysis. Here are some things that country Australians, and those of us who listen to them, are already aware of. Australians living in rural and regional areas already pay much more for their goods and services than Australians living in city areas. The flat 10 per cent increase in prices will, therefore, automatically result in greater increases in the costs of those goods and services in
rural and regional Australia than in the cities. Country Australians will pay more tax on any item or service than urban Australians. Why should the residents of Pinjarra be forced to pay more tax on their essential food items than the residents of Perth or Sydney? It is not fair.

Country Australians will not get greater tax cuts to compensate for the extra tax they will have to pay, so they will inevitably have to reduce their consumption of goods and services. This, of course, will result in a further slowing of regional economies that will compound the difficulties that these communities are already experiencing. That is not fair. Farmers and contractors who lease equipment they need to do their work will face immediate significant increases in the cost of these leases from 1 July because of the GST. Where will they find the extra money to pay the new tax? Many will be forced to borrow more, and to pay out even more of their incomes in interest, so their businesses will become less profitable while the banks get more so. That is not fair either. Farm equipment is very expensive and the extra costs of the lease agreements will severely impact on the cash flows of the farmers and contractors. It will also probably make them decide not to upgrade their equipment as regularly. All of this is going to have an impact on the profitability of their business. That is not fair.

A National Party member was quoted recently as saying that the GST was like an unwelcome guest that you lock in the back bedroom but eventually the guest gets out. The GST is going to do that and the government is not going to be able to hide for much longer. We all know that country people suffer. For each service that is used slightly less, there is more and more chance that the services offered in that community are going to be reduced.

It is not a fair tax. We must acknowledge that the effects of this budget are going to be felt in the context of an economic environment which is already having a severe effect on rural businesses. We all know that interest rates are going up. This can have a huge impact on businesses that have borrowed. John Anderson was quick to claim in 1996 that a fall in interest rates meant that $90 million in farm interest bills had been cut. But interest rates are on the way up again, so those farms are going to have to absorb those costs.

Country businesses, like other small businesses, face significant compliance costs associated with the introduction of the GST. Let us not forget that the impacts of this budget on rural and regional Australia come on top of years of neglect and underfunding by this government. Despite a number of promises that things will get better, the government is failing to initiate the badly needed improvements in health services to regional Australia: it is failing to increase the number of doctors working in regional centres; it is failing to establish the new rural health centres which it promised; it is also failing to do anything to help women in rural and regional Australia.

This budget does almost nothing to help the people who live and work in rural and regional Australia. If the government wants to convince country Australians that it has any interest whatsoever in their wellbeing, or in the contribution they can make to the future of this country, it must start providing the services and infrastructure that the country people of Australia so desperately need.

Mr Byrne (Holt) (9.46 p.m.)—I find it an interesting evening to be discussing Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2000-2001. Whilst I will be addressing some concerns in the bill, I want to turn my attention this evening to a matter that was discussed in the House during the condolence motion today and to its ramifications for the Australian community. I did have a speech prepared on this matter that would probably be more reflective of the flavour of these sorts of debates but, frankly, I felt that today was not the day to make a contribution of that nature, particularly given the bipartisan nature of the debate that occurred on the condolence motion.
I would like to start my contribution with respect to this particular matter by mentioning Greg’s family—Maria and their two children. On behalf of my constituents in Holt and the ALP branch members in Holt, many of whom knew Greg and his family, I would like to pass on my deepest condolences to Maria, the children, his mother and his sister. One thing I certainly took note of from the condolence debate is the issue of depression—an area that I worked in for a number of years prior to my coming into parliament. Another issue that was raised was the bipartisan nature of parliament and how it is portrayed in the media.

On the night I was notified that Greg had passed away, I addressed a series of three Rotary groups, and for about 25 minutes we discussed the tragic situation and their perception of political debate in this country. They were concerned also about the image of politicians and believed that there should be more bipartisanship. I said to them that I thought there was a fair amount of that—obviously not as much as there may have been in previous times. It is an issue that lurks beneath the surface, but I would like to assure particularly the members of the Rotary club whom I addressed on 14 June that today was an example of the bipartisanship that exists within the process. I am certainly hopeful that today makes this place a better place to work, for both sides, and that we put aside, particularly on matters of national significance, political advantage and that we concentrate on what people have put us in this place for—to serve the national interest. I am sure most of us do that.

I would like to talk about depression. Depression is one of the greatest silent killers in our community. As I turned my previous speech, I was looking for figures on the costs to the community of depression and associated disorders like anxiety. The cost quite stunned me. In the *Journal of Clinical Psychology* in 1999 it was estimated that the cost in American dollars of anxiety and depressive disorders was $42.3 billion—that is $1,542 per person. In proportional terms, for Australia that is roughly $9.4 billion. That is a significant economic cost to the community—not just the human tragedy and other costs—of $9.4 billion.

I have just received a later figure. In 1998, it was $US63.1 billion. So we are talking in Australian per capita terms of over $10 billion of economic cost that is caused to the community as a consequence of anxiety disorders and depressive disorders which are in most cases comorbid. That is a significant cost to the community. I think that not enough debate, particularly with respect to the people who formulate health policy in this country, and in more general terms in this place, has been focused on just how much of an economic burden is borne by the community as a consequence of this particular disorder.

If anything comes out of what occurred today, and there should be constructive action taken with respect to that, it is that we should be focusing on this. We should be focusing on the detection of depression, the early intervention and the ongoing monitoring of depression, because these are serious disorders within our community. It is a disorder that is like a mental cancer that eats away at our community. And it continues virtually unabated, notwithstanding the very large amount that is prescribed with respect to tranquillisers and antidepressants. It is becoming an area of critical concern. It is an area that governments have to take a very serious look at, re-evaluate, and take some steps on.

I am hoping that something that comes out of this particular condolee motion is a bipartisan commitment, the same sort of bipartisan commitment that was demonstrated in the condolence motion, to actually make a difference, to actually initiate more meaningful, more well-structured, more well-resourced programs within the community to actually attack this particular area.

It is interesting that 20 per cent of the adult population experience a mental health disorder in any given year. That is one fifth of our population. Given its prevalence within our community it is amazing that there is still such community ignorance and stigma about this particular issue. Of those 20 per cent, a number of them are substance abuse disorders, anxiety
disorders, schizophrenia and bipolar disorders. The major mental disorder within that 20 per cent group is depression. So we have a massive problem that exists like an iceberg lying just beneath the surface. As I said, depression is the largest area of mental health concern in this country at this time. And the depression manifests itself in substance abuse. It also manifests itself, for example, when receiving treatments for cancers, et cetera, and for schizophrenia sufferers it can actually prevent those people from actually receiving their treatment.

But it is becoming a growing area, as I said before. The World Health Organisation estimates that in the year 2020 it will be the largest cause of disability on the disability adjusted life scale in terms of quality of life, working days lost and morbidity in the health area, which is just an amazing concern. It is something that governments of both persuasions need to address as a matter of priority. I know that this government, particularly in this budget, has initiated a five-year, $17.5 million depression initiative, and I certainly welcome that. There is also a $39.2 million National Suicide Prevention Strategy for the years 1999 and 2003. That is also a good thing. There has been a National Mental Health Strategy between the years of 1993 and 1998 where we spent $169 million, and there is going to be a continuation of that National Mental Health Strategy between 1998 and 2003.

But the fact is that, given some of the economic figures that I have mentioned, and notwithstanding the tragic loss of life that should not occur within this community, we should be spending more on resources. We should be targeting community awareness treatment programs, intervention programs and awareness campaigns. It is something we should be focusing on as a major priority in any government, and it is something that lies beneath the surface and something we need to address.

The fact is that this area has been brought to people’s attention before. The Burdekin report, which was released in 1993 when Burdekin was Commissioner of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, did trigger some sort of movement towards awareness of the stigma of mental health and psychiatric disorders. It is a starting point that occurred seven years ago, but we have not completed that or even really seriously addressed this issue.

I am certainly hoping that something good can come from the tragedy that has occurred, that we can at least start some serious dialogue between the government and the opposition towards actually initiating a more concrete program—a better resourced program that targets people in need and that breaks down the stigma that exists. Having worked in the area of mental health for two years, as I did, particularly in the area of anxiety and associated depressive disorders, the stigma associated with it is just incredible. That stigma prevents people from talking about their problems. It prevents people from discussing how they feel, and that is a very important starting point. One of the critical things about depression in particular is that it is very difficult at the tertiary stage of depression, when that person is screwed down into that black hole, to pull out of the very severe downward spiral, regardless of the kindness of the people involved or even, to some extent, the medical interventions. In many cases, unless the person receives medication and prolonged psychiatric treatment, they have a very small chance of being rehabilitated and will commit suicide.

We have seen a series of tragic instances of that, more recently reflected in the loss of our colleague. I urge governments to address this as a serious issue of concern and not to pay lip-service to it. We are going to be judged in the next couple of years as to how serious we are about this commitment. As I said, in the spirit of bipartisanship I would urge the government to take my comments on board and hopefully something good can come out of this terrible tragedy.

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (9.56 p.m.)—I would like to endorse the comments of the previous speaker, Mr Byrne. He obviously has a deal of expertise in the field. I am also reminded of his predecessor, who once said in this parliament that politics is a series of
exhilarating highs and debilitating lows. I think the events leading up to the condolence motion today were probably about as low as it can possibly get. My heartfelt sympathy goes out to Greg Wilton’s family—his wife, his sister and his two kids—to his staff and to all those close to him. I also have to say that I was extremely proud to be in the federal parliament today to listen to the superb speeches of heartfelt sympathy from people on all sides of politics. If future parliaments can have people expressing their views with such compassion then they will be in good hands.

I would now like to make some comments about the previous budget. The government claims that it is splurging $1.8 billion on a package for regional and rural Australia. The interesting thing about that is that there are actually no new funds for any infrastructure for regional Australia or for anywhere else. Indeed, $500 million of the $1.8 billion that the government is bragging about is not new investment. It is money to pay for the government’s rubbery promise that the GST will not push up country petrol prices compared with city prices. So it is not $1.8 billion of new funds when you take away the $500 million for the rubbery promise.

Of course, no money for infrastructure means that there is no money for the Calder Highway duplication. I noticed in the campaign in which I was subsequently elected that my opponent made a big thing of Labor’s attitude to Calder Highway funding, yet here we are, some two years into this parliament, with two budgets and no money for the Calder Highway. The Calder Highway is the main lifeblood from Bendigo to its capital city. We have not seen any funds earmarked for it in this budget, yet the government can squander almost $500 million on this series of very biased political advertising. Again, there is no money for the Calder Highway.

One good point about the budget that I have to agree with is that that $1.8 billion—less $500 million of course—includes a program of improvements to the health system. I certainly welcome that. I also welcome the setting up of a program in Bendigo to train GPs for regional and country Australia. I still remember that when this government came into office it pulled some $800 million out of the health system; we are yet to recover from that. However, I welcome the health initiatives.

I guess we have to ask ourselves: why is there no infrastructure? The answer to that is quite simple. It is called blackmail. The Prime Minister said that we can get funds for regional infrastructure only if we agree to sell Telstra. But we on this side of politics believe that we need to keep Telstra connected to regional Australia’s future. The only way we are going to be able to do that is to have a Labor government. Regional Australia will not cop the fact that Telstra needs to be fully privatised.

In Bendigo, for instance, we felt the effect of that more than anywhere else because in excess of 200 jobs were lost as the government prepared for the partial privatisation of Telstra. That is 200 sets of wages which are not going into Bendigo’s economy. We were to get $2 million—and in fact we will get $2 million—for redevelopment of our art gallery. The Minister for the Centenary of Federation assures me of that. He believes that the deed of agreement has been signed. We are yet to see that money in Bendigo and indeed that agreement, but I have to remind this chamber that that $2 million comes on the backs of in excess of 200 workers who have fully paid for that with their jobs. It is absurd that Telstra is now promising to put jobs back into regional Australia when it has taken out so many. I think it was some 26,000 overall.

I would like to address the GST issue. The GST and country petrol prices is obviously a major issue for anybody in regional Australia. The government promised that the GST would not increase petrol prices in the country any more than in the city. Now we find that it is having to expend $500 million of taxpayers’ money over four years to honour this
commitment. The other major area of impact on my particular area of Bendigo is the GST and the City Link tolls. You will be aware that we have a series of tollways into Melbourne now—thanks to the previous Kennett government—and it is going to cost the average central Victorian motorist heaps to drive into their capital city. It means 10 per cent more on those tolls now, and that will increase the e-tag cost from $50 to $55. I have to remind this chamber that it is only the people from central Victoria who will have to pay this: if you live in Shepparton and you drive into your capital city you do not pay a toll; if you live in Geelong and you drive to the capital city you do not pay a toll; if you live in Ballarat and you drive to your capital city you do not pay a toll. But if you live in Bendigo and you use the Calder Highway you pay a toll and you get slugged with the GST—and that is unacceptable.

The GST excise on small country hotels will have a devastating effect on a range of small hotels throughout regional Victoria. Coming from the hospitality industry myself—as a trade union official like my colleague the former Deputy Speaker—I can see the impact that that is going to have. We are going to see a situation where a lot of those small hotels will be forced to close. Indeed, in my electorate we have the only hotel run on a part-time basis. The chap who owns the hotel has a day job in Bendigo and he drives back to the country and opens of a night. I suspect that will be the first one to close. You have heard the song *The Pub with No Beer*, that famous old tune by Slim Dusty. We could have a new song—perhaps we could get Joe Cocker to do it for us—called *The Town with No Pub*. I do not think we would need to spend $500 million on that.

We have also felt the effect of the state government’s cuts in country hospitals, country railway stations and schools. John Howard seems to be keeping up the work of Mr Kennett in making sure that people in country Victoria are seriously disadvantaged. Another area where we are going to be seriously affected is in our university. Our university is experiencing major problems at the moment. The GST is going to have a bigger impact on that. Bendigo is a university city. The university is vital to the region’s economy and education. The GST makes education dear for all of us. The GST especially punishes tertiary students. The federal education department has confirmed that there will be an increase of 5.4 per cent in HECS repayments in the year 2000-01. This is thanks to inflation, and especially the explosion in inflation that will be caused by the introduction of the GST on 1 July.

Nearly one million Australian students past and present have HECS debts and they will be worse off because of this. The government will rake off an extra $323 million next financial year because of this. The National Union of Students has estimated that the GST will increase the HECS debt in 2001 of, for example, an arts students by some $433, an architectural student by $616 and a law student by a massive $720. University graduates who find employment after graduating will be paying not only the HECS repayment but also the extra burden of the GST on top of it. This GST burden will eat up much of the tax cuts that the government boasts will offset the effect of the GST. The government claims that education is GST free, but this is simply not true. There was no mention of the GST burden on students during the 1998 election campaign and obviously this GST discriminates because of that. It is not paid on up-front union fees but it penalises students who are not well off enough to pay up front and must defer fee repayments under HECS. Students paying up front are eligible for a 25 per cent discount.

La Trobe University is experiencing extreme difficulties at the moment. It is a major employer in Bendigo. The figures show that, compared with its counterpart university in Ballarat, it is substantially disadvantaged. One of the reasons for that, of course, is the amalgamation of the old Bendigo College of Advanced Education with La Trobe University. I think it is fair to say that with that amalgamation, as the Commonwealth government pulled out hundreds of millions of dollars out of the education system, La Trobe University, Melbourne, has used La Trobe University, Bendigo, as a sort of a cash cow to offset cuts in its
own area. You cannot blame it for that, but it has had a devastating effect on La Trobe University and we have seen a major decline. As I said, it is one of the biggest employers in Bendigo—it employs some 2,000 people—and it has student enrolments of the order of 4,000, but it is on its knees and we need to work very hard to address that. I will finish on that basis.

Debate (on motion by Mr Adams) adjourned.

Main Committee adjourned at 10.06 p.m.
QUESTIONs ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

Cameron Offices, Belconnen: Sale and Redevelopment
(Question No. 1197)

Mr Andren asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, upon notice, on 17 February 2000:

(1) Has his attention been drawn to the terms of the Department of Finance’s December 1999 decision to sell the heritage listed Cameron Offices in Belconnen, ACT, designed by internationally recognised Australian architect John Andrews.

(2) Will the sale and redevelopment of the Cameron Offices site involve the demolition of more than two thirds of the heritage listed offices.

(3) Does section 30 of the Australian Heritage Commission Act require Ministers to ensure Government decisions do not adversely affect places on the Register of the National Estate unless there are no feasible and prudent alternatives to those decisions.

(4) Does the Commonwealth Consultation paper the Minister released in April 1999 titled A National Strategy for Australia’s Heritage Places state that all levels of Government and government agencies must demonstrate leadership in protecting, conserving, promoting and managing heritage values and that the determination of significance should be based solely on heritage values and be separated from management decisions.

(5) Has the Australian Heritage Commission’s preferred outcome for the Cameron Offices always been the retention of the entire complex.

(6) Has his attention been drawn to the Minister for Finance and Administration’s repeated statements that redevelopment of the Cameron Offices site is aimed largely at assisting the ACT’s building and commercial markets.

(7) Is he aware of a consultants’ report prepared for the Department of Finance and Administration which found that the Cameron Offices could be brought up to the required standard without impacting greatly on the heritage significance of the complex and still provide significant work for the ACT building industry; if not, why not.

(8) In light of parts (1) to (6), if the proposal outlined in part (7) is not followed, how will the Government be complying with its responsibilities under the Australian Heritage Commission Act and adhering to its policy goals as set out in the National Strategy for Heritage Places document.

Mr Truss—The Minister for the Environment and Heritage has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) Yes.
(2) Yes.
(3) Yes.
(4) Yes.
(5) Yes.
(6) No.
(7) Yes.

(8) The Government has complied with the Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975 because the proposal was referred to the Australian Heritage Commission for comment and the Minister for Finance and Administration considered this advice with other matters including the consultant’s reports outlined in (7) as required by the Act. He was satisfied that there was no feasible and prudent alternative to proceeding with partial demolition and redevelopment. The Government demonstrated leadership because on the Australian Heritage Commission’s advice the Department of Finance and Administration undertook a conservation analysis of the building when disposal was being considered. This identified heritage values, enabled the place to entered in the Register of the National Estate and management options to be referred to the Australian Heritage Commission for comment on the effect the proposals would have on heritage values.
War Widows Benefits
(Question No. 1221)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, upon notice, on 7 March 2000:
Further to the answer to the question No. 196 (Hansard, 11 February 1999, page 2636), what was the outcome of the Government’s review of the entitlement of war widows to have their veterans’ affairs entitlements restored in the event of dissolution of a subsequent marriage or the death of a subsequent spouse.

Mr Bruce Scott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
The estimated cost of restoring the pension to those widows whose re-marriage has been dissolved or who have lost their subsequent partner, would be $38 million over a four year period.

Swan Electorate: Nursing Homes
(Question No. 1231)

Mr Wilkie asked the Minister for Aged Care, upon notice, on 10 March 2000:
Has she or her Department received complaints concerning the operations, management or quality of patient care in nursing homes in the electoral division of Swan; if so, (a) how many have been received, (b) what nursing homes were involved, (c) when were complaints received and (d) what action or investigation has taken place to rectify any concern.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
For the Department of Health and Aged Care to provide the level of detail that is needed to answer these questions would require unreasonable time and resources. I am not prepared to ask the Department to divert them from health and aged care priorities at this time.

There have been 95 spot checks conducted by the Standard and Accreditation Agency and four of these have been conducted in the electorate of Swan.

Chisholm Electorate: Nursing Homes
(Question No. 1246)

Ms Burke asked the Minister for Aged Care, upon notice, on 9 March 2000:
(1) On the most recent data, how many nursing homes receiving Commonwealth funding are there within the electoral division of Chisholm.
(2) What is the name and address of each centre.
(3) How many residents are there at each centre.
(4) What sum in Commonwealth funding did each centre receive in (a) 1995-96, (b) 1996-97, (c) 1997-98 and (d) 1998-99.
(5) What is the estimated sum that each centre will receive in 1999-2000.
(6) On the most recent data, how many spot checks have been made at each of the nursing homes since 1998.
(7) Have complaints been recorded with the Aged Care Standard and Accreditation Agency about any of those nursing homes since 1998; if so, (a) how many and (b) what has been the outcome and (c) how many have been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
For the Department of Health and Aged Care to provide the level of detail that is needed to answer some of these questions would require considerable time and resources. I am not prepared to ask the Department to divert them from health and aged care priorities at this time.

(1) There are 16 aged care facilities within the electoral division of Chisholm.
(2) See above.
(3) There are 862 aged care beds in the seat of Chisholm.
(4) The sum of Commonwealth funding received by aged care facilities within the electoral division of Chisholm for the period July 1995 to December 1999 is $60,423,305.
(5) See above.
Monday, 19 June 2000

There have been 95 spot checks conducted by the Standard and Accreditation Agency. None of these have been conducted in the seat of Chisholm.

See above.

Cowan Electorate: Nursing Homes

(Compiled on 1253)

Mr Edwards asked the Minister for Aged Care, upon notice, on 13 March 2000:

1. On most recent data, how many nursing homes receiving Commonwealth funding are there within the electoral division of Cowan.
2. What is the name and address of each centre.
3. How many residents are there at each centre.
5. What is the estimated sum that each centre will receive in 1999-2000.
6. On most recent data, how many spot checks have been made at each of the nursing homes since 1998.
7. Have complaints been recorded with the Aged Care Standard and Accreditation Agency about any of those nursing homes since 1998; if so, (a) how many and (b) what has been the outcome and (c) how many have been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

For the Department of Health and Aged Care to provide the level of detail that is needed to answer some of these questions would require considerable time and resources. I am not prepared to ask the Department to divert them from health and aged care priorities at this time.

1. There are 11 aged care facilities within the electoral division of Cowan.
2. See above.
3. There are 425 aged care beds in the seat of Cowan.
4. The sum of Commonwealth funding received by aged care facilities within the electoral division of Cowan for the period July 1995 to December 1999 is $19,850,611.
5. See above.
6. There have been 95 spot checks conducted by the Standard and Accreditation Agency. None of these have been conducted in the seat of Cowan.
7. See above.

Privacy Legislation

(Compiled on 1269)

Mr McClelland asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 15 March 2000:

1. Has his attention been drawn to a situation which has been revealed in the USA where a firm known as DoubleClick has been criticised for linking personal identification and other information to anonymous data it collects about Internet users.
2. Will he examine the matter with a view to ensuring that Australia’s privacy legislation prevents that practice from occurring here.

Mr Williams—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

1. Yes. The incident in the USA concerning DoubleClick was a timely reminder that the public expect business to abide by privacy standards when they handle personal information.
2. The Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Bill 2000, which I introduced into the House on 12 April 2000, will establish a national regime for the protection of personal information by the private sector in Australia. The National Privacy Principles in the Bill are minimum benchmark standards. Under the Bill, organisations can develop codes that are consistent with these standards and which meet the approval of the Privacy Commissioner. Where there is no approved code in place, organisations will be bound by the Principles in the legislation.
What is important is that an organisation is open about its practices—how it collects, uses and discloses personal information. Australia’s legislation will not prevent organisations from merging databases and compiling information about individuals to customise advertising. What it will do is prevent organisations from doing so without informing individuals in advance about such practices. Individuals can then make an informed choice regarding whether they continue to do business with that organisation or take their business elsewhere.

**Franklin Electorate: Nursing Homes**

(Question No. 1279)

**Mr Quick** asked the Minister for Aged Care, upon notice, on 16 March 2000:

1. On most recent data, how many nursing homes and aged person hostels are there within the electoral division of Franklin.
2. On most recent data, how many nursing homes and aged person hostels are operated by (a) private companies and (b) church organisations in the electoral division of Franklin.
3. What are the names of the (a) private companies and (b) church organisations operating nursing homes and aged person hostels in the electoral division of Franklin.
4. How many spot checks have been carried out on nursing homes and aged person hostels in the electoral division of Franklin operated by (a) private companies and (b) church organisations in (i) 1996-1997, (ii) 1997-98, (iii) 1998-99 and (iv) 1999-2000.
5. What sum of Commonwealth funding did each nursing home and aged person hostel within the electoral division of Franklin receive in (a) 1996-1997, (b) 1997-98, (c) 1998-99 and (d) 1999-2000.
6. How many beds are there in each nursing home and aged person hostel.
7. How many beds are being used in each nursing home and aged person hostel.
8. How many beds were there in each nursing home and aged person hostel in (a) 1996-97, (b) 1998-99 and (c) 1999-2000.
9. How many persons are on waiting lists for each nursing home and aged person hostel.
10. Were complaints concerning nursing homes and aged person hostels within the electoral division of Franklin lodged with the Aged Care Standard and Accreditation Agency in (a) 1996-97, (b) 1997-98, (c) 1998-99 and (d) 1999-2000; if so, (i) how many and (ii) how many spot checks resulted from the complaints in each year.

**Mrs Bronwyn Bishop**—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

For the Department of Health and Aged Care to provide the level of detail that is needed to answer some of these questions would require considerable time and resources. I am not prepared to ask the Department to divert them from health and aged care priorities at this time.

1. There are 18 aged care facilities within the electoral division of Franklin.
2. See above.
3. See above.
4. There have been 95 spot checks conducted by the Standard and Accreditation Agency. None of these have been conducted in the seat of Franklin.
5. The sum of Commonwealth funding received by aged care facilities within the electoral division of Franklin for the period July 1995 to December 1999 is $65,453,694.
6. There are 754 aged care beds in the seat of Franklin.
7. 98.91%.
8. See above.
9. The Department does not keep records of waiting lists for individual facilities.
10. See above.

**Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport: Precision Radar Monitor System**

(Question No. 1386)

**Mr Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 6 April 2000:

...
(1) Will the proposed Precision Radar Monitor System (PRMS) for Sydney Airport (a) increase or decrease aircraft noise over the Sydney basin, (b) increase air pollution over the Sydney basin and (c) assist the implementation of the Long Term Operating Plan (LTOP).

(2) Will he accept the resolutions passed by the Sydney Airport Community Forum throughout 1999 and 2000 calling for the abandonment of the PRMS.

(3) Since the commencement of LTOP, are aircraft movements to the north of Sydney Airport running at 29%; if so, (a) was the LTOP forecast 17% and (b) is the present rate almost twice the number of forecast movements to the north.

(4) When will the LTOP be fully implemented.

(5) Is it a fact that (a) the PRMS is consistent with the gazetted LTOP and (b) the desired outcomes of the PRMS are inconsistent with the LTOP’s desired outcomes.

(6) Will the PRMS (a) facilitate the implementation of the LTOP, (b) assist the LTOP fulfil its objectives on noise sharing and respite periods, (c) decrease aircraft holding patterns over the Sydney basin, (d) share the arrival and departure trajectories of aircraft movements in conformance with the LTOP, (e) not reduce the altitude of aircraft flying over the Sydney basin and (f) reduce the number of aircraft movements to the north of Sydney Airport after 10 p.m. daily.

Mr Anderson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The PRM system is intended to allow the capacity of the Airport to be maintained during the morning and afternoon peak periods when there is bad weather. If the system came into use it would not be necessary to use it when there is good weather.

In order to fully examine the likely environmental impacts of the PRM, the Minister for Environment and Heritage, Senator the Hon Robert Hill, established a Commission of Inquiry under the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974. The Commission held hearings over a two week period in March this year and provided members of the public with an opportunity to put forward their views on the PRM proposal.

The Commission concluded that it was not possible to determine the full nature and extent of environmental impact of PRM without a trial of the system.

Subsequently, the Minister for Environment and Heritage announced that a trial of the PRM would be held between July and November this year. The details of the trial are now being developed. The Minister for Environment and Heritage has indicated that a consultative committee will be set up to assist in the development, running and analysis of the trial. This committee will include representatives from the community. I am advised that it is proposed to engage independent consultants to carry out the direct monitoring of the trial.

(2) See response to (1).

(3) Since August 1997 when LTOP was introduced approximately 28% of movements at the Airport have been over areas to the north of the Airport.

(a) and (b) Prior to the introduction of LTOP, a target was established of 17% of total airport movements to the north of the Airport.

(4) LTOP is being progressively implemented. Almost all elements of the Plan have now been put in place. I am advised that Airservices Australia informed the 24th meeting of the Sydney Airport Community Forum that the outstanding elements of the Plan involve technically difficult operations which will require extensive training and will add to the complexity of human management aspects of airport operations. The Forum was also informed by Airservices Australia that while these outstanding elements will not assist in achieving the LTOP runway end movement targets they will alleviate the concentration of overflights over certain areas.

(5) (a) and (b) The Commission of Inquiry considered the relationship between PRM and LTOP. The Commission was unable to find that PRM itself would lead to the erosion of LTOP.

(6) (a) and (b) See response to (5) (a) and (b).

(c) Airservices advised the Commission of Inquiry that PRM is expected to reduce the extent of airborne holding. Airborne holding currently occurs at points well outside the Sydney Basin.

(d) Airservices advised the Commission Inquiry that the use of PRM would not affect the arrival and departure trajectories other than to the extent to which arrival flight paths would be varied on bad weather days.
(e) Airservices has advised that PRM will reduce the altitude of aircraft over some limited areas.

(f) Airservices has advised that PRM will not affect the number of aircraft movements to the north of Sydney Airport after 10pm.

**Airservices Australia: Management Bonuses**

(Question No. 1389)

Mr Albanese asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 6 April 2000:

(1) What performance bonuses are available to Airservices Australia management.

(2) Are there specific performance bonuses being offered to Airservices Australia management for the successful implementation of the Precision Radar Monitoring System at Sydney (Kingsford-Smith) Airport.

Mr Anderson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) Airservices Australia advises that its Executive and Business Centre/Business Unit managers are potentially eligible for performance bonuses. A proportion of their Total Attainable Remuneration is at risk and payment of a bonus is dependent upon managers meeting established, measurable objectives.

(2) Airservices Australia advises that it is not aware of any specific performance bonuses that were offered to its management for the successful implementation of the Precision Radar Monitoring System at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport. However, as the criteria for achievement of performance bonuses are agreed at an individual level and each manager will usually need to address a number of performance objectives, it would not be unreasonable to expect that some managers may have a PRM related performance objective in their individual agreements. However, the implementation of PRM alone and the subsequent satisfaction of a related performance objective would not have determined a successful performance bonus outcome.

**Health: Phthalates Risks**

(Question No. 1412)

Mr Tanner asked the Minister for Financial Services and Regulation, upon notice, on 10 April 2000:

(1) Has his attention been drawn to the banning in the UK of all pacifiers and teething rings (dummies) that contain oestrogen mimicking chemicals (phthalates) as these compounds may present a potential health hazard to consumers.

(2) Has the Government undertaken any research on the health effects of phthalates in toys and teething ring type products.

(3) What is the attitude of the Government on phthalates in toys and teething ring type products.

(4) Will the Government’s policy on phthalates be reviewed given the growing evidence that phthalates may pose serious health risks.

(5) What is the Government’s attitude on baby walkers.

(6) Does the Government consider baby walkers to be a dangerous product.

(7) Will the Government ban baby walkers.

(8) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that imported dangerous toys that do not comply with Australian standards do not fall into the hands of Australian consumers.

Mr Hockey—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) I am aware that on 7 December 1999 the European Commission adopted a limited ban on certain phthalate plasticisers used in soft PVC toys such as teething rings which are intended to be mouthed by children under three years. Other PVC toys containing phthalates will be required to be labelled with a warning to be kept out of the mouth. The ban prohibits the sale and import of the toys but does not require the recall of products already sold.

(2) The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), within the Department of Health and Aged Care, is the main Federal Government agency which has the necessary expertise to advise on the public health risks associated with chemicals, such as phthalate plasticisers used in PVC toys.
(3) The Government will continue to monitor research on phthalates and if sufficient evidence about health risks arises will act accordingly.

(4) See answers to (2) and (3) above.

(5) The Government will continue to work with the industry association, the Infants and Nursery Products Association of Australia (INPAA) to address the issue of injuries associated with baby walkers.

(6) Baby walkers have been linked to a number of injuries to young children associated with the misuse of the product and the Government will continue to work with the industry association, the Infants and Nursery Products Association of Australia (INPAA) to address the issue of injuries associated with baby walkers.

(7) The Government will continue to monitor research on injuries related to baby walkers and if evidence warrants it, then take appropriate action.

(8) The Commonwealth and a number of States administer a mandatory consumer product safety standard for children’s toys. Enforcement of compliance with consumer product safety standards is undertaken by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). The state and territory fair trading agencies enforce their complementary regulations.

Environment: Queensland Land Clearing
(Question No. 1434)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, upon notice, on 12 April 2000:

(1) According to the best information available to the Commonwealth, what was the estimated rate of land clearing, in hectares, in Queensland for each year since 1995.

(2) Has the Commonwealth proposed to the Queensland Government that the annual net loss of native vegetation cover, including regrowth, should be reduced to almost 100 000 hectares; if so, on what basis was this figure determined.

(3) According to Environment Australia and/or ABARE, what would be the likely reduction in the annual rate of land clearing in Queensland were the State Government’s tree clearing legislation to be fully implemented with Commonwealth support.

Mr Truss—The Minister for the Environment and Heritage has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) In August 1999, the Queensland Department of Natural Resources issued a report entitled Land Cover Change in Queensland 1995-1997. According to this report, the statewide average annual clearing rate for the 1995-97 period was 340 000 hectares per year. Analysis of satellite imagery to derive the clearing rate over the period since 1997 has yet to be completed. I understand that Queensland will complete its preliminary analysis of the 1997-99 data in the near future. This analysis will require ground-truthing before accurate and reliable information can be published.

(2) In signing the Natural Heritage Trust Partnership Agreements, all States and Territories have committed themselves to the national Bushcare program goal to reverse the long-term decline in the quality and extent of Australia’s native vegetation. In August 1999, I wrote to my State counterparts to discuss barriers to the achievement of this goal.

In my letter to the Queensland Minister for the Environment, the Hon Rod Welford MLA, I noted that the national “no net loss” goal was out of reach unless the annual net loss of native vegetation cover in Queensland was reduced to around 100 000 hectares. This figure was based on analysis of estimates of the national rate of land clearing and of the area being revegetated each year, as well as on land clearing data provided by Queensland. I also noted that it would be unrealistic to expect Queensland to achieve the objective of “no net loss” of native vegetation at the State level within the foreseeable future and sought further information on current clearing and revegetation rates in Queensland.

(3) In its current form, the Queensland Vegetation Management Act 1999 would, when proclaimed, restrict the clearing of particular regional ecosystems, and areas declared to be of high nature conservation value or as vulnerable to land degradation. The Act does not establish any mechanism specifically to reduce the overall rate of clearing.
Domestic Violence: Legislation
(Question No. 1450)

Ms O’Byrne asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 13 April 2000:
(1) Does the Minister administer legislation which relates to domestic violence.
(2) If so, what is the definition applied by the Minister’s Department to the term “domestic violence”.
(3) Is the definition sourced from a policy document or statute.
(4) Is there discretionary flexibility available to be exercised by the Department when applying the definition to individual circumstances; if so, are there internal departmental manuals outlining discretionary options.

Mr Anderson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) Yes. The Minister is responsible for applied Western Australian laws operating on Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and for the applied ACT laws operating in the Jervis Bay Territory.
(2) Not Applicable
The Department does not directly administer applied Western Australia laws in the Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands. These laws are administered through service delivery arrangements with Western Australian Government agencies and Commonwealth bodies such as the Australian Federal Police.

Western Australia does not have specific “domestic violence” legislation. The laws relating to domestic violence matters under the applied Western Australian laws are included in a variety of legislation including the Restraining Orders Act 1997, Criminal Code and Firearms Act 1973. The term “domestic violence” is neither used nor defined in this legislation.

It would be very expensive in time and resources to review all Western Australian legislation for potential references to domestic violence matters or to obtain from Western Australian agencies policy documents which may obtain references to domestic violence.

In the Jervis Bay Territory the laws of the ACT apply under the provisions of the Jervis Bay Acceptance Act 1915 and ACT Government Departments administer this legislation. The Domestic Violence Act 1986 (ACT)(JBT) applies to the Jervis Bay Territory.

Domestic Violence is defined under Section 4A(1) of that Act as:
(1) For the purpose of this Act, a person’s conduct constitutes domestic violence if it –
(a) causes physical injury to a relevant person;
(b) causes damage to the property of a relevant person;
(c) is directed at a relevant person and constitutes an offence against-
(i) section 19D (breach of an order under this Act);
(ii) a provision of the Crimes Act specified in Schedule 1A; or
(iii) section 129 of the Motor Traffic Act 1936;
(d) constitutes a threat, made to a relevant person, to do anything in relation to that or another relevant person that would fall under paragraph (a), (b) or (c); or
(e) is harassing or offensive towards a relevant person.
(3) Not Applicable. (see response to question 2)
(4) Not Applicable.

Domestic Violence: Legislation
(Question No. 1451)

Ms O’Byrne asked the Treasurer, upon notice, on 13 April 2000:
(1) Does the Minister administer legislation which relates to domestic violence.
(2) If so, what is the definition applied by the Minister’s Department to the term “domestic violence”.
(3) Is the definition sourced from a policy document or statute.
(4) Is there discretionary flexibility available to be exercised by the Department when applying the definition to individual circumstances; if so, are there internal departmental manuals outlining discretionary options.

Mr Costello—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) No
(2) - (4) N/A

**Domestic Violence: Legislation**
(Question No. 1463)

Ms O’Byrne asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 13 April 2000:
(1) Does the Minister administer legislation which relates to domestic violence.
(2) If so, what is the definition applied by the Minister’s Department to the term “domestic violence”.
(3) Is the definition sourced from a policy document or statute.
(4) Is there discretionary flexibility available to be exercised by the Department when applying the definition to individual circumstances; if so, are there internal departmental manuals outlining discretionary options.

Mr Williams—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) Yes. Part VII of the Family Law Act 1975 deals with children. Division 11 of Part VII deals with the relationship between certain contact orders and “family violence orders”. The term “family violence orders” includes orders known, in most jurisdictions, as “domestic violence orders”.
(2) The definition of “family violence”, in section 60D of the Family Law Act 1975, is “conduct, whether actual or threatened, by a person towards, or towards the property of, a member of the person’s family that causes that or any other member of the person’s family to fear for, or to be apprehensive about, his or her personal well being or safety”.
(3) Yes. Section 60D of the Family Law Act 1975 provides the definition.
(4) The Attorney-General’s Department does not apply the definition to individual circumstances and there are no internal departmental manuals. The application of the definition in individual circumstances is a matter for the court exercising jurisdiction under the Family Law Act 1975.

**Office of the Status of Women: Capacity Building Funding**
(Question No. 1469)

Ms Jann McFarlane asked the Minister representing the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women, upon notice, on 9 May 2000:
(1) What is the definition of “capacity building”, referred to in the Office of the Status of Women’s 1999-2000 budget as a line item with $35,000 tagged for “NGO capacity building”.
(2) For what purpose will capacity building funding be used.
(3) What are the selection criteria for groups wishing to access this funding.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—The Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:
(1) On 14 October 1999 I announced that funding of $35,000 from the Office of the Status of Women’s funds would be used for capacity building work with four national women’s NGOs. I also announced that other women’s NGOs would be invited to share in training opportunities arising from this work. For the purposes of this work “capacity building” is defined, based on feedback from NGOs, as strengthening the capacities of national women’s NGOs to change policies and practices to benefit women.
(2) (a) $7,000 has been allocated to the Australian Federation of University Women for their 31st National Triennial Conference which included a one-day session on capacity building;
(b) $2,500 is being allocated to Muslim Women’s National Network of Australia to undertake capacity building activities within that organisation; and

(c) remaining funds will be allocated to capacity building activities available to all national women’s NGOs covering several key topics including: costing and budgeting; project management; governance; networking; lobbying and diversifying funding and membership.

(3) I nominated four national women’s NGOs to participate in capacity building activities, with other women’s NGOs invited to share in arising training opportunities. Representatives of two of the nominated groups, the National Women’s Justice Coalition and the Women’s Electoral Lobby, indicated in December 1999 a preference for sector-wide activities. Access to capacity building workshops will be open to national women’s NGOs.

Counselling and Guidance Services: Northern Territory
(Question No. 1471)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Health and Aged Care, upon notice, on 9 May 2000:

(1) Is the Minister able to say what counselling and support services operate in the Northern Territory, including those offering counselling, guidance or support of a social or psychological nature.

(2) Where does each service operate.

(3) What are the particular services provided by each of the services.

(4) Who operates the services.

(5) What proportion of clients of each of the services identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

(6) How many (a) full-time, (b) part-time and (c) casual staff are employed in each of the services, and of the total staff, how many identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

(7) How many (a) full-time, (b) part-time and (c) casual staff are employed in the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice, and of the total staff, how many identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

(8) What is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services by the (a) Commonwealth and (b) Northern Territory.

(9) What is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by the (a) Commonwealth and (b) Northern Territory.

(10) What is the total per capita allocation of financial resources provided for the services by the (a) Commonwealth and (b) Northern Territory.

(11) What is the total per capita allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by the (a) Commonwealth and (b) Northern Territory.

(12) What proportion of total expenditure by the Commonwealth is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by the Commonwealth.

Dr Wooldridge—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1-13) The provision of services of this type are the responsibility of the States and Territories. Specific questions on service delivery such as those above are best directed to the Northern Territory Government.

Although it is not strictly a Commonwealth responsibility, my Department does provide funding to Lifeline and Kids Helpline to provide telephone-based counselling services. These services operate on a National basis and include the provision of services to the Northern Territory.

Counselling and Guidance Services: Western Australia
(Question No. 1475)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Health and Aged Care, upon notice, on 9 May 2000:

(1) Is he able to say what counselling and support services operate in Western Australia, including those offering counselling, guidance or support of a social or psychological nature.
(2) Where does each service operate.
(3) What are the particular services provided by each of the services.
(4) Who operates the services.
(5) What proportion of clients of each of the services identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
(6) How many (a) full-time, (b) part-time and (c) casual staff are employed in each of the services, and of the total staff, how many identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
(7) How many (a) full-time, (b) part-time and (c) casual staff are employed in the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice, and of the total staff, how many identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander.
(8) What is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services by (a) the Commonwealth and (b) Western Australia.
(9) What is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by (a) the Commonwealth and (b) Western Australia.
(10) What is the total per capita allocation of financial resources provided for the services by (a) the Commonwealth and (b) Western Australia.
(11) What is the total per capita allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by (a) the Commonwealth and (b) Western Australia.
(12) What proportion of total expenditure by the Commonwealth is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by the Commonwealth.
(13) What proportion of total expenditure by Western Australia is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by Western Australia.

Dr Wooldridge—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1–13) The provision of services of this type are the responsibility of the States and Territories. Specific questions on service delivery such as those above are best directed to the Western Australian Government.

Although it is not strictly a Commonwealth responsibility, my Department does provide funding to Lifeline and Kids Helpline to provide telephone-based counselling services. These services operate on a National basis and include the provision of services to Western Australia.

Roads: Princes Highway
(Question No. 1497)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 9 May 2000:

(1) Is there any proposal to upgrade the bridge crossing the Pambula River on the Princes Highway near Eden, NSW; if so, (a) what is proposed, (b) what is the expected cost and (c) when will work commence.

(2) Is there any proposal to build an alternative route to the current Pambula River crossing on the Princes Highway near Eden; if so, (a) what is proposed, (b)what is the expected cost and (c) when will work commence.

(3) What is the process for community consultation and involvement in any proposed projects affecting the Princes Highway and the river crossings in the Eden district.

Mr Anderson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The Princes Highway is a State funded road, and as such, the responsibility rests entirely with the NSW Government. Consequently, the above questions (1), (2) and (3) are best directed to the NSW Minister for Roads, the Hon Carl Scully MP.

East Timor: Road Vehicle Deployment
(Question No. 1525)

Mr Bevis asked the Minister for Defence, upon notice, on 10 May 2000:

(1) Is there any proposal to upgrade the bridge crossing the Pambula River on the Princes Highway near Eden, NSW; if so, (a) what is proposed, (b) what is the expected cost and (c) when will work commence.

(2) Is there any proposal to build an alternative route to the current Pambula River crossing on the Princes Highway near Eden; if so, (a) what is proposed, (b)what is the expected cost and (c) when will work commence.

(3) What is the process for community consultation and involvement in any proposed projects affecting the Princes Highway and the river crossings in the Eden district.

Mr Anderson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The Princes Highway is a State funded road, and as such, the responsibility rests entirely with the NSW Government. Consequently, the above questions (1), (2) and (3) are best directed to the NSW Minister for Roads, the Hon Carl Scully MP.
(1) How many road vehicles did his Department deploy to East Timor.
(2) How many vehicles have since returned.
(3) How many of the returned vehicles have required maintenance work to be undertaken on them since their return.
(4) How many had this work undertaken by (a) Defence Personnel and (b) private contractors.
(5) Were tenders called for the letting of this maintenance work to private contractors; if so, when were the tenders called and when were the contracts awarded; if not, why not.

**Mr Moore**—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

1. 1530.
2. 1454.
3. The vast majority of vehicles required some cosmetic or minor maintenance. 571 vehicles were referred for repair actions in excess of 10 hours work.
4. (a) 246.
   (b) 325.
5. No. As the repairs are classified as simple procurement, in accordance with the Defence Procurement Policy Manual, tenders were not required.

**Department of Defence: Motor Vehicle Repairs**  
(Question No. 1526)

**Mr Bevis** asked the Minister for Defence, upon notice, on 10 May 2000:

1. Does his Department in Queensland arrange for panel beating repairs on UNIMOG trucks and other vehicles to be undertaken by private contractors; if so, how many vehicles have been repaired since January 1999.
2. Which contractors have been engaged to undertake this work.
3. Were tenders called for the letting of this work to private contractors; if so, when were they called and when were they awarded; if not, why not.
4. What quality checks are undertaken on the panel beating completed by the private contractors.
5. Have some repairs been found to be inadequate, resulting in in-house staff having to undertake rectification work, if so, (a) why has his Department undertaken the work rather than requiring the private contractor to complete repairs to an acceptable level and (b) have private contractors in these circumstances been billed for the cost of the rectification work: if not, why not.

**Mr Moore**—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

2. The private contractors used for these repairs were:
   Belair Truck Spray Painting Coy,
   W & S Industries,
   John McKay,
   All Day & Night Industries,
   Brett Tainsh Smash Repairs,
   Stielers Bodyworks,
   Royans (Brisbane),
   Haulmark Trailers,
   Virginia Bodyworks, and,
   Balmoral Bodyworks.
   Pearce Crash Repairs
   Townsville Industrial Panel/Paint
   Xpert Panel and Paint
   Big Rig Truck and Car
McMahons Panel and Paint

(3) No. The repairs were categorised as simple procurement, and in accordance with the Defence Procurement Policy Manual, tenders were not required.

(4) In-house contract repair supervisors manage all repair work undertaken by private contractors. All work is certified as being complete in accordance with the terms and conditions of the purchase order. Contract repair supervisors conduct quality assurance and acceptance prior to the return of the vehicle.

(5) No.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet: Commonwealth Funded Programs, Tasmania

(Question No. 1527)

Ms O’Byrne asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 11 May 2000.

(1) Does the Minister’s Department administer any Commonwealth funded programs for which community organisations, businesses or individuals can apply for funding in Tasmania; if so, what are the programs.

(2) Does the Minister’s Department advertise these funding opportunities; if so, (a) what print media outlets have been used for the advertising of each of these programs and (b) were these paid advertisements.

Mr Howard—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

I am advised by my department as follows:

(1) Yes; National Women’s Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) Funding Programme.

(2) Yes;

(a) Funding rounds are advertised nationally in the Weekend Australian, Sydney Morning Herald, Canberra Times and Melbourne Age. National Women’s Non-Government Organisations are also advised of new funding rounds by mail, email and fax.

(b) Yes.

Department of Finance and Administration: Commonwealth Funded Programs, Tasmania

(Question No. 1538)

Ms O’Byrne asked the Minister for Finance and Administration, upon notice, on 11 May 2000:

(1) Does the Minister’s Department administer any Commonwealth funded programs for which community organisations, businesses or individuals can apply for funding in Tasmania; if so, what are the programs.

(2) Does the Minister’s Department advertise these funding opportunities; if so, (a) what print media outlets have been used for the advertising of each of these programs and (b) were these paid advertisements.

Mr Fahey—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) No. However, the Department does administer the Commonwealth’s responsibility for the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements and the Natural Disaster Risk Management Studies Program. These programs are organised through inter-governmental agreements with the State and Territory Governments who also co-ordinate and manage the process for their respective jurisdictions.

(2) N/A. However, Information on the programs is available on the Department of Finance and Administration internet page.

Albert Park Barracks: Sale

(Question No. 1555)

Mr Danby asked the Minister for Defence, upon notice, on 11 May 2000:

(1) When and why were the Albert Park Barracks identified as surplus to requirements.

(2) What is the status of the sale process.
(3) When will the final decision be made.
(4) Will there be a public tender or auction process.

Mr Moore—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) to (4) The Albert Park Barracks has not been declared surplus, although the future use of the property by Defence is presently under review. No decision has yet been made, however, it is anticipated its future will be determined over the next few months. As a condition of the original sale of the property from the Victorian Government to the Commonwealth in the 1920s, the State has first right of refusal should the property become surplus. There have been some preliminary discussions with the Victorian Government.