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Monday, 26 June 2000

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

DELEGATION REPORTS

Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Tanzania and the 103rd Inter-Parliamentary Conference, Amman

Mr SPEAKER (12.31 p.m.)—I present the report of the Australia Parliamentary Delegation to the 103rd Inter-Parliamentary Conference held in Amman, Jordan, and a bilateral visit to Tanzania, 22 April to 6 May 2000.

The 103rd Inter-Parliamentary Conference discussed a wide range of topics including achieving peace and stability, dialogue among civilisations and cultures, and people-smuggling and refugees. All members of the delegation participated fully in all facets of the conference agenda. I would like to thank them for their hard work and assistance throughout the conference as well as the bilateral visit. The Australian delegation played a major role at the IPU conference and was instrumental in helping to formulate two of the three resolutions adopted. In particular, the delegation was successful in having its people-smuggling proposal accepted by the conference as its supplementary item. We also secured two positions on drafting committees, one of which was chaired by the honourable member for Fairfax.

I cannot stress sufficiently the role played at IPU conferences by our permanent delegates and the recognition of Australia as a significant contributor to debates. Special mention belongs to not only the honourable member for Fairfax as chair of a drafting committee but also to Senator McKiernan who played a pivotal role on the drafting committee on people-smuggling and refugees. His advocacy of Australia’s position on this issue ensured that the drafting committee report was balanced. It was a matter of some regret to us that the plenary session amended the committee’s draft resolution. Another significant achievement was the election of the honourable member for Prospect to the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians. I will leave it to my colleagues to discuss some of these issues.

Turning now to the bilateral visit to Tanzania, I would make a few brief comments. The visit to Tanzania coincided with Easter and Anzac Day. We commemorated Anzac Day at a dawn service at the Commonwealth War Grave in Dar es Salaam with representatives from New Zealand, Turkey, Canada, Britain, India, Pakistan, France and South Africa. The official program included meetings with President Mkapa, Mr Speaker Msekwa and a number of parliamentarians from both the government and opposition. These meetings enabled the delegation to discuss a range of issues including the bilateral relationship; the progress of economic reforms in Tanzania; the opening up of the economy and foreign investment; the plight of refugees on the borders with Burundi and Rwanda; the political tensions in Zanzibar; constitutional and parliamentary reform and the readiness to accept a fully operational multiparty system; and the scope to direct more funds into areas such as health and education. The discussions were both frank and informative. They left the delegation with a very clear impression that Tanzania, although still very poor, is making steady progress and is prepared to undertake necessary economic and other governmental reforms.

Of particular interest to the delegation was the opportunity to see the impact of Australian investment and the expenditure of Australian aid money. The delegation visited an Australian run goldmine at Nzega, 700 kilometres north-west of Dar es Salaam. It is owned and operated by Resolute Mines of Western Australia. The company not only is providing employment opportunities for people in the region but also has undertaken a very comprehensive community development program. The delegation had the honour of attending and participating in opening ceremonies at the area’s primary and secondary schools. Both schools have been funded by Resolute Mines and major assistance was provided by the Australian government in establishing the secondary school. The company has set a very worthwhile benchmark for other foreign investors. It has implemented a very innovative community based...
strategy which contributes significantly to the economic and social development of the area. The Golden Pride Mine is an open-cut operation producing around 180,000 ounces of gold per annum. The company has taken great care to revegetate the land around the site and has put in place world’s best practice to deal with its waste and by-products.

AusAID has a small but nonetheless beneficial role to play in a number of other key areas. The delegation attended a very enthusiastic and entertaining opening of a water and sanitation project in the Kibaha district. It is not very often that one gets to ceremonially declare open a toilet, and the significance of that was not lost on my colleagues. It was a memorable day and it proved once again that targeted projects such as these can directly benefit thousands of people through the delivery of year-round safe and clean drinking water and proper sanitation systems.

In summary, it was a very informative and rewarding visit. It was many years since an Australian delegation had visited Tanzania. It was evident that much progress had been made and that Australian investment, which amounts to around $600 million, is playing a leading role in a number of sectors. This investment has been made possible by the continued strong relationship between our countries.

On behalf of the delegation, I pay particular tribute to the excellent support provided by the Australian High Commissioner, Mr Philip Green, his wife, Dr Grace Moshi, and the staff of the High Commission based in Nairobi, Kenya. It was outstanding. I also thank the Ambassador, Mr Ian Russell, and the staff of the Australian Embassy in Amman. I commend the report to the House.

Mrs CROSIO (Prospect) (12.37 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I would like to make a short statement on the report you have just tabled. In complimenting our wonderful ambassadorial staff, I would like to put on record our thanks also to the High Commissioner, David Connolly, for the assistance he provided to us as a delegation in South Africa. It was a difficult period, being around the Easter break, but he certainly helped and assisted us.

As you have mentioned, Mr Speaker, as a nation we did very well indeed at the IPU conference. I thank you for the mention of the position I took. I join you in complimenting the Australian delegation for the work done. Four people from Australia were on the floor for seven days and nights and I can understand the difficulty that we had not only in putting our motions up but also in taking part in the debate that was occurring and following the different resolutions that were happening at that time.

At this 103rd conference, 124 countries participated, so it was a very large assembly of people. You have to get around to cover them, converse with them and, I suppose, liaise with them. I want to put on the record also, Mr Speaker, our appreciation of your leadership. It was a very difficult time in that, our colleague, the member for Hume, had an accident in Tanzania which left us one short when we arrived in Jordan. I not only thank my fellow delegates but I also compliment you on the leadership that you provided right throughout that seven-day conference.

I would also like to mention the Tanzanian visit where we attended a clean water opening ceremony. Other than those who have experienced it, no-one could believe where those people were originally getting their water from—a dirty hole in the ground. Thousands of people walked for 20 miles to celebrate the opening of this pump in the middle of a village. These are things that we in this nation take for granted. In complimenting or congratulating AusAID, or any other NGO development, I note that one of the things the delegation came away with after our visit is that to provide these villages with clean water is one of the greatest things mankind can do for fellow human beings.

I wish to speak as well on the Resolute goldmine. We had the opportunity to participate in the opening of two schools, the primary school and the secondary school. These people now have the ability to send their children to school. Again, those children would walk for miles just to have the opportunity of attending school. As our report has indicated, the goldmine, which was operated by the Western Australian firm Resolute, is the first modern goldmine to be built in Tanzania. The investment itself is worth an estimated $A200 million. In the region where
Resolute are operating they are so much involved in community development work that the primary school we visited was only one of the four primary schools. They have operated four primary schools or paid for the installation of the building of those to the tune of 16.5 million shillings. I put on record our congratulations to them. The funding of the water in the sanitation project by Plan International and AusAID cost around 250 million shillings. It was money well spent. I hope we continue to do that. As you have indicated, Mr Speaker, the delegation was certainly welcomed by the Tanzanian government. It was a very cordial visit. We have certainly built a lot of bridges by that bilateral visit.

More importantly, moving on to the IPU conference, all of us were very appreciative that we as a nation were able to make such a wide contribution. For those who may not know, and to those people in the gallery, when we talk about an IPU conference, it is a conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It is a worldwide parliamentary conference which allows dialogue between nations on political, economic, social and cultural issues of international significance. Australia not only got their resolutions up but participated in the drafting committees, with my colleague the honourable member for Fairfax and Senator McKiernan. I was very proud indeed to be elected to the women’s co-ordination committee as well as being a substitute member on the Middle East inquiry.

I can assure you, Mr Speaker, that the parliament certainly got their value from this particular delegation. I think it also shows that you get good results when you have consistency. I have been to a conference in the past. The first time I went there I was overwhelmed at what it was about. But when you have an opportunity of being a delegate for the term of the parliament you provide that consistency because you understand and appreciate where your role is and how you can forward Australia as a nation. More particularly, you network with a number of other countries which then provide the basis on which we can go back and say, ‘We have a particular point that we want to get across, and we want your support to do it.’ Again, I commend all staff—particularly Peter Keele, Peter Gibson and Jonathon Brown—for the wonderful briefings we had before we went.

Mr SPEAKER—I thank the member for Prospect. The time allotted for the consideration of the report has expired. I present the report to the House.

DELEGATION REPORTS

Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

Mr KERR (Denison) (12.43 p.m.)—I present the report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, 26 April to 4 May 2000. It is inevitable, when events that have occurred since a delegation has left the Solomons, that our remarks as contained in the report will be read in the light of those subsequent events. Before I go to those matters, however, let me first indicate that I believe that the delegation undertook a very valuable role in its visit to Papua New Guinea in consolidating a relationship with that country. But for the fact of the coup that occurred in the Solomon Islands, it would have been a very valuable relationship-building delegation in the Solomons. But unfortunately I need to reflect on what seems to be a very significant failure of the Australian government to respond in the national interest in relation to the Solomons.

When the delegation arrived, there was clearly tension because there had been the establishment of militia groups, particularly on Guadalcanal, and the fact that up to 20,000 Malaitans had been pressed out of that community and forced to return to their home island. When we met with the Prime Minister, he raised with us his concerns that the stability of his country was at risk. He discussed problems in his police force. He indicated that it was suffering from ethnic tensions and that his senior management was resistant to change. He suggested that a number of his police officers were corrupt and active supporters of ethnic tensions as a means of protecting their own position. His view was that the police force was non-operational but, underneath the senior level, there were a lot of very good and committed police officers who needed some leadership and he asked for assistance—a group of 50 outside police officers, 10 of whom we hoped...
would come from Australia, as part of a Commonwealth delegation to assist. His view that outside intervention was necessary to secure the stability of his country was supported by the Chief Justice of the Solomon Islands and by the Leader of the Opposition. The details of the discussions that the delegation had are included in the report.

Unfortunately, it appears that those concerns were taken far too lightly by our government. I have remarked that on returning from the delegation I wrote immediately to the foreign minister passing on my particular concerns arising from those conversations. I have not yet had a reply formally from the foreign minister. But what disturbs me more is that there seemed to be a complacency and an insufficient engagement by our local representatives. Australia ought to be the dominant and most important presence throughout the South Pacific. We are the largest economy and, in terms of influence, we are a point at which communities seek assistance. They look to Australia in that regard. But when they looked in this case they found us looking away.

I was particularly disappointed that the delegation was not even briefed by the Australian High Commission of the concerns of the Prime Minister before we met. It struck me at that time, and subsequently, that the message was not being reported with sufficient rigour to the Australian government and that the Australian government itself perhaps was deliberately closing its ears to representations that were being made about the state of the country. The suggestion that Australia’s interests were not at stake, I think, has been shown to be false by the fact that there had to be an evacuation of many thousands and that large economic interests involving Australia, including the Gold Ridge Mine in the Uepi Island Resort and a number of other places visited by the delegation, have suffered substantially.

We see the foreign minister wandering around in a cloud of ineffectuality, floating around looking for a place to settle. This morning he talked about women’s groups and civil society needing to play a part in restoring democracy. When it was pointed out to him by a journalist that those women were saying that they desperately wanted Australian help, he said, ‘What we need before we can provide help is a request from a democratically elected, established government.’ That is precisely what he had when the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands was making those desperate requests for months before the collapse of the society. We have got what we might call the ‘hole in the bucket society’, where you start out by saying, ‘There’s a hole in my bucket, Dear Liza, Dear Liza’ and, in this case, asking: how do we fix it? There is an offer; it cannot be responded to. Eventually it returns to its point of origin, but we are still ineffectual: we are not reaching the standard expected of Australia in the region. (Time expired)

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (12.48 p.m.)—It was a great honour to participate in this very valuable delegation to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. A number of highlights and special occasions occurred in both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The member for Denison has focused his remarks on the Solomon Islands. It was very important to meet with dignitaries and leaders from both countries. I cannot help but reflect on how very sad it is that security is so badly affected in both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The member for Denison has focused his remarks on the Solomon Islands. It was very important to meet with dignitaries and leaders from both countries. I cannot help but reflect on how very sad it is that security is so badly affected in both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands by the deteriorating social disruption that is occurring there. Events in the Solomon Islands have confirmed that. It is very sad, too, that both countries have such enormous potential in making a contribution in the world community.

Probably the most striking impression made upon me personally in regard to the visit to the Solomon Islands was at a meeting with the Prime Minister, the Hon. Bartholomew Ulufa‘alu, which the member for Denison has referred to. The Prime Minister opened our meeting with one of the most fervent prayers of desperation I have ever heard. It was the most earnest of prayers. It has left me with a permanent impression of a good man in a desperate situation, seeing the erosion of democracy in his precious country. His prayer contained all the anxiety of a leader caught up in the spiralling downhill demise of his country, paralysed by ethnic tensions and violence—ethnic tensions that
go back centuries. It is so sad that a man with a capacity to pray as he did with us was not able to prevent the circumstances which have subsequently occurred in the Solomon Islands.

At the meeting which the member for Denison has referred to, the Prime Minister made reference to requests that Australia be involved in a 50-person multinational task force. I have to say, contrary to the member for Denison, that I had deep reservations about how such a move, if Australia approved it, would be interpreted. The problems of the Solomon Islands can only be solved by the people of the Solomon Islands. To have a big brother move in there left me with some uneasiness. More will be said, I guess, as things continue to occur in that country.

In the few minutes that are available it is not possible to reflect on everything that occurs on a delegation: there are many things. But I would like to make reference to Papua New Guinea. The delegation had an opportunity to look at several engineering and resource development projects being undertaken—one with Australian interests and another with United States interests. One was the Moro gas fields, developed by Chevron Niugini, from which a pipeline will be built to supply gas to Queensland, which holds active interest for us in Australia.

The other mining operation is the Ok Tedi copper mine in the Star Mountains in the far north-west of Papua New Guinea. Much has been written about this mine over the years. As someone who has practised for 25 years as a consulting and practising engineer and who has lectured in mining subjects for some of that period, I believe they are very sad circumstances. The Ok Tedi mine now stands as a testimony to a monumental mistake. A deliberate policy to release rock waste and tailings waste into the Ok Tedi River, finding its way to the Fly River, which is now a very badly silted river, is an appalling situation to see. Claims that the value of the mine in terms of the development and prosperity it has brought to the Papua New Guinea community have to be tested against the cost and deterioration that has occurred in that river. I believe we need to keep up international pressure on the operators of the Ok Tedi mine to ensure that, as the mine closes down, the river is not left in a situation that leaves the Papua New Guinea people with a poor legacy and, therefore, a poor opinion of what Australian mining operations can do for their country. In speaking with a former Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, the Hon. Michael Somare, in Port Moresby after the visit, I found he was very concerned that he was the Prime Minister who signed off on the environmental requirements to operate that mine. I believe the pressure and desire for international revenue was abused in this situation. (Time expired)

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The time allotted for statements on the report has expired. Does the honourable member for Denison wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr KERR (Denison)—I move:
That the House take note of the report.
I seek leave to continue my remarks later.
Leave granted.

Mr SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. 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.

Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum, Canberra, 10 to 13 January 2000

Mr SOMLYAY (Fairfax) (12.54 p.m.)—I present the report of the Australian parliamentary delegation to the eighth annual meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum, held in Canberra from 10 to 13 January 2000. I have great pleasure in presenting this report. The meeting was held in Canberra from 10 to 13 January 2000. Australia was the host nation for this meeting, which provided us with many opportunities to contribute to its undoubted success. Because the meeting was in our own country, the delegation was very large by the usual standards for such things. Twenty-four members and senators were able to benefit from informal networking with their colleagues from other
parliaments in the region, from contributing to the debate and from listening to the contributions of others.

Our duties as host nation involved additional responsibilities. Our parliament provided the deputy chair of the executive committee meeting and the chair of the plenary sessions in the person of yourself, Mr Speaker. The President of the Senate was the deputy chair of the plenary sessions. It would be fair to say that the skill and diplomacy exercised by you, Mr Speaker, and Madam President were noteworthy. As leader of the host delegation, I chaired the drafting committee for the joint communique, which summed up the achievements of the forum. The drafting committee achieved its aims very efficiently, largely by adopting the strategy of asking delegates who found difficulty with any part of the draft to take responsibility for negotiating an alternative that would be acceptable to all. This proved to be very successful.

Australia will be hosting another important international conference, the CPA Conference, in September 2001. Again, we will probably have a large local delegation. I would like to take a few moments to make some observations about the particular difficulties that host delegations face. We are in our home political environment and the media tend to be more focused on domestic issues than on the intricacies of the international conference. There is a great temptation for delegates to speak to the media and otherwise behave in ways they would not if they were overseas. In order to host a successful conference, it is important that the home delegation demonstrate the same unity of purpose as it would demonstrate in another country. It is particularly important that the mores and ethics adopted by delegations attending conferences outside Australia be practised at home. In particular, as in the case of delegations travelling overseas, members should come to some agreement before the conference begins about who should speak on behalf of the delegation and what contact individual members should have with the media.

There are two ongoing issues arising from the eighth annual meeting. The first is that a draft resolution on peacekeeping, which was submitted to the meeting by the Australian delegation, was eventually adopted in a very different form from a draft—that of a ‘Resolution on Peace and Regional Stability’. The meeting agreed that the issue should be revisited at the ninth annual meeting to be held in Chile 2001. The Australian and Indonesian delegations, plus a delegation from a third country, will negotiate a position on this issue for presentation to the next meeting. The second ongoing issue is the need to continue the work of the technological working group between annual meetings. I am grateful to John Forrest, ably assisted by Nigel Sharp from DPRS, for their continuing work on this issue. Finally, I thank all those who worked to make this annual meeting not only a great success but also a great credit to this parliament. These thanks apply especially to the secretary of the Australian delegation, Judy Middlebrook. John Bonner and Judy were involved in the preparation of this most excellent report and are to be commended.

Mr Martin (Cunningham) (12.59 p.m.)—I would like to lend my support to the report that has been tabled today of the very successful Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum hosted by the Australian parliament in January this year. I particularly support the comments made by the leader of the Australian delegation, Mr Somlyay. It has been a while since I have been involved with the APPF. As I know from my role as Speaker—as you know from yours, Mr Speaker—we have a primary responsibility to ensure that the views of this nation are canvassed and are put forcefully at meetings of the APPF. As indicated by Mr Somlyay, we certainly took the opportunity to do that during the meeting in Canberra.

What impressed me about this meeting is that there has been an increase in the number of people attending and they represent a wider cross-section of parliamentarians from the various countries that make up the APPF. In the initial period they tended to be a little bit restricted to certain people invited by certain members of the APPF but, as a result largely of changes put in place by Australia—now carried on under your expert guidance, Mr Speaker—opportunities are widen-
ing and broadening for the participation of a great number of other people. In this way, you get not only government MPs from other countries but also opposition members coming and participating in the forum.

I would like to congratulate the parliament of Australia for the expert way in which they conducted this conference. Having been involved with conducting an Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in Australia some six months after I became Speaker, I understand the work that is necessary and the role that is played by parliamentary staff, and I certainly want to place on record my congratulations to the parliamentary staff for the outstanding job they did in looking after each and every one of the foreign delegates.

The issues canvassed during the course of the conference ranged across transnational crime, foreign affairs issues and, as Mr Somlyay mentioned, peacekeeping. I hope that the resolution that was deferred will in fact be considered further. There were some sensitivities amongst participants about peacekeeping resolutions, particularly in the light of the involvement of Australia, other ASEAN nations, and the United Nations in East Timor. As such, it was felt there needed to be an opportunity for a bit of cooling down on this very important topic and for further discussion to be left for a bit later. I think that there was a lot of common ground, and I have no doubt that a resolution will emerge on the role of peacekeeping, particularly as might be pursued by people from the Asia-Pacific nations that make up membership of this very important organisation.

I believe that this is a very worthwhile conference and that Australia has played a very strong and leading role in ensuring that there is an opportunity for members of parliaments from a variety of nations around the Asia-Pacific to put specific views and to hold in-depth discussions about very important issues. I certainly urge the parliament of Australia to give its continuing support, because in my view it does provide those opportunities.

Finally, I would like to refer to the comments made by the member for Fairfax in respect of comments that might have been made during the course of the presentation about the need for a little more caucusing and dialogue beforehand. I thought some of the comments made by Australian delegates came right from the heart and that they actually got a few people at the conference to sit up and take note. Might I say that some of the comments coming from National Party delegation members in respect of foreign trade issues were enlightening for the Americans and other delegates. I think they are still our allies, but we would have to check after some of those comments. Nevertheless, it is a great opportunity for members of the Australian parliament to participate. I would certainly recommend to any person from this parliament who is looking to participate in a conference that this is one they should go to.

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (1.04 p.m.)—I would like to focus my remarks on the activities of the technical working group, which is a very important committee of APPF. Having participated in the delegation to Lima, Peru in 1999, I was able to give some energy to achieving the aspirations of the technical working group. I would also like to take the opportunity, Mr Speaker, to congratulate you and your hard-working team. I just sat back as a participant in the delegation, marvelling at what a wonderful job you and your team did in showcasing our country. One of the things I observed in Lima was how proud the Peruvians are of their indigenous cultures, and we were able, in the program of music and venues that you and your team organised, to showcase our own country. I felt very proud to be a part of the delegation.

The technical working group is an important subcommittee of the APPF, and the member for Scullin and I were able to achieve some very important decisions in regard to ensuring that the whole program is achieved. It is all about using modern technology to assist in communication, and, isolated as communities are around the world, this is a perfect opportunity for us to do this. One very ambitious aspect of this is to establish a legislative exchange program in which the parliaments of all the participating countries of the APPF can exchange legislation in an electronic form, so that parliaments considering introducing new concepts and ideas
can do some research via the use of the technology and save themselves some difficulty if other countries are further down the track with regard to some of those issues.

During the referral of the report from the technical working group at the conference, I referred to the subject of native title. It would have been very useful for our parliament to have had access to legislation from countries like Canada or even New Zealand which were far more advanced on that subject than we were at the time, to have ready access to some of their ideas. I am very keen to ensure that, by the time the Australian delegation arrives in Chile next year, our legislation will be on the database and available for other countries to see. That is a reasonably modest vision to have, but I think it is achievable given the inputs we were able to make during the technical working group’s activities. Not all of the countries of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum have their legislation electronically available on database. Australia does, and it is located from two sources: one database on federal legislation—it is all there and available—and another on state legislation.

It was the original intention that every country would have its legislative database translated into English, which is the language of the forum, and then deposited in electronic form at the central repository in Lima in Peru. This would have involved an enormous amount of effort and activity, and we were able to persuade the chairman of the technical working group, the Hon. Oswaldo Sandoval, to accept the suggestion that, rather than every nation having to translate, they establish their own electronic databases in their own countries and connect those to the central database in Lima and have interpretation done via search engines.

It is very technical stuff, and I am very grateful to Nigel Sharp, whose deep understanding of the technical aspects has been very useful. I am hopeful that we can make some progress that will allow us to boast lyrically in Chile next year that at least Australia’s database is up and searchable in a readily accessible form. It is a great honour to participate in parliamentary delegations, in addition to the honour of being a member of this parliament. It is just a little sad sometimes that our constituencies and the media do not take enough interest. They are important forums, and the public need to understand just how important they are.

Mr NUGENT (Aston) (1.08 p.m.)—I am pleased to speak to this report of the Australian parliamentary delegation to the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum. There are two points I want to make today, and they are linked in a sense. We in the foreign affairs area so often hear—in the media and around the country—about what governments do, but the parliamentary exchanges can be very important as well. They are important from two perspectives: firstly, they give members of parliament, who may become ministers when they get a bit older, a good grounding—I am not talking about me; I am talking about the young bloods in the House, like the gentleman from the electorate of Sturt—and, secondly, but more importantly, you get feedback and information from members of parliament who are often very much in touch with their constituencies.

There are two issues I will briefly allude to, because I think they came out very clearly in this debate and they are issues that have been exercised in this country since the conference. Firstly, with respect to Indonesia, we have heard reference already to the peacekeeping resolution put forward by the Australian delegation. As soon as it was mentioned, there was a very sharp, negative reaction from the Indonesian delegation. It was suggested by the chair that the two delegations have private consultations to see whether we could come up with a resolution that both sides could agree to. Those private consultations between the two delegations went on at some extreme length, and it became very difficult to find any form of definitive resolution that we could agree on. That was an indication of the strength of feeling and the sensitivities from the Indonesian side about our role in East Timor, however correct that may have been and however well it may have worked from our perspective. There are quite clearly extreme sensitivities in Indonesia, and I think we have seen that demonstrated in a number of ways since
the conference, with the suggestion that President Wahid would pay a visit to this country, and with that having been put off on a number of occasions: because there is extreme sensitivity across the Indonesian nation, he feels that he must respond by delaying his visit here. We had some early indications at that conference about the difficulty we will have as a country to rebuild our political links and our relationship links with Indonesia. There are some extreme sensitivities and it will take a long time.

When we were discussing this particular resolution, it was interesting that a number of our regional partners stood up and praised Australia’s actions in Timor. I thought a Fijian delegate’s contribution was particularly relevant, given what subsequently happened in Fiji. He forewarned:

As a matter of fact, we no longer belong to a paradise with an abundance of sand and sunshine but, like everybody else, we also suffer the impacts of global developments through our social, economic and political activities. This is fast creating a worsening situation that, if left unattended, could lead to violent conflict situations for us in the immediate future. While we wish to live up to the real meaning of pacific as peaceful people, it is sad to admit that, given our current situation, we are very far from those necessary preconditions towards real peace.

That was from a Fijian delegate speaking at the conference in January this year, which should have given us and the whole international community an indication of the sort of situation that might develop in his country. Of course, we have all seen the sad events of the last few weeks in Fiji and the consequences thereof.

So it seems to me that there are occasions at these conferences when the parliamentarians—the people on the ground, the people who are in touch with the community and who are out there every day of the week—pick up the vibes and are able to communicate those. It seems to me that all governments should pay a little more attention to what goes on in some of these parliamentary conferences, because you can pick up the signs of potential situations that, if they are allowed to get out of hand, will become much more major problems for governments to handle.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (1.13 p.m.)—I am pleased to be able to comment, if only briefly, on the report of the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum, held in Canberra in January, which I attended. I thank the member for Fairfax for his chairmanship of the Australian delegation, a task he carried out extremely well, and also my friend the member for Aston for his kind comments in his dissertation this morning. I also thank the delegation for the opportunity to speak at the conference, albeit only briefly, on the Australian economy and our response to the Asian financial crisis. Meetings such as the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum are very important meetings for Australia in a diplomatic sense because they seriously engage us in the Asian region at a parliamentary level.

I see the member for Werriwa scoffing at the importance of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum, which is interesting given the Labor Party’s stated support for Australia engaging in the Asia region. But, obviously, the member for Werriwa regards it as unimportant. Nevertheless, I believe it is very important, and I am sure that other members of the House do as well, in establishing contacts and ties between countries. I established excellent contacts with the delegates from South Korea, Thailand and Singapore. We do not want to overstate the role that these conferences play in establishing networks and contacts but, at the same time, they are very important. We saw the former Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer’s role in Thailand, which was built up over decades of engagement with contacts and networks. I am mindful of my time running out; so I thank the House for the short opportunity to contribute. I commend the report to the House.

Mr SPEAKER—The time allotted for statements on this report has expired. I thank members for their generous remarks about the management of the conference. Does the member for Fairfax wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr SOMLYAY (Fairfax)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.
Leave granted.

Mr SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. 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.

Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee Report

Mr HAWKER (Wannon) (1.15 p.m.)—On behalf of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, I present the committee’s report, incorporating a dissenting report, entitled Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia annual report 1998-99, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr HAWKER—This report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration reviews monetary policy and the operation of the Reserve Bank, particularly over the past six months. It is based on the committee’s public hearing with the Governor of the Reserve Bank held on 22 May this year.

The committee was pleased to note that the evidence indicates that the reforms of the last few years have strengthened the fundamental structure of the Australian economy. This has, in turn, permitted a higher rate of growth to be maintained without the rapid increase in inflation that ended our earlier growth periods. The report also examines the likely impact of the new tax system after 1 July. The committee notes that an initial increase in the level of inflation is anticipated, but it will watch closely to see whether inflation returns to normal levels as quickly as the bank expects. This outcome will be crucial to the economy’s growth over the next two or three years, and a round of wage claims seeking additional compensation for the GST would not be helpful. In the bank’s opinion, such claims would not be necessary, as the income tax changes more than compensate for the GST.

A major issue of concern to the committee, addressed in the report, is the fact that the Reserve Bank had acted to increase the key interest rate—the overnight cash rate—four times between 3 November last year and 3 May this year. Those increases, totalling 1.25 per cent, raised the cash rate from 4.75 per cent to six per cent. The Reserve Bank said the increases were required to restrain inflation because the underlying measures of inflation were increasing and credit transactions were growing at a rate that could not be sustained in the long run. The bank stressed that, until the end of 1999, Australia had applied an expansionary monetary policy and that, in the changed economic circumstances in world markets, this was no longer appropriate. The bank said that the aim of its monetary policy was to continue Australia’s long period of continuous growth—already approaching nine years and longer than the periods of growth achieved in the 1970s and the 1980s. The committee, while accepting this reasoning, was very concerned about the effects that increasing interest rates could have, particularly in sectors such as housing loans. It was also concerned at indications of a sharp decline in consumer spending. The committee will continue to monitor these matters in the months ahead. In recent statements, the bank has begun referring to the exchange rate as a factor in its decisions on interest rates. The committee questioned this and the bank explained that exports were now playing a much greater role in Australia’s growth. This change, combined with a decline in the value of the Australian dollar, had produced inflationary effects that had been absent in the last few years.

In the report there was also considerable discussion on whether the Reserve Bank is truly independent of government. The 1996 agreement on the conduct of monetary policy made between the government and the Governor of the Reserve Bank clearly states that it is appropriate for the government to comment on monetary policy from time to time. In evidence, the governor assured the committee that there has been no pressure on the Reserve Bank board to do anything other than that which the board would normally wish to do. The committee will be probing this matter further at its next hearing.

Other issues addressed in the report include the transparency of the Reserve Bank’s
decision making process, links between monetary and fiscal policy, the relationship between the Australian and the US economies, the bank’s intervention in the foreign exchange market, new data on the bank’s assessment of bank fees charged to consumers, particularly householders and small business, and progress with examination of interchange fees between credit card providers and the banks. The committee will continue to follow up these matters at its next hearing with the governor to be held in Wagga Wagga, in the electorate of the member for Riverina, Mrs Kay Hull, on 11 December. That will be the first Reserve Bank hearing ever to be held outside metropolitan capitals.

I thank the Reserve Bank officers, especially the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Mr Ian Macfarlane, for their assistance with this review of the bank’s policies and activities. I would also like to thank the committee members, the secretariat staff, particularly Bev Forbes and Tas Luttrell, the Parliamentary Library, the Parliamentary Education Office and the Liaison and Projects Office for their contributions to this inquiry and report.

In conclusion, once more on behalf of the committee members and secretariat staff, I express our sorrow over the untimely death of the Deputy Chairman Greg Wilton. Greg, like other members of this committee, worked hard to achieve a bipartisan approach to the committee’s work. I commend the report to the House.

Mr LATHAM (Werriwa) (1.21 p.m.)—In the weeks preceding the committee’s hearing with the Reserve Bank, the federal government politicised the conduct of monetary policy. In a concerted public campaign, the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and even the Secretary to the Treasury placed pressure on the RBA not to further lift interest rates. The success of this campaign was reflected in the governor’s testimony to the committee. He went out of his way to avoid any further controversy with the government, leaving commentators and market analysts with the clear impression that interest rates were in fact on hold. This is not a good way to conduct monetary policy in this country. It is the reason why the opposition members on the committee, the members for Grayndler and Chisholm and I, have produced a minority report which is quite critical of the Reserve Bank and the government.

Our criticisms go to four issues. First, Mr Macfarlane insisted that the introduction of the GST package was not a factor in the conduct of monetary policy even though, according to his own evidence, the GST was having an adverse impact on inflationary risks and inflationary expectations, as well as second round wage impacts and overheating in a few markets. Second, it was the governor’s view that the recent deterioration in the federal budget surplus was not making the Reserve Bank’s job any harder, so there was no desire for a different fiscal policy, even though in November 1999 he told the committee that it was in fact wise to run big surpluses in the latter years of an economic expansion. Third, the governor refused to answer questions concerning the observation in the bank’s semiannual statement that some political comments about interest rates triggered a depreciation in the Australian dollar in late January this year. He dismissed this as a media event not an economic event. Finally, there was the governor’s claim that the RBA is independent of the government, even though the government’s chief economic official, the Secretary to the Department of the Treasury, sits on the RBA board. In each of these instances the credibility of the Reserve Bank has been diminished. Particularly on the question of fiscal policy, it is unacceptable for the RBA to point to political considerations when the bank itself is supposed to be independent of the political process. Further, it is unacceptable for the RBA to refuse to answer questions on material published in its own semiannual statement. This is a failing in the bank’s accountability to this parliament.

The RBA spends a lot of time and effort backgrounding journalists. It has a number of economic writers well and truly on the drip. It was somewhat inevitable, therefore, that one day the Reserve Bank would be caught up in a media war with the federal government. In the end, the government won this contest and the conduct of monetary policy has been compromised. It is now appropriate for our parliamentary committee to closely
examine the relationship between the Reserve Bank and the government. Much needs to be done to enhance the independence and transparency of the Reserve Bank. In our past hearings this issue has been raised continually, particularly regarding the publication of Reserve Bank board minutes and also the possible removal of the Secretary to the Department of the Treasury from the Reserve Bank board.

Accordingly, the dissenting Labor members on the committee have produced a minority report. We would request that the committee commission research work to examine the following four proposals: first, that the RBA board be made fully independent of the federal government by removing the Secretary to the Department of the Treasury; second, that one of the board members demonstrate particular expertise in regional and labour market policy, a measure which would address public concerns about the impact of monetary policy on regional development; third, that the RBA publish its board’s minutes at a suitable period of time after each meeting, which is standard practice among many central banks internationally and which would add to our processes in this country; and, finally, that the arrangements specified in the 1996 exchange of letters between the RBA and the government be converted into legislation. These arrangements for the independence, transparency and accountability of the bank would have a stronger standing at law plus greater credibility in the eyes of the financial markets if they were to be included in the RBA statute. We look forward to the further work of the committee and the close examination of those four worthy proposals.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (1.26 p.m.)—Today I would like to comment on three points in the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration on our hearings in relation to the Reserve Bank. Firstly, I would like to comment on the governor’s endorsement of the government’s handling of the economy. Secondly, I would like to endorse the governor’s comments in respect of the effect of the new tax system in putting pressure on wages—that is, wages being increased to meet increases in prices. Thirdly, I would like to comment on the farcical debate regarding the independence of the Reserve Bank of Australia.

I am embarrassed for the Labor Party that they would have a minority report on such an innocuous hearing with the Reserve Bank governor. It is disappointing and, unfortunately, their claims ring hollow because of the fact that, under their tenure of government for 13 years, including the time the member for Werriwa was a member of that government, all the requirements that they now stipulate for the Reserve Bank and its management were never implemented. In fact, they continued with an entirely controlled Reserve Bank. If I remember rightly—and I am sure members of this House remember—former Prime Minister Paul Keating would talk about the Reserve Bank governor being in his back pocket. He used to say, ‘Don’t worry about the Reserve Bank governor, I’ve got him in my back pocket.’ This was from a Labor Party that now stands up in this House and demands that we introduce four changes which will ensure the independence of the Reserve Bank. This government is the first government in the history of the Commonwealth to actually introduce an agreement with the Reserve Bank guaranteeing their independence. The whole debate about the independence of the Reserve Bank was a comic festival.

The Governor of the Reserve Bank himself made the very important point that it is an absurdity to suggest that, because there was controversy over the position of the Treasurer, the Prime Minister and the governor earlier this year with regard to monetary policy, that somehow indicates that the Reserve Bank is not independent. In fact, it indicates that it is independent because if the Reserve Bank were not independent, the Treasurer and the Prime Minister would only need to ring the Reserve Bank governor to tell him or her their view on what monetary policy should be. The Prime Minister, the Treasurer and others felt the need to make public comments about monetary policy, which they are entirely entitled to do, because they cannot control the Reserve Bank and the Governor of the Reserve Bank. It is in the board of the Reserve Bank’s fiat to
decide monetary policy; it is not the role of
the government of this day, unlike the gov-
ernment of the Labor Party, which did tell the
Reserve Bank how to set monetary policy.
The governor had good things to say, for in-
stance:
I think one of the reasons for this attracting a lot
of attention is that it can happen only when you
have an independent central bank. It cannot hap-
pen if the government is making monetary policy;
it cannot get up and criticise itself and give alter-
native views. It seems to me that it is just an in-
evitable result of having an independent central
bank in a democratic society.
I agree with that and I think the Reserve
Bank governor has encapsulated in that re-
mark the speciousness of the Labor Party’s
tactics today and of their minority report
dealing with the independence of the Reserve
Bank. I would also like to draw the House’s
attention to the remarks of the governor with
regard to the conduct of fiscal policy in this
country. The Governor of the Reserve Bank
believes that the country’s fiscal policy is
being run in a perfectly acceptable fashion.
The governor said:
. . . I think internationally we are regarded as
having a very good fiscal policy. We are probably
regarded as having fiscal policy which is almost
second to none . . .
He also said:
. . . the current stance of fiscal policy is not mak-
ing the Reserve Bank’s job any harder, so we have
no desire for a different fiscal policy . . . this is the
fourth year in a row of surplus, there is no bor-
row and the outstanding stock of government
debt to GDP is lower in Australia than in any de-
veloped country.
This is high praise indeed from the central
bank governor to the Treasurer and to the
Prime Minister, to praise the good fiscal pol-
icy which is not having an effect on monetary
policy. The governor knows that he can place
his confidence in the hands of the govern-
ment to manage fiscal policy successfully.
With respect to the member for Werriwa,
who commented on the governor saying that
surpluses should be high over the last four
years, the governor said that they should be
high in principle, but he also went on to
say—which was left out, conveniently, by the
member for Werriwa—that confidence he
had in the government’s handling of fiscal
policy. I do not think the governor had such
high praise for the government’s handling of
fiscal policy in any of the 13 years that Labor
was in office. In conclusion, I would like to
endorse the governor’s comments on pres-
sure of wages. He said, and I agree with him:
We are working on the assumption that the in-
come tax changes more than compensate for the
GST and that wage earners will not expect another
compensation for the wage bargaining process. I
would be very disappointed if there were general-
ised wage pressure for what I would call ‘double
compensation’.
I support that statement. (Time expired)

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (1.31 p.m.)—I
rise today to welcome the review of the Re-
serve Bank of Australia’s annual report. The
appearance of the Reserve Bank of Australia
before the House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Economics, Finance and Pub-
lic Administration is one of the major ele-
ments of the bank’s accountability to the fed-
eral parliament. This process of open report-
ing ensures that the setting of monetary pol-
icy in Australia is transparent. It is a major
plank in the committee’s role and I believe it
greatly enhances the committee process in
the parliament. At the outset I wish to thank
the Governor of the Reserve Bank and his
staff for making themselves available to the
committee and for all the extra work they
have undertaken for the committee. The re-
view of bank fees and charges was not an
easy exercise to undertake, but the RBA has
done so at our request and has produced
some useful and interesting findings, many of
which the committee will continue to monitor
and explore.

The governor’s willingness to appear be-
fore the committee is in stark contrast to
other heads of key institutions and agencies
who appear before Senate estimates only
when they are dragged there kicking and
screaming. The reporting to the committee is
most welcome and ensures a level of open-
ness and accountability which other institu-
tions could take note of. The governor’s
openness before the committee and indeed
the governor’s accessibility to the market,
analysts and the press have ensured that there
has been understanding around monetary
policy. Therefore, less speculation and nega-
tive impact on the Australian dollar and the Australian economy have occurred. Of late, there has been growing concern amongst the market players, business groups, economic analysts, financial journalists and politicians from the Prime Minister down that there has been a lack of clarity on monetary policy, which is uncharacteristic of the Reserve Bank and its governor.

There has been much reporting in the financial and mainstream press, both prior to our last hearing in November and the most recent one, about the decision making process of the board and its impact on recent interest rate movements. There seems to be a void of understanding behind the most recent interest rate rises. This has had a negative impact on the Australian dollar. The uncharacteristic nature of this action on behalf of the RBA prompted me at our last report tabling to state that I would pursue the issue of tabling of the RBA board minutes. Recent events are making it imperative that the board undertake to make transparent their decision making process and the economic data on which they form this view. The governor’s polite answer on the voting process of the board raises significant questions about how the board are operating at present. As stated in our minority report, it is time that the board made these minutes available.

The sanguine view of the governor towards current fiscal policy is astounding, particularly in light of recent fiscal loosening. The governor’s pat remark that this was political reality and something one had to factor in is a rather relaxed and naive view, given its impact on monetary policy. I thought the fundamental tenet of this action on behalf of the RBA was to be independent of all influences and not to factor in political reality—that is for the likes of us to do. Monetary policy should be beyond political influence. It is worrying to see the governor so lightly disregard the current trends in fiscal policy. This is most concerning in light of the latest national accounts, which show that the economy is continuing to grow in the four percentage range. While this is good news at one level, it is worrying that the governor is not concerned about what impact fiscal loosening will have on inflation, particularly in light of continued growth. This will be a worry if the government is proved right and we see a lift in spending when people receive the GST tax cut bribes. The issue which the RBA has steadfastly refused to mention—the Fawlty Towers of the RBA—is the GST. There is no mention of the GST impact on inflation, which again is astounding, given that the governor has admitted that he is relying totally on Treasury modelling and the RBA has done none of its own. This is most worrying when you consider that the RBA’s chief role is to ensure that inflation stays within a desirable range.

The RBA has identified the risk to inflation and the prospect of wages break-out that the GST may have, but the governor has simply assumed it away. This leaves one to assume that the RBA is relying totally on the government’s perspective of the impact of the GST on inflation. Again I state that this is a worrying trend. The governor has continually stated that the RBA has done no modelling itself and is relying on Treasury for its analysis. Given the impact the GST will have on inflation, this leaves one wondering about the rigorous independence of current monetary policy.

This leads me to a positive point—the fine work of the committee and the normally frank exchange of views which happen when the governor comes before our committee. This has generated much interest in the operation of the RBA and the structure of the bank and its board. The work of the committee has ensured that these issues have been debated in the press. It is now an ideal time to review the operations of the bank and its structures. To have a clear understanding behind the thinking of the bank on interest rate movements and the basis on which these decisions are made can only strengthen the bank’s standing. Notions that the board has been Sydney-centric could be disavowed if we undertook a review of its structure and the composition of its board. This is an ideal time as the changes from Wallis are now being bedded down. This has been canvassed in our minority report. The RBA should be commended for its role in international forums and for its continued recognition as a world leader in monetary policy and sound
financial management. I commend the report to the House. (Time expired)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)—The time allotted for statements on this report has expired. Does the member for Wannon wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr HAWKER (Wannon)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. 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.

Electoral Matters Committee Report

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro) (1.37 p.m.)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, I present the committee’s report, incorporating dissenting reports, of its inquiry into the conduct of the 1998 federal election and matters related thereto entitled The 1998 Federal Election, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr NAIRN—This first report of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in this parliament addresses aspects of the conduct of the 1998 federal election. This report is a significant addition to the established body of work by this committee’s predecessors that has steadily improved Australia’s electoral system. Federal elections are amongst the most significant public events conducted in this country. The 1998 federal election was no exception. Involving 12,056,625 voters, 60,000 temporary staff and 7,775 polling places, managing the logistics of such an event is no small feat. The fact that the Australian Electoral Commission was able to deliver a result by 8 p.m. eastern standard time on election day indicates that Australia’s distinguished electoral reputation is well earned. Despite these achievements, there is always room for improvement. In its report, the committee makes 59 recommendations, most of which are unanimously supported.

I will highlight four significant themes of those recommendations. First, I will address the accuracy of the Commonwealth electoral roll. Between the 1996 and 1998 federal elections, the AEC introduced continuous roll updating and an address based roll management system to improve the accuracy of the roll. In order to continue this process, the committee is recommending changes to the process of re-enrolling voters who have been removed from the roll because they no longer live at the enrolled address. In future, people will be re-enrolled for their correct address when they cast a provisional vote.

Second, the committee is keen to ensure that political parties seeking to register federally are in fact legitimate political parties. Accordingly, the committee recommends a series of improvements to the regulation of registered political parties. These include: creating a definition of a member of a political party for registration purposes; increasing the fee for registration of a political party to cover the costs of registration; restricting the registration of parties to those parties that have either a federal member of parliament or 500 party members; and empowering the AEC to conduct regular reviews of the eligibility of political parties to remain registered.

Third, a number of changes to election campaigning practices are recommended to improve the transparency of political party campaign materials. The changes include: specifying a definition of address for authorisation purposes; creating a specific authorisation regime for how-to-vote cards; including second preference how-to-vote cards; and improving the accuracy of postal vote information provided to voters by political parties with their campaign material.

Finally, a surprising outcome of the inquiry for the committee was the level of misunderstanding of the election process in sections of the community. Evidence indicates that a significant majority of voters in many remote communities require assistance to cast a valid vote. The committee is recommending that the AEC report back to it on options for providing an effective, integrated enrolment and education service for remote
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The committee also received a large number of submissions from voters who clearly did not understand as well as they might the House of Representatives full preferential voting system. Accordingly, the committee has recommended that the AEC conduct a targeted public education campaign prior to the next federal election to explain the House of Representatives full preferential system.

Other matters addressed by the report include: improving training for the officers in charge of mobile polling booths to ensure good management of mobile polls; improving public access to the Commonwealth electoral roll by recommending limited access to the roll over the Internet and on CD-ROM; improving the efficiency of the postal voting system; preventing enrolment using offensive names; streamlining the processing of political party funding returns to allow a political party’s annual disclosure returns to be lodged electronically; allowing political parties to appeal the location of polling booths; and improvements to declaration and pre-poll voting. In addition, the report addresses four-year terms for the House of Representatives, aspects of political donation reporting and the design of the Senate ballot paper.

One of the important functions of election inquiries such as the one the committee has undertaken is to provide the public with a forum in which to raise their concerns with the electoral system. This inquiry was no exception, with over 260 submissions received as well as over 100 letters submitted. I would like to thank the AEC and the members of the community who contributed to this review. I would also like to thank the members of the committee and the committee secretariat for their contributions to this inquiry and report. Throughout the inquiry, the committee operated with a spirit of cooperation, particularly in relation to some of the more intractable matters. This has ensured agreement on most of the recommendations contained in this report and has resulted in a report that will enhance Australia’s already robust electoral reputation. I commend the report to the House.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (1.42 p.m.)—I join the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in congratulating the AEC and the committee for essentially narrowing the areas of difference. This report, more than most in this parliament, is one where all parties’ self-interest is as predominant as high principle, and it is testament to our endeavours that the issues have been narrowed down. However, I would like to deal with the matters that the Labor Party in its minority report still sees at issue.

Firstly, recommendation 3 to our minds substantially reduces the possibility of large numbers of Australians being able to enrol for elections. It is a proposal by the majority on this committee that new enrollees essentially have to be enrolled by the day the writ is issued and that those seeking to change their enrolment would only have three days to do so. To give you an example of the dimensions of this problem, with numbers from the last election in 1998, there would be 351,913 Australians affected by this change. We are very concerned that new enrollees, often young people who might be perceived as slightly more critical of the government than other parts of the Australian electorate, will not be able to enrol after the date that the writ is issued. Previous analysis of elections shows that a very substantial number of people are not motivated to enrol before elections. They become interested as they watch the news, as they see what is happening, and they decide to become enrolled at a late stage. Similarly, the rights of people already on the Australian electoral roll who have moved house are to be reduced and their right to vote denied under this proposal. The government says that there could be potential inaccuracies because of the speed with which these large numbers of enrolments have to occur. However, the opposition sees this as an attempt to undermine the right of 350,000 to 400,000 Australians to vote in elections, and it is of serious concern to the opposition.

I next want to deal briefly with recommendation 27, which concerns the postmarking issue of postal votes. The proportion of the Australian electorate who use this method to vote is growing. In the report, the government members were concerned at the
growth of alternative voting to voting on election day. As of the 1998 election, 4.22 per cent of Australian voters voted by postal votes. (Time expired)

Mr SPEAKER—I am obliged to interrupt the member for Reid because the time allotted for statements on the report has expired. Does the member for Eden-Monaro wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Mr SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. 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. It being 1.45 p.m., in accordance with sessional order 101 the time for consideration of committee and delegation reports has concluded.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Goods and Services Tax: Feminine Sanitary Products

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (1.45 p.m.)—From this Saturday, for the first time in 50 years, Australian women will pay tax on their tampons and sanitary products. Over 10,000 Australians signed an electronic petition at the beginning of this year calling for the tax on tampons to be abolished. But the government has refused to listen, and from this Saturday five million everyday Australian women will pay more for their already expensive tampons. How much more?

Let us have a look at the ACCC *Everyday shopping guide* and how prices with the GST will affect everyday Australians. Of course, they are not under food, clothing, housing, household equipment and operations or transport. Maybe they are under health and personal care. The government, of course, does not consider them health products, so they must be under personal care products—but I cannot find them. Multivitamins are there, estimated to go up by 8½ per cent; nappies are there, estimated to go up 8.6 per cent, but, of course, tampons are not listed. The government does not think they are a health product. Maybe it thinks they are a recreational product—but, no, tampons are not in that list either. But there are those other everyday purchases that we everyday Australians purchase, like fishing rods or cricket bats. Thanks to the ACCC, we can monitor how these prices will change and make sure that we are not being ripped off, but there is no estimation for the five million Australian women who must purchase tampons and sanitary products. (Time expired)

Economy: OECD Report

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.47 p.m.)—It is particularly interesting to listen to the member for Jagajaga at the very time when the OECD has brought down a report with the chair of its committee being none other than our own Treasurer. The report indicates that Australia is up amongst the top six economic performers in the world. The Australian economy is growing faster than many other countries’ in the world and I think the OECD report will reveal the overall strategies and policies of the government, the way in which they are implementing the new tax system—despite the claims by the member for Jagajaga—the restraint that they have shown in bringing forward balanced budgets, surplus budgets and repaying the $80 billion-odd debt that the previous government incurred. The fact that $55 billion of that debt is being repaid indicates the reason right across the board why this government and this country are moving ahead at such a substantial rate. Countries like the USA, Ireland, the UK and Denmark are moving ahead in economically in growth terms and the member for Jagajaga just talks about one issue. It is time that she got a global vision. It is time that she saw Australia in its international context. The OECD is ranking the Australian economy in world terms. (Time expired)

Port Adelaide Football Club

Mr SAWFORD (Port Adelaide) (1.48 p.m.)—On Saturday night at Football Park, just prior to the Port Adelaide-Essendon football match, I and four others received a great honour from the Port Adelaide Football Club. Former world champion squash player Chris Dittmar, former Socceroos captain
Alex Tobin, actor Shane Connor of Neighbours and Blue Heelers fame, Channel 9 newsreader Rob Kelvin and I were presented to the 35,000 crowd as Team Power ambassadors. Apart from being humbled by the elite company I was amongst, I was extremely proud to be chosen by Port Power as one of their Team Power ambassadors for the seasons 2000 and 2001.

Port Power is, of course, the most recent club to join the Australian Football League. Port Power came from the Port Adelaide Magpies Football Club, the most successful club in all of Australia whatever the code. In time Port Power will also become a powerhouse in the AFL; I have no doubt about that, whatever the difficulties. Now in our fourth year in the competition, Port Power has gained the respect of all clubs in the AFL. Reaching the finals in 1999 surprised many and, notwithstanding the difficulties of the current year, Port Power expects to be a success in the future. We come from a proud tradition. We respect loyalty and hard work, we love the challenge of the them-and-us mentality, and we look forward to a successful future. We have excellent leadership in the club with Greg Boulton as president, Brian Cunningham as CEO and Mark Williams as coach. They are supported by a dedicated and hard working professional staff and members of the board. I hope I can play a small part in the future success of Port Power, a club that is so important to so many of my constituents and me.

**Australian Labor Party: Member for Corio**

Mr McARTHUR (Corangamite) (1.49 p.m.)—The Australian newspaper has found a new and ‘talented’ humourist amongst the ‘grey ruck’ of federal Labor politicians. Correspondent Melba’s column of 17 June 2000 is correct on both counts: the ALP is a ‘grey ruck’ and the member for Corio is talented. Unfortunately, his Irish ‘blarney’ background has led him to cast aspersions as to where other federal parliamentarians reside: he is the only genuine Labor rural representative in the House with dirt under his fingernails. However, it is important to note that the member for Corio himself does not reside in country Australia, for which he claims to be its champion. The member for Corio, in his downtown glasshouse in Druncondra in urban Geelong, should not throw stones from his city pad. The member for Corio’s undoubted football prowess has also been noted by Melba. Apart from his gammy knee, he was best on ground in the Pollies versus Press match in 1997. Now that father time has caught up with him, he should hang up his boots for good. Melba advises that he is writing a history of onion growing. I can think of no better person to undertake that literary task, having been born and bred on the rich volcanic plains of Alvie in the heartland of the electorate of Corangamite, which has been so ably and passionately represented in this, our national parliament.

**Drugs: Naltrexone Treatment**

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (1.51 p.m.)—I wish to congratulate the New South Wales government and, in particular, the Special Minister of State, John Della Bosca, for their initiative in offering naltrexone treatment in public detoxification units by the end of this year. I have, on previous occasions, informed the House of the effectiveness of naltrexone in treating some cases of heroin addiction. The initiative will make this treatment more widely available and, with an improved protocol, should make the treatment safer. There remains, however, one major stumbling block: naltrexone is not available on the PBS for the treatment of heroin addiction. Now that free naltrexone detoxification is to become available, it remains for this government to list naltrexone on the PBS to make long-term treatment available to all who could benefit from it. The New South Wales government has shown that it is prepared to act to save young lives. What is needed now is this government’s support by listing naltrexone on the PBS.

Mr ST CLAIR (New England) (1.52 p.m.)—I stand in the House today with my heart filled with sadness at the passing away last night of Judith Wright, at the age of 85. Ms Wright was one of Australia’s greatest poets and one of New England’s best loved daughters. Judith Wright was born on 31 May 1915 just out of Armidale in my electorate. She attended the New England Girls School
before commencing tertiary education at Sydney University. Judith Wright was an inspirational writer and a humanitarian, being a passionate activist for Aboriginal communities and environmental causes.

My connection with Judith Wright comes from her love of poetry and for the New England. In my maiden speech I quoted a few lines from her poem *South of my Days*, which refers to the New England tablelands. The quote was perhaps the most elegant description of the New England ever. A collection of paintings from the New England Regional Art Museum is hanging in my electorate office. These paintings are a collection that symbolises the words in the Judith Wright poem *For New England*, and I am greatly honoured to have the chance to show them off. On behalf of all New Englanders, I thank her for her wonderful contribution to Australia and I extend my condolences to her family and friends.

**Goods and Services Tax: Closure of Willunga Newsagency**

Mr COX (Kingston) (1.53 p.m.)—Two Saturdays ago I went to the newsagency in Willunga to buy the *Advertiser*. There was a sign in the window:

We regret to inform you that as from 11 am on Sunday 25th of June our newsagency will be closed. Attempts to sell our business have failed. We thank you for 23 years of patronage.

Bruce and Denise Pulford

Naturally when I bought my *Advertiser* I was moved to ask Denise whether, given the proximity of their closing date to 1 July, it had anything to do with the GST. Yes, it did—it was part of the decision to close the shop. They did not want to go through the process of coming to grips with the paperwork, so yesterday they closed the business before the GST came into effect. This is a blow for Willunga, our little country town losing its only newsagency. This ends a long family tradition of selling newspapers. Bruce Pulford’s father Ross was the newsagent in Mintaro in 1945 and since then the family had only had one year away from the newsagency business. The Pulford family built the Willunga newsagency business from scratch, door-knocking to find customers for the home delivery service and then getting up at 3 a.m. every day for 23 years to roll papers and do the delivery round. I wish Bruce and Denise luck in whatever they choose to do in the future. It would be interesting to know just how many Australian family businesses have closed this month as people get out ahead of the GST.

**Petrie Electorate: Olympic Torch Relay**

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (1.55 p.m.)—I would like to place on the record today the wonderfully successful Olympic torch relay that passed through the electorate of Petrie on 15 June. It made its historic journey across the Houghton Highway, across the waterfront at Clontarf, Woody Point and Margate and finally to Suttons Beach, where the cauldron was lit. It was a great day of celebration, with thousands showing up for the ceremonies. I would also like to make mention of two well-known residents on the peninsula, particularly Norman von Nida, who is undoubtedly one of the world’s greatest golfers and who at 86 years of age took part in the ceremony, even though his eyesight is failing. He made a wonderful contribution. I would say he is the world’s greatest golfer. At 86 years strong, he was joined by Joy Cardie. Joy is going to be the oldest person to run in the relay throughout Australia. I have to compliment Joy because, despite the fact that she had to overcome a minor stroke and a car accident in March, she was still able to take her place in the torch relay. She is to be commended for that fantastic effort.

It was a spectacular day. I thoroughly enjoyed the celebrations. It was wonderful to see the Nigi Nigi tribe also welcome the torch, and Maroochy Barambah, our wonderful opera singer from the Petrie electorate, was there to also be part of the ceremonies. I would like to congratulate everyone involved. *(Time expired)*

**Greenway Electorate: The Leprosy Mission**

Mr MOSSFIELD (Greenway) (1.56 p.m.)—Last Sunday I had the honour of attending the opening and dedication of the New South Wales state headquarters of The Leprosy Mission—TLM—Australia in Quakers Hill, in my electorate of Greenway. TLM is an international interdenominational
Christian medical mission currently working in 30 countries where leprosy is still prevalent. Through the generous support of donors, the mission has been able to set up its state headquarters, which will serve as the administrative hub of the organisation in New South Wales and also provide a place for a period of rest and recuperation for Australians who have previously served overseas treating the disease of leprosy.

The Australian taxpayer contributes to the TLM program through AusAID. For every dollar contributed from Australia to a major project, this amount is matched by $3 from AusAID. Through the excellent work of organisations such as TLM, this disease is now almost under control and efforts are now being stepped up to assist those who were not reached before the disability occurred. I am advised that there are now more people disabled because of this disease than because of the horrific damage caused by landmines. I welcome The Leprosy Mission Australia to Greenway and wish them well for the future.

Kalgoorlie Electorate: Wheatbelt Vietnam Veterans Support Group

Mr HAASE (Kalgoorlie) (1.58 p.m.)—I rise today to bring the attention of the House to the Wheatbelt Vietnam Veterans Support Group. A short time ago I had the pleasure of visiting the town of Merredin, in the heart of Western Australia’s wheatbelt region. The major purpose of my visit was to present a grant of $2,000 to the Wheatbelt Vietnam Veterans Support Group on behalf of Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and the government. I did this at a ceremony at the Merredin RSL Club on 11 June. I wish to report to the House that this support group, which has been operational for only a little over nine months, has grown to the extent that it currently boasts the largest membership of any organisation of its kind in country Western Australia. The group is largely the brainchild of Geoff and Louie Gamble, who recognised the need for veterans in the region and their partners to have an outlet to discuss their shared concerns and be informed about allied services available to them. The group does not stand on formalities and technicalities but meets on a monthly basis at different centres around the region and provides effective support for its nearly 30 members. I also wish to thank Graeme Whitworth from the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and his wife, Sue, for their attendance at the presentation ceremony, and for their contribution to a highly successful occasion. I congratulate the Wheatbelt Vietnam Veterans Support Group in their efforts and encourage them to maintain their efforts, because this is in fact a great healing process and general service to those in the central wheatbelt region.

Goods and Services Tax: Economic Modelling

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (1.59 p.m.)—The Howard government has caused much pain for ordinary Australians, as a majority of them only have their labour to sell. In discussion paper No. 39 dated February 1999 entitled Who pays the tax burden in Australia: estimates for 1996-97 Professors Ann Harding and Neil Warren in their introduction say that equity is a key issue in the tax reform debate. Australians may well speculate on the Howard-Costello government’s wording of the original brief for the GST as applied to Professors Harding and Warren commissioning them to advise on economic modelling for the GST. The GST will go down in history as one of the lowest acts ever executed against ordinary hard-working Australian citizens and voters.

Mr SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 p.m., in accordance with standing order 106A, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

CHILDERS BACKPACKERS TRAGEDY

Mr HOWARD (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (2.00 p.m.)—I know that all members of the House would want me to say how distressed not only I but all members of the government and indeed all members of the House were, and in that sense echo the feelings of the entire Australian community, at the great tragedy that occurred in the backpackers hostel fire in the Queensland town of Childers early on Friday morning. At this stage it appears that some 16 young people—it is thought four from Australia, six from Great Britain, one from Ireland and some also from the Netherlands, Japan and Korea—have lost their lives in this tragedy.
There is always something particularly moving and gripping about the loss of young lives and the loss of so many young lives together. I know how Australians felt last year at the Interlaken tragedy and how that particular event which cruelly took the lives of many young Australians was so keenly and deeply felt within the Australian community. I know there will be much sorrow in the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Japan and Korea at this particular tragedy. I want to commend on behalf of the House the remarkable efforts of the police, the firefighting people and the State Emergency Service of Queensland, and the clergy of Childers and the others involved in counselling and assisting not only the survivors of the fire but also the police who have the incredibly distressful job of removing the remains of the 16 bodies from the fire.

I went to the memorial service at Childers last night and had the opportunity of briefly inspecting the burnt out area. As always, those are scenes of not only devastation but desolation. I felt very much not only for the backpackers who survived and lost their mates but also for the men and women of the Queensland police, particularly the forensic branch of the Queensland police who in these circumstances have very unpleasant and disagreeable tasks to perform. The service in Childers last night was moving, as was the spirit of the young people, particularly when I was talking to them afterwards. So many of them expressed an intention of remaining in Childers and most of them expressed an intention of remaining in Australia. Although many of them had lost close friends, some friends with whom they had travelled from a long way away, they retained an incredible sense of hope and optimism.

On behalf of the parliament I want to extend the government’s condolences to the families of those who died in this tragedy. I want to congratulate the Mayor of Childers, the Queensland police and firefighting people and all those associated with it. The Queensland Premier, with whom I was in contact early on Friday morning after I heard of this tragedy, has rendered every appropriate assistance and has acted promptly in every way. We have agreed that, if there is any way in which we can work together to facilitate assistance to families that may wish to come to Australia, we would be very willing to do so. The loss of young lives is always particularly sad and on this occasion to see so many so cruelly taken so suddenly is in every way distressing. It was a sad day for Queensland and a sad day for Australia, but the spirit displayed by those young people from many countries around the world and also from our own country amidst this loss and devastation gives you a great sense of hope and faith about the young people. The moving and articulate way in which they spoke about their love, their friendship and their mateship was something that made a very deep impact on all of us who were there.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (2.05 p.m.)—I would like to support the remarks of the Prime Minister in extending the condolences of this parliament and this nation to the families of those who so tragically lost their lives in Childers. It is a terrible thing for a parent to lose a child. It is a horrific thing to lose a child in these circumstances, made even more dreadful by that fact that, apart from those Australian families who are experiencing this tragedy, they are from so very far away where communication is enormously difficult; that for a considerable time the fate of their child is not clear cut and then the worst of all possible news comes through; and that, despite the very best efforts of those who are associated with the investigation, I understand it is still not possible to identify individual bodies. The Prime Minister expressed well, both on the day and subsequently, the way in which all of us— and many of us are parents—in this place would feel if confronted by the same circumstances ourselves. We can put ourselves in the minds of those parents who have suffered so grievously as a result of the loss of their children.

Like the Prime Minister, I would like to pay some tribute to the people of Childers for the way in which they responded to this tragic and shocking event in their town. There was an enormous outpouring, quite evident from the reports, from the people to the survivors and to the parents of those who were not survivors. In the best of all possible Australian
traditions, assistance was rendered with clothing and with all the material things that they could possibly have wanted. The clergy and others have responded with the spiritual and counselling requirements that were there, and still are there, for the survivors and for the parents and relatives of those who have been so tragically lost.

The police have a tough job to do in investigating this. The coroner has a very tough job to do. The Premier of Queensland has indicated clearly that no stone will be left unturned in getting to the bottom of this tragedy—all facets of this tragedy; its causes, the ways in which it may have been prevented and the lessons which may be learned for prevention in the future.

The spirit of the young people, as I have seen on television, who are the survivors, in terms of their love and support for one another, is truly magnificent and inspirational. If anything is to be taken out of this that can in any way be seen—and it is only very, very marginally—as offsetting the tragedy, it is the spirit that they have shown in their support for each other. It must be of great comfort to the parents and the families of those who suffered the loss that they are so strongly supported by the 70 who survived and by the town itself.

I understand that there are reports that two of those who have been killed are Western Australians, from Lake Grace. I believe Lake Grace is in the electorate of the member for O’Connor.

Mr Tuckey—Yes.

Mr BEAZLEY—It is part of the wheat belt in Western Australia. He will be conveying, no doubt, the feelings of this parliament to the family of Kelly and Stacey Slarke. They were, from the reports of them, two of our brightest youngsters. They loved life and their loss will be tragically felt in that very tiny community.

I note that there is amongst the international community a very high regard for the interesting and rewarding nature of a tour through Australian agricultural districts. I understand that the Lonely Planet organisation has a guide that takes you from Western Australia through those districts to Queensland. Many thousands of young people from around the globe have found this a place to do a trip which stays with them for all of their lives. We should offer assurances to all those contemplating it that this is a safe and rewarding place to be, and also a helpful place when and if troubles ever emerge. I think that view has been adequately conveyed. I praise the Minister for Foreign Affairs for responding so rapidly, on his way to the Solomons, to what may have been their communications needs. Australians are not forgetters, and we will not forget this. The parents should be assured of that.

Mr ANDERSON—(Gwydir—Deputy Prime Minister) (2.10 p.m.)—I rise to support the remarks made by the Prime Minister and by theLeader of the Opposition.

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister is extended indulgence for that purpose.

Mr ANDERSON—Nothing will compensate for the loss experienced by the families of those who have died. No words could adequately describe their feelings at a time like this. While time may heal the wounds, the scars will undoubtedly remain. I know that all of us in this place feel very deeply for them. I note that we also respect all of those who have aided and assisted those in need and those who have had to deal with the practical and very unpleasant business of finding and identifying bodies and of informing and counselling families and friends. I know, too, that the local member, my good friend Paul Neville, has done everything that he can. We record our respect, Paul, for you and for your wife Margaret for the work that you have put in to help meet the needs of the people in that community at a time like this.

Ms KERNOT (Dickson) (2.12 p.m.)—I would like to add to the condolence.

Ms KERNOT—Indulgence extended.
service supporting the grieving backpackers as they spoke about their friends that really touched me. The words of the Mayor of Isis brought home to me another of the great supports we often take for granted on a daily basis—that when death, one of the plateaus of our lives, confronts us in a public form, then we are touched by our inclusion in the sorrow but also by the courage it brings. I think the news of Childers brought home to all of us in a very real way that, whatever age our children are when they travel away from home, when they travel we know within ourselves that things can happen and we do not fool ourselves that this could not happen to us. I think we all identified very closely with the thought of our receiving such a phone call.

As today parents and relatives and friends in the Childers community share their grief, we who are not part of that immediate circumstance reflect or imagine or know what they feel. Whether it is the lingering emotion that can be triggered by the acrid smell of smoke and the loss of precious processions or whether it is the loss of children in all kinds of situations, in this there is always an individual and a collective grieving. What we saw at the weekend was a humanity with a distinctively Australian flavour. I felt immensely reassured to see the foundations of our society step in to include all in the grief, all in the mourning and all in the healing, through the church, the law, the community and the emergency services, speaking so eloquently through the words of Sir William Deane, Father Gavin Talbot and Mayor Bill Trevor and our other elected leaders who represented us, as well as the grieving backpackers themselves.

I pause to reflect on the wisdom of the mayor, Mr Trevor, when he talked about the way that these young people filled a void left by a generation in the town who had to leave the area for education elsewhere. As he said, ‘To hear the different voices, the different accents in the street, has added something to the heart of our small community.’ For many of them, in five short weeks of working and living together they forged wonderful friendships. Those memories will stay with them. I join other speakers in offering our support to all who have been touched by these deaths.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (2.15 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek your indulgence to speak on this matter.

Mr SPEAKER—Of course the member for Hinkler may proceed.

Mr NEVILLE—When you drive into Childers, you see one of those idyllic places. It is a beautiful town set on top of red ridges. It has a subtropical climate and a lovely avenue of leopard trees through the centre of the town, flanked on both sides with some exquisite colonial buildings, including the old Palace Hotel which became the backpackers lodge. On Friday morning I was in Canberra to chair an inquiry. My illusions were sadly shattered by the dreadful announcement early on Friday morning. I immediately rang the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. I would like to say how much I appreciated the promptness of their response. The foreign minister agreed to come to Childers with me that day and arranged transport for me.

Nothing can quite prepare you for the sight of something like that and the implications of it, the thought that so many people from so many lands had their lives cut short in such a tragic way, and with such devastation—also, the thought of parents not knowing whether their children were alive or dead; indeed, whether they were in southern Queensland or central Queensland, or whether they were fruit-picking. The uncertainty of that first day was something unbelievable—86 young people in a building; people severely traumatised after the event who were sitting on the footpath in the early hours of the morning wrapped in blankets and quite shocked. You do not know where everyone is, how many were in the building and how many were outside. We thought there was a fifth Irish girl there and it was only yesterday that we were able to deduce that she had left two days earlier.

As other speakers have said, the people of Childers were truly exceptional. They immediately turned their cultural centre, as they
call it, into a nerve centre, a response centre. The cane growers made their headquarters available to the police. A whole series of community wheels started to spin. Everyone—from people who walked in off the street to all the councillors and their wives—was intimately involved. Hot food was prepared for 12 hours of the day and it was served to emergency services people and to the young survivors. There were some truly exceptional acts of generosity, from a pensioner couple who walked in with $4, and two bikies who brought a pile of clothes from Brisbane, to a couple who travelled 70 kilometres from Bargara with canisters of hot food—and the fruit and vegetables for which the area is famous.

The foreign minister and the immigration minister had senior officers there by midday on the Friday. Nothing is more frightening to survivors in such a circumstance, especially those who do not speak English, than to be without documents, passports, or even a wallet or money. We then set about contacting the various embassies and they responded readily. The Japanese Consul General was there by midday, followed by the British Vice-Consul and, the next morning, the Dutch Consul General. I met Richard O’Brien at Bundaberg Airport and took him there. He was the most senior diplomat on the scene and was there for two days. It was good to have those people there because they were quickly able to put in place arrangements for the reissue of documentation and so on, so that those kids did not just have a sense of physical nakedness; rather, that the support mechanisms were building around them.

To visit the building with the Prime Minister last night and earlier with Mr O’Brien was a horrifying experience. Again, nothing quite prepares you for that acrid smell that the member for Dickson spoke about and the thought of those young people being upstairs. Most of those who died were upstairs. What the police and emergency services are going through is quite extraordinary. It is taking nearly two to three hours to remove each body because of the dreadful injuries. You can imagine the trauma under which the 10 police officers who have been delegated that job have to act. I will speak further on this because there are many that I have not acknowledged and, in fact, do not even know about. So many people did so much.

I particularly make reference to Bill Trevor, the Mayor of Childers, whose leadership was exemplary, and to those who, at such short notice, arranged that very moving ceremony last night in the auditorium at the cultural centre. The most senior people from federal, state and local politics, the church and various community organisations attended. It was indeed a moving ceremony, led by the local Anglican priest and supported by the Anglican and Catholic bishops from Brisbane and senior members from other religious denominations in the district. The most poignant part of the evening was when the young people came on stage not quite at the end of the formal part of the ceremony. There was scarcely a dry eye in the hall or, for that matter, outside.

Small crops are a big part of the economy of Childers. It is a sugarcane and small crops town. The soil is very rich and the small crop side of things over the last eight years has been a booming industry. About 50 per cent of the young people who work there are backpackers, so there is a great bond between the community and the backpackers, which has even spilled over into an annual cultural festival that over 30,000 people attend each year. For a town of 2½ thousand people and a shire of 6½ thousand people, that is something quite remarkable. I think it gives you a bit of a feeling of the depth of empathy between the community and the young people from various international backgrounds who go there.

I too join with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Prime Minister and the member for Dickson in extending my sympathies. There is still more work to be done in Childers. We should not step away today and think that it is all fixed—it is far from fixed. If the circumstances in which the police are now involved are confirmed, as they are starting to look at present that they will be, a very sinister overlay covers this whole event. It is of the magnitude of Thredbo and Interlaken. I thank all those people—the ministers, the embas-
Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (2.25 p.m.)—I would like to respond to the words of sympathy and comfort from the Prime Minister and my colleagues for those who are grieving in the wake of last Friday’s tragic fire in Childers. The members of the opposition share your sentiments, Prime Minister, and our hearts go out, with those of other Australians, to the families and friends of the young people whose lives were lost so pointlessly and cruelly and to the survivors, who have so much pain to bear and who are so far away from the love and reassurance of their own families.

Last Friday in central Queensland was so beautiful. It was a flawless day of sunshine and blue sky. It was a day that made you feel good to be alive and yet, as the media reports got closer and closer to the full extent of the dreadful truth of what happened in Childers, a dark shadow seemed to come over our state of Queensland, and indeed the whole country. The horror of what happened at the Palace Backpackers Hostel is the stuff of every parent’s nightmares. The tragic irony of this terrible disaster is that the 16 young people who are believed to have died in the fire were living out a dream. They had all worked hard. They had been studying, training or working in their home towns, some in Australia and some in other countries. Their trip to Australia was a reward, a carefree look at the world, experiencing new places and new friends before settling down to their lives. Like so many people, they were going through that fantastic experience of travelling around Australia, meeting their fellow backpackers and having a fantastic time seeing everything that our wonderful country has to offer. No doubt it was a very special time in their lives.

While this was happening, their parents were far away and undoubtedly very proud of the hard work and drive their children had shown to reach their goal of travelling overseas. They would have been waiting very excitedly to read each email or letter and to be able to share that information around amongst other family members and friends, telling the stories of what their children were up to across the other side of the world. Of course, the other side of it for the parents is what they are experiencing right now—that is, the constant worry and strain in the backs of their minds, knowing that their children were having the time of their lives but also counting the days until they saw their smiling faces again and had them safe at home. So for the parents who have been through the highs of knowing their children were living a dream in achieving their goal, parents who are experiencing the lows of what they are going through now, our hearts are with you.

I also want to pay tribute to the people of the Childers community. Since the people of Childers woke up to the tragedy that occurred last Friday morning, they have stepped in to be acting families for the survivors of the fire. The people of Childers have been there to help them through the shock and grief as the reality of their loss set in. The people of Childers have also shed the tears and prayed the prayers with the absent families from around Australia and the world who lost their adored children in the fire. I think that, as all Australians have watched events unfold in Childers over the last couple of days, we have felt very proud of what has been shown by that community. We have seen the way in which they have reached out to help the survivors and to grieve and share some of the burden of the loss of those 16 young people. I guess it is our way as a nation of repaying the debts of Interlaken and similar tragedies that have occurred to Australians overseas. It has been a fantastic display of the spirit of our Queensland country towns. You are never judged in those towns; they take you as they find you. But once they take you, you are there for better or for worse, and we have seen that in the last few days.

Congratulations are due on account of the fantastic and unthinkable efforts of the emergency workers. None of us here could even begin to contemplate the horror of what those people are going through, but they are doing it in order to provide closure and comfort for families around Australia and the world.

To the survivors: I hope that you will find the comfort you need. You will all have your own ways of coping with what has happened to you and to the friends whom you lost in
the fire. I hope that you will take the rest of your time in Australia to see the good that this country can give you. Also, please remember the families of the mates you lost in the fire. Please keep in touch with them and share what you knew of the love that they had for their families. Please share the memories you can with their families, whether through letters and email or whether you visit them when you return to your home countries.

My sincere sympathy goes to the families and friends of all those people who died in the fire. I do not know the mums, dads and family members of the people who died, but I do know about the capacity of country people in Queensland. To the families and friends I would say: if you maintain your connection with Childers, you will always have love, support and people to share the happy memories of your children. Until you are ready to enter the stage of coming to terms with this terrible loss, I hope that you can find some comfort for your terrible pain.

Mr SPEAKER (2.31 p.m.)—As Speaker, may I identify every parliamentarian, their staff, and the staff of this great institution with the sentiments expressed by the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and other speakers. I extend our sympathy and condolences to the families and friends of those who died in this awful tragedy.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr BEAZLEY (2.31 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, do you recall saying on 13 August 1998, in a previous address to the nation, ‘The GST will not increase the price of petrol for the ordinary motorist.’ Prime Minister, in your address to the nation this week, will you be admitting to Australians that you have now broken your promise to them?

Mr HOWARD—I will be saying a number of things in my address to the nation, and I invite the Leader of the Opposition—who will not doubt be given the opportunity to reply, if my understanding of the rules governing these things is accurate—to reply in whatever way he thinks fit. Let me take the opportunity, as the Leader of the Opposition has raised the issue of petrol pricing, to say a few things now.

One of the things I find quite remarkable about the reaction of the oil companies is the astonishing way in which many of their spokesmen have dismissed the concept of any cost savings. Mr McMaster, the public affairs spokesman for British Petroleum, when asked on Friday whether prices would go up on 1 July, said:

They must go up. There are no savings in this for us. If there were, we would certainly pass them on.

How generous of him!

But there are none. Therefore, prices at the pump will certainly rise.

The breathtaking character of this particular spokesman for the oil industry was even worse in an earlier part of his interview. I invite all members of the House to listen very carefully, because this indicates precisely what this particular company, at least, may be interested in. He said this:

We need probably 9c a litre, not the 6.7 per cent the government is talking about.

What Mr McMaster was saying was that the straight excise cut, let alone the issue of cost savings, had to be 9c a litre. Nine cents a litre is based on a strike price not of 90c a litre, not of 85c a litre, but of 99c a litre. In making that claim, he was in effect arguing that the oil companies should be provided, courtesy of the federal Treasury and the Australian taxpayer, almost another 1c a litre by way of excise subsidy. According to the Shell company’s website, which I checked shortly before question time, the weighted average of capital city petrol prices today is under 85c a litre. What Mr McMaster was asking for was a subsidy to offset the GST, based on a strike price not of 85c a litre but of 99c a litre. Bear in mind that we have a subsidy scheme of 1c and 2c for people living outside metropolitan areas, and prices outside metropolitan areas are nowhere near 99c a litre. In Cairns today, for example, petrol is 85c a litre. In many other towns around Australia, it is under 90c a litre.

There are cost savings, contrary to what Mr McMaster and others assert. Only the Labor Party and some oil companies are
saying there are no cost savings. Our advice from the Treasury, based on their modelling, is that the cost saving is 1½c a litre. We say to the oil companies of Australia: you pass those savings on in full. As with other companies, we are asking them to anticipate cost savings where they can. We are asking that of other companies and many are doing it. I noticed an advertisement in the press today from Woolworths, which said, ‘We will pass on our own cost savings under the new tax system to our customers.’ I would say to at least one of those oil companies I have referred to: acknowledge that there are cost savings and give us an undertaking that you are going to pass them on. Are the oil companies really saying that it is impossible to anticipate any savings? Are they denying, as this spokesman is, that there are cost savings? The strike price of 90c a litre does provide an extra buffer for the consumer, based on today’s prices, of close to half a cent a litre, because the current level is below 85c a litre. I believe that the government has acted appropriately and honourably in relation to these matters.

**Trade Practices Act: Removal of Industrial Matters**

Mr BARRESI (2.37 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware of calls for industrial matters to be removed from the Trade Practices Act? What are the likely consequences of this for Australia’s economic reputation?

Mr HOWARD—I say in reply to the member for Deakin that I was really disturbed to read this morning a report in the Age, under the name of Mr Brad Norington—and it had a photograph of the Leader of the Opposition, so I assume I have the right party in the right country—which said:

... a future Labor government would abolish secondary boycott laws under the Trade Practices Act, which protect employers against sympathy strikes

If this is true—and I have a rough idea it is pretty accurate—this is the latest capitulation by the Leader of the Opposition to his trade union bosses. They talk about the Sherman Act and all sorts of other acts in the United States. If a Labor government were elected and this were to go through you would call it the Crean-Ferguson-George act because it would be a demonstration of the influence of the trade union movement on the Australian Labor Party.

I have more than a passing interest in section 45D. It was when I was Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs in the Fraser government in 1976 that we wrote for the first time into the Trade Practices Act the section that became known as section 45D, aimed at secondary boycotts by trade unions. Ironically enough, it was aimed at secondary boycotts by the trade union movement in the oil industry, which had the effect of maintaining higher petrol prices than would otherwise have been the case. There is a certain amount of irony in that, and over the years it has been a battleground for the trade union movement. They have never accepted the fact that they should be treated the same as employers under the law. They have always wanted a privileged position under the law. They have always said you should have secondary boycott legislation imposing enormous fines on companies but, when it came to trade unions, you had to adopt a hands-off approach.

As the minister, I can remember negotiating with the then Leader of the Opposition—a former leader of the ACTU who was ultimately to become the Prime Minister of Australia in 1983—Mr Bob Hawke. I can remember his telling me how, if we went ahead, there would be blood flowing in the streets and that it represented an absolutely outrageous attack on the fundamental rights of the trade union movement of Australia. It represented no such attack. All it sought to do was to treat trade unions like the rest of the community. All it sought to do was to make all Australians equal before the law. All it sought to do was to make trade unions like the rest of the community. All it sought to do was to make all Australians equal before the law. All it sought to do was to say to a trade union that if it wrecked another business, it should suffer the same penalty as another business wrecking one of its competitors. That is all it sought to do. The only reason why the Labor Party in the year 2000 would want to get away with this is that they are even more subject to influence by the union movement than was the case in the 1970s and the 1980s.

I have no doubt that this report is true in substance. I have no doubt that the union
movement has once again demanded of the Labor Party that it reinstate a commitment to get rid of it. I can assure those who sit opposite that we will have plenty of opportunity to remind you of this. We will have plenty of opportunity to tell every small business in Australia that you will take away the protection of the secondary boycott laws. We will have every opportunity to tell the business community of Australia that you want, if you once more win power, to create a situation where everybody except the trade union movement is subject to the laws of Australia. That philosophy is quite unacceptable to us, and I believe it is unacceptable to the great majority of the Australian people.

**Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices**

Mr CREAN (2.42 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I ask him whether he remembers saying to Alan Jones on 14 September 1998 about the price of petrol:

Well, anybody who is saying it will rise as a result of the GST is telling lies.

Prime Minister, are you aware that the following organisations have now said that petrol prices will rise as a result of the GST: the Business Council of Australia, the NFF, the Motor Trades Association, the Australian Automobile Association and the RACV?

Prime Minister, are you saying that these organisations are now telling lies?

Mr HOWARD—What I am saying is that we have put in place an arrangement that represents all that any government can do to give effect to the commitment we made. I am also saying to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that, if he wants to quote to me oil companies, or he wants to quote to me business organisations, the basis of the argument that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is putting is that there are no cost savings at all. Indeed, many people in the oil industry are trying to assert that.

To use an example that the Acting Treasurer has used, when you carry petrol from a terminal to a service station, you do it in large trucks which are fuelled by diesel. That diesel will fall by 24c a litre as from 1 July. Is Mr McMaster saying, is the Deputy Leader of the Opposition saying and are other spokesmen for the oil industry saying that that will not represent cost savings for the Australian community? This represents an attempt by the Labor Party once again to avoid the responsibility to articulate any kind of alternative policy. On Melbourne radio this morning, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was asked 16 times to clarify what Labor would do with different aspects of the tax system. The only commitment he could give in response to those 16 questions was that the Labor Party would keep the GST.

**Solomon Islands: Political Crisis**

Mr ANDREW THOMSON (2.44 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister inform the House of the outcomes of his visit to the Solomon Islands and the prospects for peace in that country?

Mr DOWNER—I thank the honourable member for his question. The Australian government is continuing to promote the peace process in the Solomon Islands. We have been doing that in three ways: firstly, providing neutral venues for talks; secondly, encouraging and facilitating discussion between all the parties towards peace; and, thirdly, continuing to assess and respond to humanitarian needs as necessary. Two weeks ago when I and some colleagues from the Commonwealth were in the Solomon Islands we encouraged a continuation of the truce that had been put in place for our visit. I am pleased to say that that truce has held up in Honiara, although not necessarily all over Guadalcanal, for the full two weeks. During my visit, I took the opportunity on Saturday of meeting with the Governor-General, a number of government leaders and the leader of the opposition and I brought together on an Australian landing craft the premiers of Guadalcanal and Malaita. I also met with representatives of the Guadalcanal militants. The Malaita Eagle Force met with officials in my party but they did not attend official talks, indicating that further disturbances in Guadalcanal through the course of last week needed to be addressed by them as a first order priority. The High Commissioner in Honiara, Martin Sharp, is visiting the affected areas in Guadalcanal during the course
of today to assess what humanitarian assistance might be required.

We are continuing to encourage militants and political leaders to participate in ceasefire talks. We had hoped that the Malaita Eagle Force would join with the Isatabu Freedom Movement, the premiers of Guadalcanal and Malaita and others on board HMAS To-bruk for talks on Sunday to discuss a ceasefire, but the Malaita Eagle Force decided they would stay away as a result of the violence which had taken place in the eastern part of Guadalcanal during the course of last week. Nevertheless, we are continuing to urge the Malaita Eagle Force to participate in talks. I do not wish to foreshadow what their conclusions may be, but we are continuing to work at encouraging them to do so in the next couple of days. The Solomon Islands parliament is scheduled to meet on Wednesday. In discussions with government members and the opposition, they all indicated to me their willingness to participate in the parliamentary meeting on Wednesday. But, frankly, I think it very much remains to be seen how this session will turn out in the end. As I have said for the last couple of weeks, the situation in the Solomon Islands remains fragile. I am of the view that it is important that Australia continues to do what it can to promote a peace process there. That is no easy task, but I think it is appropriate that we continue to do that.

Mr Brereton—You should have sent the police as requested in the first instance.

Mr DOWNER—The honourable member for Kingsford-Smith interjects: should we send in-line police into the Solomon Islands? We have made it clear all along and we still make it clear—and so do the rest of the South Pacific Forum and the rest of the international community—that we do not wish to send unarmed Australian police into in-line positions to try to keep separate the Malaitans from the Guadalcanalese. We do not think shedding Australian blood for that cause is an appropriate risk for Australians. I am quite happy for that to be a difference between the government and the opposition. I am quite happy to say that we will do what we can diplomatically, but we will not be invading the Solomon Islands.

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices
Mr CREAN (2.49 p.m.)—My question again is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, you claim that the strike rate you have used for petrol is 90c a litre. Is it not true that the GST will force up the price of petrol anywhere in metropolitan areas where it is retailing at 74c a litre or more?

Mr HOWARD—I stand by the claim, which is clearly defensible on any analysis, that the strike rate is based on 90c a litre.

Mr Crean—But it is 74.

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has asked his question. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr HOWARD—The original disposition of the government, as I think I indicated in an interview over the weekend, was to adopt a strike rate of 85c a litre. We decided in the final analysis to adopt a strike rate of 90c a litre, and one of the consequences of that was to provide, as I say, an additional buffer and benefit for consumers. I take the opportunity of reminding the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that, at present, according to the advice I had just before question time, the average weighted capital city price is in the order of just under 85c a litre.

Mr Crean—But the strike rate is 74.

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has asked his question.

Mr HOWARD—The strike rate that we have adopted of 90c a litre—and it was set out very clearly and very well in the news release put out by the Acting Treasurer on Thursday—means that, in effect, if current prices were to continue, you would have a half a cent a litre buffer. Part of the decision making process was to provide a strike rate that meant that that would be the consequence. If you had looked at the average of petrol prices over the last six months, you would have produced a figure of well under 85c a litre. But, in taking a strike rate of 90c a litre, we have, in effect, provided an additional buffer for the Australian consumer based on the experience of the last six months. Is the Leader of the Opposition saying that there is something wrong or ungenerous about that? Is the opposition, along with some of the oil companies, asserting that
there are no cost savings to be had for oil companies in this? If they are asserting that there are no cost savings, they are the only business organisations in Australia—

Mr Crean—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. My question to the Prime Minister asked him whether anywhere where the price of petrol in metropolitan areas was 74c or more his GST fix would drive the price of petrol up. That is the question he has to answer.

Mr SPEAKER—The Prime Minister was answering a question about fuel pricing and the impact of the GST, and he was entirely relevant.

Mr HOWARD—Mr Speaker, I do not have anything to add.

Economy: Performance

Mr PYNE (2.52 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister for Finance and Administration, the minister representing the Treasurer. Would the Acting Treasurer detail to the House any recent independent assessments of the performance of the Australian economy?

Mr FAHEY—I know the honourable member for Sturt is aware that the OECD has issued the first report on its growth project to the ministerial council meeting in Paris, which is being chaired by the Treasurer. It is an honour for Australia to chair the OECD meeting of the ministerial council. Australia was elected to chair this meeting; it is not rotated through OECD members. The election of Australia is recognition of Australia’s strong economic performance and record of policy reform and innovation. The OECD report entitled *Is there a new economy?* identifies Australia as one of only six OECD countries, including the United States, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway, that have been able to harness higher growth and higher productivity. There has been a jump in Australia’s productivity growth in recent years. Productivity growth has averaged 2.8 per cent per annum under the coalition compared to an average of 1.5 per cent per annum under Labor.

The IMF, in a report examining productivity growth and structural reform in Australia, which was released earlier this year, concluded that in recent years productivity growth in Australia had increased to rates ‘not seen since the golden age of the 1960s’. The March quarter national accounts, which the Treasurer referred to last week in this House, showed that this is the 12th consecutive quarter of through the year growth of four per cent or above. Such an outcome has been recorded only once previously, and that was from June 1968 to March 1971. The strong growth of the Australian economy has resulted in strong employment growth. Since the coalition came to office, some 712,000 new jobs have been created. The unemployment rate is now 6.7 per cent—the lowest for a decade. Importantly, the outlook for employment growth is positive and the unemployment rate is forecast to fall to 6¼ per cent by the June quarter 2001. From there on, we will be on the verge of the lowest unemployment rates in a quarter of a century. The government’s commitment to sound macro-economic policies and ongoing structural reform has delivered strong economic growth and increased employment opportunities. Australia’s good macro-economic management has been recognised by international organisations, such as the OECD and the IMF. It is this government that is implementing the policies that will bring further benefits to the Australian nation in the future.

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (2.56 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, my question without notice is to the Prime Minister. Is it not true that the GST will force up the price of petrol anywhere in regional Australia where your 1c rebate applies if it is retailing at 84c a litre or more?

Mr HOWARD—I believe that the effect of not only the announcements that were made on Friday but also the other policies announced by the government will be to give—

Mr Crean—Oh, yeah!

Mr HOWARD—He laughs, ‘Oh, yeah.’ You did not say ‘Oh, yeah’ when you jacked up petrol by 6c a litre in 1993. You did not say ‘Oh, yeah’ then. Oh, yeah, I remember that very well—and so do the Australian people. Oh, yeah, they do. They also remember that you went to that election and you not
only promised that you would cut income tax but you also promised that there would be no increases in indirect taxation. Oh, yeah, we all remember that. We all remember it very well. What happened? Was there any compensation for the pensioner? Was there any compensation for the bloke in the bush in 1993? Was there any compensation? Of course there was not. You are frauds when it comes to taxation policy. You are the greatest frauds that this country has ever seen. You have over here a group of men and women who are trying to do something decent for the tax system of Australia.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. A very specific question was asked.

Government members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition I will obviously recognise but I believe he is entitled to the courtesy of being heard without the interjections that were interrupting him.

Mr Beazley—It was a very simple question: won’t the GST force up the price of petrol anywhere in regional Australia where the 1c rebate applies if it is retailing at 84c a litre or more? It was a simple question and it requires a simple answer.

Mr Beazley—I had noted the question and I concede that the Prime Minister was, at a point in his answer, not being relevant to the question. He then came back to the matter of regional Australia, and that is why I allowed him to continue.

Mr HOWARD—I would merely add that if the people, the producers, the exporters and the hardworking men and women of regional Australia want a decent deal on fuel prices, they will continue to support, as I know they do, the taxation reform policies of the government.

Mr Crean interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—Mr Speaker, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition can energise himself with all the laughter he wants as we are in the last week of the countdown towards the introduction of the new taxation system. I would say to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that all the laughter, all the point scoring, all the thrust and counter-thrust and all
was Labor’s average over their 13 years. In the time that the coalition has been in government, the number of disputes and working days lost have been half that number. That is, in part, as a result of the reforms that we introduced in 1996.

Mr Bevis—What were they under our enterprise bargaining system?

Mr REITH—I have seen the article in the Age referred to by the Prime Minister earlier in question time today. With all due respect to the Prime Minister, I can now do better than his reference to the Age. In fact, it is my great pleasure today to launch a new policy. I am going to launch the Labor Party’s policy. Mr Speaker, I am sure you will be as interested in this as all other members of the House. In fact, there are probably a few backbenchers on the other side who have not yet realised that it is their policy, but I can assure them that it is. I table Labor’s policy, approved last Friday, which includes, amongst other things, a commitment to the abolition of the Trade Practices Act bans on secondary boycotts.

Mr Bevis—What does it say? Read the whole thing.

Mr REITH—I will go to the detail in a moment.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Brisbane is being extended a good deal of licence and is exceeding it.

Mr REITH—They’re not bad, are they? I have launched their policy for them and now they want me to read the damn thing! This policy abolishes an important part of the law which protects businesses, particularly small businesses. The absolute consequence of this proposal from Labor, if ever it were to be made law—

Mr Bevis—You can’t read. You can’t tell the truth!

Mr SPEAKER—I remind the member for Brisbane that interjecting at will has never been provided for under the standing orders. I ask him to exercise more restraint or I will deal with him.

Mr McMullan—On a point of order relating to relevance, Mr Speaker: the question related to new policy. The matter to which Mr REITH is referring has been Labor Party policy since 1983.

Mr SPEAKER—There is no point of order.

Mr REITH—I launched their policy, then they wanted me to read it and now they reckon it is not worth reading because it has been around for 20 years! I will tell you what it means. First of all, it means that they want to weaken the Trade Practices Act provisions so that the unions are above the law compared with everybody else. The second thing they want to do is not just go back to 1996; they want to rewrite the provisions. Why? Because the trade union leadership has said, ‘In return for donations to your campaign at the next election, we expect you to give us a privileged position.’ The third thing they want to do—as they claim that they will have these laws in the industrial relations laws of the land—is weaken the enforcement and the penalties under the Trade Practices Act. This is a proposition to make a wholesale transfer of power to a union elite, representing fewer and fewer of the work force. As the ACTU meets this week, the one thing they are not going to admit is that in the private sector work force less than one in five are members of a union. Labor’s answer to that is, ‘You cannot secure membership, so we will provide you with a privileged position by legislating a special deal for the trade union leadership.’

The consequence of this is more strikes, lower pay and less productivity. In the end, the average rank and file worker will miss out. It should never be forgotten that, when Labor was last in power, from start to finish low income earners saw a reduction of five per cent in their real wages. In the time that we have been in power, because we have had a fairer system of laws, not only has the number of disputes been down but workers have earned more and more jobs have been created. This is a policy prescription for giving more power to trade union bosses at the expense of the Australian community.

Goods and Services Tax: Fuel Excise

Mr CREAN (3.06 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I ask him: is he aware that his then transport minister, Mr Vaile, said
on 9 September 1998, during the election campaign:

Some ... predict more expensive petrol as a result of the GST. They are wrong. They overlook the cut in excise equivalent to the GST to effectively zero rate petrol.

Prime Minister, why haven't you reduced excise by an amount equivalent to the GST, as Mr Vaile promised the electorate?

Mr Howard—I have not seen that statement which is attributed to Mr Vaile. I have learnt from long experience never to accept as accurate a representation of a quote from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I had some further evidence of this in question time earlier today when he quoted something in relation to Alan Jones. He quoted me as saying:

Well, anybody who is saying it will rise as a result of the GST is telling lies.

Of course, he did not then go on to acknowledge that the three items I referred to in the rest of my answer bore upon: firstly, the reduction in fuel excise; secondly, the exemption from excise for off-road use; and, finally, the fact that the GST, unlike excise, will be rebateable for business purposes. The capacity of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to mislead knows no bounds.

Mr Crean—I seek leave to table the press release I referred to so that the Prime Minister might think about it in preparation for the next time—

Mr Speaker—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Leave not granted.

Goods and Services Tax: Advantages

Mr Forrest (3.08 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Finance and Administration, representing the Treasurer. Would the Acting Treasurer detail to the House the advantages of the new tax system, in particular how it will benefit families in my electorate of Mallee, as well as for individual investors?

Mr Fahey—I am delighted to get a question from the honourable member for Mallee which requests me to detail to the House the advantages of the new tax system—a positive question. In five days time, the government’s reform will give Australia a tax system for the new century, one which will benefit Australian families and investors. Under the government’s plan, income tax will be significantly reduced. There will be some $12 billion of tax cuts annually. From Saturday, 1 July, 80 per cent of Australian taxpayers will face marginal tax rates of 30 per cent or less, compared with 30 per cent of taxpayers now. This will be achieved by increasing the tax-free threshold and cutting all marginal rates except the top rate. In respect of Australian families, through the extension of the family tax initiative which the government introduced in 1997, there will be assistance. The family package will provide benefits totalling $2.4 billion per year to over two million families. A one-income family that has a child under five and is earning $29,000 per annum will be around $60 per week better off from next Saturday as a result of the tax cuts and the improvements to the family assistance introduced by this government.

I would also like to note some recent work by Woolworths supermarkets regarding the impact of tax reform on consumers. I think this is very pertinent to the question I was asked. Today Woolworths’ Chief Executive Officer, Mr Roger Corbett, said that customers at Woolworths supermarkets would be pleasantly surprised by overall lower grocery prices from Saturday onwards. He said:

We have applied New Tax System savings to Choice Magazine’s current standard basket of groceries—the result is a price drop between 2.4% and 3.3% across the nation.

That is more good news for Australian families. The honourable member for Mallee also asked me about investors. The new tax reform will bring about business tax reforms as well. These include lower capital gains tax rates and lower company tax rates. That will benefit investors and make Australian businesses more internationally competitive, especially in our region. On capital gains tax, individuals will only have to pay half of any gain that they make, provided they have held the asset for at least 12 months, and from 1 July the maximum rate will be 24.25 per cent. The government has also legislated scrip for scrip roll-over relief that will be of
great assistance in respect of takeovers. For those who are investing, there will be a refund of imputation credits.

That is a broad summary of a number of the initiatives that will benefit Australians starting from Saturday of this week. I looked for some inspiration this morning in a report on 3AW which involved the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition went through an extensive interview. On 16 occasions, as the Prime Minister pointed out, he was asked to indicate what he would do differently, what the Labor Party would do differently with the tax system. The total take-out is that they would keep the GST. Some of the questions are interesting:

Neil Mitchell: If you win the next election, would you dump the GST?
Simon Crean: We can’t dump the GST.
Neil Mitchell: Why can’t you dump it?
Simon Crean: Because there is too much sunk cost, so to speak
Neil Mitchell: What will your promise be in respect of [a particular aspect of] the GST?
Simon Crean: Our promise is to roll back the GST.
We saw last week what roll-back means: it means a lot more in the way of costs for caravan park residents and for boarding house residents. The interview continues:

Neil Mitchell: How will you make up the extra money when you roll back?
Simon Crean: It will be fully costed.
It just goes on. It is quite fascinating; after I finished reading it, the only thing I could think of for the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is that he is a red-hot favourite for the Hansie Cronje obfuscation award for the year.

Goods and Services Tax: Fuel Costs
Mr BEAZLEY (3.14 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, will you release the modelling which you claim shows that the oil companies will be in a position to cut fuel costs by 1.5c per litre on Saturday?

Mr HOWARD—I was asked this question yesterday and I said that I would have a yarn to the Treasurer about releasing it when he got back. But I have since been informed that, when you lot were in power, you never released Treasury modelling except on our policies.

Industrial Relations: Secret Ballots
Mr BILLSON (3.15 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Is the minister aware of moves to give workers a greater say in the taking of industrial action? Would the minister inform the House of support for these initiatives?

Mr REITH—Mr Speaker—
Mr Melham—The workers’ friend.
Mr REITH—‘The workers’ friend’ does have a good ring about it—doesn’t it, Prime Minister?

Mr Howard—Yes.

Mr SPEAKER—The minister will come to the question.
Mr REITH—It is an excellent question, and a very good interjection from the opposition, the best thing they have said today. Mr Speaker, I can tell you the people who are most opposed to giving the workers a greater say: the people who sit opposite. They have long opposed the idea of secret ballots and the principle of giving workers a say in the affairs of their own unions.

The coalition government is all about choice: we are about giving people choice when it comes to whether or not they enter into an agreement; we are all about choice whether you are in a union or not in a union; and we also believe people should have a choice as to whether or not they go on strike. That choice should be a real one, it should be a choice free of intimidation and it should be a choice that people should be able to exercise by way of secret ballot. This was coalition policy at the last federal election. I want to advise members today that we are still resolute in our support for the policy, which was endorsed by the Australian people at the last election. Therefore, I will today be reintroducing a bill which is to provide for secret ballots before strike action.

We have had many discussions with the Democrats in recent times. The Democrats have said to the government that, rather than having an omnibus bill containing numerous
measures, they believe it is better if policy reforms are dealt with on a bill by bill basis. Therefore, taking up that public suggestion of the Democrats, we will be introducing a series of bills this week on key workplace relations issues which will provide the parties in the Senate with an opportunity to consider them on their merits. The Democrats have said a bit about this already on the public record. In fact, Senator Andrew Murray said in a Senate committee report last November:

... Democrats are also strongly supportive of the democratic protections afforded by secret balloting processes.

Senator Meg Lees also spoke on the issue. She raised her concerns about the details of our proposal prior to Christmas but, in respect of the principle, she said that, if the government was prepared to sit down and talk with the Democrats, then they were prepared to do so in a constructive way. She said:

If we could go back to government, talk to them— as you are talking to us, you know, in what I would describe as a reasonable and logical fashion—then the answer comes out as, yes, there should be that provision.

She was speaking on Radio 2GB on 29 November last year in respect of the provision of secret ballots. So I believe that, on the basis of public comments, there is some support in the Senate for the principle of secret ballots. The government is prepared to sit down and negotiate with the Democrats about the details of such provisions. But we believe the principle is terribly important. It was voted on and endorsed by the Australian people, and I think it is another test of the Labor Party as to whether they support the rank and file trade union members or they simply do as the trade union leadership and elites tell them to do. There is no doubt this is a measure that would give real power to rank and file trade union members in deciding whether or not they should participate in strike action. Labor will, of course, vote against the principle of secret ballots, because they are opposed to giving workers a say.

Goods and Services Tax: Fuel Costs

Mr CREAN (3.19 p.m.)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. Given that you now will not release your modelling in relation to petrol, isn’t it a fact that, to cut fuel costs by 1½c per litre, oil companies will have to, over the next four days, completely rebuild Australia’s oil refineries, renew the entire tanker fleet, and overhaul every service station in Australia? Prime Minister, can you assure Australian motorists that this will occur by Saturday so that your 1½c saving will be passed on to motorists on time in full?

Mr HOWARD—You can always rely on one thing about the Deputy Leader of the Opposition: he will always go right over the top. That is exactly what the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has done. What the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is really saying is that, unlike other companies, oil companies should not pass on their cost saving as a result of taxation reform. He is not only saying that they should not pass on those savings; he is also saying that oil companies, unlike other Australian companies, should not, where possible, anticipate cost reductions. What the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is also falsely alleging to the Australian public, along with the member for Batman, who asked me a question based on a hypothetical price of petrol in a certain area, is that the arrangements announced by the Acting Treasurer on Thursday were based on a strike price of other than 90c a litre. That is at the core of this whole debate. The beginning of the deception of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was when he appeared on the PM program on Thursday night, along with a lot of the other spokesmen for the oil companies, including Mr McMaster from BP. They argued—

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—Yes, those as well. They all argued incorrectly that the strike price on which these arrangements were based was in the order of 70c to 75c a litre.

Mr Crean—Seventy-four.

Mr HOWARD—I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. As always, his interventions are helpful.

Mr Crean—I know.

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is not invited to make interventions, even by the Prime Minister.
Mr HOWARD—As indicated by the Acting Treasurer, it was based on a strike price of 90c a litre. That 90c a litre means that, in addition to the cost savings of the oil companies—which he denies exist, apparently—there is an additional buffer. Based on current prices, which were used as the basis of the question asked by the member for Batman, you have got an additional buffer of about half a cent a litre. There are cost savings.

Mr Crean—Yes? Release them.

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr HOWARD—The advice we have from Treasury is that those cost savings are 1½c a litre. Only the Labor Party and some of the oil companies—I repeat, some of the oil companies—are asserting that there are no cost savings. We say to them that they should pass on those cost savings as other companies are passing on their cost savings.

Mr Crean—The RACV. The NFF.

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition!

Mr HOWARD—The whole basis of tax reform is that the cost savings earned by Australian companies should not be pocketed by those companies but should in fact be passed on to the Australian consumer. The arrangements that we have put in place reflect the determination of the government to meet the commitments that we have made to the Australian public. I would remind the House again that when the Labor Party were last in charge of the affairs of this nation they, without warning, without compensation and in blatant breach of election undertakings, increased the excise on petrol by no less than 6c a litre. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the man who was part of that giant fraud, that giant deceit of the Australian community, has got the nerve to align himself with those in the oil industry who would assert that there are no cost savings, I say to him and I say to the oil companies of Australia that there are cost savings, and they should be passed to the Australian consumer and to nobody else.

Shipping: Policy Reform

Mr PROSSER (3.24 p.m.)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Can the minister inform the House how Australia’s coastal shipping policy provides benefits to the Australian economy? How does the single-voyage permit system enhance this policy?

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honourable member for his question. I note that, along with my colleague Mr Reith, I think I can reveal a touch of Labor Party policy today. It is in relation to coastal shipping reform. Australia’s coastal shipping policy represents a balance between providing a preference for licensed ships and the commercial needs of Australian shippers moving cargo interstate. This balanced approach allows for the issue of a single-voyage permit to an unlicensed ship to engage in coastal movement of domestic freight when there is no suitable licensed ship available and when it is considered to be in the public interest.

Some time ago the unions made a range of claims regarding the issue of single-voyage permits. There was a ruling last week on this matter. Justice Kenny of the Federal Court dismissed the Maritime Union’s claims, finding that the issue of the two permits that were in question, for the Algarve and the J Emma, was in fact in full compliance with the requirements of the Navigation Act 1912 and he declared that the unions must pay all costs. The policy clearly states that the issue of these permits must be considered in the light of the public interest. But the question has to be asked: what do the unions know about or care for public interest? It is quite clear that they see the existence of shipping as serving only their interests, not the national interest. Justice Kenny noted that the approach adopted by the Maritime Union would ‘lead to capricious and absurd results’. What did he mean by capricious and absurd results? The union representative, to give you an illustration of this, bizarrely went so far as to claim that an Australian ship which might be only two feet long and capable of transporting just 10 grams of cargo should be used in preference to a foreign flag vessel capable of carrying the lot in one go. I do not know
when we changed to metric, but the union claim that a ship two feet long capable of carrying only 10 grams of cargo ought to be used in preference to a foreign flag vessel capable of carrying the lot.

Mr Horne—How many ships are this size?

Mr Anderson—I hear it asked how many ships are there of this size. It is your policy, so you ought to be able to tell us. According to the unions, this would be the case even if someone like BHP wanted to move 100,000 tonnes of coal. If they wanted to move 100,000 tonnes of coal, according to the union policy—capricious and absurd as it is; and we know that union policy one day is ALP policy the next day—these ships must be out here. To do the maths, if one tonne is one million grams, at 10 grams a trip that is 100,000 trips just to move one tonne. You have still got 99,999 to go. This is an absolute farce. Modern Australian unionism's policy is modern ALP policy, and it can only be described, in the words of Justice Kenny, as capricious and absurd.

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr McMullan (3.28 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, it is a fact that the government will collect more tax from each litre of petrol sold after Saturday than is the case today?

Mr Howard—the arrangements that we have put in place will ensure that, as far as is possible, the commitments we made in relation to petrol will be kept. Those arrangements assume the following. Those arrangements assume that the goods and services tax impact will be offset by a combination of the excise arrangements and the cost savings, to which I have referred on countless occasions during question time. They were the commitments that were made by the government, and those are the commitments that the arrangements announced by the Acting Treasurer were designed to meet.

Mr McMullan—What is the answer to the question?

Mr Speaker—The Manager of Opposition Business has asked his question.

Mr Howard—They are the commitments that we made, and I am prepared, as always, to be accountable for the commitments the government has made, and that is the basis on which those arrangements have been entered into. Perhaps I will add an answer at the end of question time—

Mr Speaker—that would be preferable.

Mr Howard—to the example put to me by the member for Batman, and the arithmetic on that produces a very interesting result.

Mr Leo McLeay—Mr Speaker, could I ask that the Prime Minister table the document he was quoting from?

Mr Speaker—Was the Prime Minister quoting from a confidential document?

Mr Howard—I have not got it marked 'confidential'. Therefore I will not table it.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. We have been informed that the material is confidential. What is confidential about that?

Mr Speaker—it has been the practice of occupiers of this chair, for as long as I can recall, to ask ministers, no matter which party is in power, whether the document to which they are referring is confidential and to accept their assurance one way or the other.

Work for the Dole: Union Attitude

Mrs Moynihan (3.30 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment Services. Is the minister aware of attempts by
the unions to use Work for the Dole participants to bolster falling union membership levels? What have the unions been doing and what is the government’s response to their actions?

Mr Abbott—I can tell the member for Pearce that Work for the Dole is such a great program that some unions now want to jump on the bandwagon. After the union movement had previously tried to sabotage Work for the Dole projects in New South Wales national parks, and schools and child-care centres right around Australia, the Western Australian Trades and Labor Council is now trying to recruit Work for the Dole participants to boost falling union membership. A few months ago, the Public Sector Union in the west tried to stop Work for the Dole in Perth schools but now an organisation called Unions WA has written to community work coordinators in the west inviting them to attend a seminar on how unions can help job seekers. This union letter includes the remarkable claim that unions are in fact the best organisations to inculcate a work ethic in job seekers. This Jekyll-and-Hyde attitude to Work for the Dole is a lot better than blanket opposition, but I should point out that Work for the Dole participants are certainly not employees. They have no right to strike, unlike the usual objects of union attention. The best thing that Unions WA could do for job seekers is to ask their union mates around the country to stop sabotaging Work for the Dole projects and to support this great program.

The union letter says:

Our interest is based on our assessment that some form of “Work for the Dole” is likely to be a feature of the landscape for the foreseeable future. It is therefore important to have a constructive engagement with the scheme in order to contribute to its basic settings.

For once this is some union advice that members opposite should accept. This is one cave-in to the unions that the Leader of the Opposition should make, instead of denigrating this great program as he so often does.

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr Crean (3.33 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister, again. Prime Minister, are you aware of the following statement by Mr Lauchlan McIntosh of the Australian Automobile Association last Friday:

If the government is going to meet its promise of no petrol price increases because of the GST, it must reduce excise by the full 8.2 cents a litre from July 1.

Do you agree with Mr McIntosh who stated that under your current plan:

... the Commonwealth will be lifting an additional $450 million per year—

from the pockets of Australian motorists.

Mr Howard—My attention has been drawn. I think I may even have heard him say it. I do not accept what he said. Mr McIntosh’s argument, Mr McMasters’s argument, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition’s argument and the argument of one of the representatives of the other oil companies are based upon the proposition that there are no cost savings to be achieved from taxation reform and at the very least there are no cost savings from taxation reform that are available immediately. That is an absurd proposition. It is not possible for anybody who has any understanding of the oil industry to say that there are no cost savings at all available on 1 July. That is a ridiculous proposition. It defies all of the evidence that was made available by the Acting Treasurer on Thursday when he made the announcement, with the example he gave of the reduction in the price of diesel and all of the other cost reductions that oil companies are going to enjoy. It also of course totally ignores the fact that the strike price of 90c a litre—the strike price that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition refuses to accept—will provide an additional buffer of something like half a cent a litre based on current pricing for petrol around Australia. So the whole basis of the argument put forward by Mr McIntosh is, I believe, flawed and I do not accept it.

Rural and Regional Australia: Training Opportunities

Mr Lawler (3.36 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Would the minister inform the House of the response in areas of rural and regional Australia like my electorate of Parkes to the government’s
training reforms? Is the minister aware of any alternative policies in this area?

Dr KEMP—I thank the member for Parkes for his question. The government’s training reforms have been particularly welcomed and effective in regional Australia. There are now almost half a million people in rural and regional Australia accessing publicly funded training. That is 100,000 more places in regional Australia than when the Labor Party was in office. It is very interesting that in relation to vocational education and training the traditional disadvantage in terms of participation which regional Australians have suffered in other areas does not apply in relation to vocational education and training.

Participation is now at 8.9 per cent in rural Australia, some 9.4 per cent in remote Australia, outstripping that in the capital cities, which stands at 6.7 per cent. In other words, the government’s training reforms have given enormous opportunities to communities and young people in regional and rural Australia to lift their skills. At December last year, there were 87,320 new apprentices in training in regional Australia—twice as many as in the last year of the Labor government. We expect that an additional 50,000 people will start a new apprenticeship this year in regional Australia. One of the factors in this will doubtless be the doubling of the number of New Apprenticeships centres in regional Australia to some 200 sites.

The latest training policy of the Australian Education Union would see the destruction of some 350,000 training opportunities in Australia and the operation of closed shops in TAFEs throughout Australia, which would be particularly damaging in the regions. The AEU wants to get rid, essentially, of the private training providers. This is going to be a major challenge to the Leader of the Opposition and the Labor Party as they go to the conference in July. Sharan Burrow, the President of the ACTU, and Denis Fitzgerald, the President of the Australian Education Union, have made it quite clear that they are going to be putting a great deal of pressure on the Leader of the Opposition to go along with the AEU policy and to adopt a discriminatory closed shop policy against private training providers.

We have to remember that this is the Leader of the Opposition who has rolled over again and again to his trade union mates, who has given in to them, as we have seen in question time today, in a number of vital areas of industrial relations policy. In July he is going to roll over again. He is going to roll over again, as usual, to the trade unions, to give them a privileged position in the training system—the kind of privileged position that led to a reduction of 20,000 apprenticeships during one year of the time when he was education and training minister. It is this government which has expanded training opportunities in regional and rural Australia. It is the Labor Party whose policies are going to cut back on those opportunities because the Leader of the Opposition has not got the strength to stand up to the trade unions behind him.

Goods and Services Tax: Northern Territory Fuel Subsidy

Mr SNOWDON (3.40 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, can you confirm that the Northern Territory government will on Saturday be removing its 1.1c a litre fuel subsidy for Territory motorists, including those from remote communities, some of whom already pay $1.40 a litre? Why are you allowing the Northern Territory government to effectively pocket more than half your GST fuel grant for remote areas? Will you guarantee that consumers will get the full benefit of the grants, not the Northern Territory government?

Mr FAHEY—I am pleased to take this question. The opposition has, throughout question time today, made a series of assertions which effectively support the oil companies and endeavour to mislead the Australian people. What this is about is that the Australian taxpayers, through the federal government, will be giving some $2.2 billion in tax—

Mr Snowdon—I take a point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. This question was about the fuel subsidy of 1.1c a litre that has been removed by the Northern Territory government.
Mr SPEAKER—The member for the Northern Territory has made his point. I noted the question. I could hardly rule the minister out of order at this early stage in the answer. He has had less than half a minute at this stage.

Mr FAHEY—Let me go back to that point. The simple fact is that, with excise reduction commencing from Saturday of some $2.2 billion, that takes up what the Commonwealth has been collecting for the states and territories ever since the High Court case which prevented the states and territories from imposing taxes. That is point No. 1. The second point is that, in the context of providing that benefit to motorists, it was struck at a rate of 90c, as the Prime Minister has said a number of times, and 6.7c per litre is the rebate, the reduction in excise, that is given. All Australians would expect the oil companies to give over to the motorists what they will make in the way of savings.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. He has now spent over a minute, perhaps two, answering this question. What we have asked him is what his view is and whether it is a fact that the Northern Territory government, in reducing its subsidy, is going to pocket more than 1c of the 2c that is supposed to be available for people in remote areas.

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition has made his point regarding relevance and will resume his seat. I have only heard the minister referring throughout the answer to the cost of fuel, to what makes up that cost and to rebates that apply. I would have thought that was an entirely relevant answer. I call him.

Mr FAHEY—Again, as I have indicated, the reduction in excise that applies from Saturday does take into account the taxes that were once previously put on by the states and territories. The honourable member for the Northern Territory has referred to a specific amount, which he indicated in his question was being pocketed by the Northern Territory. I do not accept that at this point of time. Nevertheless, I am more than happy to examine the question in detail and see if there is any accuracy in it, get advice on the subject and advise the honourable member if there is anything in the way of substance.

On 3 February this year I noted a report in the Australian which referred to a 10c price hike in petrol over a period of three days. It went on to say that that price hike of 10c in three days included petrol excise—we have spoken about that today—and that oil companies had withdrawn discounts and rebates to petrol station operators. It referred to a weaker Australian dollar and higher world oil prices. Where was one member of the opposition when a 10c hike came in three days in February of this year? There was an acknowledgment that there are ‘many factors’ in the prices. I further indicate to the honourable member for the Northern Territory that, whilst investigating the matters which he suggested in his letter, the Treasurer has written to the Northern Territory regarding this subsidy. I am prepared to provide to the honourable member full details of what was in that letter.

Goods and Services Tax: Price Monitoring

Mr GEORGIOU (3.45 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Financial Services and Regulation. Can the minister inform the House what action the government will be undertaking to ensure that the full benefits of the new tax system are passed on to consumers?

Mr HOCKEY—I thank the honourable member for his question. I remind the House that the government, through the ACCC, is undertaking the most extensive price monitoring regime ever undertaken in Australia with the introduction of the new taxation system. The government has provided the ACCC with in excess of $56 million and the ACCC will be monitoring in excess of three million prices. In one area in particular the price monitoring will be very extensive and that is in relation to fuel price monitoring. The ACCC has advised me that the price monitoring of fuel will be the most extensive petrol price monitoring ever undertaken in Australia. The information will be passed to the ACCC on a daily basis. It will cover unleaded petrol, leaded petrol, diesel fuel, auto LPG and oils and lubricants. I take the opportunity to remind the House that there is
currently a 22 per cent wholesale sales tax on oils and lubricants which will be coming off.

The ACCC will be policing petrol prices in nearly 4,000 locations across Australia, including over 1,400 service stations in rural and regional Australia, reflecting access to 70 per cent of the rural population of Australia. Permanent monitoring will occur in 800 sites, in 100 country towns, plus a further 150 towns on a random basis each week. Over 2,500 service stations in metropolitan Australia will have their petrol prices monitored by the ACCC. So a total of over 4,000 service stations out of 8,000 service stations in Australia will have their prices monitored by the ACCC. There is a further class of petrol retailers who maintain only one or two pumps, and those pumps are incidental to their main business, in small country towns. The ACCC is contacting those retailers and looking at what information can be provided.

As I have said before, this is the most extensive price monitoring regime ever undertaken. It is backed up by section 75AU of the Trade Practices Act, which means that, if service station proprietors do not pass on the full benefits of reductions as a result of the abolition of embedded taxes, they may be guilty of price exploitation and liable to a fine of up to $10 million per offence for a company and up to half a million dollars for individuals. They are penalties that the Labor Party never put in place. Not on one occasion did the Labor Party put in place any price exploitation rules which would prevent consumers from being exploited by unworthy businesses. Not once when the Labor Party was increasing taxes did it ever have any price exploitation guidelines or price exploitation laws to protect consumers. That illustrates a fundamental difference between the Labor Party and the coalition. The coalition is about protecting consumers; the Labor Party is about doing them over.

Mr Howard—Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr Howard (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (3.50 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek the indulgence of the chair to add to an answer.

Mr Speaker—The Prime Minister may proceed.

Mr Howard—The member for Batman asked me a question based on a figure of 84c and 1c a litre off. Even if you do not have the 1.5c, according to my maths, that is 83.9c. But, if you do have the 1.5c, it comes out at 82.3c. And both of them are below 84c.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr Danby (Melbourne Ports) (3.50 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

Mr Speaker—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr Danby—Yes.

Mr Speaker—Please proceed.

Mr Danby—After my question to the Prime Minister regarding a GST-induced four per cent increase in the rent for one of my East St Kilda constituents, the Minister for Financial Services and Regulation told the House on Thursday afternoon last week:

We had the absurd situation where the member for Melbourne Ports stood in his place and asked a question of the Prime Minister about a rental property that had gone up, as I understand it, from $500 a week to $520. Unless I am missing something, it does not strike me that that property would be a caravan park residence, would it, for $520 a week? It would not be a boarding house, would it, at $520 a week?

Many may suspect that the minister, like the government, is a bit out of touch, but my constituent—a disability pensioner affected by a rise in his rent, alone larger than his government pension compensation—will be paying $520 a month.

Mr Speaker—The member must indicate where he has been misrepresented, not where his constituent has been misrepresented.
QUESTIONS TO MR SPEAKER
Questions on notice
Mr KERR—I draw your attention to standing order No. 150 and three questions standing in my name. The first is question No. 1229, regarding staffing arrangements in legal advising. I ask you to write to the Attorney seeking reasons for the delay in answering. There are two questions to the Prime Minister: the first, question No. 1242 asked on 9 March, is in regard to some conduct of the Ombudsmen; the second, question No. 1283, related to Commonwealth employment in my electorate. I ask again that you write to the Prime Minister and ask him to explain the delay in responding.

Mr SPEAKER—Under the provisions of standing order 150, I will follow up the matters raised by the member for Denison.

Mrs CROSIO—I too would like to draw attention to questions under standing order 150. I have questions on the Notice Paper: question No. 1134 to the Prime Minister on 15 February and question No. 1415 to the Prime Minister on 6 April. I request, Mr Speaker, that you write to the Prime Minister seeking reasons as to why he is delaying answering those questions concerning Kirribilli House and the Lodge.

Mr SPEAKER—I will follow up the matters raised by the member for Prospect under standing order 150.

PETITIONS
The Clerk—Petitions have been lodged for presentation as follows and copies will be referred to the appropriate ministers:

Goods and Services Tax: Education
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of the state of Queensland draws the attention of the House to the damaging impact of the GST on education. The GST will increase the cost of books, school uniforms, shoes, excursions, public transport and extra-curricula activities such as swimming and music lessons.
Your petitioners therefore ask that the House exempts education from the GST.
by Mr Bevis (from 51 citizens).

CSIRO: Microwave Communications Tower
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
We, the undersigned residents of Clayton Victoria, strongly object to the erection of a concrete communications tower at the CSIRO site in Clayton. The tower is located close to the boundary fence in Bayview Avenue, adjoining a residential area. It will be used for microwave communications. Our objections to the tower are as follows:
1. Residents were not informed of the plans to build this tower.
2. The tower causes a huge and detrimental visual impact on the surrounding area and is visible in a wide arc.
3. The tower may adversely impact on the value of surrounding properties with a flow-on effect for the income of the City of Monash.
4. The impact on health of microwaves is at the very least still not proven. The microwave dish points directly over residential properties.
We request therefore:
1. That the tower be dismantled.
2. That a comprehensive environmental impact statement be prepared including an investigation of the health impact of the transmission of microwaves.
3. That a thorough process of consultation be undertaken with residents in the neighbourhood.
Your petitioners therefore pray that the House heed our wishes.
by Ms Burke (from 13 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Price Displays
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 that under current legislation the GST will not be included on docket and that consumers will not know how much GST they are being charged, or whether they are being charged correctly.
Your petitioners therefore request the House that when a business provides a consumer with a receipt or docket issued in respect of a taxable supply the receipt or docket must separately include:
(a) the price of the goods or services excluding the GST;
(b) the amount of the GST; and
(c) the total price including the GST.

by Mr Emerson (from 1,546 citizens).

Commonwealth Dental Health Program
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
The electors of the NSW Electorate of Richmond comprising the Tweed region draw to the attention of the House their deep concern and disappointment about the abolition of the Commonwealth Dental Health Program by the Howard Government in 1996.
The abolition of the Commonwealth Dental Health Program has left pensioners and many people with no means of receiving affordable, preventative dental health care.
We, the undersigned, ask the House of Representatives to re-establish the Commonwealth Dental Health Program immediately.

by Ms Macklin (from 124 citizens).

Banking: Branch Closures
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
We, the residents of Haberfield, draw the attention of the House to the imminent closure of the Westpac Bank Branch in Ramsay Street, Haberfield.
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 546 citizens).

Disability Services: Unmet needs
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:
Our recognition of the equal value and rights of citizens who have a disability and of their families and carers to access to an independent spokesperson to ensure that their rights are upheld and their needs met.
Our expectation that our elected representatives will allocate adequate public funding to ensure: that our fellow citizens are provided with the support they need; and that advocates for people with a disability on the Far South Coast receive the resources they need to speak up for those they represent.

Our concern that at least 451 Australians living in the Eurobodalla Shire with moderate to severe disabilities have an unmet need for independent advocacy to protect and promote their individual interests.
We, the undersigned, do respectfully urge the House to observe its responsibilities under the Disability Services Act 1986 (Cth) to assure the rights of Australians with disabilities and their families to have access to advocacy support.

by Mr Nairn (from 368 citizens).

Genetically Modified Food: Labelling
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of The House of Representatives assembled in Parliament
We, the citizens of New South Wales and in particular all members of Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW Inc and all older citizens point out to the House that it is imperative that all labelling of genetically-modified food should state the products used in the manufacturing process. It is requested that no manufacturer be granted any exemption. The members of CPSA and all older citizens are alarmed by the reaction these genetically-modified ingredients could have on their medication. This petition therefore requests the House to take the necessary action to ensure that any product used in genetically-modified food is clearly stated on the label.

by Ms Plibersek (from 1,826 citizens).

Australia Post: Removal of Letter Boxes
The Honourable Speaker and Members of The House of Representatives assembled in Parliament
The following citizens of Australia call the attention of the House to the removal of letterboxes by Australia Post in the suburb of Trammere, South Australia, causing problems to senior citizens in the area.
Your petitioners therefore request that the House take action to reinstate their access to postal facilities close to their homes.

by Mr Pyne (from 170 citizens).

Petitions received.

COMMITTEES
Communications, Transport and the Arts Committee
Report
Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (3.55 p.m.)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts, I present the committee’s report entitled Regional ra-
dio racing services—Inquiry into the impact of the decision by ABC Radio to discontinue its radio racing service, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr NEVILLE—I acknowledge members in the chamber here today, including the members for Lowe, Moreton and Bendigo, who were active participants in this inquiry. In the very first chapter of our report we make the following opening statement, which came from a submission by Mr Crane:

The beauty of having a broadcast you can hear is that you can place your bets then go home and listen to them on the radio and be with the family... Now twenty years on we cannot even hear them. They call that progress. We can land a man on the moon but we can’t hear a race.

I thought that was a very poignant start from one of the early submissions to our inquiry. The whole business of this inquiry was to try to re-establish in regional Australia something that had become an icon for people with regard to their Saturday and public holiday entertainment. It was strange that when we announced the terms of reference for the inquiry, and even before the inquiry proper had got under way or gained any momentum, the ABC issued a press release that said that claims by the racing industry that ‘there is a groundswell of support from ABC regional listeners for the return of the service’ were far from the truth. It also said that 80 per cent of ABC radio regional listeners ‘had not the slightest interest in horse racing coverage’.

We found that quite extraordinary and, as the inquiry unfolded, we received 208 submissions. Hardly a reflection of no interest! We received 200 form letters and 500 signatures on petitions.

As the committee went out and visited Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart and Barraba, in north-western New South Wales, as well as holding hearings in Canberra, it became clearly obvious that people were very much affected by this decision. The interesting feature about this is that the submissions came from ordinary people—ordinary, rank and file people. It became clear that the best and most effective solution for the restoration of this radio racing service would be for the ABC to restore it. Clearly, however, that is now no longer possible because: (a) the whole system within the ABC has been dismantled; and (b) the ABC having dismantled their own service and being reliant in some states on the TAB, there are conflicts with the charter of the ABC.

We were surprised at the inadequacy of the ABC’s research on audience needs and preferences. Surveys were actually held after the inquiry commenced, which we found most unusual. There was a lack of public consultation, and the ABC did not even refer this matter to its national advisory council. If you were going to cut out something that was fairly widely liked in regional and rural Australia, wouldn’t you think you would call on your advisory council to provide you with some advice?

We have decided that the best way of doing this is to expand the TAB services, be that 4TAB, 927, 2KY or whichever service is available in each state, and we will require alterations to licences to give those race broadcasters greater certainty. My colleague the member for Lowe is going to expand on that, as will other members of the committee, including the member for Throsby, in the Main Committee. (Time expired)

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (4.01 p.m.)—I would like to endorse the remarks of the member for Hinkler, and I would also like to commend the committee secretariat, in particular Jan Connaughton for the solid work she has put into the report. People from all over regional Australia were very concerned about the withdrawal of this service, because a whole range of other services has been pulled out of regional Australia over the last 10 years. We have seen small towns where chemists and banks have closed and Telstra services have been wound down. This is all a result of the way the economic situation works at the moment. Of course, they see this radio racing service as just another service that is lost.

As the member for Hinkler has pointed out, a considerable number of people took an interest in this issue, and many people signed petitions. During the course of the inquiry, a couple of anomalies came into being—in particular relation to the ABC—which the
member for Hinkler has addressed. One area that he did not touch on is the licence area planning organisation which is administered by the Australian Broadcasting Authority. This organisation has come under quite considerable criticism in the report, justifiably in my view. I have had one particular experience with this organisation in Bendigo. A group called Gospel Radio has been offering a very worthwhile radio service throughout regional Victoria for some 15 years. For the last two years it has been operating without cost to government. It has been entirely funding itself, and its licence was withdrawn some months ago. It was taken away totally by the ABA. One of the worst things about that is that the ABA have yet to determine just what available spectrum there is, not only in regional Victoria but all over Australia—a task that was, I understand, given it some 25 years ago with still no result. They come under considerable criticism, and that criticism is justified.

One of the other problem areas with the reduction of radio racing services by the ABC is that commercial stations have not been able to fill the gap, and there have been some very good reasons for that. The main one is the establishment of the low power open narrowcast licensing system. At the moment, those licences are put up for auction. Obviously, some of the commercial radio stations are very interested in buying those, but they are forced to pay a premium for them at auction by people who go to auctions and push the bidding up but have no use for that particular licence. Of course, that prevents the commercial stations from taking up the slack that the ABC has left, because they are not able to buy these licences.

The report makes some very interesting recommendations in relation to dealing with that matter and I certainly hope that the minister is able to take those up. As I said, it has been a very good committee to be on. I commend the report to the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Does the honourable member for Hinkler wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. 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.

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Advisory Report

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (4.05 p.m.)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, I present the committee’s advisory report on the Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Bill 2000, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr ANDREWS—The advisory report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs is the result of a brief study of the Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Bill 2000. The introduction of this bill indicates the importance that is placed on the protection of privacy. The committee recognises the bill as historic, in that it introduces national standards for the protection of personal information by organisations in the private sector.

The national privacy principles outlined in the bill are intended to provide a framework for business in the way that personal information may be collected, stored, used, corrected and transferred. Through the bill, the Commonwealth proposes to establish a single national scheme for the protection of personal information handled by the private sector. The committee endorses the stated aim of the bill. It seeks to achieve an appropriate balance between the competing interests of consumers, who are demanding greater care be taken with private information, and business, which, while not wishing to be burdened with heavy compliance costs, recognises that good privacy management is good business practice.

In summary, the recommendations include: small business should be able to opt into the system; health services should be
brought under the legislation from the outset; the collection or disclosure of personal information by a small business for any reason, without consent, should be subject to the national privacy principles; the exemption of employee record should be narrowed; the exemption for the media should be balanced by a voluntary privacy code for the media and journalists; the exemption for political representatives should be clarified; the provisions relating to health information should be retained in the bill; the provisions relating to health records should be harmonised with the ACT legislation; a period of grace of three years should be extended to holders of existing information; the national privacy principles should apply to tenancy databases from the commencement of the bill; and an offer to opt out should be prominently displayed on direct marketing.

The bill seeks to strike a balance between a number of competing interests. While there is a strong public interest in protecting an individual’s right to privacy and access to information about them, there are other competing public interests. These other interests are taken into account through exemptions to the application of the bill and the national privacy principles. While the committee broadly supports the light-touch approach and the phase-in transitional provisions provided in the bill, it is concerned that some exemptions are inappropriate. Although the small business exemption will be denied to some organisations that are regarded as having a degree of privacy risk inherent in their operations, all small businesses are exempted from the bill for 12 months after it commences. This 12-month exemption also applies to organisations that provide a health service and that hold health information. As previously noted, the committee has recommended that the operation of the national principles is not delayed with respect to small businesses that provide a health service.

Evidence to the committee suggested that a major issue in the community is the need for privacy of health information. Some arguments were put that health information should not be covered by the bill because such information is uniquely sensitive and should be handled differently from other private information. It was also argued to the committee that the health provisions in the bill provide a lower standard of protection for health information in the private sector than is provided in the public sector. The committee was not persuaded that health service providers and consumers were currently in a position to develop a separate legislative or regulatory code to govern privacy in private health services. Accordingly, the committee has not recommended that health information be removed from the bill’s operation. It has, however, proposed that access to private medical records be on equivalent terms to the access that is currently provided in the public sector and the private sector in the ACT.

Time does not permit me to go into further detail, but other issues that have been raised in evidence and addressed in the report include the application of the bill to direct marketing, to information that has already been collected and to tenancy databases. I would like to thank the members of the committee for their contributions during the inquiry and for the finalisation of the report. This report reflects the committee’s commitment to aiding the parliamentary process by contributing to the resolution of complex issues and suggesting where the balance may lie between competing interests and principles. While the committee would have wished for more time to scrutinise the impact of the bill, particularly in relation to the way in which it is to be enforced, we are confident that we have gone some way towards addressing concerns that were raised about its impact.

I thank the committee secretary, Catherine Cornish, the research officers, Deborah Nance and Richard Glenn, and the administrative officers Frances Wilson and Jane Sweeney. I commend the report to the House.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand) (4.10 p.m.)—On behalf of the other committee members, I also add my voice in thanking the committee secretariat for their extraordinary work. I know they are up in the gallery today. It certainly was beyond the call of duty to meet the extraordinary timetable. As deputy chair, I would like to record my thanks to the chair, who also had to put in a significant amount of time to meet the deadlines required. This is indeed an important bill, as the chair of the
committee has already indicated. There is a common view in the community that privacy is something that should be respected and protected but, in fact, with the exception of the public sector, we do not have any legislation which protects privacy. This bill does go some of the way to introducing our concepts of privacy into a legal system where people will have rights and protections that they probably expect are already in place.

The report of the committee consistently indicates its concerns with the bill as it currently stands and recommends a significant tightening of the broad exemptions that are currently in the bill. The chair has already taken the parliament through a number of those exemptions, but important changes have been recommended by the committee because the issue of privacy is of such importance to the community. We were unable to draw distinctions between small and large business, for example, just on the basis of size or turnover, but we could draw distinctions if they were handling sensitive information and therefore should protect consumers in the handling of their details.

It is a similar situation with employee records. An employee has very little choice but to provide a lot of personal information to an employer. We were concerned to ensure that that information did not need to be made available—in fact, in many circumstances it should not be made available—to other people without the employee’s consent. By recommending changes to the definition, we have significantly tightened an area identified in the bill as needing some exemption, but the committee was of the view that the exemption did not need to be as broad. Similarly, with the media exemption and the exemption for political parties, we have made recommendations which significantly tighten both of those exemptions, even though the committee is aware that in those circumstances there are two very strong competing public interests which perhaps run counter to the normal principles of privacy—that of the freedom of the press and the right to communicate on political issues.

The chair has briefly mentioned our views in relation to health, and this was a very contentious area of the bill. I stress that the committee came to the view that there should be some protection for the handling of health information, and that remains in the bill. This was despite being encouraged by many health advocates and those in the health industry to separate out the treatment of privacy in the health area. In recommending that these should stay within the bill, our view is that this is a good interim step. In our report, we have encouraged the industry and the government to take active and urgent steps to negotiate appropriate standards in the health industry if these interim and minimum standards are not sufficient.

The issue of existing databases was contentious. We are all aware that people in the community already have a lot of personal information on record, and that they will not be covered by the same provisions as new databases will be once this act comes into place. We have recommended a way to phase in the privacy principles and the way that existing databases are handled. A number of us have expressed some concern that the time frame may be a little generous to operators of existing databases, but we have sought to reach a balance for those holding existing databases, like small community organisations, and those that might have much larger corporate or commercial interests.

An issue of significant concern, which was raised briefly by the chair, is that the committee was not able to reach any final view on the question of enforcement. This is indeed one of the very contentious areas of the bill. Whilst the government has sought to take a light touch approach in introducing privacy for the first time into the private sector, that will be of little effect if we do not have an adequate enforcement regime in place. Unfortunately, the time frame set by the government for the committee handling of this bill did not enable us to reach any conclusive views on this, but a number of committee members had some concerns and grave reservations if the enforcement procedures are not significantly altered.

This is, of course, an area that is organic; it is new; it will be growing and developing over time. I think that this committee report is a significant step in this developing field of privacy law. I commend the report to the
Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenk信s)—Does the member for Menzies wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. 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.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, I present the committee’s advisory report on the Criminal Code Amendment (Theft, Fraud, Bribery and Related Offences) Bill 1999, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be printed.

The introduction of the Criminal Code Amendment (Theft, Fraud, Bribery and Related Offences) Bill 1999 concluded an exhaustive process of consultation between the Commonwealth and the states and territories. The advisory report concludes a brief opportunity to examine the way in which the bill will operate. The committee is pleased to have undertaken the task of reviewing this bill. No area of law is more fundamental to a society than its criminal law. Criminal law sets the parameters of right and wrong in society, and hence the boundaries in which an individual must operate if they wish to be part of society. The bill represents one of the most significant changes to Commonwealth criminal law in recent years. It arises out of the Commonwealth’s long-term aim of consolidating all of its criminal laws in one easily accessible, clear and consistent act of parliament. The committee endorses the rationale for this legislative reform, hoping that it will lead to greater efficiency and fairness in the application of the criminal law.

The main concern of the committee related to the offence of general dishonesty that is proposed in the bill. The current maximum penalty for general dishonesty under section 29D of the Crimes Act 1914 is 10 years. Under the proposed general dishonesty offence that will replace section 29D, this penalty will be reduced to five years imprisonment. The committee was concerned that the reduced penalty, combined with the fact that it is a general offence, may tempt prosecutors to use general dishonesty as a catch-all offence; that is, it may be used to catch dishonest conduct that does not fall neatly into one of the more specific offences and which society may not expect to be subject to a criminal charge. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has suggested that its prosecution guidelines would not allow the proposed offence of general dishonesty to be used inappropriately in prosecutions. However, it also acknowledged that the guidelines would have to be redrafted to take account of the new provision with its reduced maximum penalty. The committee accepts that the guidelines have the potential to provide reassurance on this matter, but the information provided so far has not been sufficient to suggest that there is no need for caution. The committee has decided that, in these circumstances, it cannot support the enactment of the offence of general dishonesty. The committee has therefore recommended that the proposed offence not be proclaimed until the DPP has satisfied the committee and the Attorney-General that the prosecution guidelines will ensure its appropriate application.

The second major area of concern that the committee had with the bill was with the offence of organised fraud. This offence imposes a maximum penalty of 25 years for a person who derives a substantial benefit from the commission of three or more public fraud offences. The main argument for this proposed offence is that it will ensure that there are significant penalties for people who commit a series of frauds. It is also argued that the proposed offence is necessary as a
trigger for the automatic forfeiture provisions in the Proceeds of Crimes Act 1987. The committee found these arguments unconvincing. First, there may be other and perhaps better ways to trigger automatic forfeiture. Second, the current law, via the imposition of cumulative sentencing, is capable of ensuring that persons who commit multiple frauds are adequately punished. It should also be noted that the only element of organisation required in the offence is that the defendant has organised to do several frauds rather than just one. This means the proposed offence could potentially provide inappropriate coverage, catching persons such as social security recipients who commit multiple frauds due to financial desperation, rather than people with serious criminal intent. Therefore, the committee recommended in this report that the offence of organised fraud be deleted from the bill and that efforts should be made to seek other means by which the automatic forfeiture provisions can be activated.

Before concluding, I turn to the fact that the enactment of the bill will lead to the repeal of some 250 Commonwealth offences that are specific to a number of Commonwealth agencies to be replaced by the general application offences in the bill. The intention is to simplify and modernise the law and to make it consistent. The committee endorses this. However, to ensure a smooth transition, the committee suggests that every effort be made to ensure that the relevant Commonwealth agencies are educated adequately about the replacement provisions and their operation.

I thank the members of the committee for their contributions during the inquiry and the finalisation of the report. I thank the committee secretary, Catherine Cornish, the research officers, Robert Horne and Deborah Nance, and the administrative officers, Jane Sweeney and Frances Wilson. I commend the report to the House.

Mr KERR (Denison) (4.21 p.m.)—I extend my appreciation for the role of the chair in relation to this inquiry. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs has had a number of references proceeding simultaneously, and it has been quite a significant intellectual effort from the chair and the deputy chair, who have carried much of the work of the committee—Nicola Roxon as deputy chair and the honourable member for Menzies as the chair—and the committee secretariat to undertake this work. It is a pleasure to be able to endorse all the remarks of the chair in relation to this legislation. The Criminal Code Amendment (Theft, Fraud, Bribery and Related Offences) Bill 1999 has received the general endorsement of the committee. It has been the product of at least a decade of work by the Model Criminal Code Officers Committee, extending through to the life of the previous government and the time when I had carriage of this matter as minister. So in the slow way these things are worked through, it now comes before us, and it has had the benefit of an examination by a committee which I think has further refined it.

I endorse everything the chair said in respect of the general offence of dishonesty. This was not an offence which the Model Criminal Code Officers Committee thought appropriate to include, but we were persuaded by submissions from the Attorney-General’s Department that it was appropriate for us to have a general offence of dishonesty. Perhaps because of the concern of the government in response to the model criminal code officers, the decision to reduce the length of imprisonment for the offence from 10 years to five years might have a perverse and unintended impact of that offence being used more readily than would otherwise be expected. Notwithstanding the best of intentions of all involved, the solution proposed by the committee that we await the tabling of the DPP’s guidelines in relation to prosecution policy before that section comes into effect is a very sensible solution. There is no doubt that the general principle that applies in the current prosecution policy—that in the ordinary course the charge or charges to be laid or proceeded with will be the most serious offence disclosed by the evidence—is not the course that this committee expects or anticipates will be pursued. That is because in many instances one would expect that lesser offences would be charged where the evidence at least would meet with the possibility
I also endorse what is said in relation to organised fraud. I would like to make some short comments in relation to false or misleading information, a matter that I am certain only time prevented the chair from addressing specifically. That is a third area where we make some suggestions. What is proposed is an offence which makes it a crime for a person to give information to a Commonwealth entity knowing that the information is false or misleading. In ordinary circumstances, if you provide misleading or false information to another person, whether it be a police officer or a commercial entity, you do not commit a criminal offence. There is only a narrow band of circumstances where you are obliged by law to provide truthful information. Now we are going to make a general provision that, in relation to all your dealings with the Commonwealth, if you provide false or misleading information, you will be guilty of a criminal offence. That carries very serious consequences. It is not a trivial criminal offence either; it carries a significant period of imprisonment. The committee felt that it would not be appropriate for that circumstance to come into play unless people were actually warned that such a consequence could occur.

It will be easy enough to do when the request for information is in writing because the warning can be included on the form in a size of type that is sufficient for people to become aware of it. They can then decide either to answer or not answer that question, knowing that if they provide false or misleading information they may be the subject of criminal charges. Similarly, if people are asked by a Commonwealth officer to provide information, it is an easy matter to require the officer to warn that the provision of false or misleading information will give rise to the possibility of criminal charges. A failure to provide such a warning would mean that those charges could not proceed. I think that provides an appropriate balance for making certain that the interests of the Commonwealth are provided for but that a sense of fairness in relation to those who may be subject to it is also taken into account. I conclude by indicating that the opposition has approached this, as always in relation to the work of this committee, with an attempt to be bipartisan and we are very pleased that that outcome appears to have been achieved. (Time expired)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—The time for statements has expired. Does the honourable member for Menzies wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. 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.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING (OBJECTIVITY, FAIRNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY) BILL 2000

First Reading

Bill presented by Mr Beazley.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (4.28 p.m.)—I present the Government Advertising (Objectivity, Fairness and Accountability) Bill 2000 in the hope that it will draw, but not the anticipation that it will draw, support from the government. There is no doubt in the public mind that there is a great deal of disquiet over the way in which the government has used taxpayers’ funds to advertise its political position, particularly in relation to the goods and services tax. The figures of this advertising campaign are now well known: a cost of some $431 million. It is, by its dimension, an act without precedent in the history of the Commonwealth—an extraordinary waste of public resources. One of the outstanding features of it is that, at the conclusion of it all, we see recorded from small business and we see recorded in the most recent public opinion poll that at least a majority of the public have come out of it with basically no understand-
ing of the obligations which are about to hit them.

In the case of those who are the government’s taxpayers, it is inducing a state of desperation and a position of blind fury when they confront the Australian Taxation Office and those who are supposed to be able to give them information. When they sit in their lounge rooms and see the television component of this campaign talking about simpler taxes and talking about a tax regime that is beneficial to the Australian public—and while millions are being spent on that—but they cannot get answers to simple questions, it aggravates them beyond belief. What the more general taxpayers—those who are going to pay the tax rather than organise it—see in that $431 million is disappearing primary school teachers, disappearing high school teachers, unbuilt hospitals, closed hospital wards, unbuilt public nursing homes and all the plethora of public investment that this country so desperately needs but which has been scoured to provide the government with resources to pay the upper income tax cut that is associated with the goods and services tax.

The only people unambiguously benefiting from the changes in the taxation arrangements are the top 15 per cent of income earners. They are benefiting not from the implementation of the GST but from the expenditure of amounts of money that were raised by taking a billion off universities, billions off R&D concessions to business, hundreds of millions off public hospitals, hundreds of millions off the public education system and programs like the dental care program for the elderly, and billions off programs training the unemployed to get themselves back into the work force. Those are the opportunity costs of the government’s payment of income tax breaks to those on upper incomes. Within that, I suppose you would have to incorporate the $431 million that has come from the budget to support the government’s advertising campaign.

Let me say what this bill does and where it comes from. The bill will amend the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997 to require government advertising to meet minimum standards with respect to objectivity, fairness and accountability, and to prohibit the expenditure of taxpayers’ money on advertising which promotes party political interests. It expressly makes it an improper use of public money to use or permit to be used any public money for a government information program unless that program is in accordance with the principles and guidelines for the use of government advertising—that is, in addition to the other ways in which public money may be improperly used or disposed of.

We set out the principles and guidelines for the use of government advertising which are substantially identical to the draft guidelines recommended in October 1998 by the Auditor-General following a report on the government’s $20 million tax reform advertising campaign in the lead-up to the 1998 federal election. The Auditor-General, while not approving of that particular campaign, decided that the act rendered the government, or, more specifically, himself, powerless to comment on what he regarded as a completely inappropriate expenditure of public funds.

You will recollect that $20 million campaign. That was put in place immediately after the release of their documentation. We remember it well for one cardinal element of it: nowhere in the two weeks of campaigning and the $20 million worth of expenditure were the words ‘goods and services tax’ mentioned—nowhere. The Auditor-General clearly found that an absurdity, given that at the heart of the government’s proposals was a $30 billion new tax. It was the only elephant unrecognised in any advertising campaign involving elephants which any of us could recollect. It was like Bullen’s Circus being advertised without the animals. It was an extraordinary use of public funds at that stage. It broke all records both in amounts expended and in proximity to elections. Precedents were seen and perceived in past behaviours of governments, including our own, but the big difference was in quantum and location and in the complete abandonment of any pretence that the core elements of the package being advertised were actually going to be mentioned in the advertising campaign. Nowhere in the advertising in re-
lation to the superannuation campaign or the employment services campaign that had been run by previous Labor governments months and months before elections—not a fortnight before—was there any removal of a core feature of it from any form of the advertising. The core feature of this particular campaign was well and truly removed from government consideration.

At that tiddling stage, we can now say—it looked substantial at the time—at that minuscule, embryonic stage of what has been the greatest act of theft from the public purse by a government for its own benefit in the history of this country, the Auditor-General recommended a set of guidelines and principles that a government ought to operate on. This is not an exclusion of government advertising. Obviously, governments have to advertise. There is a plethora of programs that governments adopt, there are issues that governments must take up—health warnings, health problems and the like—which will oblige governments to spend not insubstantial sums of money on informing the community about what is going on, what benefits they might access and what things they must do in order to comply with the requirements of a particular government policy. All these things have to be done; there is no doubt about that. Because they have to be done, the potential is there for abuse. In most situations, where there is an obligation to do something in terms of public policy or public activity, where that obligation is capable of being abused for purposes that are at variance with the principles of that particular activity, there are sensible safeguards. Those sensible safeguards have been proposed by the Auditor-General and are contained within the provisions of the private member’s bill which I am introducing. Among other things, the principles and guidelines provide:

- Government advertising material should be relevant to government responsibilities.
- Material should be presented in an objective and fair manner.
- This particular campaign hits its first rock. It has skated past the initial rock and now it has hit its first. It then moves on:

Information should be based on accurate, verifiable facts, carefully and precisely expressed in conformity with those facts.

It is now mounting the reef. It has some speed and momentum behind it, this one. It continues:

- No claim or statement should be made which cannot be substantiated.
- The recipient of the information should always be able to distinguish clearly and easily between facts on the one hand and comment, opinion and analysis on the other.
- Material should not be liable to misrepresentation as party political.
- Information campaigns should not intentionally promote, or be perceived as promoting, party-political interests.
- Material should be presented in unbiased and objective language, and in a manner free from partisan promotion of government policy and political argument.
- Material should not directly attack or scorn the views, policies or actions of others such as the policies and opinions of opposition parties or groups. Information should avoid party political slogans or images.
- The ‘Unchain my heart’ advertising was of a piece with the Liberal Party’s advertising at the previous election. It continues:

No information campaign should be undertaken without a justifiable cost/benefit analysis.

What a ripper that would produce in this particular case. It continues:

- The cost of the chosen scale and methods of communicating information must be justifiable in terms of achieving the identified objective(s) for the least practicable expenses. Objectives which have little prospect of being achieved, or which are likely to be achieved only at disproportionate cost, should not be pursued without good reasons.
- Very few of those criteria would see this government’s advertising campaign skating safely through them. They would be wrecked comprehensively on this reef—and so they should be. This campaign has been an absolute disgrace. Not only did the phrase ‘goods and services tax’ not make it into the lexicon of the advertising for the initial $20 million campaign which caused the Auditor-General to suggest that these sorts of standards ought to be imposed upon governments, but it was scarcely mentioned during the $430 million
full ‘adult’ version of the initial $20 million embryo, even though there is now an obligation on very large numbers of Australians to implement the government’s legislation on pain of quite severe penalties if they fail to do so.

We seek to put in an act the suggestions of the Auditor-General which call for objectivity in advertising. Contemplate those suggestions in the context of the ‘John and Wendy’ component of this advertising, which we demonstrated conclusively was misleading. We demonstrated that conclusively enough for those ads to disappear: the government was not completely shameless as far as that was concerned. Recollect how John and Wendy would be demonstrably worse off in a reasonably anticipated set of circumstances. Given the birth dates of about half the children in this country, a reasonably anticipated set of circumstances would see ordinary Australian families effectively bereft of any compensation that matched the size and weight of the goods and services tax.

In this advertising, we have had not an information campaign but a disinformation campaign, which has been put forward by the government to defend its position on tax. The government is hoping desperately that from all of this it can drive into the public mind the notion that somehow or other, for all its faults in shifting the basis of tax away from those who can afford to pay towards Australian families in particular, the tax is good. The government engaged in this process hopes that those who are now the principal taxpayers of this nation, those who are now the principal, unpaid tax agents of the Commonwealth, will suspend all judgment about the complexities that now confront their lives and the unfairness of the situation they now confront and say, ‘Well, whatever else it is, it is good for the country.’ Nothing that requires this sort of advertising campaign, with this sort of expenditure of money, can be described as ‘good for the country’. Nothing that requires this level of complexity in its administration, with more than a million new Commonwealth tax agents, can remotely be described as ‘good for the country’. Nothing which shifts the burden of taxation onto ordinary Australian families can be described as ‘good for the country’. A $430 million campaign, whatever else it does, is incapable of delivering that. So it is the opportunity cost here that we must lament—the $430 million campaign as a political task has been a massive failure. But what has been lost to our schools and hospitals, in care for our elderly and in public investment, is untold. I ask leave of the House to present the explanatory memorandum to the bill.

Leave granted.

Bill read a first time.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—In accordance with standing order 104A, the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next day of sitting.

WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL 2000 [No. 2]

First Reading

Bill presented by Mr Beazley.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (4.43 p.m.)—Let me tell the House why the Workplace Relations Amendment Bill 2000 [No. 2] is necessary and why it is urgent. This nation and this economy are going through a period in which industrial disputes are longer and more vexatious than in any time since the Labor government set up the enterprise bargaining system. A principal reason for this is that the government, and especially its Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, has stripped the Industrial Relations Commission of much of its power and resources to prevent and to settle disputes. The bill seeks therefore to try to give back this power to the commission, and it demonstrates our intention when in government to do so. In other words, we will restore to the commission the capacity to meet its central and historical obligation to promote fairness, to keep the peace in the workplace and, in the process, to protect the public interest. The reason for this and the need for urgency are obvious. There is a violence in industrial relations nowadays, in both action and language, that we have not seen for many years. We saw what happened to the picket line in Sydney during the waterfront dispute and in Melbourne more recently. Strikes by employers have become more vicious. G&K
O’Connor’s Meatworks in country Victoria, in an action labelled ‘a baseball bat lockout’ by Justice Spender of the Federal Court, locked out its employees for eight months because they refused to accept 10 per cent to 17.5 per cent pay cuts. ACI in Melbourne locked out its employees on Christmas Eve last year and kept them out for five months. The Joy mining machinery workplace in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales has locked its workers out for more than two months.

The minister makes much of the statistics which show that the level of all industrial disputes is relatively low—so it is. When he has tipped the balance of workplace justice so far against individual working people, that is not all that surprising. When he has spent every waking moment for four years finding ways to vitiate the role of the commission to keep the peace and the obligation of unions to protect working people, why wouldn’t it be? But the point that the Labor Party is making—the point that the minister cannot avoid, try as he might to put daylight between himself and the facts—is that the level of strikes that tend to be longer, more bitter and less easy to solve is higher than it used to be. This is against the good of the economy and against the good of society.

The minister says that we are wrong. He does so in his usual way, comparing like with unlike, apples with oranges—the tricks that have led so many people to have much trouble believing anything he says. We are not wrong. ABS figures on industrial disputes in the enterprise bargaining era that began in 1992 clearly show that strikes lasting 20 days or more—the kinds of disputes that beg for action by an independent umpire—are something like 116 per cent higher under the coalition than they were under Labor. A 116 per cent change in anybody’s language is a massive trend. The figures are clear. What we see as we look around the industrial scene is clear. We have a problem here. We have moved well away from the coalition’s pledge, when it was promising whatever it took to win office, that its industrial policies would bring about a more inclusive and cooperative workplace. We cannot be shocked when a national study of workers’ attitudes carried out for the Australian Industry Group discovers a workplace environment in which the values of cooperation have been driven out by the raw drive to survive. I quote the report:

Employees have never competed so ruthlessly against each other for jobs and money. Loyalty between employer and employee is being eroded across the board and many young people don’t experience it. Some people have done well out of this situation, but the sense of insecurity that is engendered among workers generally is great and growing. It can be found not only in the AIG study that I have just mentioned but also in the surveys done regularly by the Roy Morgan organisation and—most notably, because the canvass was so broad—for the ACTU by Yann Campbell Hoare Wheeler. So, on the one hand, we have the government’s claim that it is a system that, by banishing the old complexities of industrial law and practice, brings about a more productive and flexible workplace and increased living standards by encouraging greater cooperation and participation. On the other, the reality is a steadily more insecure and apprehensive work force in which the gap is widening between the haves and have-nots and disputes are increasing and becoming more poisonous and complicated.

Why has this happened? It is because, from the moment he assumed office, the minister has been making industrial relations in this country over in his own image—confrontational, bullying, aggressive and partial. The minister was handed this confrontational brief by the Prime Minister, who told parliament back in 1992, when asked about the coalition’s plans for the commission ‘we will stab them in the stomach’. He was quite upfront about it. He would not come around and stab the commission in the back—he said that he would tackle them head-on and ‘stab them in the stomach’. The minister has been following orders without question ever since. Here is a man who has spent the last four years indulging his obsession of exempting working people from forms of protection offered for nearly 100 years by the commission, sending them out to fend for themselves in a workplace environment where only the
strong can survive. And the strong, I might say, cannot only survive but they become confrontational. We will see the consequences of that confrontation in the next round of enterprise bargaining foreshadowed for Victoria.

The person to blame for that exclusively—the system in operation exclusively in Victoria is the minister’s system—is the minister. This facade that we have seen, firstly in their defeated legislation and now in their serial legislation, so he seeks to be a serial offender in this regard, all of that cobbled together is part of one thing: politically attempting to get himself exempted from the consequences of his own legislation when it comes home to roost over the course of the next month or so.

Among the first changes the minister made to industrial legislation in 1996, he transferred jurisdiction over various matters, including the conduct of industrial action, from the commission to the Federal Court, though its experience of industrial disputes settlement was quite limited. Presumably he anticipated that the Federal Court, since it was uncontaminated by any noxious IR club influence, would do the right thing to the noisy and troublesome proletariat. But the minister has been disappointed. The court has refused to be one of his poodles. He has therefore been forced to cast around for alternatives. One was to piggyback industrial relations matters on to the authority of the new Federal Magistrates Court, to which all parties agreed basically to deal with the overflow of matters from the Family Court. Twice the minister tried to add industrial relations matters to the authority of the new court and twice this parliament has stopped him.

His second alternative was in his pattern bargaining bill, which, among other things, proposed to extend the jurisdiction over the conduct of protected action from the Federal Court to state and Territory courts—anywhere, it must be noted, but the commission. The minister tried to argue that the bill proposed more, not less, power to the commission relating to industrial action. It did nothing of the kind. What it actually proposed was to put limits on protected action and then direct the commission not only to police these limits but also to do so within a very limited timetable—once more what we might call the minister’s Patrick syndrome: his epic and often unavailing struggle to explain what the facts actually are.

The role of the commission may well be different in a bargaining system than in an arbital one. Its principal obligation should remain, however, to be the independent umpire to see that peace is maintained and justice is done in the workplace. The minister disagrees. He has set out to clip the commission’s wings from the day the Prime Minister gave him his orders. His 1996 legislation restricted its power to arbitrate and, in so doing, its capacity to conciliate. It restricted the commission’s power to make awards. In doing so, it limited its capacity to prevent and settle disputes. The courts have become the arena for settling industrial disputes. We know why this is so. The minister understands full well what it means in terms of the financial and other costs to unions and their members and to individual working people. He understands what it means when the financial and other capabilities of the interests involved are compared. The Hunter Valley dispute has been dragging on for years while lawyers have carried out complicated and expensive manoeuvres to deny employees access to what is left of the arbitration powers of the commission. The waterfront dispute, with all its implications for the national economy, had to wend its way through the Federal Court and up to the High Court before it could be settled. The Victorian and Queensland governments have explained to the Senate committee looking into the second wave proposals how this emasculation of the commission was causing problems for them. In addition, the commission has had to cope with a stream of morale sapping criticism whenever it has threatened to get in the minister’s way. It has been censured as an unwanted third party in workplace relations. It has been accused from the Senate of frustrating the minister’s strategy. It has been criticised for not dealing quickly enough with famously nitpicking award stripping processes. And when the minister did not like some of its award stripping provisions he referred them to the full bench, displeased with what he calls its generous living wage adjustments. He suggested in his notorious
letter to John Howard in December 1998 that it share its wage decision making with bureaucrats from the Productivity Commission, the Reserve Bank and Treasury.

The minister himself may be well pleased about all of this. Some interests have done rather well out of it, but it is hard to see many advantages in it for working people, for the community as a whole or for our future as a knowledge nation. The Labor Party therefore intends to restore the capacity of the commission to oversee industrial relations and to ensure that the system serves the national interest and not just partial interests. This bill is intended to kick-start this process. Let me describe its provisions in general terms. Its purpose is to facilitate and maintain a cooperative industrial system which promotes the economic prosperity of all Australians, meaning, among other things, that with the commission’s protection wages and conditions will be determined on the foundation of minimum standards by agreement among employees, employers and their organisations; that an effective award system will provide for secure, relevant and consistent wages and conditions; and that there will be a framework of rights and responsibilities for employers, employees and their organisations which supports fair and effective bargaining and ensures that the parties abide by the awards and agreements that apply to them. The bill provides that the functions of the commission shall be to prevent and settle disputes, by conciliation if possible or arbitration where necessary. To this end, it provides that the commission will have the limitations put on it by the government removed so that it can make or vary awards. Finally, and significantly, it will be able to make orders ensuring that parties negotiate in good faith and genuinely try to reach agreement, that they do not tried to obstruct negotiations or the conclusion of agreement. An enterprise bargaining system cannot be fair or effective unless the law insists on good faith bargaining. If we are to be a sophisticated and skilled economy and society, we must have an impartial, fair, orderly and effective industrial system. We cannot have or sustain such a system when the authority overseeing it is under constant assault, as it has been under this government.

The Labor Party in government will thoroughly overhaul and modernise the legislation so that it reflects this century’s economic and social conditions rather than those of two centuries ago. For the moment, this bill is a first and urgently needed step. This is at the heart of our industrial relations strategy. The only defence this government has is to misrepresent our positions. We saw that again here in question time today. One of the first things we did in industrial relations was to take the penal provisions out of the Trade Practices Act—not eliminate them but take them out of the Trade Practices Act and put them where they belong, in the Industrial Relations Act. It is a piece of the same process. While this government has sought to throw out into dozens of different situations the industrial powers of the Commonwealth, we see it, relevantly, as resting with the body which has built up expertise and the trust of ordinary Australians over a century of activity. That is because we are about ordinary Australians. We are not about the few; we are about the many. We are about their sense of security, their sense of a capacity to be able to provide for their families without fear, their ability to operate in workplaces which constitute a third of their lifetime’s activity without threat and without fear, and this bill is going to help. (Time expired)

Bill read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed:
That grievances be noted.

Personal Injury Compensation

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (4.58 p.m.)—Few people would not be moved by hearing the words of Sydney grandmother Judie Stephens concerning her grandson Jackson, who was just three months old when a car crash left him brain injured, blind and quadriplegic. Mrs Stephens’s daughter and her husband—Jackson’s mother and father—were killed in the accident. Mrs Stephens says, ‘Jackson is unlikely to ever be able to work and will need care for the rest of his life. When I am dead, a structured settlement will absolutely guarantee that Jackson has
quality care for the rest of his life.’ She says ‘Our government must act quickly to ensure that structured settlements are made available to protect people like Jackson.’ Let me pay tribute to Judie’s tireless efforts to reform the law to encourage structured settlements, and say to her that Labor has listened to her. I announce today Labor’s interest in making periodic payments for accident victims tax free, as lump sums presently are.

Labor will now engage in a round of consultation with representatives of victims, the insurance industry, the legal profession and relevant state authorities with a view to finalising our position prior to the election campaign. At present a person who permanently loses all or a significant part of their earning capacity and who requires extensive long-term care due to the injuries they have suffered may well be entitled, depending on the circumstances of the injury, to a large amount of compensation. In Australia this is almost invariably taken in the form of a lump sum. The reason for this is essentially twofold. First, there is no doubt a lump sum mentality, partly due to the attractiveness of finality. Claimants like to receive a final payment which they can spend as they please, and defendant insurers also like to make a final payment so that they can close their files. Secondly, there is the current uncertainty regarding the tax treatment in Australia of periodic compensation payments. If a claimant receives compensation as a lump sum, it is generally received tax free. But a claimant who receives compensation in the form of periodic annuity payments payable for an indefinite period, such as the claimant’s life, may be subject to income tax. While the tax office’s attitude to these periodic payments remains unclear, injury victims are not prepared to accept their compensation in the form of periodic payments and take the risk that they will be income taxed.

The object of personal injury compensation is, as best one can do this with money, to put the victim back in the position they would have been but for the accident. Lump sum compensation frequently fails to achieve this. Because a whole series of calculations are required about the victim’s life expectancy, inflation, investment returns, their capacity to return to work, and the cost of injury related care and medical attention, lump sums frequently get it wrong. Sometimes a victim dies shortly afterwards and their dependants receive a windfall gain. More frequently the lump sum compensation turns out to be inadequate and the victim ends up as a social security recipient. A Business Review Weekly report suggested that 60 per cent of recipients who receive lump sum payments have dissipated the amount within five years. Sometimes lump sums run out because they are improperly managed. The anecdotal stories of this kind are dreadful. One recent Victorian case involved a woman who had gambled her quadriplegic son’s compensation payment on poker machines.

Acutely aware of these shortcomings, a number of victims’ families, members of the legal profession and insurance companies have developed and have been campaigning for the alternative to lump sums—periodic payments. This alternative is referred to as a ‘structured settlement’—a technique that enables those who are injured to receive all or part of their compensation in the form of a periodic payment rather than wholly in the form of a lump sum. The essence of the structured settlement arrangement is as follows. It does not completely exclude a lump sum; most structured settlements include an up-front lump sum component. It is optional rather than mandatory, only entered into with the agreement of both claimant and defendant. It is usually an out of court periodic payment settlement agreement between the parties, although such an arrangement could be ordered by a court. It applies in the context of compensation for personal injuries where the victim has an action for damages against a defendant and where the defendant is liable for damages and is insured in respect of that liability. It is most appropriate where the damages are large and include substantial future care and lost future earning capacity components.

There are obvious advantages for victims in having an annuity rather than a lump sum. The payment is not dependent on investment returns and continues right throughout the person’s life. There are also advantages for defendant insurance companies. Based on
overseas experience, the introduction of structured settlements may result in savings to general insurers of the order of eight to 15 per cent. This is because the settlement sum which the defendant insurer has to pay to settle the case in a structured settlement is generally eight to 15 per cent less than the sum which would otherwise have to be paid out as a traditional lump sum.

There are also savings to Commonwealth and state governments. Despite the fact that the advocates of structured settlements want the Commonwealth to provide that annuities will not be taxed as income and therefore to forgo revenue as a result, investigations into the impact of this change suggest that it will save money for both the Commonwealth and state governments. The New South Wales Motor Accidents Authority 1998 report on structured settlements contains quite detailed financial modelling of the structured settlements proposal. This analysis of their estimated over 5,000 claimants each year who receive a lump sum in excess of $100,000 in settlement for personal injury is that these claimants cost the Commonwealth some $225 million per annum. That is made up of $540 million in social security costs and $94 million in health and welfare costs offset by taxation revenue of $408 million, leaving a net cost of $225 million. If you model the structured settlement alternative, the social security cost is reduced to $324 million and the health and welfare cost to $14 million, leaving a total of $338 million. Although the taxation revenue comes down from $408 million to $332 million, the net cost is $6 million, saving $218 million for the Commonwealth.

Another survey of potential costs and savings from structured settlements was carried out by consulting actuaries Cumpston Sarjeant in February this year. This report produces a much lower saving to the government of between $1.7 million and $3 million. That is because it uses a much more conservative estimate of the number of people who would actually take up a structured settlement option. Based on UK figures, it suggests that in Australia there would be 30 to 60 structured settlements each year. While these reports rest on a number of assumptions, they are a reasonable basis for believing that such a measure would not be a cost to revenue. I have asked a number of questions on notice designed to elicit information about the government’s own assessment of this issue.

The international position is interesting. The common law countries Britain, the United States and Canada have similar legal systems to our own. It is highly significant that each has moved in recent years to facilitate structured settlements. In 1982 in the United States, the Internal Revenue code was amended to exclude from gross income any damages received ‘whether as a lump sum or periodic payments’ on account of personal injuries or sickness. Money paid out in structured settlement annuities has grown from under US$1 billion in 1982 to $5 billion by 1996. In Canada, Revenue Canada announced in 1979 and refined in 1981 and 1987 an advance ruling that periodic payments received by a claimant as part of a settlement agreement were tax free. In the United Kingdom in 1984, Inland Revenue gave tax clearance to a hypothetical structured settlement case and from 1990 structured settlement cases began to be settled. So in each of these three countries we have seen movements in the direction of structured settlements.

A recently formed group in Australia, the Structured Settlement Group, has as members the Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Association, Injuries Australia, the Insurance Council of Australia, the Law Council of Australia and United Medical Protection. This organisation has been heavily lobbying the Howard government and a number of government members of parliament—one is in the chamber—have given their support to the group’s objectives. Regrettably, however, the government has failed to respond to their proposals. I challenge the government either to indicate clearly to Judie Stephens and to the rest of the country what its objections to this proposal are or to adopt it.

People with Disabilities: Supported Accommodation and Respite Care

Mrs VALE (Hughes) (5.08 p.m.)—Firstly, I would like to support the member for Wills for raising in the House the important issue
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of structured settlements for accident victims. I personally know Judie Stephens. I commend her good work and common sense in seeking to provide security for accident victims.

Today I want to raise in this grievance debate, and once again bring to the attention of the House, the significant contribution made by certain people in our community who care for members of their families who have an intellectual or a physical disability. As the greater weight of the burden of caring for disabled people falls upon the shoulders of family members, there is grave concern amongst the community about the ability of family carers to continue to care indefinitely for their loved ones. Carer burnout is a very real problem. In addition to this, concern has reached high levels of anxiety amongst older carers, who become distressed at the thought of what might happen to their disabled adult child when they themselves die.

Support for the disabled presents a complex picture which features a constellation of community organisations for every possible interest group and disability. Although much has been done by successive governments, the most serious concern raised with me by those caring for the disabled is the increasing incidence of carer breakdown. Recently in my electorate an important research document entitled *Who Cares?* was released by the Sutherland Shire Working Party into Permanent Accommodation under the auspices of the Sutherland Shire Carers and Consumers Forum and with the assistance of the Sutherland Shire Carers Support Project. Many of the members of these caring organisations have children with an intellectual disability and, like all parents, are concerned about their children’s future welfare. But the future to which they look forward is one full of anxiety. They ask questions parents elsewhere ask: will their children be cared for in a loving and caring way after they themselves have become disabled or die? Will the families have a say in the type of accommodation and the level of care their relations will receive?

When these parents raised their concern with governments and other organisations involved in assisting parents to provide care, they found there was very little information available about people in a similar situation to themselves. So they decided to gather the information. This report is the result of that research. The parents found that there were many other families in a same or similar situation to themselves. They were overwhelmed by the number of people who responded, the consistency of their responses and the depth of feeling expressed. Two hundred and seventy-three families responded. The vast majority provided constant or frequent care to their family member with a disability. Yet these families feel they receive inadequate assistance to remain caring for their children in the family home. They face an uncertain future about how they will manage as they age and perhaps are unable to continue the extraordinary level of care that they now provide.

The research found that 30 families are in need of supported accommodation for a disabled family member now. Many more expect to require such assistance in the future. But it is the shortage of respite care for these families that is likely to push them into requiring permanent accommodation much earlier than they would want. One hundred and fifty of the respondents to the survey included a personal account of their situation and how disability affected their lives. These stories provide powerful reading, particularly when there are so many. Many parents found putting their story down on paper just too distressing a task, so only some of the stories were told. Here is just one:

I have been caring for our daughter for more than 23 years. She can’t walk, talk, sit up, shower, dress or feed herself and is totally dependent. Three to four hours every day are needed just for feeding and personal care. She’s quite intelligent, but the frustration of being trapped inside such a disabled body is displayed in frequent and unpredictable screaming tantrums that all who know her have experienced many times. The constant and emotional strain of ongoing and relentless care over many years have taken a heavy toll on health, marriage and family dysfunction. Her younger siblings long ago stopped asking to do the normal things families take for granted, like going to a movie or going out for a pizza. An outsider could not comprehend the effect on them unless they have lived their lives. As they have grown up, so has their resentment.
Why do we need help? Are we whining and asking for more? The small amount of respite available is appalling. If outside respite were more available and flexible, the need for permanent placement would not be so urgent. We have been on a list for permanent accommodation for more than eight years. I have been told unofficially that her name won’t ever get to the top of that list. A family in crisis or ill-health will take priority. To get a place I will have to take her to respite and not come back. I love my child; do I have to abandon her like an unwanted mongrel dog? She deserves better than that. I am physically and emotionally burnt out, worn out and tired. I don’t know how much longer I can keep going. The community not affected by disability is disbeliefing at the lack of respite and supported accommodation places available. They wrongly assume that there are ample places for people with disabilities.

The report acknowledges the fact that the provision of supported accommodation and services designed to maintain people in their own homes is largely a state responsibility. However, it found that the home based respite services that the Commonwealth provides directly through the carer respite centres do not go far enough in meeting the needs of these parents. They tell us in this report that a primary need is for centre based—that is, away from home—planned respite, not in-home emergency respite. While there is a huge array of programs and services delivered to the disabled and their carers and over $1.7 billion a year spent by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, there is still a long list of unmet need. Because anyone can become a carer at any time or at any stage of their life the situation should ring alarm bells with all of us. Although many are spared the struggle and challenge of raising a disabled child, at any time a loved one could be physically or mentally disabled, or both. A motor vehicle accident could suddenly turn an active family member into one with challenging behaviour who needs 24 hours supervision day in, day out, year in, year out.

In recent years, the move away from institutionalisation, coupled with early discharge programs from hospitals, has brought some benefits. The downside is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to get disabled people into permanent accommodation, even if it is in their very best interests. The weight of responsibility has been left with the families to cope with as best they can. Respite care is intended to provide short-term care for people with a disability needing extra assistance to remain independent, or as an important fall-back support for family carers of people with a disability who require time out from their caring responsibilities. The unmet need for respite services touches a significant number of families. In the Parliamentary Library current issues brief entitled ‘Unmet need in disability services: shortfall or systemic failure?’ Jackie Ohlin reports that, while 76 per cent of primary carers nationally say they do not need any respite to support them in their caring role, 13 per cent of carers receive respite. However, 10 per cent of primary carers report that they do need respite support but have never received it.

Currently, respite care places are being filled by people in need of long-term solutions. Other studies show that about 40 per cent of respite care beds are not used for respite at all but are continuously occupied by consumers with challenging behaviour who cannot be accommodated in supported accommodation. There is also the situation where young people with a severe disability have been placed in nursing homes because there is no other accommodation suitable for their needs. The real problem here is that, once admitted to a nursing home, these people are just left there for the rest of their lives. It is unconscionable, but it appears that no review of their placement occurs. Such people do not appear to have any rights at all. Even criminals in prison are reviewed from time to time. There should be some mechanism whereby the state government must review their placement every 12 months. Otherwise, such people are simply left in the nursing home as a lifetime sentence.

Under the Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement, the Commonwealth government has responsibility for employment, training and placement services for the disabled, and the state government has responsibility for accommodation support, information services, independent living training, recreation services and respite care. This government is acutely aware of the critical need for accessi-
ble respite care and for permanent accommodation and has moved to assist the state governments in addressing this critical shortage. Last year, Minister Newman offered the states an additional $150 million to be met dollar for dollar by the states. I understand that the New South Wales government has only recently reached agreement with the federal government on this initiative. This will make available an extra $16.84 million this financial year and a further $33.68 million in the year 2001-02 in new money for these needs in New South Wales.

While this will increase the federal government’s contribution under the CSDA to $750 million in the final year of the agreement, there still remains a significant gap between the level of need for specialist disability services and the capacity of the existing system to meet this need. How it can be met effectively remains a serious question for all governments. Some have called for a national disability plan to mobilise governments and review agencies and advocacy groups to ensure consistency in local planning with national objectives and priorities, as well as the immediate current need and the longer term issues. Essentially, whole of government approaches must also provide for whole of community solutions to be able to go anywhere near providing the appropriate level of support to the overworked, worn-out and stressed people who labour as family carers. Any measures we can implement to prevent carer burnout will benefit the carers, their disabled family member and the community. It will also benefit governments and government expenditure. With a well considered long-term national disability plan, appropriately funded by all governments, personal carers will feel better able to continue on with the job of looking after their loved one and at the same time doing the job far better than any government. It is the very least they deserve from us. (Time expired)

Customs House, Newcastle: Sale

Media: Misrepresentation

BHP: Hot Briquetted Iron Project

Mr ALLAN MORRIS (Newcastle) (5.18 p.m.)—This afternoon I would like to touch on a number of issues. The first is the decision by the government to place the Newcastle Customs House on the market. Customs House in Newcastle is one of our most significant buildings, with a long and proud history of service to the nation. It is seen as an icon building in the Newcastle cityscape. It is a beautiful building which was seriously damaged in the earthquake of 1989—so much so that the cost of restoration and repair to that building was just on $4 million, a sum which was not justified by its economics or by its then usage by government departments. Subsequent to its restoration, the building has been converted to a convention centre-cafe and is currently leased by Damon and Gabrielle McCabe, who operate an excellent establishment which has been of great benefit to the community. It also means that the Newcastle community has access to the building and takes advantage of that.

In placing the building on the market, the government has called for tenders, much to the alarm of many people in Newcastle. The concerns that have been put forward to me and by me to the government have been responded to by the Minister for Finance and Administration. He has suggested that the building is secured because of the Newcastle City local environment plan and the New South Wales Heritage Act 1977. Of course, both of these refer to the demolition of or substantial changes to the building. The concern that most of us have is that the potential maintenance of the building could become a major cost problem in the years ahead. Whilst it has been restored recently and is, therefore, a commercial matter means the Commonwealth will not be able to recover the $4 million spent on it, nor, in my view, will it be able to sell it to a buyer on a commercial basis. I do not believe the rent will be enough to make the property viable and provide sufficiently for its future maintenance. The alternative is that the government sells it at a fire sale price and effectively loses money on the cost of restoration. That would be reprehen-
sible in two ways. Firstly, the investment was made in the restoration of the building not on a commercial basis but because of its significance and Commonwealth responsibilities. It would be wrong to undo that and to change that emphasis.

Secondly, selling it on other than commercial terms or at a lower price is almost to encourage misuse of the building. The fact that the Commonwealth appears not to value the building and is pushing the responsibility for its long-term maintenance on to state government legislation or city council regulation and planning is an abdication of responsibility that this parliament and governments have maintained for over 100 years. As I said, the building has serviced the Commonwealth well and it is tragic that, at this point in time, the Commonwealth wishes to jettison it. I would encourage the people of Newcastle to continue their protests and their campaigns of letter writing, and whatever other form their protests can take, to bring to the government’s attention their displeasure at this nitpicking approach to Commonwealth assets. This asset is one that we all value. It is a pride of the nation and should be treated as such.

The second matter I want to raise is in relation to legal action in the mid-1980s that I was required to take because of an article in the *Newcastle Herald* that was written by Jeff Corbett, who made accusations about me that were incorrect. After requesting the newspaper to correct the record and indicate that they had been inaccurate, the response was that they insisted the report was accurate and they would stand by it. As a result of that, we ended up with a court case that went on for quite a long period and during which the *Newcastle Herald* were given every opportunity to demonstrate the veracity of what they had put forward. The court case was concluded at the request of the *Newcastle Herald* because of their incapacity to demonstrate the truth of the report. In accepting their plea to terminate the case, the major issue for me was the fact that the *Herald* recognised that you just cannot go around telling lies about people. You cannot always rely on things you are told being accurate, and journalists should always check accusations and claims they get about people, particularly those in public life.

For a couple of years the *Newcastle Herald* did in fact do that and were quite careful and quite professional in their reporting. However, in recent years the same journalist has begun a habit of again printing gossip, and falsities have become the norm. The most blatant was on 12 June, when this same journalist ran an article that was about the awarding of life memberships to some members of the Australian Labor Party. He made the point that such awards would normally be formally endorsed by the local member, in particular, me. He went on to point out that I was conspicuous by my absence. The implication, of course, is that I did not support these people and that I had acted abnormally. Despite my request to the *Newcastle Herald* to correct that, and for this journalist to point out that he had neither checked with me about the story he had been told nor checked with anybody with any authority, the fact is that I had not been given an opportunity to make such support known. If I had been, I would have. So to claim that I acted abnormally or conspicuously in some way is totally false.

In public life we all deal with impressions and perceptions and there is a fair bit of give and take in how much we stress that things be correct. Most journalists I deal with from most media, here, in Newcastle and in other parts of the country, try very hard to be accurate. They try to check their sources and, invariably, any mistakes that occur are usually just that—mistakes. I find it most bizarre that a journalist can write about me constantly and never ever check anything. I have not spoken with the man or been asked to check any of his sources since 1989, which is when the court case was held. I think it is disappointing that the *Newcastle Herald* allows this low level of professionalism and journalistic ethics to continue. If people wish to write about us, they should at least have the ethics and responsibility to actually check their facts. As I said, it is disappointing that this man is apparently paid to write about people like me without any real observance of the facts of matters.
The third matter that I want to raise is about BHP and its activities in Newcastle. I should point out at the start the concern I have about the hot briquetted iron project in Western Australia, which arises from my interest in industry and industry development. It is now in a very difficult situation and there is great danger that it will be completely closed down. The total cost all up to BHP of such a project is likely to be something like $3.7 billion. So this is a major national issue and, potentially, a major national disaster. I am optimistic that this project can be saved and can be successful in the long term because of the excellent scientific skills of the people in the Newcastle central laboratories of BHP. In my view, because of their scientific skills, they have analysed the problem adequately. They have worked out what can be done and I trust that will happen. My fear is that the decision on that plant may be decided by the stock market, not the scientists and engineers. There is a very great danger that BHP will be scared of the stock market implications and the financial writers, rather than listening to the technical scientific advice. Every project involves technical risks. This one does and it is important that BHP be encouraged to proceed.

Howard Government: Foreign Aid

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (5.28 p.m.)—I rise today to talk about the importance of Australia and other developed nations maintaining an appropriate level of foreign aid. Foreign aid is an essential part of being a responsible global citizen. The aid we provide does much more than feed and clothe the needy and disadvantaged people of the world, although this is most certainly an essential component. The foreign aid we provide promotes human rights, political freedoms and the supremacy of individual responsibility. In doing so it reflects the values of the Australian people. This year, Australia has increased the amount of official development assistance it provides by four per cent in real terms, to $1.6 billion. It is a clear demonstration of the importance the Howard government places on advancing Australia’s national interests by helping developing countries to reduce poverty and to achieve sustainable development.

It is a fact of great concern that, over the last decade, aid to developing countries has plummeted. Those who suffer are the poorest, most powerless and most physically vulnerable: the children. Half the world’s poor are children. For many of them, their future will entail early death from preventable disease, illiteracy or traumatic conflict. And the situation is becoming more pressing each day. Currently, 82 million children are born every year in less developed nations, compared with about 1.5 million in more developed nations. Last year the world population hit six billion. More than 80 per cent of these men, women and children live in developing countries—the same places where 98 per cent of the world’s population growth occurs.

The distressing link between overpopulation and poor quality of life can be seen on our doorstep. As Australians, we have a particular obligation to the people of South-East Asia and the Pacific. If we ignore those obligations, tragedies like those occurring in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, East Timor, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea will proliferate, because when a country is underdeveloped and its people are poor and desperate, the process of democracy is fragile and easily shattered by tyrants. Basic survival instincts tell you that shelter, food and clothing are the essentials of human survival. They must be attained first and foremost. Only after those essentials of life are secure can the population concern itself with philosophical and political concepts like democracy. So it is logical that, without foreign aid, the political democracies which govern the developing countries surrounding Australia could tumble.

Many Australians are under the misconception that the foreign aid Australia provides goes into the pockets of political leaders or government coffers. In fact, we have established a number of innovative programs and delivery mechanisms, often forging partnerships with non-government organisations and community groups to deliver services on the ground. In the true spirit of the Howard government, we provide aid in a form that helps the people of developing nations to help themselves—to irrigate farmland, grow
crops, build schools and develop sanitation systems that prevent disease.

Children are the foundation of the future. Any threat to their wellbeing is ultimately a threat to the wellbeing of the whole community, and the biggest threat to most developing countries is overpopulation. Poverty is clearly linked to birthrates, and population growth is linked to economic development, education, the environment and health. For example, in First World nations like Australia, population growth is either declining or very slow. The average Australian woman will have 1.76 children, while the average for First World nations is 1.6—well below the level of 2.1 which is needed for parents to replace themselves. Contrast this with developing nations, where women average 3.4 children. This is an issue of immediate concern to all Australians, because in the next 50 years over half the world’s population growth will occur in Asia—in our backyard.

Seventy-one per cent of the adult population of less developed countries is illiterate. As a result, the population has not undergone the reproductive revolution which marked the development of family planning methods. Access to family planning is integral in motivating smaller family sizes and socioeconomic change. Education about contraceptive methods also prevents diseases like HIV/AIDS, which in itself is responsible for stunting the progress of many Third World countries. But Australian aid is addressing these problems. In Vanuatu, we have instituted programs that overcome the stumbling block of illiteracy by spreading the message of family planning through theatre. Aid workers travel through villages, using drama to teach about preventing unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Cutting off or decreasing aid would do a tremendous amount of harm. Today we have the largest number of young people in history coming of reproductive age. Whether or not we invest in their future will have profound consequences on the quality of life for many generations to come. But, despite the growth in the wealth of donor countries, official development assistance has steadily decreased. In just five years—between 1992 and 1997—development assistance dropped by 21 per cent in real terms to $48.3 billion. Aid as a proportion of donor countries’ GNP—a measure of their ability to provide aid—fell to an average of 0.22 per cent in 1997, the lowest point since 1970, when the world agreed on an aid target of 0.7 per cent of donors’ GNP. For the group of seven leading industrial countries, the decline was almost 30 per cent.

I am proud to be part of a government that is rebutting that trend. In 1997, Australia’s official development assistance had dropped to just $1.1 billion, or 0.28 per cent of GNP. This represented $58 in aid per person—a decrease of $12 per person since 1990. But since that time, the Howard government has increased total official development assistance by half a billion dollars, to $1.6 billion in 2000-01. This year’s budget alone has seen a boost of nearly $100 million over last year and a real increase of four per cent.

The purposes of our foreign aid are many and varied, but the vast majority of it goes towards protecting our national interests by assisting nations in the South-East Asian and Pacific rim. As part of Australia’s continuing role in the reconstruction of East Timor, the Howard government has committed $150 million over the next four years. Our goal is to help East Timor to become an independent, stable and self-reliant nation. In addition, Australia will maintain its commitment to helping Indonesia in meeting the mammoth challenge of implementing political and economic reform, with a contribution of around $120 million. This government is committed to providing 100 per cent bilateral debt forgiveness to countries that qualify under the IMF and the World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative. To date, our total contribution stands at $55 million.

This is an essential part of Australia’s foreign aid contribution. It has been said that debt has a child’s face because the burden debt imposes often falls most heavily on the minds and bodies of children. Debt leaves children without immunisation against preventable diseases. Debt deprives them of education and a chance to break the poverty cycle, and debt orphans many of them because hundreds of thousands of women die in childbirth as a result of inadequate health.
care. Heavy debt takes a terrible toll on children, who will always pay the highest price for the failure of adults.

For nearly two decades, the huge amount of debt carried by some of the world’s poorest countries has had a crippling impact. It is a credit to this government and to the Australian people that we are helping to remove the economic shackles around the throats of developing countries. In our own region, it was the children of countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines who suffered most the effects of the Asian economic crisis. Through the Asia Recovery and Reform Fund, the Howard government will complement the support provided by bilateral country programs and will assist countries most affected by the aftermath of the financial crisis. Our total contribution to Asia will be about $488 million.

As we enter the new century, the need to maintain a reasonable level of foreign aid has never been greater. The coup crises currently unravelling the stability and infrastructure in Fiji and the Solomon Islands should warn the developed world not to neglect disadvantaged nations. Regional security is put at risk, and the result is a much higher aid bill than would have been the case if stability and peace had prevailed. At the same time, population growth in the most underdeveloped regions will only continue. It is imperative that Australia utilises its foreign aid budget to address the underlying causes with a view to stabilising the birth rate and promoting sustainable economic development. We all have an obligation to protect the world’s children. (Time expired)

Holt Electorate: Pilkington Glass

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (5.39 p.m.)—I rise today to talk about a tragedy that is occurring in my area with increasing frequency. This tragedy has manifested itself in a corporation that has been a major employment generator in my region for a number of years. This would be one of the last companies you would expect to stand up in the ‘file of shame’—but it seems to be performing on its workers at this particular time. One wonders why it is being done, and I would like to reflect on the framework. We have seen some of the bills
seeking a better redundancy package for staff and improved wages and conditions.

I have been to this plant two or three times. Having met with the management and having met with the workers, this company would be one of the last companies I would have expected to treat the workers this way. This issue concerns the conduct of the management of Pilkington Glass. It is an icon glass manufacturer in the city of Dandenong and a major employer of labour in the Dandenong region.

You can see Pilkington Glass in the windows in your homes, in skyscrapers, in showers and in the windows of your cars. It is an instantly recognisable product which is predominantly made in Dandenong. People in my electorate instantly recognise Pilkington Glass by the large glass smelter smokestack which can be seen in virtually every part of my electorate—in fact, it can be seen from the Rialto Tower in Melbourne, albeit with binoculars. The smokestack has been seen as a symbol of prosperity, of economic development and of our region getting ahead, notwithstanding the traumas that have been experienced due to restructuring.

Recent events have changed the perception of this symbol in my electorate. It is now seen as a symbol of division, of employers trying to screw employees, of employers oppressing a cooperative, productive work force that has been driving the cost of the production of glass down now for some period of time—a work force that had been attempting to work cooperatively with management. I had the privilege of meeting with a group of workers who were protesting at the front of Pilkington Glass on a cold morning on 9 June. They were good people, some of whom had been working at the facility for 20 years. Their working lives had revolved around this place. Some of these people were about to lose their jobs. They were brave, but they were also bewildered. They wanted to know why Pilkington Glass was treating them this way. After all, it had not been this way in the past.

Up until the early 1990s, management and staff had worked cooperatively and harmoniously. There had been some recent difficulties, but what saddened most of these workers that I met was the change in corporate management from a cooperative collaborative to a company that promoted people who fomented discord between workers and management—a company whose culture changed from working productively with unions to direct confrontation. As I said, I had a meeting on a cold Friday morning with a number of these strikers—good community people like Jim Baird, Laurie Anderson, Fred Townsend, Frank Lerna, Steve Green, Fred Rodriguez and Warren Kelly. They were accompanied by their AWU shop steward, Harry Lumanovski, and their national organiser, Paul Currie. They discussed what had actually been going on.

I visited this company in 1997 when I was working with Senator Jacinta Collins. The company was seeking our help to assist them with dumping of processed glass from China that had been occurring in the area. At that time, there was a meeting of management and workers and there was a good spirit of cooperation—they were going to work together to beat the crisis. The union and its workers had taken pay cuts and had increased productivity to make sure that their company could compete against those from overseas. So in a period of just over three years we have gone from a situation where management and staff met cooperatively to discuss how they could fight the challenge from overseas to a situation where staff are effectively thrown out on the street by their employers and where, when they seek some form of compensation—legitimately in a bargaining period—they are told to go away. As I said, the strike that took place was part of the negotiations for the new EBA. Negotiations had been going on since October 1999. This was protected action under Reith’s industrial relations laws.

Over the next two to three years 120 workers are going to be laid off from the float glass and processing areas, notwithstanding the fact that productivity gains and staffing reductions that have occurred over the years have meant hundreds of millions of dollars in savings for the plant. The current offer from the company is redundancy pay of three weeks for each year of service. But, based on contractual hours, that is way below
the average week worked. These people work a lot of hours. The AWU was seeking 17.5 per cent loading to make up for the overtime worked and to make the payout better, particularly given that some of these people may not be able to work again. Under the EBA, pay based conditions offered by Pilkington included a two per cent rise plus one per cent for performance. The company is also prepared to pay bonuses of $5,000, but it wants to choose whom it gives the bonus to. So, again, it is playing worker off against worker. The company will not accept union recognition clauses or the right to collective bargaining. Why should they, particularly given the encouragement that has been provided by, shall we say, the Prime Minister in waiting? The company has cancelled payroll deductions and it wishes to put workers on AWAs. The workers are currently back at work and negotiations are continuing. In fact, as I understand it, there is a meeting today. Long service leave is also part of the negotiations, and they are looking for a three-year agreement. This work force have worked cooperatively and collaboratively with these people and were told that management were going to continue to work cooperatively and collaboratively, but there has been a change in management culture. One wonders why that has been. But one just has to watch parliament to see the alternative Prime Minister and the sort of goading that occurs in this place.

This company has been in a continuous process of restructuring since 1973. At that time 600 people were employed in the processing and glass float areas. They used to work with 28 persons per shift with five shifts per day. Today they work with 12 to 16 per shift over four shifts. So, effectively, there is a recognition by the workers there that times move on; that they do need to become more productive, and they have been doing that cooperatively, particularly given the last EBA that was negotiated in 1996. Today there are 110 in the float glass area and 170 in processing. Thirty are going to go from the float glass area and 90 from the processing area. This place used to be union friendly until 1992. From what I am hearing, the last two years have been worse than ever. The last strike at this company was in 1994 over the sacking of a site delegate. They have rarely needed to withdraw labour. This company has been an icon company in my electorate for the past 30 years. When people went to that company, they knew that they would basically work out their working lives there. People in my electorate have been working there for 20 years and are about to be chucked—given a corporate backhander by this company. They do not deserve to be treated in the way they have by this company at this time. I urge the management of Pilkington to go back to where they were with respect to cooperative relationships and make sure that these people are treated decently. (Time expired)

Parkes Electorate: Water Reform

Mr LAWLER (Parkes) (5.49 p.m.)—I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak in the House tonight on a matter that is very dear not only to me but also probably to all residents of my electorate of Parkes in western New South Wales. Probably by far the most precious resource available outside the eastern seaboard, and especially in western New South Wales, is water. This precious commodity has always been the lifeblood of our communities and the presence or absence of suitable water stocks has largely defined what areas were settled and what areas were not. For example, the rugged north-western area of New South Wales—and therefore the north-west of my electorate—features more towns than the plains to the south-west, largely because the former sits above the Great Artesian Basin. In fact, for members interested, it was at Bourke in western New South Wales, which is a place right on the Darling, that the first artesian bore was sunk. Yet modern day efforts to reform water usage for the economic and environmental benefit of Australian communities has bottlenecked at a key stage. Water is the lifeblood of communities in my region for two reasons: firstly, because it is comparatively scarce and any decline in availability could spell the demise of most towns and their populations; and, secondly, because it is a vital component in those activities which maintain the economic balance in western New South Wales, whether through cotton farming, market gardens or by supporting sheep and cattle pro-
duction in more arid areas via bores. Water resources also play a key role in sustaining ecosystems and attracting tourists to such areas as the Macquarie Marshes near Warren, which is home to a huge variety of flora and fauna. To put it simply: towns in the west of New South Wales exist somewhat precariously on a strictly limited water supply and suffer a degree of economic vulnerability as a consequence.

Regional specialisation, brought about by environmental circumstances, dictates that many small towns have few economic alternatives if the local irrigation industry is placed under too much pressure. All communities recognise that some of the practices of the past have been wrong or excessive, to the extent that a major environmental crisis is looming, especially regarding water quality. There is no farmer in my electorate who does not recognise the problem with rising salinity levels in land and water and that these problems are the most economically pressing issues facing those primary producers. Yet efforts to address the environmental side of the equation pose just as serious a threat to these same producers.

As the House is well aware, national competition policy in relation to water usage dictates that access to this resource is granted to the most efficient users. The aim is to establish a real market value for water, to punish waste and to provide an avenue for the community to buy water for environmental pursuits if that is their wish. A key component of this reform is to ensure that those who are disadvantaged by this new system will be given assistance to soften the blow. Yet in the cases where irrigators’ water licences will be restricted or put on hold, the avenues for compensation have all but dried up for those farmers affected in my region, if the New South Wales white paper is anything to go by and based on the fact I have recently become aware of in Queensland: that is, the Queensland government have very little understanding of the situation—very similar to the New South Wales government.

The federal government have made available funding to offset the negative impact that national competition policy may have on the commercial interests and livelihoods of some operators. Yet access to this compensatory funding for those farmers hit hardest in my region is very uncertain. I believe that there is an argument for delaying the assessment by the NCC. This delay would be a reasonable outcome provided it also meant a delayed decision regarding the tranche recommendations to the federal Treasury. This delay could then enable industry representatives to enter a process of debate and consultation with the NCC and the New South Wales government regarding the implementation of national competition policy in water reform in line with COAG. That is the important thing—being in line with COAG. It is one of the underlying features of COAG that national competition policy will produce some areas of the community that will be forced into some difficulty. To negate that, it should have been the process of national competition policy all along to ensure that there was education and that the community were brought along with this. That would have been just as important as the implementation of the reforms themselves.

In too many cases it seems that today’s irrigators are being made scapegoats for the practices of their predecessors and the expectations of the community at that time, without any recompense. The way it stands now, the most sensible and environmentally conscious irrigators, for whom there is the same reduction in access to water as there is for some who have had less concern for the use of water, will be the ones hardest hit. That is because the ones who have not paid attention to using their water wisely have options open to them like computer driven drip irrigation, which the ones who have do not have access to. The result is that many irrigation operations are facing great difficulty, particularly since further borrowings would be greatly jeopardised in light of the temporary and uncertain nature of the proposed licensing arrangements. This financial hardship could be alleviated by the funding that this government has already made available for that purpose. Yet in New South Wales the state government have been anything but helpful in giving those farmers adversely affected by competition policy access to the compensation they so rightly deserve.
This is an outrageous situation within which no business operator should be expected to function, yet a great number of farmers are in this very position. Of course, even the casual observer can see that the viability of many productive farms will be undermined to the extent where many will simply fail. It will be at this stage that the broader economic implications for the surrounding communities that are deeply reliant on irrigators’ incomes will become distressingly evident. The town economies we are talking about are not large, they are not diverse and they are not robust. They need only sustain very little pressure before the inevitable population decline, real estate stagnation and slide towards welfare only income begins.

It must also be taken into account that the irrigation industry is a major employer in western New South Wales, providing valuable seasonal work to cotton chippers or in processing. The demographic make-up of the regions in the north-west means that many of these seasonal workers are severely disadvantaged Aboriginal people. Many of the farming organisations in my area, for example in Bourke and further north in Moree, are actively encouraging the employment of Aboriginal people. There are very productive partnerships being entered into between the Aboriginal community and the farming community. This is moving inexorably towards reconciliation in the towns that perhaps have reputations as being towns where reconciliation is most needed. Some of these programs are actually being funded by the federal government and some of them are being funded by the cotton growers themselves.

The additional income each year for these people is a lifeline to better living standards without the need to leave culturally familiar areas to seek work elsewhere. To snatch out this source of income and opportunity for Aboriginal communities would be a blow to many indigenous families and possibly add weight to the cost of social problems in those centres with high unemployment. Many of these areas, as I said, are taking the position that it is up to the communities themselves to solve their own problems. You have only to look at what is being done in Bourke to make that assessment. Besides the cotton growers entering into a relationship with the Aboriginal community, members of the community have put in many hundreds of thousands of dollars already and have had corporate promises of $1.6 million at last count to fund a centre called The Back of Bourke. This will highlight the development of white settlement in Bourke but, most importantly, highlight the contribution that the Aboriginal people have made not only to today’s society but also to history, as well as the great, colourful characteristics that they have brought to our way of life.

Water reform is not just another issue among several in my electorate; in many ways the outcome of this water reform is the difference between continued economic independence and future dependence on the taxpayer and the public purse. It is beholden upon the state government to honour its responsibility to the farmers who have borne the brunt of the community’s decision to change its attitudes towards the provision of natural resources.

Community Services: Housing

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (5.59 p.m.)—I am pleased to speak this evening on the continued failure of successive National Party ministers of community services to help the poorest and most vulnerable in our community, particularly in relation to housing. The member for Wide Bay, while he was the Minister for Community Services, mentioned housing in this place no more than half a dozen times—only then it was in response to issues raised by the opposition. The present minister, the member for Richmond, has only mentioned the word ‘housing’ once. In fact, housing is of little interest to either minister or to the rest of the government. CSHA funding under this government has been cut by $100 million. On top of this, a further $360 million came out of the CSHA budget when the government forced the states to contribute to its three-year benefit deficit reduction program.

It is no surprise to me to learn that the states which opted to cut the heart out of their public housing funding had conservative premiers at the time. The result is that low
cost housing has never been more difficult to obtain. It is estimated that 17 per cent of households—that is, 905,000 households or 2.6 million people—are in some degree of housing need. Of these, 250,000 households are on public housing waiting lists. This is why, unlike the government, Labor is committed to establishing a national housing strategy that will expand the range and supply of secure, affordable and appropriate housing choices, deliver more efficient and effective housing provision and land development, and better integrate housing and other services to provide neighbourhoods that are safe to live in and close to employment opportunities.

The GST will have a particularly devastating effect on all areas relating to housing. The government knows this now, but it does not care. In this year’s budget, housing was not even mentioned—not a word. Apparently it has dropped off the agenda completely for the government and the minister responsible either has not noticed or does not care. Homelessness is another pressing issue that has been given low priority by the relevant ministers. Despite a review by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute recommending a 25 per cent increase in funding to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program in order to service existing demand in the sector, the government simply ignored its findings. When the government finally unveiled its much touted national homelessness strategy in May, it did not pledge one extra cent to fight against homelessness. Words do not keep you warm and safe at night. It is all ‘holistic approach’, ‘comprehensive framework’ and improving ‘linkages between agencies’—all talk and no action, all words and no funding. This is like the reconnect program, which the Minister for Family and Community Services announced five times in one year.

Since details of the GST and its impact on the housing sector have come to light, Labor has represented the concerns of people all over Australia who will be adversely affected and inadequately compensated for the GST. One of the primary concerns has been the issue of the GST on residential rents. The government promised that this would not occur. The member for Lyne, in writing to his electorate in relation to permanent residents of caravan parks, distributed a leaflet stating:

This will be treated in the same way as rental of a house or unit, and is GST free.

Within six months, it was a very different story. The then Minister for Community Services stated:

What are caravan parks if they are not tourist accommodation?

The minister responsible for housing was not even aware that people live permanently in mobile homes. It is interesting that, by the time the current Minister for Community Services came to office, his earlier commitment to pursuing the needs of pensioners living in mobile home parks in his electorate seemed to evaporate. On 7 October 1999, he stated:

Site fees are not the same as rent. This whole issue is nothing new.

Compare that with what he said earlier in August 1996 when referring to pensioners in his electorate:

They pay a rental charge when they live in mobile home parks.

So in August 1996 it is rent, but by October 1999 it is not. Both ministers have failed to see the inherent injustice in charging one group of people GST on their rent and not others. The National Party woke up to this when some two weeks ago they carried a resolution. We heard a lot of huff and puff from the National Party about the action that was going to be taking place as a result of the commitment. The current minister actually stated very clearly:

The party will be making certain decisions, and so will I—

hence raising the prospect of him putting the issue before his personal career. This was after 9 February 2000 when the member for Richmond said:

And I hope I can come back to you shortly, and I will through your representatives, and hopefully there can be a change.

There has been no change, in spite of the unanimous resolution of the National Party conference. All that occurred when the National Party came to Canberra was that they
decided to talk to the ACCC and set up a monitoring committee. We know already what the ACCC thinks. I think that caravan park residents will be informed of this as well. I have here a letter dated 19 June 2000 from Professor Allan Fels to my colleague the member for Chifley, Roger Price. I acknowledge the work that he and the member for Greenway have done on this issue in Western Sydney. I attended a very successful meeting in Riverstone at which the member for Mitchell was told very clearly what residents think of this unfair tax. In this letter, the ACCC states:

The first important point concerning the implementation of the New Tax System with respect to the operation of caravan parks is that under the new tax legislation short-term and long-term residents of caravan parks, together with residents of hotels, hostels, and boarding houses, are not grouped with tenants renting residential properties. Tenants of caravan parks are classified as occupying commercial residential premises.

That is the whole problem. What these residents want is equal treatment with all other Australians, not special treatment, and there in the second paragraph of the letter the ACCC makes it very clear what it is objecting to. This is the body that the National Party are going to rely upon to defend these 161,000 people. It states:

It is important to note that with the second option the GST concessional rate will not apply to additional charges for goods or services provided as part of the accommodation, for example, electricity, gas, mini bar items, laundry bills, meals, phone calls, etc. These items will attract the full GST rate of 10 per cent.

Do two things with that quote: firstly, compare it with the Prime Minister’s quote on AM last week when he argued that all these extra services were the services provided by the caravan park operators, which is why they needed to apply the GST—because their costs would be increased; secondly, I ask the Prime Minister and the Minister for Community Services, or any of the ministers opposite, to speak to a single resident of a caravan park in Australia and tell them that they get mini bar items put in their fridge overnight, tell them that they get their laundry done for them and tell them that they get some concession with regard to meals or phone calls being provided. It shows absolutely the enormous gap between what this government says and what the reality of life is for these residents.

After the National Party presented this backdown last Monday, they then got further rolled because the Democrats came out and said, ‘The policy of the GST—which we voted for—is unfair.’ The Democrats voted for a GST on these vulnerable residents and then asked for a study: ‘You can have the tax and then we’ll have a study.’ And guess what: the government sat on the study for six months and, when it came out, the Econtech study showed that rents for boarding house residents would go up by 4.4 per cent. It also said that in the long run private rents would go up by more than double the estimate—up to 4.7 per cent over the long run. For 24 hours, the Democrats had a position that the GST should be cut to 2.7 per cent, but then they folded on that. In the end, we had a $33 million increase in maximum rental assistance that does nothing for the majority of permanent caravan park and boarding house residents. The National Party put out a press release saying:

Mrs Dickie said it was only right that the National Party had pursued the issue forcefully.

What a joke. Whilst the Labor Party stands for roll-back on this tax with regard to permanent residents of caravan parks and boarding houses, the National Party stands for roll-over. They have rolled over on this tax and they have rolled over in representing their constituency. The Democrats are forced into the farcical position of attacking a tax and a discrimination which they voted for and which they are now defending. This is an issue which is about equal treatment, which is why the GST should be removed for these Australians. (Time expired)

Queensland: Labor Government

Mr SOMLYAY (Fairfax) (6.09 p.m.)—Queenslanders woke up to a shock yesterday morning when they picked up their Sunday Mail from the front lawn. The headline of one article was ‘Resign call on Budget blow-out’. The alarm bells start ringing. I quote from the article:

Treasurer David Hamill yesterday faced new calls to resign with the revealing of a $1 billion Budget
blowout. Employee expenses soared 13% to $9.15 billion in the Beattie Government’s first year, according to Treasury.

I speak in this grievance debate because I grieve for the people of Queensland and their expectations under the Labor government led by Premier Peter Beattie. These expectations become bleaker every day. There is one indisputable fact of history in Australian political life, and that is that the Labor Party cannot handle money. There has never been a successful Labor government in terms of money or financial management. In my adult lifetime, the Whitlam government was my first experience of a Labor government. The financial damage to individuals, families, businesses and farmers will never be forgotten by those who were caught by Labor during those long three years. It is incredible how much damage was done. The accumulated wealth of generations was wiped out. There were record bankruptcies and record unemployment.

The 1980s saw the financial disasters of John Cain and Joan Kirner in Victoria. Between them, they bankrupted Victoria with their financial scandals, with Pyramid, the State Bank, et cetera. Brian Burke and Carmen Lawrence in Western Australia presided over the scandal of WA Inc.; again thousands lost their investments and savings after believing in Labor. In South Australia, John Bannon presided over another of Labor’s financial disasters—the disaster of their state bank, which the people of South Australia are still paying off with a special tax. The Keating-Beazley financial disaster hurt so many people; $80 billion of debt accumulated in five years, from 1990 to 1995. And it always seems to be up to a coalition government to come in after a Labor disaster, pick up the pieces and sort the problem out. Queensland is no exception. Wayne Goss was no exception. When he became Premier of Queensland, he promised to do for Queensland what John Cain did for Victoria. That was a very prophetic prediction. In Queensland the Labor bells are warning again. As I said, yesterday’s Sunday Mail—a newspaper which is not in the habit of being unkind to the Beattie Labor government—carried the familiar, ominous warning ‘Resign call on Budget blowout’. I will quote from it again:

Treasurer David Hamill yesterday faced new calls to resign with the revealing of a $1 billion Budget blowout. ... The State Opposition yesterday claimed—

I believe correctly—

the government was “swimming in red ink” ...

This report in the Sunday Mail came on the immediate tail of the attempt by Mr Beattie to con the Queensland people over petrol prices. Queensland has always been a low tax state. Queensland never had many of the innovative taxes that the southern Labor states dreamt up. Because Queensland never had a petrol tax, it was cheaper to do business in Queensland than in other states. That was one of the main attractions of Queensland. In my electorate of Fairfax, 1,400 people a month are added to the electoral roll. A thousand people a week move to Queensland from the other states. Queensland never had a petrol tax—that is, until Mr Beattie came along. Peter Beattie tried the biggest con ever perpetrated on the people of Queensland. It was a very dishonest attempt to introduce a Queensland Labor petrol tax and, at the same time, blame the GST. Mr Beattie announced an 8c per litre price rise in petrol, together with a $150 reduction in motor vehicle registration in the south-east corner as an offset. There were two things wrong with this stunt. What Mr Beattie did not declare was that he had raised motor vehicle registration $45 in the previous year. As well as that, when he was in opposition Mr Beattie claimed that an 8c per litre rise in petrol would cost Queenslanders almost $400 per year—a $250 per family rip-off. So when he was in opposition and the Borbidge-Sheldon government was dealing with the federal government, Mr Beattie said that the 8c per litre equated to $400 per year or $250 per family. Yet his offer of compensation to the people of Queensland for introducing that new tax was $150. According to his own figures, that is a rip-off of $250 per family. The other great disadvantage with what Mr Beattie proposed was that road funding in Queensland is funded by motor vehicle registration. If you reduce motor vehicle rego, you reduce road funding. That would affect every part of Queensland. Queensland is the most decentralised state in this country. No state de-
pends on a roadworks system more than Queensland. If you reduce the take that the government gets from motor vehicle registration, you also reduce the amount of money that can be spent on roads. Remember that, as I said, the Queensland government—Mr Beattie’s government—raised registration by $45 last year. So Queenslanders would have had higher fuel costs and worse roads—that is a very smart Labor recipe. After $400,000 of public money was spent on advertising the new Beattie fuel tax, Mr Beattie backflipped to abandon the scheme when there was an outcry across the state.

The warning in the Sunday Mail is ominous—Mr Beattie and his Treasurer are looking for revenue. They are again raiding the hollow logs. How long will it be before Liberal leader David Watson’s prophetic words come true? He said:

They are getting ready to strip hundreds of millions of dollars from superannuation funds, port authorities, water boards and anything else they can lay their hands on.

The budgetary situation in Queensland is precarious. I want to raise two additional things that the Beattie government has done which I think are unfair and have outraged most Queenslanders. With the introduction of the GST on 1 July, less than a week away, the state government, on state government services and other services, is putting stamp duty on top of GST. That is a tax on a tax. That is profiteering at the expense of taxpayers. There is no reason why the state government should make stamp duty payable on the GST inclusive price whether it be a commodity, the transfer of a house or a service provided by the government.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hollis)—Order! As the time for the grievance debate has expired, the debate is interrupted and I put the question:

That grievances be noted.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Message from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the following bills:

New Business Tax System (Venture Capital Deficit Tax) Bill 2000

Telecommunications (Interception) Legislation Amendment Bill 2000

Pooled Development Funds Amendment Bill 2000

Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment Bill 2000

Taxation Laws Amendment Bill (No. 3) 2000

Customs Tariff Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2000

Excise Tariff Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2000

A New Tax System (Trade Practices Amendment) Bill 2000

SYDNEY HARBOUR FEDERATION TRUST BILL 2000

First Reading

Bill received from the Senate, and read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT (SECRET BALLOTS FOR PROTECTED ACTION) BILL 2000

First Reading

Bill presented by Mr Reith, and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr REITH (Flinders—Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business) (6.20 p.m.)—I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The coalition’s 1998 workplace relations election policy More Jobs, Better Pay contained commitments to further legislative reform in our second term of office.

These commitments were reflected in four pieces of legislation already introduced by the government since October 1998, dealing with small business unfair dismissal exemptions, superannuation, youth wages and multiple reform issues in the Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (More Jobs, Better Pay Bill) 1999.

That bill was passed by the House of Representatives on 14 October 1999 but subsequently blocked by the combined opposition of the Labor Party and the Australian Democrats in the Senate.

Since opposing the ‘more jobs, better pay bill 1999’ last November, the Democrats
have publicly indicated that they prefer to deal with the contents of that bill on an issue by issue basis, not as an omnibus piece of legislation.

In a speech to the ACT Industrial Relations Society on 6 April 2000, Democrats spokesman Senator Murray said:

In my view only technical bills should be general and broad ranging. Policy bills should be specific. It is far better for a reformist government to deal with one issue at a time on a specific and limited basis.

And again, in the course of the inquiry by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Legislation Committee into the bill, the senator said:

It seems to me the act can be conveniently broken up into major sectors... I find these kind of omnibus bills result in a lot of negativity and it is very difficult to progress them.

Taking these sentiments into account, the government has sought to accommodate the preferences of the Australian Democrats by proceeding, other than on technical issues, with an issue by issue consideration of policy matters arising from the more jobs better pay bill 1999.

The first of these issue by issue bills was a bill dealing with pattern bargaining and related matters, which passed the House on 1 June 2000 but which is now also being opposed in the Senate by the Labor Party and, so far, by the Democrats. The government is now in a position to introduce further single issue bills drawn from the more jobs better pay bill 1999.

This bill deals with secret ballots prior to the taking of protected industrial action.

Secret ballots provide a fair, effective and simple process for determining whether a group of employees in an enterprise want to take industrial action.

Although Australia has long had provisions for secret ballots at the federal level, they have not been compulsory as a precondition to industrial action. In the past this was not such an issue, as prior to 1994 virtually all industrial action was unlawful.

The government believes it is appropriate, in view of the protections against civil liability for industrial action taken in pursuit of enterprise agreements provided by the Workplace Relations Act 1996, that secret ballots become a precondition to accessing protected action. Extension of the existing scheme of secret ballots in this way would enhance freedom of choice, minimise unnecessary industrial action and strengthen the accountability and responsiveness of unions to their members.

Evidence from the United Kingdom, where secret ballot provisions have been operating since 1984—and were retained in the Blair government’s Employment Relations Act 1999—shows that the introduction of legislative requirements for secret balloting has:

- provided union members with a direct say in the authorisation of industrial action;
- encouraged greater consultation by unions of their members;
- in conjunction with other legislative reforms, helped to significantly reduce strike activity; and
- had the support of UK trade union leaders.

The UK experience shows that secret ballots are about improving the way unions consult with their members and so reducing the likelihood of unnecessary and illegitimate industrial action.

This bill will enhance the opportunities for democratic participation by employees in making decisions about taking industrial action. A more democratic process will enable the employees who are directly concerned to decide for themselves whether industrial action is warranted. This will ensure that protected industrial action is not used as a substitute for genuine discussions during a bargaining period.

Support for secret ballots has been a position advocated by the Australian Democrats.

In the Democrat Senate committee report last November, Senator Murray indicated:

As a principle the Australian Democrats are generally strongly supportive of direct democracy. Democrats are also strongly supportive of the democratic protections afforded by secret balloting processes.

And following the rejection of the more jobs better pay bill 1999, the Leader of the Australian Democrats has indicated that the
Democrat concern appeared to be with matters of detail, not matters of principle. In speaking on Sydney radio about mandatory secret ballots, Senator Lees said on 29 November 1999:

If we could go back to the Government and talk to them as you’re talking to us, you know, in what I would describe as a reasonable and logical fashion, then the answer comes out as yes, there should be that provision.

In introducing this bill I am clearly indicating that the government is determined to proceed on an issue in respect of which there appears to be Democrat support. We invite the Democrats to make us keep the promise we made to the Australian people in October 1998 to introduce secret ballot requirements. The government is prepared to consider amendments to refine the detail of the secret ballots regime proposed by the bill, if it is the detail that is the barrier to the bill’s passage through the parliament.

Our intention is simple. We intend to implement the legislative amendments that reflect the policy objective on secret ballots in our second term workplace relations policy.

The provisions contained in this bill will introduce a requirement for a secret ballot to precede industrial action organised by employees or a union. If this precondition is not met, the industrial action will not be protected. The precondition will not, however, apply following the suspension of a bargaining period unless the protected action proposed varies from that which was authorised by the ballot.

Either a union or an employee who is a negotiating party will be able to apply to the commission for a protected action ballot to be held. If an application for a ballot is made by a union, only union members whose employment would be covered by the proposed agreement would be entitled to vote in the ballot. If the application is made by employees who are seeking a non-union agreement, all employees whose employment would be covered by the proposed agreement would be entitled to vote in a ballot.

Where the application is made by an employee, or several employees acting jointly, there must be evidence that the ballot application is supported by a prescribed number of employees at the workplace. Where the application for a protected action ballot is made by an individual employee or employees, they will also have the option of doing so through an agent so that their identity will be protected. This protection will also be extended to employees initiating a bargaining period.

The new provisions set out procedural requirements for ballots, including specific information that must be provided to employees in ballot papers. Industrial action would be authorised by a ballot if at least 50 per cent of eligible voters participate in the ballot, and if more than 50 per cent of the votes cast are in favour of the proposed industrial action.

The commission will be required to act quickly in relation to applications for protected action ballots, and would be required, as far as possible, to determine an application for a ballot order within four working days of the application being made. In making a determination in relation to a protected action ballot application, the commission must be satisfied that the applicant has genuinely tried to reach agreement with the employer. This bill enhances the role of the commission. This is an outcome that should be welcomed by the Australian Democrats and the Labor Party, who both regularly make calls to enhance the powers of the AIRC.

Unions would normally be liable for any costs incurred in the process of consulting their members over proposed industrial action. However, consistent with the government’s commitment to ensuring responsiveness and accountability, the Commonwealth will reimburse 80 per cent of the reasonable cost of the ballot—whether the application is made by a union or an individual employee or employees.

These measures will improve the quality of workplace relations in our community, and the grassroots involvement of working people in decisions that affect their jobs, job security and working conditions.

Of course, this matter has already been before a Senate committee. However, the government would welcome further Senate scrutiny provided that such a committee will re-
view the bill in order to achieve a workable scheme rather than just be a platform for union opposition to fundamental democratic principles.

The right of the coalition to implement its workplace relations mandate, subject to constructive Senate review, is a principle that has been acknowledged by the Democrats—and one that they should now act upon.

On 15 June 1996 the then Leader of the Australian Democrats, now Labor shadow minister Kernot, said on the issue of workplace relations:
The Democrats accept that the Government has been elected to govern and that it has its right to present its legislative program to the parliament for consideration. But the Democrats have been elected to do a job, and that is to closely scrutinise legislation to ensure that it is fair and workable and the best solution to an identified problem.

She then went on to say:
The Democrats have no intention of being obstructionist in this Senate. As we have done for 15 years of holding balance of power, we will carefully review legislation, suggesting ways to make it work better if possible.

Adopting a 'just say no' attitude to this bill would be inconsistent with not only the proper role of the Senate as a house of review, but also breach the principle under which the Democrats themselves have marked out their past approaches to these issues, at least until 1997.

I have pleasure in commending the Bill to the House. I present the explanatory memorandum to this bill.

Debate (on motion by Ms Kernot) adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 6.31 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

CENTENARY OF FIRST SITTING OF COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT

Mr SPEAKER (8.00 p.m.)—The House will recall my advice on 10 May this year that a joint sitting of the two houses of the Victorian parliament had that day unanimously agreed to a motion inviting both houses of the Commonwealth parliament to return to Melbourne on 9 and 10 May 2001 to commemorate and celebrate the centenary of the first sittings of the Commonwealth parliament. I have subsequently received a letter from the presiding officers of the Victorian parliament conveying the invitation to this House to convene at the Royal Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne on 9 May 2001 and at Parliament House, Melbourne, on 10 May 2001.

Mr REITH (Flinders—Leader of the House) (8.01 p.m.)—by leave—I move:

(1) the House of Representatives accepts the invitation extended by the Houses of the Parliament of Victoria on 10 May 2000, and conveyed by the letter of 11 May 2000 signed by the President of the Legislative Council and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, for the House of Representatives to meet at the Royal Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne on 9 May 2001 and at Parliament House in Melbourne on 10 May 2001, to mark the centenary of the first sittings of the Houses of the Commonwealth Parliament on 9 and 10 May 1901;

(2) the House of Representatives thanks the Houses of the Victoria Parliament for this invitation;

(3) the Speaker convey the terms of this resolution to the President of the Legislative Council and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; and

(4) the Speaker, in conjunction with the President of the Senate, President of the Legislative Council and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, make the necessary arrangements for the commemorative sittings.

It is my great pleasure and honour to be able to move this motion this evening in the House of Representatives to accept the very kind and generous invitation of the Victorian parliament. I am pleased to be able to do so in the presence of my colleague the Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation and I want to put on record the government’s appreciation of his continuing work to ensure the success of the celebrations of the centenary. It is not every day that the Victorian parliament assembles in a joint sitting of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council and it is a mark of the high importance with which the Victorian government and parliament treat this issue that they were so able to convene on 10 May. The joint sitting was also characterised by the fact that they used modern technology never dreamt of in the year 1901 to ensure the wide broadcast of the proceedings of the joint sitting to
schools and community groups within the state of Victoria. The Premier summed it up very well when he said:

We extend that invitation aware of the great sense of history behind it. We invite our federal colleagues to meet at the Royal Exhibition Buildings on 9 May 2001 as their predecessors did 100 years ago, and we invite them to sit the next day here in this building, where the business of governing Australia began.

It is quite true, as members said in that debate, that many Australians have not appreciated their own history and in particular the fact that the first federal parliament sat in Melbourne for 26 years following the commencement of Federation on 1 January 1901.

A perusal of the Hansard also gives colour to the occasion in 1901, which I am sure will be referred to again as we come closer to the celebration next year. I particularly liked the reference by Peter Ryan, the Leader of the National Party, who referred to the celebrations in the city of Sale in eastern Victoria, in the seat of Gippsland. He referred to a Mr Shankley who built a triumphal arch in York Street. Unfortunately as it turned out it was not high enough and so the procession had to march around it. ‘Beware the dimensions of the triumphal arch!’ was Mr Ryan’s injunction to us all. We of course look forward to this occasion in 2001. Not only were triumphal arches erected around the country but there were huge celebrations in Melbourne on 9 and 10 May. I am told that in the order of 12,000 people attended the first sittings in the Exhibition Buildings and thousands are anticipated and planned for when this parliament meets in Melbourne next year.

It barely needs to be said—but it should be said—that the establishment of Australia’s federal constitutional arrangements was preceded by much hard work by many Australians. The conventions are often the subject of reference in constitutional debates even today. There is a reason for that, and that is that the constitutional fathers—the founding fathers as they are sometimes referred to—had a great understanding of basic democratic principles. Whilst today we drive in modern vehicles and we enjoy aeroplane transport and the like, in those days it was the horse and buggy and the like. But the basic democratic principles of how people get on together, that parliaments should represent the interests of the people—the basic concepts of the national good and the like—are still constant. It is very important that we celebrate the centenary of Australia’s federation.

We not only celebrate the successes of those who put the constitutional arrangements in place but also celebrate the fact that it was done peaceably and that this country has observed the best of democratic principles and traditions, which has allowed the vast majority of Australians to enjoy the wonderful resources that this country has to offer. Their vision has endured the test of time and it is important that we celebrate in 2001. Let me therefore conclude by commending this motion to the House. We look forward to 9 and 10 May.

Mr McMULLAN (Fraser—Manager of Opposition Business) (8.07 p.m.)—It is a pleasure to support the motion moved by the Leader of the House. As he said in his remarks, it is a ceremonial occasion but an important occasion to both reflect upon our history and make a strong reaffirmation of our commitment to democracy. Because our transition to independence and to democracy was won peacefully in Australia, I sometimes feel that they are not treasured as they might be by those who have had to struggle more directly for their own nation. Although our people have fought for democracy for other people, we did not, in a sense, have to fight for it for ourselves. Nevertheless, it was an important debate and an important stage in our history, and it is appropriate that we should mark it significantly. I endorse the remarks of the Leader of the House in thanking the Victorian parliament for their invitation and the Victorian government for facilitating it.

The original parliament was a very interesting composition in terms of some issues around today—I do not want to dwell on it too much—and I will refer to a couple of them. Of course, there is the significance of the free trade and protectionist arguments that were going on at the time—they might get a bit of a re-run some time during the year, although I doubt it will be on 9 and 10 May—and, in the context of the history of
the time, the Morning Post reported Alfred Deakin as saying:

... No capital wherever situated can keep in touch with more than a fraction of its dominion, and must be so remote from the rest as to permit the presence of but a few qualified representatives from its outlying regions. Yet its Government and Legislature must needs speak, act, and provide for the whole.

Of course, technology brings us all closer together in a lot of ways and it might eventually challenge some of those representative democracy assumptions as we can do more things directly. Nevertheless, the parliament is a profound and important representative institution and its history is a chart of the course of Australia’s history. To meet and to reflect upon it, to celebrate it and to commit ourselves to continue it are important things to do.

In supporting the motion, I thought that there were a couple of other comments I should make about the comments of that time drawn from Gavin Souter’s book Acts of Parliament. I am sorry that the Clerk is not here because I am sure he would be pleased to know that at page 38 it says the salary prescribed for the Clerk of the House of Representatives was £60 less than for the clerk of the lower house in New South Wales and £100 less than for his counterpart in Victoria—that is, the Clerk was worth only 90 per cent of the salary of the clerk of the Victorian parliament. I hope, Mr Speaker, that you will convey this message to the Clerk. I am sorry not to do it first-hand, but he is ably represented here and I see the clerks wincing only slightly in response to these comments. I think that was an outrage, which I am sure was duly taken care of in the next 100 years. But I thought people would want have to that significant fact drawn to their attention.

I also note in Gavin Souter’s book at page 44, after he describes some of the robust debate that took place and how certain matters and standing orders issues were raised and dealt with, that the opening speech delivered to members of both chambers assembled in the Senate mentioned various bills that were to be dealt with by the first parliament. In a way you could say that not much has changed. One of the very significant bills being proposed was to establish conciliation and arbitration machinery for the settlement of industrial disputes—and of course the Leader of the Opposition was doing just that today. So we have in fact significant links to our history in both procedural terms and substantively.

Mr Speaker, on a serious note, as the Leader of the House has correctly said, this is an important occasion and the opportunity to participate will be a privilege for us all. I welcome the Victorian parliament’s facilitation of it and appreciate your work, the work of the staff here and in all the parliamentary departments, of the government and of our representative, Senator Faulkner, in participating in the development of these events. I hope they will be as significant and as successful as they deserve to be.

Mr Speaker (8.12 p.m.)—Before I put the motion, may I just add my own comments of appreciation for the role played by the Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation in facilitating this, my appreciation of the comments made by the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business, and my appreciation, I believe on behalf of members of both houses of the federal parliament, of the invitation extended to us by our Victorian counterparts. I join all members in looking forward to the celebrations on 9 and 10 May.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

MIGRATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PARENTS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2000

Cognate bill:

MIGRATION (VISA APPLICATION) CHARGE AMENDMENT BILL 2000

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 22 June, on motion by Mr Ruddock:

That the bill be now read a second time.

upon which Mr Sciaccia moved by way of amendment:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“the bill be withdrawn and redrafted to provide for an increase in the quota for parent visas based on:
(1) a fair contribution by parents or their sponsors towards the costs to be met by Medicare for parents’ general health care;

(2) any health contributions to be used to offset the increased costs for Medicare and public hospital services; and

(3) the size of any contribution not being such as to exclude access to visas by parents of Australian families with limited means”.

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (8.14 p.m.)—I rise to speak to the Migration Legislation Amendment (Parents and Other Measures) Bill 2000 and the Migration (Visa Application) Charge Amendment Bill 2000. I knew that if we waited long enough we would finally see just how far this government would go when it came to a free market economy. We have seen this government put a price on emergency evacuation from a world trouble spot. We have seen this government put a price on everything from child care to aged care. But now we have seen it all. This government has put a price on motherhood. How much is a mother worth? According to this government, a mother is worth $35,000 or, if you take the package deal, it will throw in dad as well for $64,000. That is the price of entry to Australia. That is what it will cost you to get your parents into Australia.

What kind of nation have we become when we put a dollar value on citizenship? Are we to join the ranks of Monaco and Switzerland in checking an applicant’s bank balance rather than character before admitting them to our society? And will we judge an application only in terms of the costs rather than the value that they may bring to a family and to our nation? This heartless government look at parent migration and see only costs. They judge human beings like entries in a cashbook. As Oscar Wilde put it, they know the price of everything and the value of nothing. The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs told us in his second read speech:

... many participants who wished to bring their parents to Australia indicated that they would meet all the costs associated with the migration of their parents.

He told us that he learned this from his community consultations on the 2000-01 immigration intake. But if you ask which communities he consulted, you might not be so surprised by that result. Did the minister consult in my electorate of Fowler, the electorate with the highest level of migrants in Australia? No. Did he consult in nearby electorates, such as Prospect or Blaxland, which also have high levels of migrant residents? No. So where did he conduct his community consultations? As the shadow minister has told us, the minister travelled from one end of the country to the other carefully avoiding electorates with high numbers of migrants.

The results of the consultations are not surprising. Given the cultural obligation of caring for parents held by many of my constituents, I do not doubt that a majority would go to great expense to bring their parents to Australia. Many would go into debt to pay the costs. Unlike this government, they do not put a price on motherhood. They will suffer any hardship to meet that cost. But the $64,000 cost represents quite a different burden for a family on $30,000 a year with no cash assets, as is common in my electorate, and a family with an income of over $100,000 a year with large cash assets. That is the difference between a price and a value. The value is the same for both families, but the price, or the burden of paying that price, is different. That is what this government cannot see.

This is a government which is prepared to exploit the bond between children and parents. It knows the strength of that bond and it knows that it can charge whatever it likes: people will pay what they must. The minister did not have to go on a round of consultations to find that out. The question he did not ask, though, was how people in electorates such as Fowler could afford to pay the ransom that this bill is demanding. In describing the previous entry arrangements, which were disallowed by the Senate, the minister said:

The government was not creating a visa class for the rich. We wanted to allow more parents to live in Australia, in a way which ensured a fair deal for the Australian taxpayer.

I am still looking for ‘the’ Australian taxpayer. I, for one, would like to thank him or her for keeping us all in the style that we would like to become accustomed to. The fact is, and the government is quick to over-
look this, ‘the’ Australian taxpayer also includes the many thousands of Australians whose parents live overseas. And so far as ensuring a fair deal for the Australian taxpayer, how fair is it for them to pay taxes to support the health and welfare costs of parents other than their own?

What the minister fails to recognise is that migration has given Australia the advantage of a much younger population than would have occurred naturally. We have already received benefit from not having to meet the expense of education and child care for a large proportion of our population. The fact is that we got a free ride on the backs of migrants who arrived in Australia ready to work—a free ride at the expense of the parents of those migrants. We did not have to feed and clothe them until they were old enough to work. We did not have to provide them with an education. We did not have to provide them with the skills which we now demand that they have before migrating here. That was all done for us and, in most cases, was funded by their parents. So do we say ‘thank you’? Not likely—not unless your kids can come up with $64,000. The minister insists that they are not visas for the rich and he goes on to explain—and I quote again, ‘that the previously disallowed arrangements may not have been a good deal for the Australian taxpayer.’ The minister went on to list the total health costs for each parent as $120,000 in addition to $160,000 in welfare costs—a total lifetime cost of $280,000 for each parent or, you could say, $560,000 for both. So let us say that for an investment of $64,000 you could get a payout of $560,000. That, the minister would tell you, is getting a good deal for the Australian taxpayer. There is no mention of fairness for families who cannot afford to pay the ransom.

The fact is that the Australian taxpayer is still going to pay the bulk of the cost. But if you can come up with a down payment of $64,000, you can jump the queue. There is no need to consider each case on its merits. There is no need to consider the situation of the family in Australia that may desperately need the assistance of a parent to help a family member who is ill or disabled. There is no need to consider the plight of parents in areas such as the former Yugoslavia or, as is becoming apparent, Fiji, where their safety and wellbeing are under threat. But that is how the government see it. It all comes down to the bottom line or, in the minister’s words: ... the negative budgetary impact of parent migration...

But that is not the whole picture. What this issue really comes down to is not a matter of fairness to the Australian taxpayer and it is certainly not a matter of fairness to families with parents overseas; it comes down to the policy of this government. This is made clear by the minister’s actions and words. Faced with the disallowance by the Senate of his visas for the rich, he restricted the number of parent visas to 500. He then told us that he has reserved 4,000 places for designated parent visas over two years. That is 2,000 places per year. That is four times as many places for his visas for the rich than the 500 places for this year’s intake. And that assumes that the present program will not be scrapped altogether and that the only applications approved will be for those capable of paying the $64,000.

An intake of aged parents of 2,500 per year should be compared with intakes of over 11,000 per year 10 years ago. When you consider that there is a waiting list of more than 20,000, it is clear that only a very small proportion of applicants will ever be approved. So when it comes to fairness, it is not really about fairness to the Australian taxpayer, and it certainly is not about fairness to the many thousands of Australian families who will never be able to have their parents living with them. It all comes down to price. That, after all, is what the market system is all about. It is not about need and it is not about human factors. It is the same type of policy that this government are putting into place in areas of health and education. If you have private health insurance, you can jump the queue. Private schools can count on more and more taxpayer funding while public education gets less and less. That is the principle that drives this government’s policies. If the rich are prepared to pay a little, they can feel entitled to grab a larger share of the cake when it comes to public resources. If you can afford to pay $64,000 to bring your parents into the
country, they will be four times as likely to be accepted and that entitles them to nearly five times their investment in potential health and welfare payments. Whichever way you look at it, it is definitely not fair. This legislation deserves to be defeated.

Mr LINSDAY (Herbert) (8.25 p.m.)—So the legislation is defeated; what happens to the parents? Do you want them to stay overseas? You did not answer the question of how much the Labor Party will charge them. Perhaps the member for Lowe, when he speaks, might like to tell the House what the party’s intention is. The Labor Party have agreed, and I do not know if the member for Fowler is aware of this, with this legislation in principle but will not say how much they will charge. Why not? Why won’t you say? That surely shows up the hypocrisy of your speech, that in fact the Labor Party are prepared to charge but are not prepared to tell the Australian people how much it might be. But they are prepared to say, ‘We will defeat this legislation and leave the parents overseas.’ I ask the member for Fowler: how fair is that?

I am pleased to speak on this Migration (Visa Application) Charge Amendment Bill tonight, because the coalition acknowledges and celebrates Australia’s multicultural heritage. That, of course, goes back to the First Fleet. We have shown our commitment to ensuring that Australia’s cultural diversity is a unifying force, both in the interests of the individual and of society as a whole. I see this, as you do, Mr Deputy Speaker, when we attend our respective citizenship ceremonies. I make a point of attending every citizenship ceremony that I can in Townsville and Thuringowa to reinforce this point about Australia’s cultural diversity. We are probably the most culturally diverse nation in the world today, and I am pretty proud of that.

There are currently about 20,000 parents waiting to migrate to Australia, and if they were all allowed to migrate under current arrangements, the cost to Australian taxpayers would be measured in literally huge amounts of money. Indeed, the member for Fowler alluded to that. She gave an idea of the quantum of money, but she is saying that they should come at no cost. Whilst the entry of parents assists in providing support to their Australian families, and I recognise that, research shows that people who migrate to Australia late in life make minimal contribution to revenue and incur a very substantial cost in terms of social security and health. I believe the member for Fowler also recognised that.

The coalition is committed to maintaining the Australian community’s confidence in the migration program. That is something the Labor Party do not recognise, but it is certainly something the government recognise. The program is currently being run in Australia’s national interest so that all can enjoy the many benefits that a well-focused program brings to the country. Mr Deputy Speaker, it is likely you will remember that the Labor Party when in government recognised this cost, and still do today. It was the Labor Party that introduced the assurance of support bond and health charge in the early 1990s. Was that somehow or other discriminatory, as the member for Fowler said? During consultations with the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs on the 2000-01 immigration intake, many participants who wished to bring their parents to Australia indicated to the government, indicated to the minister, that they would meet all of the costs associated with the migration of their parents.

In response to the preparedness of sponsors to contribute to the costs of aged parents migrating to Australia, the government announced on 3 April 2000 that it would introduce new entry arrangements for parents in the 2000-01 program. These new arrangements will provide for a significant increase in the number of parents who will be able to come to Australia to be reunited with their children. I certainly have a significant number of ethnic groups in my community, and I would like to pause for a moment to thank the people from the Townsville and Thuringowa Migrant Resource Centre, who very ably work with me to look after the concerns of people in my community. They said to me that they welcome the government’s initiative which is being debated tonight. They understand that there is a program where 500 applicants can enter Australia at no cost. That
program still exists and it is likely that it will continue to exist. They also understand that the amount that the Australian government and the Australian taxpayer are asking parents to pay covers only one-fifth of the actual cost of bringing them to Australia. That is a huge concession.

I ask the question: should the Australian taxpayer be expected to pay? The member for Fowler seems to think that the Australian taxpayer can pay for everything. That is what got this country into difficulty some 4½ years ago when the Labor government spent $10,000 million a year more than they had, and that is not something this government are prepared to be a party to. We believe the budget should be maintained in surplus, and we believe that we should not spend more than we have. I see we have some young people in the gallery tonight. Thank you for coming along to the parliament to be with us. Many of them would know that when they get their pocket money they cannot spend more than they have; and if they do they get into trouble. It is the same with the Commonwealth of Australia. The Australian government gets itself into trouble if it spends more money than it has.

I am intrigued that the Labor Party have said that they agree in principle with what the government are trying to do, but they are going to vote against the legislation. Also, they have never said how much money should be charged. I call on the Australian Labor Party to say what their policy might be. I ask the member for Lowe, who is going to speak next: what is the Labor Party’s policy? He will not say, even though he is a fine representative for Lowe and a person whom I consider to be a good colleague. He should say to the Australian people: ‘This is the policy of the Australian Labor Party’, and I would like to hear a response from him tonight.

A contingency reserve of 4,000 visa places is available for the parent category over the next two program years. This is in addition to places for other parent categories. The Senate voted to disallow the previous entry arrangements for parents, as they believed them to be visas for the rich. The member for Bowman would have you believe that this program is a Maserati visa or a visa for wealthy people. I can assure the House and the gallery that the government are not creating a visa for the rich. We want to allow more parents to live in Australia, in a way which ensures a fair deal for the Australian taxpayer.

As a result of the disallowance and the negative budgetary impact of parent migration, the government were able to accommodate only 500 parents in the migration program intake for 1999-2000. I can tell you that there were many Australians who were disappointed at the actions of the Senate and the Australian Labor Party in preventing their parents from having the opportunity to come to Australia. How fair is that? We heard the member for Fowler complaining that these are visas for the rich but, on the other hand, we hear Australians saying that the Australian Labor Party have stopped their parents from coming to Australia. I ask the House: how fair is that?

The designated parent visa category was introduced in November 1999 and was specifically designed to assist those parents who were adversely affected by the Senate’s disallowance of the previous parent entry arrangements. The designated parent visa class incorporates key elements of the previously disallowed parent entry arrangements, including the payment of a $5,000 health charge for each parent. A very high level of interest in the designated parent visa category has been demonstrated by almost full acceptance of the minister’s invitation to lodge an application under this category. Around 1,100 parent visas have been granted since November 1999, with the remaining 1,100 to be granted in the 2000-01 program year.

The introduction of the designated parent visa category was accompanied by an announcement of a more flexible visitor visa arrangement for parents with an ongoing migration application. This was in recognition of the extended processing times faced by parents and has resulted in a greater number of parents being able to visit their children in Australia. With its immigration policies, the coalition has sought to achieve a proper balance between its social, economic, environmental and humanitarian objectives in a non-
discriminatory way. Isn’t that Australia all over? We are indeed lucky to live in this country.

We are committed to the rights of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and to be treated with equal respect, regardless of race, colour, creed or origin. We strongly support the building of an Australia that is a culturally diverse, accepting and open society united by an overriding commitment to our nation and to its democratic institutions and values. We denounce racial intolerance in any form as incompatible with the kind of society that we are and that we want to be. I strongly support Minister Ruddock and this legislation this evening, as do the constituents in my electorate of Herbert—in Townsville and Thuringowa. I look forward to the member for Lowe indicating that Labor agree in principle with this particular bill and indicating to this parliament tonight how much Labor would set its entry requirements at. I doubt that he will do it.

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (8.38 p.m.)—I rise to speak on the Migration Legislation Amendment (Parents and Other Measures) Bill 2000. I would like to respond to the invitation from the member for Herbert, and I will start by returning the compliment—he is a fine person, and we enjoy a good working relationship on the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communication, Transport and the Arts. He has invited me to respond and to put a figure on the cost of parent visas, but I make the point to the member for Herbert that only those who can afford to pay $65,000 can have those parent visas. He knows as well as I do that most of those who are seeking those visas come from Third World countries. The bulk of my work in the electorate of Lowe is immigration work, and it is a monumental triumph for double standards for the member for Herbert to expect me to stand up and put a figure on it. This is something for affluent people who can afford to bring out their parents. As the member for Herbert said, we are here to support parents being reunited with their families here in Australia, but if he honestly thinks people from Third World countries can afford $65,000—I am sorry, that is not possible.

I will start by supporting the amendment moved by the shadow minister for immigration and shadow minister assisting the Leader of the Opposition on multicultural affairs, the Hon. Con Sciacca. There is a strong sense of deja vu in this bill before the House this evening—here we are again facing a bill that is substantially the same as the bill last year. The bill is one that is close to my heart, because it affects a number of constituents in my electorate of Lowe. Members will know that the federal electorate of Lowe is located in the inner west of Sydney. Lowe is one of the most ethnically diverse electorates of Australia and, according to the 1996 census figures, held by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there are more than 20 statistically significant ethnic groups in my electorate. Every one of them has approached my electorate office on migration matters since I was elected to this House.

There are more than 500 active constituent files at any one time in my electorate office, and the bulk of these inquiries—are about immigration matters. On this basis, I can say that I have gained a degree of expertise in the matter. I will be most interested to hear other members of this House who have a significant migration practice give their testimonies as to the impact this will present in their electorate. I and my parliamentary colleagues on this side of the House oppose schedules 2 and 3 of the bill. We do so on ethical grounds, and I will address these grounds in a moment. Firstly, though, I wish to recount the history of this bill and the disastrous consequence of the gov-
government’s handling of a similar bill last year. Members will recall that, between March and November last year, the government introduced the new 113 subclass parent visa. The 113 visa was designed to replace the current 103 parent visa. The critical mismanagement by this government occurred when it introduced the 113 visa before the passing of last year’s bill—essentially the same bill before us today. The critical mistake of this government was that it introduced the 113 visa administratively before the bill was passed by the Senate. This government receives applications from Australian embassies and high commissions throughout the world. Fees were taken that were upwards of $16,000 per retired couple seeking to enter Australia. This acceptance of 113 applications was taken by the government only to see the bill similar to this bill defeated in the Senate.

The administrative repercussions were catastrophic. Applications were received on a visa which no longer existed. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs lumped all 113 subclass visas into the 103 subclass visa queue. This resulted in a massive visa waiting list blow-out. Members of this House will know that the current situation with the 103 parent visa waiting lists is both a farce and a disgrace. There are some 20,000 applications worldwide, with capping and queuing provisions of the department permitting an allocation of only 500 parent 103 visas per year. Hence the waiting period for a parent visa applicant is approximately 40 years—40 years for a parent visa applicant to wait for migration to Australia.

By definition, these parent visa applicants are already retirees. Most of us in this House will be dead in 40 years. A parent visa applicant lodging his or her application today may have their application processed in the year 2040. You can imagine the impact the decision had on existing applicants to lump 113 applications with 103 applicants once the 113 visa subclass had evaporated. I received many complaints from relatives arguing, with complete justification, that this administrative decision was a fundamental denial of natural justice. And so it was. The fact is, in administrative legal terms a legitimate expectation had been created by this government in its active acceptance of applications and the considerable sum of money for the purpose of applying under the new 113 subclass visa, thus drastically reducing the waiting period for entry to Australia.

Last year the opposition attempted to introduce more flexibility into the harsh conditions imposed by this legislation by including assets in the assessment of suitability of those offering assurances of support. The government rejected this proposal, instead promising to replace the taxable income level to $23,500 per annum with a cash saving component. Real assets remained ineligible. Further, the opposition attempted to deny the worst case scenario in seeing the existing pipeline of some 17,500 applicants abandoned in favour of the new elite 113 visa class getting red carpet entry to Australia. A token response was made by the government, offering to place some 25 per cent of the new applicants in the old pipeline. There is an annual intake of 2,800 parent visas. Twenty-five per cent of these equals approximately 700 applicants. The 25 per cent intake means that it would take an estimated 25 years to clear the backlog. It is totally academic whether the waiting period is 25 years or 40 years—both these periods are prohibitively long.

This bill, the proposals contained therein and the government’s response are totally inadequate to the magnitude of the task. The government has failed to accept reality on this matter. The government has completely failed to adequately address the problem. This is a disgrace against the rights of the family, the rights of citizens and the natural law. This is why the Senate opposed the 113 visa last year and looks set to do the same again, in that those who could afford to pay the substantial fee for this visa were entitled to immediate entry into Australia while those who could not afford the $16,000 fee were essentially left to die. The only way a 103 visa applicant was going to enter Australia was in a coffin. The result was a messy situation, resulting in those applicants who lodged between March and November last year being entitled to be processed under the 113 queue but only after considerable outrage and distress was caused. I also understand
that legal action under judicial review proceedings was afoot. The government, to its eternal shame, punished both the applicants and the Australian people with a public interest in this matter by resorting to the original system of 500 capped applications under the old 103 subclass visa. It did this as punishment for the Senate’s refusal to participate in its inequitable and unjust law—a law we are again being called upon to enact.

This bill seeks to close applications for the 103 parent visa. This visa has become a notorious visa worldwide, in that it demonstrates perhaps one of the most mismanaged visas this government has administered in its term of office. The bill before us repeats the regime of error that was defeated by this parliament last year. During World War II, Field Marshall Rommel said of the British Army in North Africa: ‘They came in the same old way and they died in the same old way.’ If ever there was a case of old dogs performing old tricks it is the government today. This government has demonstrated today in this bill that it is too tired to think of innovative policies based on sound ethical reasoning. It is serving up the same old tripe. This government is simply serving up an old mouldy dish, a reheated dinner, that was bitterly unpleasant in the first place. Parliament did not like the bill last year and I anticipate that it will not like the bill any better now. The only thing that has changed is the number of people discriminated by the current regime.

This bill is about amendments to our migration laws, as it affects the sanctity of the family. I am reminded of the papal encyclical familiaris consortio as I say this. I am particularly reminded of the immediate rights of every family member to be united with their family. This is a natural law right in the hands of each of us. To deny reunification breaches the natural law. I do not concern myself with using terms such as human rights or reliance on the United Nations instruments. These instruments are secondary policy only to the more fundamental laws of the natural law and right reason. Let us be clear of the fundamental policy rationale that underpins family stream migration—the very ethic of family stream migration itself. The ethic is found in the right of families to be united. It is a fundamental and inalienable right of persons to exist as families. Family stream migration means that there is a judicial and policy recognition by our government in Australia that spouses may be united, that parents and their children may be united and that orphans and last remaining relatives may be united. This is a fundamental reason why the Australian government has separate visa subclasses for these and other personal circumstances. It is for this basic ethical reason that parents, spouses, last remaining relatives, orphans and others should be entitled to circumvent other criteria, such as working skills and language fluency, and be entitled to become permanent residents in this country without satisfying such qualifying criteria.

The sanctity of the family is paramount. Any policy which trammels this sanctity is anathema to good governance. It is both manifestly unreasonable and unjust to impose restrictions on parent migration. The approach by the government today is as reprehensible now as it was last year—I say again that it is substantially the same bill, and I say that particularly for the benefit of the member for Herbert—because only those who are well off can afford to be reunited with their parents. The ethical error of this government is at once immediate and obvious. The bill seeks to use money to financially discriminate between those who can afford to pay a sum of money—now up to $65,000 for a retired couple, as I have been saying—for the new subclass visa and thus gain immediate entry to Australia, whilst those who cannot afford the money are totally denied entry to Australia forever. The new subclass will require an application fee of $1,075 for offshore applications or $1,695 onshore plus a social security bond of $10,000 for the main applicant and $4,000 for secondary applicants and a health levy, which has increased from $960 per applicant under the present 103 visa to a whopping $25,000 fee per applicant. Remember that these fees are for each applicant.

Under the present regime the 103 subclass continues to exist. The proposed legislation will eliminate the AX103 visa entirely. This will mean that only persons who can afford
to pay the $65,000 can enter Australia on parent visas. To put it bluntly, everyone else will be economically locked out of the visa. This is the hidden agenda of the government—the way it will manage the 20,000 queue of parent visa applications. New parent visa applicants will simply be denied absolutely the right of entry because they will be economically prohibited from entering Australia. There is a policy rationale that asserts that these parent visa applicants have not contributed to the Commonwealth of Australia through the taxation system. This is true. As permanent residents, they are entitled to the benefits of the social welfare system, including Medicare and our health system. However, this is anticipated through the other family stream migration that lends itself to the rights to sponsor parent visa applications. The benefits to the government in this bill are blatantly financially driven. The government expects to reap a profit of between $127 million and $155 million on fees recovered from the new parent visa over the first four years. The financial gains from this expedition are offset against the moral injustice afforded to family members.

What this government has failed to understand is that migration in the other migration streams has compounding consequences on other visa subclasses, including the parent visa. For example, inducing a person to enter Australia as a skilled migrant carries with it the reasonable expectation that this skilled migrant also has living parents, perhaps a spouse and even a last remaining relative living abroad. Hence, the skilled migrant’s rights as an Australian citizen include the right to sponsor his or her spouse, parent or last remaining relative to Australia. In certain circumstances this can result in a significant number of people. These are rights in the hands of permanent residents and Australian citizens which skilled migrants inevitably and predictably become. It is inconceivable that this government does not have these facts in contemplation when it wishes to increase the migration intake of, say, skilled migrants. When the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon. Phillip Ruddock, proudly boasted of increasing skilled migration this year, he must also have reasonably contemplated that every one of these applicants may have spouses, parents and last remaining relatives in another country. It is therefore manifestly unreasonable to deny the skilled migrants their rights as citizens and permanent residents of Australia in sponsoring such people.

This bill is an attempt to deny this basic fact and is a serious defect in reasoning in Australian migration policy. Australia is decreasing alarmingly in population. Our fertility rate is now so low that we are not populating sufficiently to enable sustainable economic and social growth. Without an increase in our migration program, Australia will simply go backwards as a country. The government wants to have its cake and eat it too. Through constraints created in the business visa program, it wants young, English literate, educated, productive, skilled immigrants to enter Australia and thus be immediately productive in the Australian economy. On the other hand, it is placing economic barriers to these people’s extended families and denying them basic rights by economically separating them from their parents and those for whom their family duties make them natural carers.

This government has failed to acknowledge that, if a skilled man or woman makes the decision to bring their skills and expertise to Australia and to settle here permanently, they will obviously leave behind their ageing parents, who will not usually have anyone else to look after them. In time, the obvious happens: the parents are in need of constant care with the onset of age. These people apply to migrate to Australia, only to be told that they must pay $65,000 per couple for entry. This is unjust. This government cannot have its cake and eat it too. It must acknowledge that it cannot avoid the reality that Australia must ‘populate or perish’. If it chooses to encourage skilled migration, then it must accept the social costs of that migration. The social costs include the possibility of parent stream migration, that these parents may be a direct financial burden on the Australian taxpayer for the rest of their natural lives and that there will be no return on investment to the Australian government.

We cannot enjoy the benefits of the skilled immigrant on the one hand and deny our
moral obligations to that new Australian on the other. If the government was honest with itself, it would seek to deny undue reliance on immigration as a solution to our disastrous and economically unsustainable population decline in Australia; it would provide economic incentives and create a suitable social environment for increasing local population in Australia. Instead, it has chosen this back-door approach to population increase, whilst avoiding the difficult choices involved in addressing the collapse of local population fertility, which is slightly less than two children per female.

The injustice presented by the government in this bill is manifest. The bill discriminates against the poor. The bill violates the legitimate expectations of the Australian citizen or permanent resident flowing from their legal rights. The bill abandons those who cannot pay so that they are never permanently reunited with their immediate families. The bill creates a new, elite visa class of those who can afford to enter Australia on economic grounds. I hope this patchy, ill-conceived legislation serves as a salient reminder to the government that it can no longer simply rely on short-sighted legal drafting to overcome economic and social fundamentals. We have seen the government enact over 40 separate acts in respect of the new taxation system. These laws covered every aspect of our financial lives. It seems it was not beyond the government to perform a thorough overhaul of our taxation system. Yet, in respect of the social policy of population trends, we see a government that is too weak and too scared to address the fundamentals of social policy and, in particular, population decline in Australia and economically sustainable domestic population growth.

Instead, this government lives this fool’s paradise, thinking it can increase skilled labour whilst pretending that it can abrogate its broader social responsibilities, denying family stream migration by financially taxing and discriminating against it. In doing so, Australia has become the social policy pariah of the developed world. We have become discriminatory in our policies. The origin of this issue is our lack of population growth. The conclusion is that the government seeks to penalise family reunion, thus compounding a sin upon a sin. It is timely to remind ourselves of the sin of Saul, and what will happen if this government fails to address the real issues that lie at the heart of this bill. I urge every member of this parliament to support the amendments proposed by the Hon. Con Sciacca.

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY (Dawson) (8.58 p.m.)—May I just say to the member for Lowe that the only thing that your opposition to the Migration Legislation Amendment (Parents and Other Measures) Bill 2000 and your amendments to it will do is to ensure that the Labor Party is not accepted in northern Australia. People in northern Australia do not want the Labor Party’s regional treaties. They do not want to pay for people to come into this country. You forget what a family is. A family is the Australian family, and they do not want to have to pay for the Labor Party’s mistakes. The member for Lowe is living an urban delusion. Let me talk to you about family. The coalition believes that family is a basic unit of our society, and that is a fundamental belief of the government. This bill reflects that philosophy in a practical, sensible and humane way.

Mr Murphy—Who can afford $65,000?
Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY—The taxpayers of Australia—is that what you want? The member for Lowe wants the taxpayers of Australia to pay. He wants 20,000 families reunited in Australia at a cost to the taxpayer.

Mr Murphy—One Nation lives!
Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY—The Labor Party lives now by reaching into taxpayers’ pockets! Later in my address, I am going to go into the figures of what it will cost the taxpayer for your extravagant spending on this. The opposition has tried to claim that sponsoring families who make a contribution to their parents’ ongoing care and welfare is a scheme for the rich. That is untrue. I want to address what the minister, the Hon. Phillip Ruddock, said in response to the member for Bowman. The member for Bowman basically said:

We’re opposed to a scheme that would favour people with money.

The minister said:
He is really saying, ‘We are opposed to those people who have the funds to support their parents using those funds and taking their parents out of the queue for the places that are available on a fully subsidised basis.’

The member for Lowe has said:
Only those that are well off.

What he really means is that those in Australia who are not well off can pay for all of the immigrants. He talks about profit for the government. What he means is that taxpayers can pay. He talks about relief and profit for the government. What he should be looking at is the burden on taxpayers. He talks about rights as a citizen and why the birth rate in Australia is so low. Let me suggest one thing. Women in Australia work very hard. You and I know that. But for 13 years the Labor Party put up taxes and fuel excise. No wonder families work so hard. Let me give you the figures. The Department of Health and Aged Care estimates that the health costs for a person aged 65 is $6,000 a year while the cost of the special benefit that an aged person can access in lieu of the age pension is $8,500 per person per year. This cannot be recovered from the sponsor once the current two-year assurance of support period is passed. Let me go into what this works out to be. The total health costs of a person over the age of 65 means $120,000 given a remaining life span of 20 years. The total welfare costs in special benefit and age pension payments have the potential to be around $160,000 per person over a remaining life span of 20 years. Thus, the average lifetime costs for an aged person coming into this country would be about $280,000 in today’s dollars, but of course the real costs would be much higher.

Let me talk about the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs who, by the way, is a good minister. It is a hard job, a difficult job, with not a lot of credit. He has to stand up and stand strong for taxpayers. In Northern Australia, where I come from, where illegal immigrants are constantly coming in, this minister is absolutely admired. I want to talk about the comments the minister has made about the opposition. The opposition is saying—in the minister’s words—that 20,000 parents should be allowed into Australia on the basis of those costs being met fully. In the context of the charter for budget honesty, the opposition ought to be prepared to go out and argue the case, to put to the Australian taxpayer that their responsibility should be to support those sponsored parents whose families are saying that they have no intention of asking the taxpayer to pay. Don’t you love to reach into people’s pockets! When I spoke about the concept of family being central to the beliefs and philosophy of this government, I meant a commitment to the total Australian family, the national family, and about them not being asked to shoulder the full burden. It is important that the details of the legislation be understood and that the deceitful misrepresentation of the opposition be exposed.

Let me tell you about the cost of ageing migrants to this country, reaching into taxpayers’ pockets—that is what they are doing. Let me give you the figures. The Department of Health and Aged Care estimates that the health costs for a person aged 65 is $6,000 a year while the cost of the special benefit that an aged person can access in lieu of the age pension is $8,500 per person per year. This cannot be recovered from the sponsor once the current two-year assurance of support period is passed. Let me go into what this works out to be. The total health costs of a person over the age of 65 means $120,000 given a remaining life span of 20 years. The total welfare costs in special benefit and age pension payments have the potential to be around $160,000 per person over a remaining life span of 20 years. Thus, the average lifetime costs for an aged person coming into this country would be about $280,000 in today’s dollars, but of course the real costs would be much higher.

The opposition believes that the Australian taxpayer should be responsible for this cost, especially when there are responsible migrant families who are not only able but fully prepared to make a contribution to the welfare of their aged parents. In fact, what is being asked of those families in this legislation is quite modest. The proposed new visa classes will be accessible to aged parents and will require undertakings from their sponsor that he or she will pay a social security bond of $10,000 for the principal applicant and $4,000 for each adult dependant. This bond is refundable with interest in 10 years after arrival if no welfare benefits are accessed. It will ensure that the 10-year residency requirement for access to the age pension has real meaning. There is also a not unreasonable requirement that such aged parent immigrants take out private health insurance, as most Australians are being encouraged to do, to cover the first 10 years after arrival or, if
there is no such facility available, demonstrably to pay a health services charge of $25,000 a person. That is not an unreasonable request by Australian taxpayers when we are looking at the alternative of $280,000 per person in today’s dollars for their care. Let me give you the current figure of the bonds. They are set at $3,500 and $1,500 and operate for only two years, while the designated parent visa class applicants pay a $5,000 charge and other parent visa applicants pay a $960 health levy.

One of the arguments that the opposition has is that a principle is not in place. Of course there is a principle in place: that of a family contribution to the care and welfare of aged parents. This principle already exists in legislation, so this bill is not groundbreaking legislation. It is not overturning some sacred rule; it is a fair, reasonable and absolutely appropriate readjustment to the contribution required. In any case, the contributions proposed by this legislation are only a fraction of the possible cost. They are not draconian, and it is untrue to say that only the rich could access them.

The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, when explaining this in parliament on 15 March, provided some very illuminating data. He stated that very few aged parents currently access special benefits during the first two years after their arrival. Allow me to quote him:

But what it does show is that two years after arrival, and for up to 10 years after arrival, when costs are not recoverable, the special benefits are accessed in lieu of the age pension. At about $8,500 for a single person, based on eight years of use, it represents a total cost per person of $68,000. When you know that after 10 years residency they could also access an age pension, based on a life expectancy of 20 years after arrival it represents another $95,000 in lifetime costs.

The minister made the point that the cost to the Australian taxpayer that the Labor Party wants us to pay for an aged immigrant parent over 20 years is some $280,000 in current costs. The opposition wants to bring in 20,000 aged immigrant parents to be paid for by the taxpayer. With a little simple arithmetic, 20 years brings that to the huge financial burden on Australian taxpayers of $5.6 billion. They are big spenders on the opposition benches, when there are families willing to make that contribution themselves.

I would like to make some general comments on the issue. The government, and particularly Minister Ruddock, has been subjected to some criticisms over the handling of refugees recently that frankly have almost been hysterical. I read in the Australian on 21 June an article by Mr Gary Klintworth, a former member of the Refugee Review Tribunal. This was a very thoughtful and insightful article that should be considered by every member in the House. He made the points that the inhumane people smuggling business—which of course we have had evidence recently—is a multimillion-dollar global enterprise and that illegal immigrants protesting their plight in detention centres deserved a fair hearing. He also said:

If the detainees deserve greater understanding, so too does Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock. The publicity thus far has favoured the detainees, as though they were somehow the innocent victims of an inhumane Minister and an unjust Australian refugee policy.

The fact is that 62 per cent of Iraqi and Iranian applicants who applied to the Refugee Review Tribunal in 1998-99 were allowed to stay. This bill before us addresses the family—not just the immigrant family but the whole Australian family. Unlike the Labor Party that tries to pander to immigrants at a cost to decent, hardworking Australians, the government’s bill looks to the Australian family. I commend it to the House.

Ms HOARE (Charlton) (9.11 p.m.)—I know I have not got the usual amount of time to speak in the debate this evening on the Migration Legislation Amendment (Parents and Other Measures) Bill 2000, but I cannot start my speech until I answer some of the comments that the member for Dawson raised in her speech. I was astounded to hear the initial comments of the member for Dawson, who is walking out the door now. In those comments, she was discriminating between white Australian born families and those Australian families who are born in countries other than this one which we fortunately live in now. The member for Dawson said that white Australian families should not have to bear the brunt of supporting those
Australian families who were not born in this country, and I think that comment is an absolute disgrace.

The comments of the member for Lowe, which were scathingly attacked by the member for Dawson, were very moral comments. The member for Lowe spoke about families as a whole. He spoke about all Australian families and the need for all Australian families to obtain the support that they deserve from their government and to be united in this country. The member for Lowe did not discriminate between Australian families, and I would encourage all members following that scathing attack from the member for Dawson to go back and read the comments from the member for Lowe so that he is not misrepresented as she tried to do. The member for Dawson also made some comments about the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, saying what a good minister he is. I do not have any quarrels with that statement. In my time here and in my relationship with Minister Ruddock, I have found him to be a basically good and decent person, a man who has been given the hard jobs in a conservative government of furthering the cause of reconciliation and of immigration and multicultural affairs. However, in this case I believe that the minister is wrong. This piece of legislation is ill-planned and misconceived.

While there are currently 20,000 aged parents on waiting lists around the world waiting to come in and be reunited with their families in this country, this bill allows for an intake of only 4,000 over the next two years. And that is only if those people can pay: only if they can pay their fees and levies, substantial social security bonds and health care levies, and pay up to $64,000 per parent couple waiting to come into this country. I will quote from an editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* which was published on 7 April this year. The editorial referred to these measures as ‘hard nosed’. These were the measures requiring people to put up a $10,000 social security bond and also requiring them to take out private health insurance for 10 years or pay a health services charge of $25,000. The editorial goes on to say:

In practice this means the scheme will be open only to people with access to serious money. The scheme seems more rigorous than necessary to protect against welfare benefits claims. This government has already collected over $21 million from these 20,000 people who are still on waiting lists. Last year Minister Ruddock tried unsuccessfully by regulation to introduce user-pays measures, these visas for the rich. He was defeated in the Senate. I will call on the Democrats in the Senate to continue to exercise some semblance of morality and defeat this particular bill in the Senate. Make no mistake: aged parent couples can jump this queue of 20,000 if they or their family can afford to pay $64,000 plus airfares. As Labor’s immigration spokesman, Con Sciacca, said:

It would be very difficult for us to support a measure which, in effect, creates an absolute gold Rolls-Royce class where, if you have got $64,000, you can bring your parents in.

That is why we are opposing this piece of legislation, because it is unjust, unfair and discriminatory. However, we do support schedule 1 proposed in this bill, which, in the main, corrects an anomaly which existed following the introduction of the three-year temporary protection visas—which Labor supported, I might point out to the member for Dawson. Under that visa category at that time, the minister decided that the refugees were not entitled to access Medicare assistance for the majority of that three-year period. The minister was forced into this current position, which provides that holders of temporary protection visas are entitled to Medicare without needing to apply for a further visa, once it was pointed out to the government that, being a signatory to the 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees, we as a nation have a responsibility and an obligation to provide appropriate services to those assessed as being in need of protection. Labor supports this schedule because it is fair and just. However, as I have stated before, we do not support schedule 2 and schedule 3 because they are unfair and unjust. There is currently a cost associated, as Minister Ruddock emphasised in his second reading speech. He said:

Whilst the entry of parents assists in providing support to their Australian sponsors, research
shows that people who migrate to Australia late in life make a minimal contribution to revenue but incur a very substantial cost in terms of social security and health.

I must say this statement was reiterated—and basically screeched across this chamber—by the member for Dawson. These statements from government members and these equations do not include the human factor; they do not include the humanity factor. When debating how much it is going to cost for Australian families to be reunited with their parents, the minister and government members speak in terms of ‘contribution to revenue’ and ‘substantial costs’. I was listening to the member for Dawson’s contribution to this debate. It was not until her last two or three sentences that the member for Dawson actually mentioned the word ‘families’. Not once in her tirade of attack against the member for Lowe and the Labor Party in general did she speak of families.

As I said, we understand that there is a cost associated with this. Labor introduced a cost structure of around $8,000 for families to be reunited with their parents who were living overseas. We support mutual obligation. That is why we introduced the original cost structure. But we also understand the commitment of families to support their older members. The cost comparison that has been made by the minister and government members denies part of the actual circumstances which would occur. We know currently that if an aged pension couple are living together they receive less pension than two single pensioners living apart. That situation goes for a range of government services. Even in our private lives, we find that, living together as a couple or with two or three people sharing a house, the costs are much cheaper. With these families who have given a commitment to support and to sponsor their aged parents—so they can come out here and live their final days with their children and their grandchildren to provide some kind of semblance of a family structure—the costs would not go anywhere near those cited by the minister and government members, because these families have a commitment to their family structure and they have a commitment to support their parents when they come out here. In his second reading speech the minister referred to costs and equations without considering the humanity factor. He said:... on average the total health costs for persons over 65 years of age are around $6,000 per year. For a person with a remaining lifespan of 20 years, the total may be around $120,000. The total welfare costs in special benefit and age pension payment could be as large as $160,000 per person over the same period.

As I just stated, the costs of family care versus the cost of state care are two completely different areas. If anybody would study a lot more closely the particular bottom line equations that the government has used, they would find that the costs of the care of these parents who are migrating here to spend the rest of their time with their families would be much lower.

The other issue that has been raised is the issue of skilled migrants in relation to the migration to Australia of aged parents. We in the Labor Party support a ratio of roughly 50 per cent skilled migration and 50 per cent family reunion. We think that is about right. We have said that we would establish an Office of Population and we would actually engage demographers to determine Australia’s optimal population level. It cannot be done on an ad hoc basis, as the minister is trying to do with this piece of legislation. When we compare the skilled migrant intake to the aged parent intake, we are expecting migrants to come here with their skills to contribute to the Australian economy, which many of them do and have done over the past century. We take their taxes, we take their productivity and we take their hard work. We take their hours away from their family as well. They contribute. Yet, when it comes the time that they want to bring their parents here to spend the rest of their days with them, we say, ‘You have given us everything you possibly can. You have given us your work commitments, you have given us your time, you have paid your taxes, yet we are going to charge you $65,000 to bring your parents out here so that they can form your final family structure in the last years of their lives.’ That is unfair and that is discriminatory.

We are a multicultural society. Migrants from all over the world have made Australia their home. We are constantly emphasising
that Australia was built on the backs of migrants. We had the first European settlers and the importation of the convicts. You can drive around the back roads of New South Wales and probably most other states across the country—you would know these roads from your area, Madam Deputy Speaker Gash—and see roads built by the convicts when they were first brought out here. In the early 20th century we had a wave of migrants from Europe and the United Kingdom to help build infrastructure. We have just recently had the 50th anniversary of the completion of the Snowy Mountains scheme. There were large numbers of Greek and Italian migrants who came to call Australia home and contributed to the rich fabric of our society today. I have a Macedonian friend whose mum and dad came to Australia. His dad stepped off the boat one day and landed a job at BHP as a steelworker the next day, and he worked there until the day he retired. Then we saw a wave of migration from Asian nations bringing further expansion in the tourism industry as well as specific skills related to information technology. These Australians have a right to ask the government, ‘If we were relied on so heavily, why can’t we expect to bring our family members here so that we can see ourselves as a total family structure and our aged parents can live out their lives with their children and grandchildren?’

There has been a lot of talk about the budget implications of this. Government members talk about the financial implications and the cost to revenue, without considering the family or the humanity factor. It has been said that there is a positive budget implication of these measures of between $127 million and $155 million over four years. A piece of legislation like this will cause so much angst and heartache for a large part of our community. I do not think it is very fair for this government to be raising these amounts of money. We are talking about $155 million over four years compared with $430 million this government has spent advertising its propaganda on the GST. These families have a right to feel hard done by. In conclusion, I support Labor’s amendments. I call on the Democrats to exercise some morality in the Senate and to reject this piece of legislation, which is ill-conceived, ill-planned, discriminatory and just plain unfair.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (9.27 p.m.)—From the outset, I wish to indicate my absolute support for the Migration Legislation Amendment (Parents and Other Measures) Bill 2000 and the benefits it will create for the people of my electorate. My electorate of Riverina is very multicultural, with the city of Griffith alone having 140 nationalities represented. It is for this reason that I have become deeply involved in immigration issues and constantly seek ways to assist the Riverina’s multicultural community. At the recent National Party federal convention, I coordinated a workshop which covered a range of issues relating to the developing nature of our population and issues from immigration to natural increases and attracting people to regional Australia. The current situation is that our population is increasing by 1.2 per cent per year, or about 250,000 people. On current population trends, it is to peak at around 23 million in 2051. Sixty-two per cent of our population live in cities with more than 100,000 people, and 83 per cent of our population live within 50 kilometres of the coast. The fertility rate, that is, the number of births per woman, needed to replace the population is 2.1. Australia’s current fertility rate is at 1.7.

The issues we discussed in depth at that conference included the consequences of having a higher or lower population level than the projected 23 million people by 2051. This was discussed, and we came to the conclusion that the population should be higher than this. The advantages this would bring to Australia included increased domestic markets, economic growth and stability, cultural diversity and an increase of the skills base. There were some areas of concern in increasing our population, such as resource and water issues, general environmental degradation issues, local social problems and problems of unemployment. These areas would have to be addressed to facilitate increasing the population. The tools to increase the population are natural increase and immigration.

Promoting natural increase was seen as a priority. To do this we should promote par-
enthhood and place a very high value on it, promoting family values and the advantages of staying as a unit. There is also the need to support parents in offering parents a choice to stay at home working with their children in comparison to working for a boss and the need to be proactive in encouraging workplaces to adopt family friendly practices, including child-care facilities and flexible working hours for both mothers and fathers in the role of parenthood.

Immigration issues were discussed in depth. The benefit from the skills of migrants is valuable to Australians and I support a controlled increase in immigration numbers. Attracting people to regional Australia was also identified as a priority. I support the promotion of policies that encourage economic development outside core regions rather than just population resettlement. It was recommended that a platform be developed in a number of areas including the promotion of policies to naturally increase the population, support for responsible increased overseas adoption, support for the controlled increase of immigration and support for a population summit to get the experts and community together to discuss this important issue. There is an urgent need to ensure that infrastructure is available in rural and regional areas to enable all of our immigrants to experience a quality of life when they resettle. That is a cost. This infrastructure should include the easy access to English speaking classes, as I suggested. That is a cost.

I believe parents should be able to be reunited with family members and if these families are able to bear the cost then it will free up more places for those immigrants who are unable to afford payments. Believe me, there are many families who are only too happy to bear costs outlined within this legislation. I maintain a second electorate office in Griffith and much of the time spent in this office involves immigration issues. One of the more common issues brought to my attention is for people wishing to reunite their families by sponsoring their families to join them. There is currently a very long line of people waiting to bring their parents into this country. This was highlighted in no uncertain fashion in recent meetings held with constituents. One constituent had both parents die overseas while they were on the waiting list to gain access to Australia. This family would have dearly loved to have had this legislation available to them in order to have their parents live out their last days with members of the family that they had not seen for many years. Another constituent interview indicated that both parents had been on the waiting list but one had since passed away, leaving their partner alone overseas, separated from his sons all of whom are living in Australia. These sons gladly bore the cost to have their parent reunited with them and, again, freed up space to move up in the
This bill and the closely associated Migration (Visa Application) Charge Amendment Bill 2000 seek to implement the government's recent announcements on visa arrangements for parents wishing to migrate to Australia. We currently have a situation whereby some 20,000 parents are waiting to migrate to Australia. If they were all allowed to migrate under current arrangements, as mentioned by the member for Charlton, the cost to the Australian taxpayer would be enormous. Whilst the entry of parents assists in providing support to their Australian sponsors, research shows that people who migrate to Australia late in life make a minimal contribution to revenue but incur a very substantial cost in terms of social security and health. Many people who wish to bring their parents to Australia have expressed their willingness to meet all of these costs associated with the migration of their parents in order to reunite their families.

In response to the preparedness of sponsors to contribute to the costs of aged parents migrating to Australia, the immigration minister announced on 3 April 2000 that the government would introduce new entry arrangements for parents in the 2000-01 program year. These welcome new arrangements will provide for a significant increase in the number of parents who will be able to come to Australia to be reunited with their families. This initiative is very positive and by allowing an increased ability for families to be reunited it will be warmly welcomed by multicultural communities across Australia. Initial concern with this bill was that it only allowed the rich to be able to access visas into Australia. For this reason, the Senate voted to disallow the previous entry arrangements for parents. This devastated many of my people in my electorate who had made applications in good faith and were willing to bear the substantial cost to have their families reunited, because they could afford to. They do not want handouts from the Australian government. They are proud people. They are proud to have their family and proud to have their origins. They are wanting to bring their family members into Australia to give them a better quality of life.

I support the government in its view that the aim was not to create a visa class for the rich. The government wanted to allow more parents to live in Australia in a way that ensured a fair deal for the Australian taxpayer. The Australian taxpayers are the families of these immigrants—and, believe me, many of our migrant families support the creation of this category. As a result of the disallowance and of the negative budgetary impact of parent migration, the government was able to accommodate only 500 parents in the migration program intake for the year 1999-2000. The designated parent visa category was introduced in November 1999 and was specifically designed to assist those parents who were adversely affected by the Senate's disallowance of the previous parent entry arrangements. The designated parent visa classes incorporate key elements of the previously disallowed parent entry arrangements, including the payment of a $5,000 health charge for each parent.

The level of interest in the designated parent visa category has been demonstrated by an almost full acceptance of the invitation to lodge an application under this category. Around 1,100 designated parent visas have been granted since November 1999, with the remaining 1,100 to be granted in the 2000-01 program year. Some of those people in my electorate happily accessed that great invitation. The introduction of the designated parent visa category was accompanied by an announcement of a more flexible visitor visa arrangement for parents with an ongoing migration application. This was in recognition of the extended processing times faced by parents and has resulted in a greater number of parents being able to visit their children in Australia.

The value of uniting the family cannot be underestimated. Health and welfare costs for aged parents suggest that the previously disallowed arrangements may not have been suitable for the Australian taxpayer. On average, the total health cost for persons over 65 years is around $6,000 per year. For a person with a remaining life span of 20 years, the total cost may be around $120,000. The total
welfare cost in special benefit and age pension payments could be as high as $160,000 per person over the same period. Faced with these potential lifetime costs totalling $280,000, the new arrangements introduced by this bill involve a very reasonable contribution by applicants and sponsors, particularly for the cost of health services.

The most important features of the new visa classes are an extended assurance of support period of 10 years instead of the current two years; an increased bond payable in respect of an assurance of support—the amount will go up from $3,500 for the main applicant and $1,500 for other adults, to $10,000 and $4,000 respectively—and a choice for applicants to either obtain suitable private health insurance for the first 10 years in Australia should such a product be available or pay an up-front health services charge of $25,000 per person. It is important that we recognise that those who can afford to sponsor their parents are able to do so and that those in a weaker financial position are also able to get their parents fastened along the list. This is all about equity. The extended assurance of support period is consistent with the longstanding 10-year residency bar for access to the age pension. The increased bond is refundable with interest after 10 years—so it is not something that a family loses for all eternity—less any welfare benefits that may have been accessed during that time.

The health services charge of $25,000 per person represents only about one-fifth of the potential health costs. While the current parent visa class will be closed to new applicants upon implementation of the new visa category for aged parents, those in the pipeline currently will continue to be processed within current capped levels. Given the greater financial commitment of applicants and the consequent lower budgetary impact, it should be possible to increase parent visa places over the next two program years without placing an unsustainable burden on the Australian community as a whole. My electorate, and I am sure a great many others with a significant multicultural flavour, will welcome this with open arms.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (9.42 p.m.)—Because of the inherent injustice contained in the Migration Legislation Amendment (Parents and Other Measures) Bill 2000, I am happy to support the amendment to the motion for the second reading as moved by the shadow minister for immigration. The aim of the amendment is to ensure that an increase in the quota for parent visas does not automatically exclude people on the basis of economic position. This bill as it stands is indicative of the mean-spirited nature of this government. It encapsulates the ‘us and them’ mentality that pervades all this government’s policy. As in the government’s health and education policy, this bill moves immigration towards a two-tiered system, between the haves with economic means and the have-nots.

It is interesting to note too that, while the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs has been quick to condemn onshore asylum seekers as queuejumpers, he is happy to institutionalise a form of queue jumping based upon economic means. The minister for immigration, while hiding behind the principle of user pays, has made migrating to Australia far more expensive—so much so that it is a burden that would-be migrants from poorer backgrounds cannot bear. Furthermore, while publicly welcoming skilled migrants regardless of their cultural background, the minister has made English language proficiency a prerequisite. People from countries where English is rarely taught in schools are automatically excluded from the process. If passed, this bill will entrench in our immigration policy a principle that, if you are wealthy, you are welcome, and, if not, you are welcome to apply but do not expect to have your application processed. The result of such discriminatory legislation is that people from wealthier, often predominantly white, countries will be able to access our immigration program more readily than people from poorer, often non-white, countries. This is a disgrace. It shows this government’s hidden agenda to limit the diversity of the people migrating to Australia.

This is the government’s second attempt to entrench discrimination into the preferential family program. Some 18 months ago, the
minister sought to introduce a new parent visa category that gave applicants an opportunity to jump the already lengthy queue. In March 1999, Labor moved to disallow these changes on equity grounds. It was unfair that some applicants would be given preferential treatment simply because they were wealthier. The minister’s anger at the time was palpable. In retaliation, he slashed the already reduced parent visa intake to just 500 a year. At this level, given the queue was 20,000, it would have taken people up to 40 years before their parents could join them in Australia—a ludicrous situation. Applicants will either die of old age in the queue or, by the time there is a place for them, they will be too frail to meet the rigorous medical requirements.

The government was only too happy to accept some $10 million in application fees, but it is not prepared to process the applications, let alone issue a reasonable number of visas. This government talks big about accountability. But where is the accountability here—10 million hard-earned dollars and nothing to show for them? Even if the government increased the existing quota 10 times over, there are still people waiting in the queue that will never get here because, with every year that passes, their age is against them when it comes to meeting the health criteria.

Therefore, as a matter of decency, I call on the government to allow existing applicants the choice of whether they want to stay in line or whether they want a refund of the application fee which has been gained on the basis of fraud. If you are told that your parents are eligible to apply for a parent visa and the department of immigration happily takes your $1,075 application fee, it is reasonable to expect that the department will actually follow through and process the application. The reality is, however, that in the majority of cases a departmental officer would have barely looked at the application. So what does the minister do to address this? Does he offer to refund application fees? No. Does he increase the allocation of parent visa subclass 103? No. Instead, he tries once more to introduce a new discriminatory visa that automatically excludes those who have few financial resources at their disposal.

On the whole, the families in my electorate who have parents waiting to migrate to Australia cannot afford to pay such a huge sum of money to bring out their parents. However, they will do everything in their power to get the money together to pay the increased visa costs. What this government has never understood has been the vital importance of parents and elderly relatives to most migrant families. The Liberal Party pretended to understand this basic issue before the 1996 election when it promised, and I quote:

Family reunion and refugee/humanitarian immigration will remain central parts of the immigration program. The family unit is the foundation of our society and must be at the core of immigration policy.

It has abandoned that policy. Clearly, the Howard government has no understanding of the importance of family reunion to migrant families. Labor, on the other hand, recognises the cultural importance that many migrant communities place on caring for their elders. We also acknowledge that a united family is an economically productive family. They play an important role in the diverse fabric of our society and they should not be treated like parasites whose only aim is to drain the health system dry. It is a nonsense. My office deals with a large volume of immigration related inquiries, most of them relating to the family reunion program. My electorate is full of families who are heartbroken as they realise that the chances of being reunited with their parents get slimmer and slimmer by the day—families who originally migrated from China, Vietnam, Lebanon, Greece, Russia, Poland, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Thailand and the Philippines; families for whom $64,000 is an unbelievable sum of money.

The $25,000 figure the government has come up with as the new health service charge is also of great concern to the opposition, because there has been no basis for this figure. This really is policy on the run. The program is less accessible to people from non-English-speaking backgrounds and from poorer countries. But the minister’s actions
have not taken place in a vacuum. They should be placed in the context of a Prime Minister who has difficulty even saying the word ‘multiculturalism’. It ranks close to ‘sorry’ in his top 10 of taboo words. This is a government that is not short on glossy brochures promoting multiculturalism and tolerance but, when it comes to actual commitment, the story is quite different. The people of my electorate have come to know this the hard way, through years of waiting for their parents to arrive. It is a bit like waiting for Godot. The characters in Beckett’s play want to believe Godot will eventually arrive but, as the curtain closes, they are still waiting.

Motion (by Miss Jackie Kelly) put:

That the question be now put.

The House divided. [9.53 p.m.]

(Madam Deputy Speaker—Mrs J. Gash)

Ayes………… 71
Noes………… 60
Majority……… 11

AYES
Abbott, A.J.
Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E.
Barresi, P.A.
Billson, B.F.
Bishop, J.J.
Cadmans, A.G.
Charles, R.E.
Draper, P.
Fahey, J.J.
Forrest, J.A.*
Gamborino, T.
Hardgrave, G.D.
Hockey, J.B.
Jull, D.F.
Kelly, D.M.
Kemp, D.A.
Lieberman, L.S.
Lloyd, J.E.
May, M.A.
McGauran, P.J.
Moylan, J. E.
Nehl, G. B.
Neville, P.C.
Prosser, G.D.
Reith, P.K.
Ruddock, P.M.
Secker, P.D.
Somlyay, A.M.
St Clair, S.R.
Sullivan, K.J.M.
Thomson, A.P.
Tuckey, C.W.

Wakelin, B.H.
Williams, D.R.
Worth, P.M.

NOES
Adams, D.G.H.
Andren, P.J.
Burke, A.E.
Cox, D.A.
Croso, J.A.
Edwards, G.J.
Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Gibbons, S.W.
Hall, J.G.
Hoirale, K.J.
Horne, R.
Jenkins, H.A.
Kerr, D.J.C.
Lawrence, C.M.
Livermore, K.F.
Martin, S.P.
McFarlane, J.S.
McGill, R.F.
Morris, A.A.
Murphy, J. P.
O’Keefe, N.P.
Price, L.R.S.
Roxon, N.L.
Sawford, R.W.*
Sercombe, R.C.G.*
Smith, S.F.
Swan, W.M.
Thomson, K.J.

Washler, M.J.
Wooldridge, M.R.L.

Albanese, A.N.
Breton, L.J.
Byrne, A.M.
Crew, S.F.
Danby, M.
Ellis, A.L.
Evan, M.J.
Ferguson, M.J.
Gerick, J.F.
Griffin, A.P.
Hatton, M.J.
Hollis, C.
Irwin, J.
Kernot, C.
Latham, M.W.
Lee, M.J.
Macklin, J.L.
McClelland, R.B.
McLeay, L.B.
Melham, D.
Mossfield, F.W.
O’Connor, G.M.
Pilbers, T.
Ripoll, B.F.
Rudd, K.M.
Sciaccia, C.A.
Sidebottom, P.S.
Snowdon, W.E.

PAIRS
Costello, P.H.
Howard, J.W.
Vaile, M.A.J.

* denotes teller

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Original question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Leave granted for third reading to be moved forthwith.

Bill (on motion by Mr Ruddock) read a third time.

MIGRATION (VISA APPLICATION) CHARGE AMENDMENT BILL 2000

Second Reading

Consideration resumed from 7 June, on motion by Mr Ruddock:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Question resolved in the affirmative.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Leave granted for third reading to be moved forthwith.

Bill (on motion by Mr Ruddock) read a third time.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE CONSOLIDATION LEGISLATION

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation for amendments to the Youth Allowance Consolidation Bill 1999 announced.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE CONSOLIDATION BILL 1999

Consideration of Senate Message

Consideration resumed from 21 June.

Ordered that the further requested amendments be taken into consideration together.

Senate’s further requested amendments—

(1) Schedule 4, item 9, page 126 (line 14) to page 128 (line 8), omit the item, substitute:

9 Point 1066A-B1 (table and notes)

Repeal the table and notes, substitute:

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
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<td>Person’s family situation</td>
<td>Rate per year</td>
<td>Person with dependent child</td>
<td>Person without dependent child</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Column 3A</td>
<td>Column 3B</td>
<td>Column 4A</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rate per year</td>
<td>Rate per fortnight</td>
<td>Rate per year</td>
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<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,206.60</td>
<td>$3,848.00</td>
<td>$354.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) is under 18 years of age; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) is not a homeless person; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) is not an independent young person; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) is not living away from the person’s parental home because of a medical condition of the person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,206.60</td>
<td>$7,027.80</td>
<td>$354.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) is under 18 years of age; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) is:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) a homeless person; or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) an independent young person; or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) living away from the person’s parental home because of a medical condition of the person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,206.60</td>
<td>$4,625.40</td>
<td>$354.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column 1</td>
<td>Column 2</td>
<td>Column 3</td>
<td>Column 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Person’s family situation</td>
<td>Rate per year</td>
<td>Rate per fortnight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Column 3A</td>
<td>Column 3B</td>
<td>Column 4A</td>
<td>Column 4B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Person with dependent child</td>
<td>Person without dependent child</td>
<td>Person with dependent child</td>
<td>Person without dependent child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) has reached 18 years of age; and
(b) is living at a home of parent or parents

| 4      | Not a member of a couple and person: | $9,206.60 | $7,027.80 | $354.10 | $270.30 |
|        | (a) has reached 18 years of age; and |            |            |          |          |
|        | (b) is not living at a home of parent or parents |            |            |          |          |

5 | Partnered $7,716.80 $7,027.80 $296.80 $270.30

6 | Member of illness separated couple, member of respite care couple or partnered (partner in gaol) $9,206.60 $7,027.80 $354.10 $270.30

Note 1: For member of a couple, partnered, illness separated couple, respite care couple and partnered (partner in gaol) see section 4.
Note 2: For dependent child, homeless person and independent young person see section 5.
Note 3: For living away from the person’s parental home see subsection 23(4D).
Note 4: The rates in columns 3A and 3B are adjusted annually in line with CPI changes (see section 1198B).

9A Point 1066A-B1 (table and notes)
Repeal the table and notes, substitute:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Person’s family situation</td>
<td>Rate per year</td>
<td>Rate per fortnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Column 3A</td>
<td>Column 3B</td>
<td>Column 4A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Person with dependent child</td>
<td>Person without dependent child</td>
<td>Person with dependent child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1      | Not a member of a couple and person: | $9,575.80 | $4,001.40 | $368.30 | $153.90 |
|        | (a) is under 18 years of age; and |            |            |          |          |
|        | (b) is not a homeless person; and |            |            |          |          |
|        | (c) is not an independent young person; and |            |            |          |          |
|        | (d) is not living away from the person’s parental home |            |            |          |          |
### Table B—Maximum basic rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Person’s family situation</td>
<td>Rate per year</td>
<td>Rate per fortnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Column 3A</td>
<td>Column 3B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,575.80</td>
<td>$7,308.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) is under 18 years of age; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) is:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) a homeless person; or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) an independent young person; or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) living away from the person’s parental home because of a medical condition of the person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,575.80</td>
<td>$4,810.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) has reached 18 years of age; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) is living at a home of parent or parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,575.80</td>
<td>$7,308.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) has reached 18 years of age; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) is not living at a home of parent or parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Partnered</td>
<td>$8,026.20</td>
<td>$7,308.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Member of illness separated couple, member of respite care couple or partnered (partner in gaol)</td>
<td>$9,575.80</td>
<td>$7,308.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note 1:** For member of a couple, partnered, illness separated couple, respite care couple and partnered (partner in gaol) see section 4.

**Note 2:** For dependent child, homeless person and independent young person see section 5.

**Note 3:** For living away from the person’s parental home see subsection 23(4D).

**Note 4:** The rates in columns 3A and 3B are adjusted annually in line with CPI changes (see section 1198B).

(2) Schedule 4, item 10, page 128 (line 9) to page 131 (line 8), omit the item, substitute:

10 Point 1066B-B1 (table and notes)

Repeal the table and notes, substitute:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Column 2 Person's family situation</th>
<th>Column 3 Rate per year</th>
<th>Column 4 Rate per fortnight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Person with dependent child</td>
<td>Person without dependent child</td>
<td>Person with dependent child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1    | Not a member of a couple and person:  
(a) is under 18 years of age; and  
(b) is not a homeless person; and  
(c) is not an independent young person; and  
(d) is not living away from the person's parental home because of a medical condition of the person | $9,206.60 | $3,848.00 | $354.10 | $148.00 |
| 2    | Not a member of a couple and person:  
(a) is under 18 years of age; and  
(b) is:  
(i) a homeless person; or  
(ii) an independent young person; or  
(iii) living away from the person’s parental home because of a medical condition of the person | $9,206.60 | $7,027.80 | $354.10 | $270.30 |
| 3    | Not a member of a couple and person:  
(a) has reached 18 years of age; and  
(b) is living at a home of parent or parents | $9,206.60 | $4,625.40 | $354.10 | $177.90 |
| 4    | Not a member of a couple and person:  
(a) has reached 18 years of age; and  
(b) is not living at a home of parent or parents | $9,206.60 | $7,027.80 | $354.10 | $270.30 |
| 5    | Partnered | $7,716.80 | $7,027.80 | $296.80 | $270.30 |
| 6    | Member of illness separated couple, member of respite care couple or partnered (partner in gaol) | $9,206.60 | $7,027.80 | $354.10 | $270.30 |
Note 1: For member of a couple, partnered, illness separated couple, respite care couple and partnered (partner in gaol) see section 4.

Note 2: For dependent child, homeless person and independent young person see section 5.

Note 3: For living away from the person’s parental home see subsection 23(4D).

Note 4: The rates in columns 3A and 3B are adjusted annually in line with CPI changes (see section 1198B).

10A Point 1066B-B1 (table and notes)

Repeal the table and notes, substitute:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1 Item</th>
<th>Column 2 Person’s family situation</th>
<th>Column 3 Rate per year</th>
<th>Column 4 Rate per fortnight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Column 3A Person with dependent child</td>
<td>Column 3B Person without dependent child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,575.80</td>
<td>$4,001.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) is under 18 years of age; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) is not a homeless person; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) is not an independent young person; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) is not living away from the person’s parental home because of a medical condition of the person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,575.80</td>
<td>$7,308.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) is under 18 years of age; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) is:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) a homeless person; or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) an independent young person; or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) living away from the person’s parental home because of a medical condition of the person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,575.80</td>
<td>$4,810.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) has reached 18 years of age; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) is living at a home of parent or parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not a member of a couple and person:</td>
<td>$9,575.80</td>
<td>$7,308.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) has reached 18 years of age; and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table B—Maximum basic rates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1 Item</th>
<th>Column 2 Person’s family situation</th>
<th>Column 3 Rate per year</th>
<th>Column 4 Rate per fortnight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Column 3A Person with dependent child</td>
<td>Column 3B Person without dependent child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Partnered</td>
<td>$8,026.20</td>
<td>$7,308.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Member of illness separated couple, member of respite care couple or partnered (partner in gaol)</td>
<td>$9,575.80</td>
<td>$7,308.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) is not living at a home of parent or parents

**Note 1:** For member of a couple, partnered, illness separated couple, respite care couple and partnered (partner in gaol) see section 4.

**Note 2:** For dependent child, homeless person and independent young person see section 5.

**Note 3:** For living away from the person’s parental home see subsection 23(4D).

**Note 4:** The rates in columns 3A and 3B are adjusted annually in line with CPI changes (see section 1198B).

(3) Schedule 4, item 16, page 132 (lines 1 to 5), omit the item, substitute:

16 **Point 1067G-B4 (table)**

Repeal the table, substitute:

**Table BC—Maximum basic rates (long term income support students)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1 Item</th>
<th>Column 2 Person’s situation</th>
<th>Column 3 Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not independent, lives at home and not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$218.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not independent, required to live away from home and not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$328.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Accommodated independent person and not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$218.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Independent, not an accommodated independent person and not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$328.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Member of a couple</td>
<td>$296.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The rates in column 3 are indexed annually in line with CPI increases (see sections 1191-1194).

16A **Point 1067G-B4 (table)**

Repeal the table, substitute:

**Table BC—Maximum basic rates (long term income support students)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1 Item</th>
<th>Column 2 Person’s situation</th>
<th>Column 3 Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not independent, lives at home and not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$227.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not independent, required to live away from home and not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$341.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Accommodated independent person and not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$227.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table BC—Maximum basic rates (long term income support students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Person’s situation</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Independent, not an accommodated independent person and not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$341.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Member of a couple</td>
<td>$308.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The rates in column 3 are indexed annually in line with CPI increases (see sections 1191-1194).

(4) Schedule 4, item 19, page 132 (line 10) to page 134 (before line 1), omit the item, substitute:

19 Points 1067L-B2 and 1067L-B3

Repeal the points, substitute:

Person who is not a long term income support student

1067L-B2(1) If the person is not a long term income support student (see section 1067K), work out:

(a) whether the person is a member of a couple (see section 4); and
(b) whether the person has a dependent child (see subsections 5(2) to (9)); and
(c) if the person is not a member of a couple, whether the person has a YA child (see subpoint (2)).

The person’s maximum basic rate is the amount in column 3 of the table that corresponds to the person’s situation as described in column 2 of the table.

Table BA—Maximum basic rates (persons who are not long term income support students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Person’s situation</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Does not have a dependent child or a YA child</td>
<td>$270.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is a member of a couple and has a dependent child</td>
<td>$296.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Is not a member of a couple and has a dependent child or YA child</td>
<td>$354.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The rates in column 3 are indexed annually in line with CPI increases (see sections 1191-1194).

(2) In this point:

YA child, in relation to a person who is not a member of a couple, means a child who is receiving youth allowance, is under 18 years of age and would be a dependent child of the person if he or she were not receiving the allowance.

Person who is a long term income support student

1067L-B3 If the person is a long term income support student (see section 1067K), work out whether the person is a member of a couple (see section 4).

The person’s maximum basic rate is the amount in column 3 of the table that corresponds to the person’s situation as described in column 2 of the table.

Table BB—Maximum basic rates (persons who are long term income support students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Person’s situation</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is a member of a couple</td>
<td>$296.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$328.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19A Points 1067L-B2 and 1067L-B3

Repeal the points, substitute:

Person who is not a long term income support student

1067L-B2(1) If the person is not a long term income support student (see section 1067K), work out:

(a) whether the person is a member of a couple (see section 4); and
(b) whether the person has a dependent child (see subsections 5(2) to (9)); and
(c) if the person is not a member of a couple, whether the person has a YA child (see subpoint (2)).
The person’s maximum basic rate is the amount in column 3 of the table that corresponds to the person’s situation as described in column 2 of the table.

### Table BA—Maximum basic rates (persons who are not long term income support students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Person’s situation</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Does not have a dependent child or a YA child</td>
<td>$281.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is a member of a couple and has a dependent child</td>
<td>$308.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Is not a member of a couple and has a dependent child or YA child</td>
<td>$368.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The rates in column 3 are indexed annually in line with CPI increases (see sections 1191-1194).

In this point:

**YA child**, in relation to a person who is not a member of a couple, means a child who is receiving youth allowance, is under 18 years of age and would be a dependent child of the person if he or she were not receiving the allowance.

**Person who is a long term income support student**

If the person is a long term income support student (see section 1067K), work out whether the person is a member of a couple (see section 4).

The person’s maximum basic rate is the amount in column 3 of the table that corresponds to the person’s situation as described in column 2 of the table.

### Table BB—Maximum basic rates (persons who are long term income support students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Person’s situation</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is a member of a couple</td>
<td>$308.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is not a member of a couple</td>
<td>$341.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr ANTHONY (Richmond—Minister for Community Services) (10.01 p.m.)—These government amendments are to update some youth allowance, Austudy and disability support pension rates contained in the Youth Allowance Consolidation Bill 1999. The rates were correct at the time the bill was introduced on 11 February 1999 but have become out of date during the delayed passage of the bill. The rates in the bill were current on 1 January 1999; however, an indexation increase was due on 1 January 2000. Furthermore, an increase to compensation for the introduction of the goods and services tax is due on 1 July 2000.

These amendments provide two alternative sets of rates in each case. Which set commences will depend on whether royal assent is given to the bill before or after 1 July 2000. The outcome in either case will be to bring the rates up to date. These amendments are technical in nature and are non-controversial. I table the further amendments for the Youth Allowance Consolidation Bill 1999.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (10.02 p.m.)—Labor has no difficulty with the amendments that have come back to the House tonight. They provide for the fact that this bill has been delayed for some time. The government must take some responsibility for this delay. As with most of the bills that come along, mildly beneficial measures are mingled with the usual line-up of mean-spirited cuts. These amendments make necessary technical changes to the basic rates of rent assistance. That is all. These amendments do nothing to actually alleviate the unfair ‘family pays’ principle of the government’s youth allowance scheme. They do nothing to ease the fact that when the Youth Allowance Scheme was first introduced 12,800 young people lost all their benefits and 33,250 young people had their benefits reduced.

These amendments do nothing to compensate Australian families for the $5 billion worth of cuts to social services in this country and the $4.2 billion cut from education and training programs. These amendments in
no way compensate for the abolition of the CES, the gutting of the Public Service, the closure of Medicare offices all around the country, the attacks made by this government on aged care and child care, and the billions of dollars lost to our health care system. These amendments may give a little, but since 1996 the government has taken away much more. When this bill was being debated in the Senate, Labor and the Democrats took the opportunity to move amendments to address some of the most pressing issues surrounding the operation of youth allowance. We have also ensured that students who, through no fault of their own, must study for less than 75 per cent of a full-time load are not disadvantaged as a result.

We also sought to make the government accountable for its 1996 election promise to lift the farm discount on assets to 75 per cent. However, the government, having argued against its own promise, now intends to gain the credit for announcing the same measure in its recent budget. Having been forced to be accountable, the government is now cynically trying to claim it was all its idea. We have seen many broken promises from this government. The most recent examples have torn at the heart of the coalition and forced the Minister for Community Services to at last show his true colours. Before the last election, the government promised not to impose the GST on rents. The government promised rents would rise by only 2.3 per cent. Now the line has changed. Australians living in boarding houses and residential parks will be paying the GST on their rent. Private rents will rise by at least 4.7 per cent, according to the Econtech report—probably more—and these breaches of promise will have a direct and negative impact on some youth allowance recipients and on those most vulnerable in our community.

This government’s modus operandi is to make poorly conceived, hasty policy and then spend a considerable amount of time trying to patch up its mistakes. Its grand new tax system is fraying at the edges. Instead of fixing the core problems that lie at the heart of this unfair tax, the government chooses to create elaborate compensation schemes that do nothing to address the source of the inequity—government decisions. It just hopes that people will not notice that the $33 million increase in rent assistance is a one-off payment, paid to those who receive the maximum rate of rent assistance. This payment is a one-off, whereas the GST will last forever. The government hopes that young people—

Mr Brough—Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. We are here to discuss youth allowance and the member has talked about everything other than youth allowance.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)—Before calling the honourable member for Grayndler, I do encourage him to speak about the youth allowance.

Mr ALBANESE—I will, Mr Deputy Speaker, because the government does not want to discuss any issues relating to the financial impact of its decisions, whether they be on young people or people in other sectors. As I was saying, the government hopes that young people will be so thrilled by the minor increases to their rent assistance contained in this bill that they will forget that, in this year’s budget, the government spent six times more money on advertising for the GST than it spent on new funding for the nation’s schools.

Mr Anthony—Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. We are talking on the Youth Allowance Consolidation Bill 1999. The member for Grayndler gets carried away at times, but I encourage you to bring him back onto the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—I thank the minister. I do not need his encouragement. The honourable member for Grayndler has the call and will, of course, speak to the subject of the debate.

Mr ALBANESE—Many thousands of Youth Allowance recipients do not receive the maximum rate of rent assistance and will get nothing from this deal. They should be sceptical of any claim by this government that they are being given more. It is not surprising that the government runs and hides from debate. The minister, even tonight, has spoken on this issue for only one or two minutes and has attempted once again to stifle
the opposition from putting forward our position on this issue. *(Time expired)*

Motion (by Mr Anthony) agreed to:

That the further requested amendments be made.

**DEFENCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FLEXIBLE CAREER PRACTICES) BILL 2000**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 7 June, on motion by Mr Bruce Scott:

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (10.08 p.m.)—It is a rare event and a rare pleasure to speak in this House on government legislation relating to our defence forces. Over the past two years, the only defence legislative effort that we have debated has been a series of private member’s bills introduced by the opposition relating to employment protection and defence leave as an allowable matter, both of which obviously concern the reserves. That said, the Defence Legislation Amendment (Flexible Career Practices) Bill 2000 proposes three separate changes to the personnel provisions of current legislation governing Army and Navy personnel. The government has indicated that parallel changes impacting on the RAAF will be made through changes to the relevant Air Force regulations. The bill is described as helping to achieve more flexible career practices in the Defence Force. In his second reading speech the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs indicated that this move had its origins in the 1995 strategic review of defence personnel policy, better known as the Glenn report.

The former Labor government commissioned that report. It arose out of the 1994 defence white paper that emphasised the ongoing challenge to attract and retain highly skilled personnel in the face of demographic, social, technological, industrial, legal and cultural changes. The review had extensive terms of reference, which could be summarised as being principally to examine and to report on the adequacy, applicability and implementation across the three services of the ADF’s then personnel policies and to identify the key principles which should form the basis of the ADF’s future personnel policy strategy. On page 55 of that report, it is stated:

Those principles would be to achieve a versatile and flexible fighting force, attract and retain the right people and lead and manage people for organisational change.

The resulting report is officially entitled *Serving Australia: the Australian Defence Force in the 21st Century*. It contains a host of findings and recommendations to do with employment and work practices, industrial relations, reward, recognition and entitlements, and support for members and their families. The reserves were also covered: skilled deployment and the need to adopt a new management style. While aspects of the environment in which the Defence Force operates have since changed, these fundamental issues remain relevant to the development of a comprehensive personnel recruitment and retention strategy that is essential if the Defence Force is to be able to fulfil the requirements set for it by the government.

Since 1996, the coalition has found itself unable to properly come to terms with these issues. Under the previous minister we were simply assured that greater efficiencies, massive outsourcing and job cuts would automatically, ipso facto, solve all the problems of the portfolio. We now know, of course, that many of the coalition’s so-called cures have actually left the patient in a worse state, as evidenced by the disastrous state of the reserves, the parlous position acknowledged by the Secretary to the Department, Dr Hawke, and a series of damning reports by the Auditor-General. The opposition will be closely examining the government’s discussion paper on the future of the Defence Force, being released tomorrow, to see whether it is finally beginning to face up to these fundamental issues.

I turn now to the specific provisions of the bill. In doing so, I indicate that two of the three measures in the bill are quite straightforward and do not cause any problems for the opposition or for the various interest
groups that we have consulted. It has been necessary for us to seek clarification from the government on the remaining measure, and we do have some reservations about it that I will mention later. The first aspect of the bill seeks to extend the reach of the limited tenure promotion scheme. This scheme was introduced by the former Labor government to give the ADF greater flexibility in managing its senior officer work force. Under rules that took effect from June 1995, service chiefs can promote such officers to a specific appointment for a set period. At present this applies to the level of colonel and above in the Army and to the equivalent ranks in the Navy and the Air Force. The bill seeks to extend this provision to the next lower officer rank in each service—lieutenant-colonels in the Army, to commanders in the Navy and, by regulation, to wing commanders in the Air Force. The Glenn report actually proposed a more radical recommendation that limited tenure promotions be extended to a much wider category of personnel, not just to middle ranking and senior officers, to give more flexibility to defence management. That was their suggestion. On the other hand, that report indicated that such an expanded provision should be used only very sparingly.

The cautious approach that the government has taken to the issue in this bill is, I believe, appropriate. The current arrangement, where such a mechanism is only applicable to senior officer positions, does not appear to have generated many problems. As identified in the Glenn report, there are of course situations where it is sensible for Defence to use a person’s skills and experience for a set time to carry out a specific task on fixed term promotion, recognising that they would not otherwise have received a permanent promotion. The person concerned understands that at the end of such a posting they will either return to their previous rank or they will retire from the service. Extending the concept of limited tenure too widely, or using the provision too frequently, could cause problems. For this reason, I am comfortable with the approach taken in the bill.

The next aspect of the bill that I want to refer to is the two amendments—one for the Army, the other for the Navy—enabling a serving member to convert an open-ended enlistment or appointment to a fixed term one. Currently, personnel who complete an initial period of enlistment, or appointment in the case of officers, can volunteer to serve further, either on an open-ended basis, theoretically until retirement, or for a fixed term. I note in passing that an open-ended enlistment is often only theoretically until retirement, as the context of such service has been changing because of other government policy changes. The most obvious changes have been the coalition’s individual readiness requirements regarding fitness and proficiency and its staff cuts due to massive outsourcing of various support and logistic functions. These mean that ‘open-ended’ enlistments increasingly end up being ‘permanent’ in actual practice, as the number of redundancies and discharges has grown enormously. There has been speculation in the last day or so about further decreases with regard to the number of people in the armed forces.

While the current legislation allows serving personnel to later seek to convert a fixed term enlistment or appointment into a permanent one, the reverse is not the case. This means there is no provision for them to seek to convert an open-ended enlistment or appointment into a fixed term one. This is an anomaly that the bill seeks to rectify. I note that the Glenn report actually recommended that all defence personnel be engaged on a fixed term of employment—FTE—basis, accompanied by completion incentives and resettlement assistance. That report argued that the ADF should move away from offering lifetime careers and from managing wastage through recruitment. It argued that the ADF should have full discretion about whether to offer personnel further periods of employment. It saw this as the only way that separations, either too many or too few, could be dealt with. In mentioning this argument I make it clear that Labor reject the model of across-the-board fixed term employment. We see the model as being too loaded in favour of the employer. We believe the Defence Force can and should offer long-term careers to as many personnel as possible. While recognising that the prevalence of lifelong service has been declining and will probably continue to do so, our vision of the
Defence Force involves its offering more than just fixed term or temporary jobs. That reality is obviously going to undermine the whole morale of the force. We do not see flexible career practices as just giving all choices to the employer and removing the rights of serving personnel. The bill adopts the cautious approach of enabling serving personnel to convert their permanent enlistment or appointment into a fixed term one where they volunteer to do so—and I stress that point. It is on this basis that we support the change proposed by the government.

The final aspect of the bill clarifies the circumstances in which a service chief can, without reference to the Governor-General, reject the resignation of an officer. The Defence Act and the Naval Defence Act currently set out narrowly defined grounds on which an officer’s resignation can be rejected. These grounds include the existence of a war or defence emergency, the possibility that the resignation would seriously prejudice Defence’s ability to carry out military operations, that the resignation occurred within 12 months of an officer’s promotion to the position of colonel or above or the Navy equivalent, where an officer in the reserves seeks to resign during a period in which they are required to provide continuous full-time service under the call-out provisions or, finally, that the officer had not completed his or her required minimum period of service after undertaking training, a period of special duties or employment outside Australia or after being transferred to Australia. This requirement is known as the return of service obligation or ROSO.

It is to do with the last mentioned circumstance—regarding a so-called minimum period of initial service by an officer—that this bill seeks to make a change in the legislation. It has taken some effort on the part of the opposition to establish the true import of the change. The explanatory memorandum circulated by the minister when he introduced the bill on 7 June was of little help. It essentially avoided the issue—the reality of what the government is trying to do. After partly summarising the current legislative situation, that memorandum indicated that: In order to require officers to serve for an initial period of service ... The provisions provide that the officer’s initial period of service will be determined by instrument in writing by the relevant Service Chief.

It also noted that this section of the bill would apply only to officers who were appointed after the amending act commences. All this begged the questions as to what the proposed initial period of service for an officer would be, how this relates to their existing return of service obligation and whether the new requirements would be the same for all officers. The best I could establish, after quite a number of phone calls, was that the real purpose of the amendment appears to be to resolve doubts about the enforceability of a change that Defence actually made in 1998—two years ago. The ROSO system was put in place to ensure that Defence gets an adequate return for the extensive and expensive training that it provides to serving members. It operates on the basis that personnel have to serve one year for each year of defence training plus one year. Thus an officer cadet who completes four years of training—three years at ADFA plus a year of military training—is in turn required to serve for a further five years, or nine years in total. During the period, a service chief can refuse such an officer’s resignation or, at the ADF’s discretion, accept financial payment in lieu thereof or waive the obligation. These arrangements are legally enforceable.

Concurrent with but separate from the ROSO period is a new concept of fixed periods of service that Defence introduced on 1 July 1998. All new entrants from that date have been required to enlist for a fixed period that has varied from situation to situation. For officer cadets, their fixed period of service is generally nine years, as with their ROSO. Doctors, dentists and chaplains can be appointed with a more lenient fixed term of service. While these requirements are detailed in a Defence instruction, they appear not to be legally enforceable without legislative backing. It appears it is this that the bill seeks to ensure by, in effect, equating the fixed period of service concept with the proposed initial period of service for officers that each service chief will determine should the bill be carried. I seek the assistance of the
minister in clarifying at last—finally, after many attempts to get the clarification—what the expected initial period of service for officers will be. I note that the minister’s office kindly provided me with a written answer on this matter earlier today. I believe it would be appropriate for this answer to be shared with the parliament. I do so because, in the absence of such details, the Senate may well decide that any determinations by service chiefs should become disallowable instruments. I also seek the minister’s assurance that serving personnel have been advised of the proposal and have been consulted about the details. I have received some indications to this effect. I would not like changes to occur that come as a surprise to serving personnel or that cause any difficulty with future recruitment and retention.

In his second reading speech, the minister indicated that the bill removed what he described as ‘legislative encumbrances’ to some personnel policy changes that have already been made. To that extent, the bill is less than revolutionary: it is a case of the legislation catching up with current practice in the Defence Force. The opposition does not seek to obstruct passage of the bill. This does not mean we are happy with the coalition’s approach to Defence personnel issues—we are not. We have constantly highlighted the state of the reserves and asked: where is the government’s call-out legislation or its employment protection measures? It was because of our efforts that the government was forced to announce two separate sets of concessions on the issue of reporting fringe benefits on the group certificates of serving personnel. We have highlighted the government’s failure to respond to the major report on the military justice system by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. We have noted the Auditor-General’s scathing reports on the redress of grievance system, on the retention of military personnel, on tactical fighter operations and on the Army individual readiness system, amongst other indictments against the government.

Debate (on motion by Fran Bailey) adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Goods and Services Tax: Car Industry

Mr COX (Kingston) (10.24 p.m.)—It is time to examine the effect of the Howard government’s policies on the Australian car manufacturing industry and in particular on Mitsubishi. The thing that has had the greatest bearing on the car industry over the last 12 months has been the introduction of the GST. Like all of the Howard government’s other claims about the benefits of the GST, the benefits for both Australian car buyers and Australian car makers have been exaggerated. I do not expect to see the massive increase in demand for new cars that the government promised when it unveiled its GST before the last election.

The government’s message was that, with lower personal taxes and a drop in the indirect tax on cars, volumes would increase dramatically, benefiting both buyers and car makers. The reality is something much less than that. First, the drop in indirect taxes is not from 22 per cent down to 10 per cent because the 22 per cent is a wholesale sales tax and the GST is 10 per cent at the retail level. The real difference is from 14 per cent—the rate of wholesale sales tax equivalent to the GST—down to 10 per cent. Second, most buyers trade in their old cars. To the extent that new car prices are reduced, so too will the value of second-hand cars be reduced. The changeover cost will therefore tend to be maintained. Third, John Howard’s deal with the Democrats to remove some food items from the GST included some reduction in the tax cuts for higher income earners. That means they do not have as much to spend on new cars as they had been promised. Fourth, while the indirect tax burden on an Australian made car will fall slightly, the indirect tax burden on cheaper imported four-cylinder cars will fall by an equivalent amount, making them even cheaper. It is reasonable to assume that they will continue to erode the Australian car makers’ market share.

Fifth, because the government refused to provide an adequate GST transitional arrangement between the passage of the GST
legislation and it coming into effect, there was a GST car buyers strike. The government should have reduced the wholesale sales tax to the GST equivalent rate but refused to in order to save wholesale sales tax revenue. The local car makers were left to carry all the financial burden of the buyers strike. The Australian car makers were putting $4,000 and $5,000 worth of free extras into their cars to sustain a modest level of sales and help keep their factories operating. Paradoxically, this has resulted in the period of the GST buyers strike being an excellent time for consumers to buy a new car. Unfortunately, that also means that with the GST coming into effect the only direction for car prices to go will be up. The boost in sales that was expected to follow the introduction of the GST is likely to be less than might otherwise have been anticipated.

Sixth, the only GST transitional arrangement which the government put in place for cars was one to reduce the incentive for business fleet buyers to defer expenditure until after the GST came in so that they could claim input tax credits. The mechanism they chose was designed to maximise the revenue that would be collected. The availability of input tax credits will be phased over two years. Fleet business buyers will not enjoy the benefit of being able to deduct the full amount of the GST they pay on business vehicles from their GST liability for the goods and services they sell for two years. This transitional arrangement will disrupt and distort sales to the fleet market for a further two years. Given that 70 to 80 per cent of Australian made cars are sold to fleet buyers, that will continue to be a serious issue. The government should scrap the phasing arrangement for input credits, but they are short of revenue and will not. Our local car manufacturers will have to carry the combined burden of restricted access to input credits and lower residual values for vehicles, making investment in a vehicle fleet much less attractive. Those are the six factors which bear on the state of the car industry as a result of the GST.

A recent indicator of the Howard government’s lack of interest in the local car manufacturing industry was its decision to put three imported four-cylinder sports cars on the list of eligible vehicles to be available to senior public servants as part of their remuneration package. The cars were the Toyota MR2, the Nissan 200SX and the Toyota Celica. Previously, cars leased under the scheme had all come off an Australian production line, except where there were compelling reasons such as the need for business purposes to have a four-wheel drive, a people-mover or a small four-cylinder sedan. This change would have resulted in serious inroads being made into the number of Australian made cars being acquired under the scheme. I ensured this decision was given the sort of adverse publicity it deserved and, as a result, the government quietly amended the list of eligible vehicles, omitting the offending sports cars.

We discovered a couple of weeks later that the reason this reversal was executed so quietly was that the government had also taken a decision to allow more junior public servants to lease any imported car of their choosing under salary sacrifice arrangements utilising FBT motor vehicle concessions. To date there has been no reversal of this policy. The industry minister, Senator Minchin, has in fact defended it, saying that allowing public servants to choose a taxpayer subsidised imported car is a human rights issue. Frankly, I am more concerned about the livelihoods of Australian car workers and their families. This government has shown a callous disregard not only for the welfare of car workers and their families but also for the fate of the Australian car industry. The government chose early to deny there was a GST car buyers strike. The loss of volume and the need to discount stock to move it were detrimental to profitability. (Time expired)

McEwen Electorate: Muirfields

FRAN BAILEY (McEwen) (10.29 p.m)—The town of Yarra Junction in my electorate of McEwen is situated in the heart of the Upper Yarra. It is a town steeped in the history of the timber industry, which, over the years, has developed new industries reflecting the changing nature of the region. Part of that change began 22 years ago when Bruce Muir, with just one ute, a trailer and $500, started Yarra Valley Exterminators. This
small pest control company was an example of the quintessential Australian small business, conceived in hope, nurtured with vigour and commitment and born with a determination to succeed. And succeed it has, diversifying into contract herbicide spraying, landscaping, turf renovation, golf course maintenance and construction. It is a long way from Yarra Junction to that holy grail of golf, St Andrews in Scotland, but that is part of the journey on which Bruce Muir has taken his business. Today, that same small business now employs over 100 people and has developed a reputation as one of the premier environmental greening companies in Australia, now known as Muirfields. It has been able to achieve this because its founder, Bruce Muir, is a man not just with a dream to succeed but who thrives on finding solutions to environmental problems and is prepared to employ the best people to achieve those solutions, whether the problem is large or small or is here in Australia or anywhere in the world.

In October, 1999 Muirfields attended the Beijing International Turf and Landscape Expo in order to explore further growth potential. They were able to establish a contact with the Hengdian Turfgrass Company that has an annual turnover of $US1 billion and now have an agreement with them to refurbish and undertake a turf grass growing trial in Chongqing and to establish an experimental tree plantation in Hangzhou. It is significant that it is Australian tree seedlings that have been used—eucalypts, acacias and casuarinas. The best performing of these will then be planted along a 600 kilometre section of both sides of the Yangtze River in order to arrest the environmental degradation from centuries of agricultural production and logging activities, and begin the remedial work that is urgently needed, as demonstrated by the recent floods of the Yangtze.

Another project Muirfield is currently working on is with the city of Nanjing. Already 200 seedlings from 10 different eucalyptus species have been planted. These were planted under the guidance of Muirfield’s arboricultural expert, Dr. Peter Yau. As well as meeting the scientific criteria, these species have been selected for their fast growth rate, evergreen foliage, large straight trunks and their beautiful flowers. Once these trials have been successfully completed, the Nanjing Bureau of Agriculture and Forestry will start its program of the Greening of Nanjing, involving the mass propagation of both trees and turf. In fact, Nanjing city officials were so excited about this Australian venture that the provincial newspaper for Jiangsu province carried this story on its front page to its 70 million readers. Muirfield is also involved in further discussions with the Ming Sheng-Shanghai Gardens Group regarding design and construction of turf and landscape projects.

Muirfield has always made a real commitment to research and development and this has played an important part in its success. The expansion of their business into China has been complex and Bruce Muir, together with his business manager, Michael Toby—both of whom are present in the gallery tonight—would want me to place on the public record their gratitude to this government for the assistance provided to them through an export marketing development grant and to participate in a trade mission to China with the Minister for Trade. It has been a great privilege for my office to assist Muirfield wherever possible. Not only has Muirfield demonstrated that they have been prepared to put back into their business, but they have also demonstrated that they have been prepared to put back into the community. Muirfield has not only a finely tuned economic barometer but also, importantly, a social conscience. I congratulate Bruce Muir and his staff and wish them every continued success both in our local economy in Yarra Junction and in our national economy.
years up until 1997 were a nightmare. I busted my guts to obtain the best possible care for her in all areas of her health management. This included correct medication dosage and the general management of her illness. In hindsight these areas left a lot to be desired, mainly because of the way the mental health system is run and administered. Thank God her mental illness is now under control and her management has been good for the past two years.

While receiving care at a psychiatric hospital in 1992, a routine medical examination discovered lumps in my wife’s left breast. Correct examination procedure took place with mammograms and ultrasounds being taken. This confirmed the possibility of cancer. However due to her unstable mental capacity this was pushed into the background. For whatever reason this was not followed up upon I still do not know, even though she was under a community treatment order. Three years later in 1995 it is confirmed that she has breast cancer and she loses her left breast.

In June 1999 it was confirmed her breast cancer had returned. It has now taken hold in her bones, both sides of her neck, and in early 2000 it is diagnosed in her lungs. It is now a terminal illness.

My wife lives by herself, I have to have her removed from the family home because of her mental illness. The entire twenty-year saga has been a total nightmare. I cannot bring her home and have her slowly die in front of our young son. My wife completely agrees with me and understands that it would not be fair on all concerned. This leaves me caring for my wife from a distance; this is undesirable but definitely necessary.

As far as I am concerned, as a carer, I believe, I am the worst. Making the decision of not having my wife home with us during her remaining time has been very hard.

Our son is twelve years of age and has had a harrowing time coming to grips with his mother’s mental illness, and now the realisation that she is going to die from cancer. Many nightmares have eventuated because of this. There is just no help for children in these situations with a parent that has a mental illness. There just has to be a better support system for the children, not just coloured brochures.

I feel my wife’s life in one sense has been wasted. In another sense, if any good can come from my endeavours to improve the system, I guess it will be something positive. My wife concurs with me and would not wish the events of the past twenty years that we had to endure to afflict anyone else. I will not let the system get the better of me.

John has truly tried every way to help his wife, and he continues to pursue the matter through every available channel. His desire is to see a better health system for all who suffer from mental illness. John has articulated this in many ways, and he has committed much to paper to see that the system be improved. On medical authorities and associated bodies, John wrote:

Co-operation between all authorities regarding patient care. Bodies should be online with all relevant information regarding patients so they can successfully co-ordinate proper care.

This has not been the case in Virginia’s situation. On courts and the mental health system, he wrote:

These institutions must work together. If they do not, the carer and family along with the consumer suffer the consequences.

In the case of John and Virginia Halloran, the consumer is suffering the consequences. But the final words belong to Dan, a rather remarkable 12-year-old who has been through more than any of us would care to imagine. I would like to read from a letter that Dan recently submitted to a newspaper titled ‘Treasure your mum while you can’:

It looks like I’ve just had my last Mother’s Day with my mum. My mum has breast cancer and it is now in her lungs. My mum also has a mental illness but she is OK as far as the mental illness goes and I know that it is not her fault.

The reason I am writing this is to let other kids know not to give their mothers a hard time and respect them, as you never know how long you have them, as I figured out.

So, next Mother’s Day do something special for your mums when they don’t expect it.

I would really like something special to be done in the case of Virginia Halloran. Sadly, her health is beyond repair. But I believe that some good should come from Virginia’s story, and on behalf of John, Virginia and Dan Halloran I ask: isn’t there a better way? Isn’t there a better way to deal with our mental health system than to leave individuals to their own devices, especially in a situation where somebody’s cancer was not detected at the outset? Had it been, we know that Virginia would probably not be in the situation she is in today.
Goods and Services Tax: Australian Labor Party Policy

Ballarat Electorate: New Apprenticeships

Mr RONALDSON (Ballarat) (10.39 p.m.)—They dealt themselves out of the debate. They complained, and then they kept it. Of course, I am referring to those duplicitous desperadoes, the members of the ALP. When the tax debate first started, they were the ones who did not want to get involved. They were the ones that stood back and said, ‘We’re not interested in getting involved in this debate,’ so they left it to the Australian Democrats. They then complained when a deal was done—and they complained mighty hard. And when push came to shove, what did the ALP decide to do about the GST? They are going to keep it. They are going to tinker with it—but undoubtedly will make life difficult for the small business community—but they are going to keep it. They have been running this campaign against the GST for nearly 12 months now—the GST they apparently despise, the GST that they do not like, the GST that they are going to keep. On 1 July, some six or seven days away, I wonder what the Australian Labor Party are going to talk about. They probably will not talk about the GST because all of a sudden they will be forced to make some decisions about what they are going to do with it. They are going to be forced to talk about their roll-back and what the cost of that roll-back is going to be. It is going to be a very interesting debate for the next 12 to 18 months as to where that falls.

One of the main things they have been talking about over the last 12 to 18 months is the cost of food and the cost of groceries. They would have been absolutely horrified—they certainly would not have greeted the news with any joy—to hear the Chief Executive Officer of Woolworths, Mr Roger Corbett, say today that customers at Woolworths supermarkets would be pleasantly surprised by overall lower grocery prices on 1 July. That is great news for the people in my electorate of Ballarat because they—like, I suspect, many others throughout Australia—have been concerned by the scare campaign run by the Australian Labor Party, a campaign designed for an appalling political purpose: to scare people—to scare to scare people—to scare pensioners, to scare low income earners, to scare families. On 1 July, that scare campaign finally comes to a close. My constituents in the electorate of Ballarat will be very pleased to hear what Mr Corbett said:

We have applied New Tax System savings to Choice Magazine’s current standard basket of groceries—the result is a price drop of between 2.4% to 3.3% across the nation.

I am sure that the member for Longman and the member for Kalgoorlie, who are in the House today, were as pleased as I was to hear a senior man, a man who is going to be pricing groceries in this country, saying that there will be a drop in prices. That is very good news; what I am talking about makes this a good news night!

While I am talking about good news tonight, I would like to talk about the 500,000 people in rural and regional Australia who are accessing publicly funded training—100,000 more places than were provided under Labor. Mr Speaker, you will be acutely aware that there are a number of initiatives designed to further increase participation in training. The coalition has introduced a rural and regional New Apprenticeship initiative, which has helped employers of over 4,500 new apprentices in rural industries experiencing skills shortages. Unemployment in Ballarat is coming down. It will not be down far enough for me until it gets to the stage where everyone who wants a job gets one. But we are bringing it down, and there is a sense of renewed confidence in Ballarat and throughout my electorate. Young people are getting apprenticeships. That is great news—they are indeed the skills foundation of this country over the next five, 10, 15 or 20 years. They are getting jobs, they are getting a start, and for them and their families—and I hope for everyone in this House—that indeed is good news.

Goods and Services Tax: Housing

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (10.44 p.m.)—I would like to congratulate the member for Ballarat on a superb performance. Unemployment may be going down, Member for Ballarat, but everything else in your electorate is going up, including the price of goods that most people will struggle to afford, notwithstanding—
ing the so-called tax cuts that you will be giving to a number of your constituents. They will remember you when you are hiding under a rock after 1 July.

Mr Speaker—Member for Holt!

Mr Byrne—Mr Speaker, I would like to talk about a question that I raised with the Prime Minister on Thursday. I asked a question of the Prime Minister which was basically whether or not he would confirm that the housing industry had asked for a three-month moratorium on the introduction of a GST on the construction of new houses. I further asked him whether or not he was concerned that many Australians presently building their homes, who have experienced building delays caused by the pre-GST rush, will now have to pay thousands of dollars in unexpected GST on work that is unfinished on 1 July. The Prime Minister, for whatever reason, deigned that he was too significant to answer that question and the Minister for Finance and Administration, in his capacity as Acting Treasurer, was asked to reply. Mr Fahey responded with respect to this moratorium that:

... there has been some speculation recently in respect of a moratorium on the GST for housing. All of us would recognise the frustration felt by home buyers whose homes have not been completed as expected by 1 July. But buyers and home builders have known about the GST since 2 December 1998.

And he said that, for that matter, whilst there had been some difficulty in getting tradesmen due to inclement weather and the GST, well, so be it. He continued:

The simple fact is that home buyers do not have to pay GST on the full value of their partially completed houses because the government has put in place a margin system for property whereby only the value of the work done after 1 July ... is subject to GST.

After the minister had completed that particular answer, the Prime Minister, with his back turned towards me—and to the voters in Holt—said, ‘That should answer the question.’ I am afraid I have news for the Prime Minister: that does not answer their question. Incidentally, after the Prime Minister’s performance, I had a couple of phone calls. The callers were a little bit annoyed about the treatment that they had received, because they thought this was a significant issue. An example of this was a Mrs Stevancevic. She and her husband are both 37 years of age and both work. They have seven children and are currently renting a property. They had intended to commence construction of their family home, their dream home, in Endeavour Hills. The construction of the home has not started yet due to GST driven labour shortages. The Stevancevics were intending to have over 40 per cent of their home completed before 1 July—before the construction of their home became subject to the GST.

Mr Brough interjecting—

Mr Byrne—The pre-GST cost of their home, the member for Longman, was $180,000. The new GST cost is $198,000. That is an additional $18,000—$9,000 more than they budgeted for. The original cost of the land was $98,000. The housing cost is on top of this price. There is a problem for the Stevancevics: the banks will not lend them the additional $18,000 due to the family earnings and the size of the family. These people, hardworking and with a large family, cannot complete their home because of the government and the GST. It is not, as the Prime Minister and the Minister for Finance and Administration were saying, the Stevancevic family’s fault; it is the Prime Minister’s fault. He cannot avoid the blame on this one. He should have foreseen this. My electorate and many others are suffering because of a distortion in the market caused by this government policy. Blaming the victims of this administrative nightmare is like the rats blaming the victims of the plague.

I would like to draw to the House’s attention another representation I have received, from Milroy Martyn, an activist in Kinkead Crescent, Endeavour Hills. He too spoke about the difficulties that he was experiencing. I will have to read this fairly quickly. He was talking about housing construction and how he was looking for an exemption for houses commenced before 30 June and incomplete after 30 June. He asked that they be GST free. He said:

I am building a home. Because the construction will continue into July/August though the construction commenced in Nov. it did not have con-
tinuous construction time (because of the shortage of labour due to the demand for skilled labour from construction companies overburdened with housing construction trying to beat the GST) The government should take into consideration this factor and exempt all houses which are in the process of construction where the contracts were signed before June 30th.

I ask that you use your hallowed office as representative of the suffering people to put in motion an amendment to the GST to exempt houses in construction where the contract was signed before 30th June. My estimated GST liability is over $8,000.00 to get the mortgage for this and when I ultimately pay it I would be paying 3X8,000: $24,000.00. If this is not inflation what is? This is unfair.

Thank you.

There are over 100,000 homes and families in this plight.

So, as for my representation to the Prime Minister, he should, rather than arrogantly turning his back on those that are obviously experiencing severe difficulty as a consequence of the implementation of the GST, actually give serious consideration to many in my electorate—young families, and not just in my electorate but in the areas of Narrewarren North, Narrewarren and Narrewarren South. These suburbs are roughly half in Holt and half in La Trobe. (Time expired)

Goods and Services Tax: Housing
Education: Indigenous Programs

Mr HAASE (Kalgoorlie) (10.49 p.m.)—I rise this evening specifically to talk about outstanding achievements of the Kununurra District High School. Before I go on to that, I am moved by the member for Holt’s comments about this dreadful situation we are supposedly faced with where home buyers will be forced to pay GST on the uncompleted portion of their home. I find it quite remarkable that a member of the opposition would dare to suggest that people have been caught up in this dilemma when, in fact, the opposition have done nothing but scare the innocent public of Australia in many cases into that decision to build a home before 1 July 2000. I am well aware of many, many current new home builders who, in fact, have been faced with increases of something like 20 per cent in the normal cost of home construction due to the huge backlog, the outstanding orders for new homes. As market demand will do, prices have been pushed up as a result. If it had not been for the scare campaign, the tactics deployed for political gain by the ALP, many of these otherwise innocent parties would not now find themselves in the dilemma. Had they ordered their first home after 1 July 2000, of course they would be enjoying a $7,000 bonus from this government under the First Home Owners Scheme. So let us not have any crocodile tears from members of the ALP about those poor, innocent members of the public now finding themselves having to pay 10 per cent on the uncompleted portion of their new home.

As I said, I rise specifically this evening to address the House with regard to the indigenous education program, and excellence in that particular field. I refer to the achievements of Kununurra District High School in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, in the far north of my electorate. It was recently one of the four winners at the inaugural Excellence in Leadership in Indigenous Education Awards. I am exceptionally pleased to bring this to the attention of the House because I believe that this is an area where the future of reconciliation between the mainstream and indigenous populations really lies. When we have self-esteem gained from real employment, which can only be gained as a result of genuine education, only then will we truly have reconciliation in this country.

These awards have been made by the Australian Principals Association’s Professional Development Council and they reward initiatives in literacy, numeracy, attendance and school-community partnerships. Kununurra District High School principal Ian Francis and teachers Colleen Morris and Pam Sherrard received the numeracy award for their efforts to improve the understanding of number concepts by students in years 3 and 4 who are designated as educationally at risk. Kununurra District High School is one of the largest high schools in Western Australia, with an enrolment of 819 students. More than one-third of these students are Aboriginal, with 18 students in years 3 and 4 speaking English as a second language. The initial as-
assessment showed that these students were operating at below average for their age. However, following less than a year's specialist tuition, they showed significant improvement, with many progressing the equivalent of more than 18 months in one year.

This initiative demonstrates that the Howard government’s commitment to genuine education for indigenous people will be the mainstay that will create true reconciliation. We have a regrettable situation in many of the communities today where there is not a solid grounding in education during the primary years. I believe it is only the initiatives of the Principals Association and efforts like these outstanding awards in excellence for leadership in indigenous education that will bring about real education, real jobs and true reconciliation. (Time expired)

Griffith Electorate: Community Youth Initiative

Mr RUDD (Griffith) (10.54 p.m.)—There is an emerging literature about the importance of social capital. By social capital we mean the informal set of community networks and relationships which exist in local areas which go towards the solution of particular problems in localities, be they of an economic or of a social nature. In my electorate of Griffith I have recently been holding a number of discussions with community leaders on how this concept of social capital could perhaps be applied to particular local social problems which we are experiencing in the southern suburbs of Brisbane. We have been discussing a particular proposal broadly defined as a community youth initiative. My discussions have included a range of Neighbourhood Watch organisations across the Brisbane Southside, a range of churches—the Garden City Community Church, the Christian Outreach Centre and Grace Christian Fellowship—sporting clubs such as the Mount Gravatt Junior Cricket League, as well as other community programs, including one which focuses specifically on providing assistance for children who are having difficulty finding a proper place to do their homework after school. This particular program provides voluntary care for children to undertake supervised homework in the local library.

What has impressed me about this range of discussions is the quality and quantity of community initiatives which exist out there committed to solving particular local social and community problems. The specific item for discussion with these groups over the last several weeks has been how we combat a problem which exists right across metropolitan Australia. I refer particularly here to the problem of drugs and young people. The data from across the country indicates that not only do we have a rising incidence in the level of drug experimentation and drug addiction across metropolitan Australia but also there is emerging evidence that the age bracket of young people experimenting with drugs is in fact coming down. Some years ago, the target group—those for whom police had most concern—was the middle high school, the upper high school, and of course post-school young people. Now the concern is that we are beginning to see instances of this permeating down to the lower secondary school and the upper primary school.

The practical challenge which I have been discussing with these local community organisations in the southern suburbs of Brisbane is how we best mesh the range of volunteer services which exist in the community already with the knowledge which the schools often have of those children who are most at risk. If you go to individual schools, quite often you find that the principal or the teachers within that school know through first-hand experience, having dealt with classes over a long period of time, which children within those classes might be most at risk. At the same time, within the community supporting those schools you will find a range of church youth groups, sporting organisations and the like which are keen to help but, frankly, the coordination often does not exist between those services and those children who most need assistance. What we are seeking to do with our local community youth initiative is to determine how best to mesh, how best to bring together, our knowledge of children who are at risk within the community, particularly with the focus on drugs, and preventive strategies along those
lines and the raft of community services which exist within the southern suburbs of Brisbane in order to assist those children to develop a full and healthy life.

Of course, this is but one application of the concept of social capital within a particular metropolitan area. There are many other applications as well. It is hoped that, if this sort of initiative can work on a locality basis—the more locally focused the better—then it would be worthy of broader application to other parts not just of the city of Brisbane but of other metropolitan communities across Australia. The key thing lies in identifying those children who are at risk and meshing them with community services and volunteer efforts across sporting groups and the rest which are there ready, willing and able to lend assistance. What is simply required is social entrepreneurship, social capital—the practical application of those skills in order to bring these two groups together so that we can engage in effective preventive strategies for our young people for the future. If we fail to do so, the police are faced with the more intractable task of how to deal with the problems of young people once these drug problems have become entrenched. (Time expired)

Ballarat Electorate: Rural Communities Program

Mr RONALDSON (Ballarat) (10.59 p.m.)—Very briefly, under the Rural Communities Program this afternoon the Stawell Gymnastic Club Inc. received the sum of $3,000—

Mr Fitzgibbon—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. I understood that, if not provided for in the standing orders, certainly it is convention in this place that a speaker does not seek the call twice whenever there is a member on the other side seeking the call.

Mr Speaker—The member for Hunter does make a valid point of order and he is right that I in fact looked to my right. I was in error. I apologise to him. It is, however, now 11 p.m., and so I will recognise the member for Hunter tomorrow evening if there is a matter he wishes to raise.

House adjourned at 11.00 p.m.

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Reith to present a bill for an act to amend the Workplace Relations Act 1996 so far as that Act relates to termination of employment, and for related purposes.

Mr Anthony to present a bill for an act to amend the A New Tax System (Compensation Measures Legislation Amendment Act 1999, and for related purposes.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

Australasian Research Strategies
(Question No. 538)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 24 March 1999:

Has (a) the Minister, (b) his or her predecessors or (c) the Department or an agency for which the Minister holds, or his or her predecessors held, portfolio responsibility, engaged Australasian Research Strategies, related companies or organisations or Mr Mark Textor to undertake research since 2 March 1996; if so, in each case, (i) what was the nature of the research, (ii) what was its purpose, (iii) what was its cost, (iv) was the outcome of the research supplied to a non-government organisation, individual or political party and (v) will the Minister release the outcome of the research.

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

(a) (b) and (c) No.

Australian Law Reform Commission: Report
(Question No. 1387)

Mr Kerr asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 6 April 2000:

(1) Will he provide copies of the submissions which the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the National Crime Authority (NCA) made to the Australian Law Reform Commission Report No. 87 “Confiscation that Counts. A review of the Proceeds of Crime Act 1987”.

(2) In the submissions referred to in part (1), what were the estimates provided by the AFP and the NCA for the anticipated value of assets which would be seized under a non-conviction based confiscation scheme, as recommended by the AFP and the NCA.

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

(1) I have made arrangements for copies of the submissions made by the AFP and the NCA to the Australian Law Reform Commission to be made available to the honorable member, with the exception of a confidential addendum to the AFP’s submission dated 19 June 1998. The AFP has advised that this addendum is not to be provided as the matter is currently sub judice.

(2) The submissions made by the AFP and the NCA referred to in part (1) of my response contain no estimates of the value of assets which would be seized under a non-conviction based confiscation scheme. The AFP has also advised that the confidential addendum referred to in part (1) of my response contains no estimates of the value of assets which would be seized under a non-conviction based confiscation scheme.

Counselling and Guidance Services: Northern Territory
(Question No. 1472)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister representing the Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government, 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.

(13) What proportion of total expenditure by the Northern Territory is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by the Northern Territory.

Mr Anderson—The Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

My Portfolio has no responsibility for the matters raised in this question.

Counselling and Guidance Services: Northern Territory
(Question No. 1474)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister representing the Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government, 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.

(13) What proportion of total expenditure by the Northern Territory is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by the Northern Territory.

Mr Anderson—The Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

My Portfolio has no responsibility for the matters raised in this question.
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Drug and Alcohol Counselling Services: Western Australia
(Question No. 1478)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister representing the Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government, upon notice, on 9 May 2000:

1. Is he able to say what services operate in Western Australia to provide assistance or counselling in relation to the use of alcohol or drugs.

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 the Western Australia.

Mr Anderson—The Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

My Portfolio has no responsibility for the matters raised in this question.

Sporting and Recreational Services: Northern Territory
(Question No. 1479)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister representing the Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government, upon notice on 9 May 2000:

1. Is the Minister able to say what services operate in the Northern Territory which provide persons with assistance in organising or running sporting or recreational events, including the provision of community recreation officers.

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.

Mr McClelland—The Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

My Portfolio has no responsibility for the matters raised in this question.
(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.

(13) What proportion of total expenditure by the Northern Territory is the total allocation of financial resources provided for the services in areas related to the correctional services and justice by the Northern Territory.

Mr Anderson—The Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

My Portfolio has no responsibility for the matters raised in this question.

Illegal Immigrants: Psychiatric and Medical Care

(Question No. 1511)

Dr Lawrence asked the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, upon notice, on 10 May 2000:

(1) How many of the detainees currently held at Perth, Port Hedland and Curtin Detention Centres have received psychiatric care and for what conditions are they being treated.

(2) How many are receiving medication for psychiatric or psychological problems.

(3) What medical services and what qualified medical staff are available at each centre.

(4) Do any of the personnel providing medical care have expertise in the treatment of torture and trauma.

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

(1) Of the detainees currently held at detention facilities in Western Australia, 6 detainees at Perth, 15 detainees at Port Hedland and 12 detainees at Curtin have required psychiatric assessment and care. Detainees are being treated for depression and/or psychotic conditions.

(2) 6 detainees are receiving anti-psychotic medications and 28 detainees are receiving anti-depressant medications.

(3) The Perth, Curtin and Port Hedland detention facilities all have a medical clinic on site. The Perth IDC has a nurse at the facility between 08.00 and 16.00 hours, Monday to Friday. A doctor is on call 24 hours a day. As for persons in the Australian community, detainees have access to a psychologist on referral by the doctor.

The medical clinic at the Port Hedland IRPC is open between 08.00 – 20.00 daily, with nurses on call beyond those hours. The Port Hedland facility provides a full-time counsellor, a full-time psychiatric nurse, a psychiatrist who attends once a week, and a psychologist as required. Counselling services are available eight hours a day, five days a week, with emergency sessions available as required.

The medical clinic at the Curtin IRPC operates on a 24-hour basis. A doctor is available at the facility 7 days a week. The doctor is complemented by a number of nurses (approximately 7 at any one time) with a range of skills and qualifications, including midwifery, early childhood and psychiatric.

(4) A number of ACM medical staff possess professional psychiatric qualifications necessary for the treatment of detainees with mental health needs. Detainees have access to further specialist treatment on referral if required.
Commonwealth Funded Programs: Tasmania
(Question No. 1528)

Ms O’Byrne asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, 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 Anderson—The answer to the honorable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The Department of Transport and Regional Services administers the following programs for which community organisations, businesses or individuals can apply for funding in Tasmania:

REGIONAL CITIES PROGRAMME

Programs available under the Regional Communities Program to people in rural Tasmania are the Rural Plan and the Rural Communities Program.

Funding is available to groups with strong community or regional involvement.

Applicants must be either incorporated or sponsored, e.g. by a local government body, except where applying for community planning assistance.

Individuals, commercial organisations or bodies established for profit-making purposes are not eligible for funding. However, groups established for profit-making purposes may be considered for categories of strategic planning and coordination of the implementation of strategic plans.

RURAL TRANSACTION CENTRES PROGRAMME

$70 million has been committed over five years to assist rural communities establish Rural Transaction Centres (RTC). The RTC Program was launched on 11 March 1999.

Any not-for-profit organisation representing a community group or operating at town or district level can apply for funding under the RTC Program.

Potential applicants include local government councils (and organisations of councils), community groups progress associations or chambers of commerce.

Individuals and organisations established primarily for profit-making purposes, including private businesses and local post offices, are ineligible to apply for funding.

ROAD SAFETY RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM

Community organisations, businesses and individuals can apply for funding from this national program.

BASS STRAIT PASSENGER VEHICLE EQUALISATION SCHEME (BSPVES)

The BSPVES proposes to eliminate the cost disadvantage associated with travel across Bass Strait for a driver of a passenger vehicle by equaling the cost of travelling the same distance on a highway.

The rebate is provided to the driver of a passenger vehicle as a direct reduction in the fare charged by a ferry operator. The Commonwealth reimburses the ferry operator on a monthly basis. The rebate varies depending upon the time of year the travel is undertaken.

The rebate granted is the same irrespective of which passenger ferry operator service the passenger chooses to use.

TASMANIAN FREIGHT EQUALISATION SCHEME (TFES)

TFES compensates shippers for the freight cost disadvantage incurred in shipping goods between Tasmania and the mainland.

The Scheme applies to goods produced in Tasmania for use or sale on the mainland and to equipment and raw materials of Australian origin, used as inputs to the mining, manufacturing, agricultural, fishing and forestry industries in Tasmania.

Centrelink provides shippers with a reimbursement of a component of their freight cost using a predetermined formula upon receipt and processing of the shippers’ application form.
Recipients of assistance under the Scheme range from large multi-national corporations to one-off claims by individual farmers and other businesses.

2. The Department of Transport and Regional Services advertises the programs as follows:

**REGIONAL COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME**
(a) The Rural Plan and Rural Communities Program are advertised in all regional and rural newspapers.
(b) All advertisements are paid for from Commonwealth funds.

**RURAL TRANSACTION CENTRES PROGRAMME**
(a) The RTC Program has used paid advertising in the following print media in Tasmania: *Burnie Advocate; Hobart Mercury; Launceston Examiner; Central Coast Courier; Scottsdale NE Advertiser; Sun Coast News; Tamar Times; and Northern Midlands Community News.*
(b) Paid advertising occurred in March 1999 (at the time of the Program’s launch) and November 1999 (at the time of the St Mary’s RTC opening).

**ROAD SAFETY RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM**
(a) In 1999/2000, these opportunities were publicised through advertisements in the *Australian Financial Review* and the *Weekend Australian.*
(b) These were paid advertisements.

**BASS STRAIT PASSENGER VEHICLE EQUALISATION SCHEME (BSPVES)**
**TASMANIAN FREIGHT EQUALISATION SCHEME (TFES)**
(a) The Department of Transport and Regional Services does not directly provide or pay for any promotional material. Centrelink, as service provider, produces brochures promoting the two Schemes and application forms for the BSPVES. The brochures can be obtained from their office in Hobart. Information regarding the Schemes is also sent out upon request.

The impact of the Commonwealth rebate (i.e. TFES) is clearly acknowledged on documentation provided to passengers by the shipping operator.
(b) There are no paid advertisements for either of the two Schemes.