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Mr SPEAKER (Mr Neil Andrew) took the chair at 9.30 a.m., and read prayers.

PRIVACY AMENDMENT (PRIVATE SECTOR) LEGISLATION

Mr WILLIAMS (Tangney—Attorney-General) (9.31 a.m.)—I wish to correct the record in relation to one aspect of the debate on the Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Bill 2000.

Mr SPEAKER—The Attorney-General is seeking indulgence to correct the record and may proceed.

Mr WILLIAMS—As I said, I wish to correct the record in relation to one aspect of the debate on the Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Bill 2000 in the House on 8 November 2000. In comparing the application of the national privacy principles to existing data in the bill to the law that applied when the public sector provisions of the Privacy Act were introduced in 1988, I said that the retrospective aspects of the bill mirror the provisions that applied to the public sector at the time that the public sector provisions of the Privacy Act 1988 were introduced. That is at Hansard page 22387. My department had provided this advice but has now re-examined the issue. I am now advised that the position under the bill is more complex than my statement might suggest.

The broad approach in section 15 of the Privacy Act 1988 and clause 16(c) of the Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Bill 2000 is the same in that some principles will apply to all information whenever collected and some only to information collected after commencement. However, it is necessary to consider the position in relation to each particular issue. For instance, I acknowledge that, in relation to the particular issue of access to and correction of personal information, the position under the proposed bill is that the relevant NPP on this issue only applies to information collected after the commencement of the bill. The explanatory memorandum on the bill makes this clear. In this respect, the position does not mirror the position under the 1988 act. In certain other respects, such as national privacy principles Nos 1 and 4, the position in relation to collection and security of information under the bill is consistent with the position taken in relation to those issues under the act.

MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES: WITHDRAWAL OF COMMENTS

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (9.33 a.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to raise a matter of unfinished business from yesterday. Are you going to ask the Minister for Employment Services to withdraw unconditionally—

Ms Macklin interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—As is evident, the Minister for Employment Services is seeking the call. The Attorney-General had been given precedence because the matter raised by him was a matter that could have been interpreted as unwittingly misleading the House, which clearly was not his intent, and it seemed to me for that reason to have precedence, so the Attorney-General was granted appropriate precedence. I invite the Minister for Employment Services, who is standing, to resume his seat; the Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr BEAZLEY—Regarding the minister who has got to the table, we are seeking—as we sought yesterday after he exited the chamber—an unconditional withdrawal such as all other members of this House are obliged to make in similar circumstances.

Mr SPEAKER—As is evident, the Minister for Employment Services is seeking the call. The Attorney-General had been given precedence because the matter raised by him was a matter that could have been interpreted as unwittingly misleading the House, which clearly was not his intent, and it seemed to me for that reason to have precedence, so the Attorney-General was granted appropriate precedence. I invite the Minister for Employment Services, who is standing, to resume his seat in the interests of the House, and I recognise the Manager of Opposition Business.

Mr McMullan—Our concern is not that you allowed the Attorney-General to speak first; that was proper. Our concern is that this minister—

Government members interjecting—

Mr McMullan—It is a point of order.

Mr SPEAKER—I do not need any help from the member for Mitchell or any other members on my right. The Manager of Opposition Business is being granted a good
deal of latitude, as he knows. He is aware of what is about to happen.

Mr McMullan—The point of order I am seeking to raise is not about this minister being given leave to make a statement but about you requiring him to withdraw the remark. That is what happens to everybody else. They are required to withdraw unconditionally.

Mr SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. As will be evident to everyone in the House, it is not the right of any member of the House to dictate the terms to the chair. I have had no conversation with the Minister for Employment Services other than the conversation that I relayed to the Manager of Opposition Business yesterday evening. The Minister for Employment Services has indicated that he wishes to address the House and I recognise him.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Minister for Employment Services) (9.35 a.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek your indulgence briefly to clear up an apparent misunderstanding.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. A member of parliament has required the minister to withdraw a statement that he made yesterday. That is the only matter that ought to be before the House. That is all.

Mr Reith—Mr Speaker, I raise a further point of order. My point of order is very simple. It is clear from your remarks that you intend to give the minister the opportunity to address the House. Under those circumstances whatever the issues might be that the opposition want to raise they cannot be raised by way of phoney points of order to prevent the minister from addressing the House. They have their problems on the opposition side. We have all read page 1 of the Daily Telegraph today.

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will resume his seat.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, on the point of order raised by the Leader of the House: I would have thought the appropriate precedence would be as follows. You can of course give indulgence to any member of the House, as you see fit, at any point in time, but the unfinished business here surely would take precedence over any indulgence. A request for a withdrawal is a simple matter—a simple, ordinary matter. It happens every day in this chamber and every day you exercise your authority. If, after the minister has withdrawn, you are prepared to give him some sort of indulgence, that is a matter entirely for you. But what is there in precedence is that you now have the first opportunity to act, with this minister being in the House after he has been requested to withdraw a statement about a member of parliament who has been offended by something he has said, and that ought to take precedence over anything else he does.

Mr Reith—Mr Speaker, on the further point of order—

Mr SPEAKER—This is the last occasion that I will recognise a point of order on the current ruling before me. I recognise the Leader of the House.

Mr Reith—Thank you for your patience, Mr Speaker, but the facts are that the minister has not been asked by you to withdraw. What the Leader of the Opposition is attempting to do is beguile you into preventing the minister from addressing the House, which you indicated was your intention. We simply invite you to proceed with your stated intention without further delay.

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I refer to page 476 of House of Representatives Practice. How can giving leave to the minister to make a statement meet the requirements of the standing orders: Having been asked to withdraw a remark a Member ... must withdraw the remark immediately, in a respectful manner, unreservedly and without conditions or qualifications.

How can a statement meet that requirement?
Mr SPEAKER—I have indicated to the Manager of Opposition Business that I have taken this as far as I intend to take it in terms of an absurd—

Mr McMullan interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—At the great risk of diluting the authority of the chair, I recognise the Manager of Opposition Business. He knows the spirit in which I concede that to him.

Mr McMullan—I appreciate that point, Mr Speaker, but you have just said, correctly, that there is a ruling before the chair. Can you tell us what the ruling is. Are you ruling that he does not have to withdraw and that you are not going to require him to withdraw? Is that your ruling?

Mr SPEAKER—For the information of all members, there is a matter which was exacerbated by my misunderstanding of a statement yesterday. Following that, I spoke briefly to the Minister for Employment Services, who was in transit to Melbourne. I indicated to him that the House would be facilitated if he would come into the House and make a statement. I have a great deal of confidence in the commonsense of all members of this chamber. I do not believe that the Minister for Employment Services seeks in any way to fuel—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—It would not facilitate the House in any way if the chair were forced to take disciplinary action on any member of the House at this particular point in time. My conversation with the minister followed the remarks that have been referred to in the chamber. I invite the minister to clarify the matters that were raised yesterday, and I will take action if I consider his action has been inappropriate following the conversation I had with him. I call the minister.

Mr Beazley interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—Leader of the Opposition, the minister has been recognised. The minister has had no opportunity.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Beazley—Then I will have to move dissent from your ruling.

Mr SPEAKER—There has been no ruling. I am merely inviting the minister to come to the dispatch box and clarify a matter which I have already discussed with him. I call the minister.

Mr ABBOTT—My comment in the House yesterday:

... how can you keep the so-and-sos honest when you are taking their money?

was clearly a reference to the Australian Democrats party, which the member for Dickson then led. It was not a reference to the member for Dickson personally.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I formally again ask that the minister withdraw his comments of yesterday. I will read these comments to you because what he has just said is an out-and-out lie.

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition—

Mr Beazley—An out-and-out untruth. I will read from the statement he made yesterday:

Yesterday the member for Dickson, responding to misleading statements from ACOSS, issued a press release—

He continued:

She did not do live media lest she be asked the obvious question: how can you keep the so-and-sos honest when you are taking their money?

There is nothing generic about that, Mr Speaker. The member for Dickson was repeatedly identified in that particular statement as the person who had taken the money. It was therefore an allegation, with the clear implication of a bribe. We require an unreserved withdrawal—right now!

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—I would be very disappointed if, in order to get an opportunity to address the House, I had to rise. In a genuine effort to clarify this matter I invited the Minister for Employment Services to make a statement. I distinctly heard him say that he was in no way reflecting on the member for Dickson as an—

Opposition members interjecting—
Mr SPEAKER—I distinctly heard him say that he was separating the member for Dickson from—

Ms Kernot—That is not what he said.

Mr SPEAKER—Member for Dickson!

Mr McMullan interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. I distinctly heard the minister say that he was separating the member for Dickson from any reference that he made yesterday. I now ask him if in fact that was precisely what he did and if he withdraws any inference that the member for Dickson was in receipt of any money.

Mr ABBOTT—I’ve already done that.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—That was my understanding.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I move that your ruling be dissented from.

Mr Reith—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The fact of the matter is that there has not been a ruling. But I would say to the Leader of the Opposition that if he cares to move a motion for the suspension of standing orders to allow the matter to be debated—

Mr Wilkie interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—I warn the member for Swan!

Mr Reith—the government would allow him, without gag, to move a suspension motion, and the minister will be very happy to respond to each and every one of your baseless claims. The fact of the matter is that the government supports the minister; we support what he said—

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will resume his seat.

Mr McMullan—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I am seeking a ruling from you on—

Mr SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business may be seeking a great deal, but until the House is orderly he will not be recognised. I call the Manager of Opposition Business.

Mr McMULLAN (Fraser) (9.48 a.m.)—Mr Speaker, I am seeking a ruling from you under standing orders 75, 76 and 77. Standing order 75 says:

No Member may use offensive words against either House of the Parliament or any Member ...

Standing order 76 says:

All imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on Members shall be considered highly disorderly.

And standing order 77 says:

When any offensive or disorderly words are used ... the Speaker shall intervene.

Mr Speaker, are you ruling that those words were neither offensive nor personal reflections nor disorderly, given some of the things which you have required us to withdraw, including statements about him.

Mr Reith—I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The fact is that you did not make a ruling. Now you are invited to establish a ruling for the purposes of the games that the opposition want to play in the House this morning. Mr Speaker, there are forms of the House and, as the government have said, we are more than happy not to exercise our rights to gag any suspension motion. If they want to move a suspension motion, they should do so. But, Mr Speaker, a request to you to make a ruling simply for their political purposes is not a request which in our view you should accede to. It is as simple as that.

Mr Cox—Mr Speaker, on the point of order: I draw your attention to standing order 78 about the Speaker determining offensive words:

When the attention of the Speaker is drawn to words used, he or she shall determine whether or not they are offensive or disorderly.

Mr SPEAKER—There is no way that I, any of my predecessors or—I am bold to suggest—any of my successors would do anything that in any way eroded the status and authority of any standing order, I hope, but in this instance particularly the standing orders referred to by the Manager of Opposition Business. In an effort to ensure that what could have been seen as an unfair reflection on the member for Dickson was appropriately dealt with, yesterday afternoon as
the occupier of the chair I both granted her more indulgence than is normally extended in a personal explanation and I contacted the minister, who was in transit, and asked him to come in and make a statement which would ensure that there could be no suggestion that the member for Dickson had been implicated in the comments he made. He not only did that this morning but, when I asked him to clarify the matter, he indicated that he had also withdrawn any statement he had made. For that reason, I believed that the matter had been entirely, appropriately and fairly dealt with and that the standing orders had been maintained.

Mr Beazley—What about your ruling on the request of the Manager of Opposition Business?

Mr SPEAKER—My belief is that the Hansard record will show that there is nothing that has been said by the Minister for Employment Services that could unfairly impinge on the reputation of the member for Dickson.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (9.53 a.m.)—The ruling is that there have been no offensive expressions against the member for Dickson. I move that the Speaker’s ruling be dissented from. The Speaker’s ruling, which has just been given—

Mr Reith—Mr Speaker, only a few moments ago the opposition were asking you to make a ruling. You did not make a ruling, so they get up and pretend you have made a ruling. The fact is there has been no ruling and, on that basis, they have only one choice, and we have offered it to them: they have to move a motion to suspend standing orders and then they can have their say.

Mr BEAZLEY—I will persist in speaking to my motion.

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition has never been denied the call and is not being denied it now. I am merely applying the rule that I have applied for over two years and that is that, unless people can be heard, they will not be recognised.

Mrs Crosio—The Leader of the House’s microphone goes on very quickly; ours do not.
that the Leader of the Opposition had a valid motion because I did not believe that I had ruled.

Ms Kernot—I do not want clarification; I want a withdrawal, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER—the Minister for Employment Services had said that he had in fact withdrawn them.

MEMBER FOR DICKSON
Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Minister for Employment Services) (9.59 a.m.)—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the member for Dickson from making a statement forthwith to explain her actions in relation to the 1996 preference selling deal between the ALP and the Australian Democrats.

Come on, let’s have the debate! You say you want the debate: let’s have it. Come on! Show a bit of ticker for once.

Mr SPEAKER—the minister will resume his seat!

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr McMullan—I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. That motion is out of order; there is already a motion before the chair. Unless you are going to rule the Leader of the Opposition’s motion out of order, this motion is not in order. You can’t avoid ruling forever. One of these motions is out of order and you have to determine which one.

Mr SPEAKER—as the Manager of Opposition Business is aware, in consultation with the Clerk—and I concede that the Leader of the Opposition was continuing to address the chamber, not inappropriately—I did not believe that the Leader of the Opposition had a valid motion because I did not believe that I had ruled.

Mr Lee—Is that your ruling?

Mr SPEAKER—I have so ruled, yes.

DISSENT FROM RULING

Mr Beazley (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (10.00 a.m.)—I move:

That the Speaker’s ruling be dissented from.

That is a matter which has to be discharged before any other matter is considered. There is a ruling here now, clearly, and the ruling is—

Mr Martin Ferguson—Mr Speaker, we can’t hear.

Mr SPEAKER—the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Beazley—We now have a clear-cut ruling. The ruling that you have just made, Mr Speaker, goes to the view that there was not a valid matter before the House because you felt that the request yesterday that this minister be required to withdraw the statement that he made had been adequately dealt with by what he had had to say here in this chamber and that you had sufficiently exercised your jurisdiction under standing orders. Quite clearly, that is not the case, and you have now ruled that it is not possible for me to move a dissent motion from that particular ruling. You have now ruled, and I have moved dissent from your ruling that has just been delivered.
Mr Reith—Mr Speaker, the government has afforded the opposition an opportunity to debate this matter. This is clearly a fabrication.

Motion (by Mr Reith) put:
That the member be not further heard.

The House divided. [10.07 a.m.]

(Mr Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

Ayes........... 75
Noes............ 60
Majority........ 15

AYES
Abbott, A.J. Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J. Anthony, L.J.
Bailey, F.E. Baird, B.G.
Barresi, P.A. Bartlett, K.J.
Bishop, J.I. Brough, B.K.
Bishop, J.I. Brough, M.T.
Cadman, A.G. Cameron, R.A.
Causley, I.R. Charles, R.E.
Costello, P.H. Downer, A.J.G.
Draper, P. Entsch, W.G.
Fahey, J.J. Fischer, T.A.
Gallus, C.A. Gambaro, T.
Gash, J. Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W. Geoghegan, P.
Hawker, D.P.M. Hockey, D.G.
Hull, K.E. Jull, D.F.
Katter, R.C. Kelly, D.M.
Kelly, J.M. Kemp, D.A.
Lawler, A.J. Lieberman, L.S.
Lindsay, P.J. Lloyd, J.E.
Macfarlane, I.E. May, M.A.
McArthur, S. * McGauran, P.J.
Moylan, J. E. Nairn, G. R.
Nehl, G. B. Nelson, R.J.
Neville, P. C. * Nugent, P.E.
Prosper, G.D. O'Keefe, N.P.
Reith, P.K. Poyne, C.
Ruddock, P.M. Ronaldson, M.J.C.
Scott, B.C. Schultz, A.
Slipper, P.N. Secker, P.D.
Southcott, A.J. Somlyay, A.M.
Stone, S.N. St Clair, S.R.
Thompson, C.P. Sullivan, K.J.M.
Truss, W.E. Thomson, A.P.
Vaile, M.A.J. Tuckey, C.W.
Wakelin, B.H. Vale, D.S.
Williams, D.R. Walsh, M.J.
Worth, P.M. Wooldridge, M.R.L.

NOES
Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, B.N.
Beazley, K.C. Brereton, L.J.
Burke, A.E. Byrne, A.M.
Corcoran, A.K. Cox, D.A.
Crosio, J.A. Danby, M.
Edwards, G.J. Ellis, A.L.
Emerson, C.A. Evans, M.J.
Ferguson, L.D.T. Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A. Gerick, J.F.
Gibbons, S.W. Gillard, J.E.
Griffin, A.P. Hall, J.G.
Hatton, M.J. Hoare, K.J.
Horne, R. Jenkins, H.A.
Kernot, C. Kerr, D.J.C.
Latham, M.W. Lawrence, C.M.
Lee, M.J. Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L. McClelland, R.B.
McFarlane, J.S. McLeay, L.B.
McMullan, R.F. Melham, D.
Morris, A.A. Mossfield, F.W.
Murphy, J. P. O'Keefe, N.P.
Plibersek, T. Price, L.R.S.
Quick, H.V. Ripoll, B.F.
Roxon, N.L. Rudd, K.M.
Sawford, R.W. * Sciaccas, C.A.
Sercombe, R.C.G. * Sidebottom, P.S.
Smith, S.F. Snowdon, W.E.
Swan, W.M. Tanner, L.
Theophanous, A.C. Thomson, K.J.
Wilkie, E. Zahra, C.J.

PAIRS
Forrest, J.A. Bevis, A.R.
* denotes teller

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Mr McMULLAN (Fraser—Manager of Opposition Business) (10.11 a.m.)—I second the motion. This minister is a disgrace and the government’s support for him is a disgrace and the Prime Minister should be ashamed of himself for supporting this scumbag.

Motion (by Mr Reith) put:
That the member be not further heard.

The House divided. [10.11 a.m.]

(Mr Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

Ayes........... 75
Noes............ 60
Majority........ 15

AYES
Abbott, A.J. Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J. Anthony, L.J.
Bailey, F.E. Baird, B.G.
Barresi, P.A. Bartlett, K.J.
Bishop, J.I. Brough, B.K.
Bishop, J.I. Brough, M.T.
Cadman, A.G. Cameron, R.A.
Causley, I.R. Charles, R.E.
Costello, P.H. Downer, A.J.G.
Draper, P. Entsch, W.G.
Fahey, J.J. Fischer, T.A.
Gallus, C.A. Gambaro, T.
Gash, J. Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W. Geoghegan, P.
Hawker, D.P.M. Hockey, D.G.
Hull, K.E. Jull, D.F.
Katter, R.C. Kelly, D.M.
Kelly, J.M. Kemp, D.A.
Lawler, A.J. Lieberman, L.S.
Lindsay, P.J. Lloyd, J.E.
Macfarlane, I.E. May, M.A.
McArthur, S. * McGauran, P.J.
Moylan, J. E. Nairn, G. R.
Nehl, G. B. Nelson, R.J.
Neville, P. C. * Nugent, P.E.
Prosper, G.D. O'Keefe, N.P.
Reith, P.K. Poyne, C.
Ruddock, P.M. Ronaldson, M.J.C.
Scott, B.C. Schultz, A.
Slipper, P.N. Secker, P.D.
Southcott, A.J. Somlyay, A.M.
Stone, S.N. St Clair, S.R.
Thompson, C.P. Sullivan, K.J.M.
Truss, W.E. Thomson, A.P.
Vaile, M.A.J. Tuckey, C.W.
Wakelin, B.H. Vale, D.S.
Williams, D.R. Walsh, M.J.
Worth, P.M. Wooldridge, M.R.L.

NOES
Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, B.N.
Beazley, K.C. Brereton, L.J.
Burke, A.E. Byrne, A.M.
Corcoran, A.K. Cox, D.A.
Crosio, J.A. Danby, M.
Edwards, G.J. Ellis, A.L.
Emerson, C.A. Evans, M.J.
Ferguson, L.D.T. Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A. Gerick, J.F.
Gibbons, S.W. Gillard, J.E.
Griffin, A.P. Hall, J.G.
Hatton, M.J. Hoare, K.J.
Horne, R. Jenkins, H.A.
Kernot, C. Kerr, D.J.C.
Latham, M.W. Lawrence, C.M.
Lee, M.J. Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L. McClelland, R.B.
McFarlane, J.S. McLeay, L.B.
McMullan, R.F. Melham, D.
Morris, A.A. Mossfield, F.W.
Murphy, J. P. O'Keefe, N.P.
Plibersek, T. Price, L.R.S.
Quick, H.V. Ripoll, B.F.
Roxon, N.L. Rudd, K.M.
Sawford, R.W. * Sciaccas, C.A.
Sercombe, R.C.G. * Sidebottom, P.S.
Smith, S.F. Snowdon, W.E.
Swan, W.M. Tanner, L.
Theophanous, A.C. Thomson, K.J.
Wilkie, E. Zahra, C.J.
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Minister for Employment Services) (10.15 a.m.)—The Australian Labor Party are in a deep political crisis and the one thing they do not want to hear is the truth.

Motion (by Mr Beazley) put:
That the member be not further heard.

The House divided. [10.15 a.m.]

(Mr Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

Ayes………… 60
Noes………… 75
Majority……… 15

AYES
Adams, D.G.H.
Beazley, K.C.
Burke, A.E.
Corcoran, A.K.
Crosio, J.A.
Edwards, G.J.
Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Gibbons, S.W.
Griffin, A.P.
Hatton, M.J.
Horne, R.
Kernot, C.
Latham, M.W.
Lee, M.J.
Macklin, J.L.
McFarlane, J.S.
McMullan, R.F.
Morris, A.A.
Murphy, J. P.
Plibersek, T.
Quick, H.V.
Roxon, N.L.
Sawford, R.W. *
Sercombe, R.C.G. *
Smith, S.F.
Swan, W.M.
Theophanous, A.C.
Wilkie, K.

NOES
Albanese, A.N.
Bereton, L.J.
Byrne, A.M.
Cox, D.A.
Danby, M.
Ellis, A.L.
Evans, M.J.
Ferguson, M.J.
Gerick, J.F.
Gillard, J.E.
Hall, J.G.
Hoare, K.J.
Jenkins, H.A.
Kerr, D.J.C.
Lawrence, C.M.
Livermore, K.F.
McClendon, R.B.
McLeay, L.B.
Mellah, D.
Mossfield, F.W.
O’Keefe, N.P.
Price, L.R.S.
Ripoll, B.F.
Rudd, K.M.
Sciacca, C.A.
Sidebottom, P.S.
Snowdon, W.E.
Tanner, L.
Thomson, K.J.
Zahra, C.J.

NOES
Abbott, A.J.
Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E.
Barresi, P.A.
Billson, B.F.
Bishop, J.I.
Cadman, A.G.
Causley, I.R.
Costello, P.H.
Draper, P.
Fahey, J.J.
Gallus, C.A.

PAIRS
Forrest, J.A.
Bevis, A.R.

* denotes teller

Question so resolved in the affirmative.
Mr ABBOTT—Why are members opposite so scared of giving the member for Dickson an opportunity to speak? Why can’t we let this prize of truth explain the national preference selling deal—

Mr Beazley interjecting—

Mr McMullan interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I have given an opinion under standing order 86—

Mr McMullan—A ruling.

Mr SPEAKER—I would not have said I had given a ruling; I would have said I have given an opinion. Standing order 86 insists that, should any of the questions be negative, no similar proposals shall be received by the Speaker or the chair. I have no other choice but to indicate they are the standing orders.

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: either my motion is in order or you have ruled it out of order. There is no third position. Is my motion in order or not?

Mr SPEAKER—The motion moved by the Manager of Opposition Business is not in order.

Mr McMullan—That is a ruling, Mr Speaker. I have to tell you, by any interpretation of the English language, that is called an r-u-l-i-n-g.

Mr SPEAKER—And I have ruled the motion out of order.

Mr Beazley—And I want to move that your ruling be dissented from, Mr Speaker. It is in order for anyone in this place to move that a ruling be dissented from. This cowardly bunch opposite decided to gag both of us when we were up on our scrapers speaking on that dissent ruling. What is good for the goose is good for the gander as far as we are concerned. There are double standards operating in this place.

Mr Reith—Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is not entitled—not because of any ruling that you have given but because of the standing orders. You can move a dissent against rulings which require the exercise of judgment by the Speaker, but you cannot move a dissent because you do not like the standing orders. He used to be the Leader of the House. You would think he would at least understand the elemental features of the standing orders.

Mr McMullan—That is a ruling, Mr Speaker. I have to tell you, by any interpretation of the English language, that is called an r-u-l-i-n-g.
tion, therefore, should be allowed to be put and then we can hear from the member for Dickson.

Mr SPEAKER—In order to facilitate the House, let me pick up the point made by the Leader of the House. The time allotted for the suspension of standing orders moved by the Minister for Employment Services has expired. As the question was not stated by the chair, the motion lapses. The motion currently before the chair is a motion of dissent from the chair’s ruling, which was not dealt with prior to the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr McMullan—So am I seconding the motion to dissent from the ruling? Is that where we are, Mr Speaker?

Mr SPEAKER—The motion currently before the chair is a motion of dissent from the Speaker’s ruling moved earlier by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr McMullan—The earlier one?

Mr SPEAKER—Yes, it has not been dealt with.

Mr McMullan—Then, Mr Speaker, I will speak to it.

Mr SPEAKER—To clarify the point raised by the Manager of Opposition Business, all that the chair has sought to do is progressively deal with the motions before it. The motion currently before the chair is a motion of dissent from the Speaker’s ruling moved by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr McMullan—And I want to speak to it.

Mr SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will be recognised at the appropriate time. It is normal for the call to be given from one side to the other.

Mr McMullan—He wasn’t standing; I was.

Mr SPEAKER—The Clerk has pointed out to me that not only my resolution but the clock furthermore reinforces the fact that the person who currently has the call is the Minister for Employment Services.

Mr ABBOTT—Mr Speaker, the point I want to make is: why are they scared of letting the member for Dickson speak? Why wouldn’t they accept our original suspension?

Mr Leo McLeay interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT—It is because they are absolutely terrified of what the member for Dickson might say. The member for Dickson is the booby trap at the heart of the Labor Party. That is what the member for Dickson is now.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Minister for Employment Services.

Mr ABBOTT—Thank you, Mr Speaker. The member for Dickson should explain exactly what she has had to do with the 1996 preference selling deal between the Democrats and the ALP.

Mr Leo McLeay—Mr Speaker!

Mr ABBOTT—She should not leave it to Meg Lees to explain these matters. She was the Leader of the Democrats then.

Mr Leo McLeay—Mr Speaker!

Mr SPEAKER—The Minister for Employment Services will resume his seat. The Chief Opposition Whip has been expressing perhaps understandable indignation, but he must appreciate the fact that it is neither appropriate nor necessary for the chair to recognise him when he is not in his position.

Mr Leo McLeay—I am Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—

Mr SPEAKER—I am well aware of that, and the Manager of Opposition Business is in the House. For that reason I was unable to recognise the Chief Opposition Whip.

Mr McMullan—If the motion before us is the dissent, he is not speaking to that motion and he is out of order and should not be allowed to continue in that tone in this debate. But in any event, I move that he be no longer heard.

Mr SPEAKER—I wonder whether the Manager of Opposition Business, would in fact like to reconsider that motion. In fact, I had given the Minister for Employment Services a good deal of latitude anticipating that he ought to come to the debate and then, as I trust the Manager of Opposition Business noted, required him to resume his seat.
If the Manager of Opposition Business cares to withdraw his motion, in fact the Minister for Employment Services’s time has almost expired. The Minister for Employment Service’s time has expired.

Question put:
That the Speaker’s ruling be dissented from.

The House divided. [10.32 a.m.]

(Mr Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

**AYES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ayes</th>
<th>57</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noes</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AYES**

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Beazley, K.C. Burke, A.E.
Byrne, A.M. Corcoran, A.K.
Cox, D.A. Crosio, J.A.
Danby, M. Edwards, G.J.
Ellis, A.L. Emerson, C.A.
Evans, M.J. Ferguson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J. Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Gerick, J.F. Griffen, A.P.
Gillard, J.E. Hatton, M.J.
Hall, J.G. Horne, R.
Hoare, K.J. Kerner, C.
Jenkins, H.A. Latham, M.W.
Lawrence, C.M. Lee, M.J.
Livermore, K.F. Macklin, J.L.
McClendon, R.B. McFarlane, J.S.
McLeay, L.B. McMullan, R.F.
Melham, D. Morris, A.A.
Mossfield, F.W. Murphy, J. P.
O’Keefe, N.P. Plibersek, T.
Price, L.R.S. Quick, H.V.
Ripoll, B.F. Roxon, M.L.
Rudd, K.M. Sawford, R.W. *
Sercombe, R.C.G. * Sidebottom, P.S.
Smith, S.F. Snowdon, W.E.
Swan, W.M. Tanner, L.
Theophanous, A.C. Wilkie, K.
Zahra, C.J.

**NOES**

Abbott, A.J. Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E. Baird, B.G.
Barresi, P.A. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, J.I.
Brough, M.T. Cadman, A.G.
Cameron, R.A. Causley, I.R.
Charles, R.E. Costello, P.H.
Downer, A.J.G. Draper, P.
Entsch, W.G. Fahey, J.J.
Fischer, T.A. Gallow, C.A.
Gasu, J. Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W. Hardgrave, G.D.
Hawker, D.P.M. Hickey, J.B.
Jull, D.F. Kelly, D.M.
Kemp, D.A. Lawler, A.J.
Lieberman, L.S. Lindsay, P.J.
Macfarlane, I.E. May, M.A.
McArthur, S. * McGauran, P.J.
Moylan, J. E. Nohl, G.B.
Neville, P.C. * Prosser, G.D.
Pyne, C. Reith, P.K.
Ronaldson, M.J.C. Secker, P.D.
Slipper, P.N. Somlyay, A.M.
Southcott, A.J. St Clay, S.R.
Stone, S.N. Thompson, C.P.
Truss, W.E. Tuckey, C.W.
Vaile, M.A.J. Vale, D.S.
Washer, M.J. Wooldridge, M.R.L.

**PAIRS**

Forrest, J.A. Bevis, A.R.
* denotes teller

In division—

Mr Lee interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—There was I understand a one-minute ringing of the bells. In fact I am unable to explain to the House why there was a one-minute ringing of the bells.

Later in division—

Mr Tim Fischer—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I have just observed that there are a number of people outside the doors. I ask that you consider recalling the division.

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: what is the result? The standing orders require the result to be—

Mr SPEAKER—I do not have the result of the division. That is why I could not respond.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I ask for the result of the division.

Mr SPEAKER—As I indicated to the Leader of the Opposition earlier, when I was accused of ignoring him, I do not have the result of the division.

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, I can raise a point of order. My point of order is that at least two government members were admitted to the vote after you had required the doors to be closed: the member for Makin and the member for Mitchell.

Mr SPEAKER—I am conscious of the matter raised by the Manager of Opposition Business and in fact have been conferring with the Clerk about it. I call the Leader of the House.
Mr Reith—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: it seems to me—and on the supposition of an equality of votes—the circumstances are clear to everybody in the House, and they are that there was intervening debate but a one-minute division called. I did not hear all of the words of the Manager of Opposition Business, but obviously if that were the case there would be two courses of action available. I understood him to suggest that you could recommit the vote, which is not uncommon in the Senate, or that you could rely otherwise upon the general principle that for a vote to be carried a majority is required. Finally, without further checking my constitutional legal principles, I put it to you, Mr Speaker—

Mr Leo McLeay interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Chief Opposition Whip is out of order.

Mr Reith—To put the matter beyond doubt, Mr Speaker, you would of course be perfectly entitled to exercise a casting vote so that the matter is dealt with expeditiously.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, is it not a fact that the result of the division is 57 votes all? The division has been conducted in accordance with the requirements that you have laid down, with the bells rung to your satisfaction and the members who wished to vote entering this chamber to vote. It is 57 all, as we can all see here, Mr Speaker. That leaves you in the situation of having a casting vote. Mr Speaker, you are now in the situation of determining between the dignity of the House and your job.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mrs Crosio interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—When the House as come to order, including the member for Prospect: I would respond to the Leader of the Opposition by indicating that I do not have the result at this stage. I merely indicate to the Leader of the Opposition that I do not have the result.

Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Lyons!

Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Lyons will be dealt with.

Mr Tim Fischer—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The Chair of the Main Committee, the Deputy Speaker, because of the intervening debate, repaired to the Main Committee for its resumption—

Mr SPEAKER—if I could, I would recognise you—and I now can, thanks to the member for Banks exercising some courtesy.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, as I understand it, the result of the division is in the hands of the clerks; the clerks are in a position to hand it to you. Mr Speaker what is the result?

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition understands that I am not in a position to pronounce the result of the division until I have the division sheets.

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, under standing order 203, when the count has been conducted, it shall be handed to you and you will give the results to the House. Now we have been waiting for more than five minutes. When are you going to apply standing order 203?

Mr SPEAKER—as the Manager of Opposition Business is well aware, the clerk makes the sheets available to the occupier of the chair, when he or she is satisfied that the division is accurate. I am simply awaiting that event.

Mr Reith—Mr Speaker, on the point of order: just prior to matters being brought to a head—I only put this to you in response to the comments from the Leader of the Opposition—the fact of the matter is that there was a one-minute intervention and we could see people standing outside. The fact of the matter is, Mr Speaker, not too much should be made of this. It should simply be dealt with by the casting vote or by the re-commitment. On that basis, Mr Speaker, that is obviously a matter for you. I would put to you that the simplest thing is for you to exercise a casting vote, which no-one doubts that you have.

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, on a point of order. There’s the result. Enforce the standing orders, take it and declare it—

Mr SPEAKER—the Manager of Opposition Business is in fact being a little less patient than is normally the case. I had just finished hearing a point of order from the
Leader of the House. The result of the division is ayes 57, noes 57. The question is therefore not resolved. I have the power, as the chair, to exercise a casting vote. It would clearly be inappropriate for me to cast a casting vote with the ayes, given that I believe that my original decision was entirely appropriate. It would also be, in my view, equally inappropriate to exercise a casting vote with the noes because I do not believe that I should vote simply to maintain myself in office. For that reason, under standing order 208, it seems reasonable to recommit the vote. Ring the bells for four minutes.

Mr McMullan—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, you call for a division under standing order 208 in the case of an error. There is no error.

Mr SPEAKER—The bells are being rung. There was an error.

Opposition members then left the chamber.

The House divided. [10.55 a.m.]

(Mr Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

Mr SPEAKER—The question is that the Speaker’s ruling be dissented from. I appoint the honourable members for Corangamite and Hinkler tellers for the noes. There being no tellers for the ayes, the question is therefore negatived.

MR SPEAKER

Want of Confidence Motion

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (10.56 a.m.)—I move:

That the Speaker no longer possesses the confidence of this House.

This is an unprecedented day. This day has arrived without precedent basically because of faults in your own rulings. At the beginning of this day, you had an opportunity to uphold the standing orders of this parliament—the standing orders of the parliament which you have exercised hitherto with rigour on this side of the House and with some vigour, from time to time, on the other side of the House.

It may well be an oddball standing order in one sense, but there is an absolute requirement that, if a member of this parliament raises the point that something that was said to them was offensive, the member responsible is obliged to withdraw. Generally speaking, when a Leader of the Opposition gets up and asks for a withdrawal of a comment that has been made, it is withdrawn unreservedly. I realise you have a child, an unguided missile and a bully on your hands in the form of the Minister for Employment Services, and that is a difficult thing for a Speaker to deal with at the best of times. But it is one thing to have a termagant on your hands and quite another thing to allow him to get away with it.

This morning, it was time to bring this character, who has gone out there over the last 24 hours in defiance of the concerns that you expressed yesterday, to order. Characters like Abbott, characters like this minister, are invariably time bombs under their own decks and the time bomb under this deck has blown up on you comprehensively, Mr Speaker, has destroyed the authority of your speakership, has destroyed the meaning of standing orders and has destroyed decent behaviour in this House.

The minister got up. Instead of being required to withdraw at the beginning of proceedings, a simple procedure, he was allowed to stand up and lie in this chamber. Despite the existence, and the obvious implications, of what he had to say in the Hansard—and it was not an implication; it was a clear-cut statement—he decided to excuse himself by saying that all his comments were generic, and then he decided to compound that defiance of normal standing orders by getting up and moving that the member for Dickson be obliged to answer a lie. That is what Abbott did, the minister did, in this chamber.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. Nobody who is lecturing you should be using members’ names when they know the rules of the House.

Mr SPEAKER—The Minister for Forestry and Conservation will resume his seat. The Leader of the Opposition in fact corrected the error he had made. For that reason I did not intervene.

Mr BEAZLEY—Mr Speaker, what the minister has been doing over the last 24
hours is cocking a snoot at you. He knew full well yesterday—you acknowledge your mistake. In the way in which you acknowledged it you made it clear-cut that, if you had understood the full implications of the meaning of what was said by the minister to the member for Dickson, you would have required action on his part. What the minister has been saying over the airwaves since then is that he intends to come into this place, defy normal parliamentary precedence—and get away with it—and say, ‘How smart alec I am.’ He has been boasting around the benches of the parliament, ‘Look, I am the big bomb thrower, I am the big deal, I am the fellow who can get the opposition running.’

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

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat—

Mr Speaker—The Minister for Forestry and Conservation and the Leader of the Opposition will resume their seats.

Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr Speaker—And the member for Lyons is warned.

Mr Beazley—What was said by the minister yesterday was this:

Yesterday the member for Dickson, responding to misleading statements from ACOSS, issued a press release. She did not do live media lest she be asked the obvious question: how can you keep the so-and-so’s honest when you are taking their money?

This is plain language. It is a suggestion in this plain language that the member for Dickson had received a bribe. That was the implication of it, and it is against those sorts of implications that the standing orders stand to protect members. Then the minister came into this chamber and, firstly, misled this chamber by saying that all he had said was of generic application to Democrats as opposed to the member for Dickson—that particular proposition is a defeat of plain language, I would have thought—and then compounded this reasonable interpretation of it by getting up and moving a motion in this chamber to try to get the member for Dickson to come in and state that she had not received a bribe. It was a classic ‘when did you stop beating your wife’ type performance. None of that would have happened if something very simple had occurred earlier this day, and that is if normal standing orders had proceeded.

I was reminded earlier today of an incident in the Senate in 1986 when my Senate colleague from Western Australia Peter Walsh described Senator Walters as a ‘harpy’. Walsh then left the chamber after a withdrawal had been demanded. The President of the Senate—and remember the President of the Senate does not necessarily have a majority supporting them—sent the Black Rod down to Walsh’s office to arrest him to bring him back into the chamber to make a formal withdrawal. That was Doug McClelland—that was a Presiding Officer. That is what happened then. That was a President of the Senate determined to uphold the standards of the Senate. He was prepared to have the Black Rod arrest the minister to oblige him to enter the chamber to make a formal withdrawal. That is guts; that is defence of the parliamentary process.

That was not actually required of you, Mr Speaker. There was just a simple requirement for the Minister for Employment Services to get up and withdraw. And I note that recently you have developed this habit of also asking for apologies—though I must say that is nowhere in standing orders that I can find. Nevertheless, it might have been useful on that particular occasion to ask for an apology as well. Accusing somebody of taking bribes in the political process is in anybody’s terms, in anybody’s language, an offence against standing orders that requires, at a minimum, a motion and, backing up that motion, a serious presentation of evidence to that extent.

None of those things of course were occurring. That is how this whole imbroglio started. Then, after their smart alec efforts at seizing the standing orders in this place and getting stuck into us, they found themselves arguing against impossible propositions that rulings were not rulings—absurd propositions. Whenever you pronounce on the standing orders you make a ruling. Whether the ruling is clear-cut in your favour or whether it is an area of discretion—whatever—it is a ruling. You make rulings when you are asked by members of parliament.
You cannot sit in the chair and say, ‘This is not a ruling. I am just giving you some sort of advice.’ Of course you cannot do that. Everything you say from the chair, because you are the Presiding Officer in charge of standing orders, is a ruling—every point is a ruling.

A motion of dissent may be well based or ill based and, generally speaking, motions of dissent rarely are moved in this place. You find yourself in this situation, as I said, only partially through fault of your own. But, at the end of the day, you have to be independent of all of us and you have to make rulings. If we dissent from your rulings, that is a matter for debate in this chamber; it is a perfect entitlement of all members to do it. But, in persistently trying to slip-slide around that, we finally get to a position where a dissent motion was acceptable even to you and your very strange interpretation of what a ruling is in this place. That dissent motion was then put before this chamber, and in the course of that dissent motion the bells were rung. They were rung for a period of one minute. We on our side of the House suggested that perhaps they should have been rung longer. When we suggested that they should have been rung longer, you ruled that we were wrong. You ruled that it was perfectly appropriate in the circumstances for the bells to have been rung for one minute. It is not as though there was any doubt in the minds of any member in this chamber. There was a small problem with that, in that one or two of the folk who voted ultimately for you found themselves on our side at the normal closure of the division and were allowed, as you spoke slowly, to move to the other side.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr BEAZLEY—After you had closed it, two of them came through the door. Had they been locked out, it would have been 55-57 against you. Then there was the vote, and the vote was 57-all. It was a vote legitimately counted in this chamber and a division legitimately held when all objections that could have been raised to it—that is, that the doors had not been quickly enough locked on the other side and that one minute was not a long enough period of time for the division to be held—had been ruled on by you. Those were the only potential impurities in the division, and before the count was held you had ruled on both of them.

Then, when you finally had handed to you, after avoiding it for a period of some 10 minutes, the Clerk’s recording of the division, you stood up and said that as far as you were concerned there was a sufficient level of confusion for you not to cast your vote either for or against yourself and to invite a further division in this chamber. There was no confusion or error. You had given clear-cut rulings. Nobody was lying in the cross-benches there who was counted twice on one side or the other by the tellers. There was no issue as to whether or not the particular bodies in the seats at the time were alive. There was no issue as far as that was concerned. There was no question of a stranger in the House appearing to vote when the stranger should not have been voting. There was no question of that. There was no question of a member under suspension voting in the chamber and creating confusion and contaminating the result as a result of that. There was no person involved at all in confusing the division. Any potential inadequacies in that division had already been ruled on by you, and we did not persist with them. You made the ruling that the couple of characters who were let in after the doors were supposed to have been closed could vote. Fine, we did not persist with it. You made the ruling that one minute was long enough for the division after we had asked for it to be longer. We did not persist with it. We accepted the rulings that you made. And then the vote came to 57-57.

Now you find yourself in the position of working out what it is that you ought to be doing. You have to make a choice between your job and the dignity of this place—between your job and the operation of these standing orders. I am afraid, Mr Speaker, you did not take the choice that most accords with the dignity of this place; hence we have been obliged to move no confidence in your handling of the processes around this division and no confidence in the way in which you have handled this particular minister, who has been treated with kid gloves over the course of the last 24
I can recollect yesterday, one after another, our people being obliged to withdraw. I cannot recollect one of those withdrawals involving an accusation on the other side that they had been involved in bribery or that they had been involved in, for example, that particular incident which occurred in New South Wales when a member of parliament—a senior Liberal—invited the Shooters Party to change their preferences on the basis of a payment. We made no accusations to the Prime Minister on those matters, though he was the leader of the party at that point in time. We had plenty of opportunity to sling mud yesterday on those particular matters, but we did not. Only had we done so where would we have found ourselves in a position where somebody on this side of the House said something anywhere remotely as offensive as was said by this particular minister.

This particular minister is the classic bomb thrower. He is so proud of his reputation that he does not care what happens to you, he does not care what happens to the government and he does not care what happens to decent standing orders in this place. He is utterly arrogant. From time to time people who live their lives in a state of suspended adolescence arrive in this chamber—people who spend their lives frozen in the school debating techniques of their childhood—people who have never left the sandpit do arrive in this place, and of course have no moral function, no moral direction and no understanding of the traditions that apply in this chamber, only an utter self-centredness, an utter pridefulness and an utter disregard for the basic decencies which dominate the political processes. Those children have to be stood on by Speakers to establish their authority. There is one child in this House now, and this is the child who has got you into trouble. But the child could have been dealt with by you, Mr Speaker, so simply, so easily. All you required of him was a simple withdrawal. He could have moved his childish motion after that if he had wanted to. He could have moved his childish suspension of standing orders, if he had wanted to, at that point in time, having been subject to the normal decent processes that apply to the rest of us. But that, Mr Speaker, was not a course you took. You have, as a Speaker, made error after error in your handling of this material over the course of the last 24 hours. You have allowed the chair to be defied; you have allowed the chair, therefore, to be defiled in the way in which you have conducted yourself in this regard. Then, finally, you have allowed a division to be bodged. This House can have no confidence in you at all. (Time expired)

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

Mr REITH (Flinders—Leader of the House) (11.16 a.m.)—Mr Speaker, you are a good Speaker; Mr Speaker, you are an honest Speaker. Mr Speaker, not one person—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will resume his seat. The Leader of the Opposition was heard in silence on what is obviously a matter of great moment to the House and to the occupier of the chair. Similar courtesy will be extended to the Leader of the House.

Mr REITH—Mr Speaker, you are a good Speaker; you are a fair Speaker; you are a highly respected member of this parliament. On both sides of this parliament, your decency and your fairness have been respected by all members. Only this week, I heard senior members of the Labor Party speak in glowing terms of you not only as a person but furthermore as a Speaker with the goodwill—

Mr Hatton—You are defying the chair again.

Mr SPEAKER—So is the member for Blaxland.

Mr REITH—I have heard members of the Labor Party say, despite their constant interjections, that you are a Speaker who has clearly exhibited a goodwill—

Mr Kerr interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Denison!

Mr REITH—the bona fides of a Speaker attempting to do what everybody recognises is always a difficult job.

Mr Kerr interjecting—
Mr SPEAKER—The member for Denison!

Mr REITH—As I will, I hope, forensically show in my remarks today, all of the claims that have been made against you are either completely and totally exaggerated out of all proportion or, furthermore, as in some cases, simply and completely fabricated—just fabricated. Just to give you a quick example, I could barely believe my ears but I did hear the Leader of the Opposition say, ‘Everything you say is a ruling,’ therefore attempting to justify some of the absurd motions that he moved this morning. I refer you to page 204 of _House of Representatives Practice_ where it says that, in 1984, Speaker Jenkins named a member and an attempt was made to dissent from his ruling in naming the member. The Speaker then ruled that the proposed motion of dissent was not in order as he had not made a ruling. In other words, there was a Labor Speaker making the very point that you made this morning, and we had this, quite frankly, stupid suggestion—but I say it was a malicious suggestion—from the Leader of the Opposition. He knows otherwise, because he has been a Leader of the House. That claim that those motions that he moved this morning in dissent were validly based he knows to be wrong. For him then to use that as justification for this motion shows you that, when he is after a political objective—in this particular case, the Minister for Employment Services—this weak leader is prepared to attack a Speaker who is well respected by people on his own side. So he was simply attacking you, Mr Speaker, and fabricating arguments for his own political purposes. That is weakness in the extreme, and we utterly and completely reject it, as we will of course completely reject this baseless, uncalled for, unreasonable and unjustifiable motion.

All this comes about—

Mr Kerr interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Denison is warned!

Mr REITH—because yesterday, as is often the case in question time, there was a controversy.

Ms Kernot interjecting—

Mr REITH—I do not think the member for Dickson should throw barbs in our direction when the Manager of Opposition Business used the word ‘scumbag’ in the House this morning, reminiscent of one of the worst offenders in this House, namely, the former leader of the Labor Party—the man from whom the Leader of the Opposition learnt some of his tricks—former Prime Minister Keating. It came about because yesterday there was a fracas because, as Australia now knows, federal Labor members in Queensland have been associated with payments in cash, in brown paper bags, to provide financial support to other political parties. As one of the editorials—

Mr Melham—Mr Speaker, I have a point of order in relation to comments that the member is now making. I argue that this is a no confidence motion against you, Mr Speaker, and that this is not relevant to the substantive motion before the House.

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the House had prefaced his remarks by indicating why he was using this illustration.

Mr REITH—I am simply explaining the context in which this matter came about. The Labor Party is very sensitive because one of theirs has been caught up with the allegations of corruption being made in Queensland. That is why you are so sensitive about it. The words used by the Minister for Employment Services—and he can go to the details of that—

Ms Macklin interjecting—

Mr REITH—Pass me over the quote; I am sorry I do not carry it around with me. Big deal. What he referred to was a slogan of the Australian Democrats. That slogan was: ‘Vote for the Democrats and we will keep the bastards honest’. That is the slogan to which he referred. Yesterday in question time he referred to the fact that, to your great embarrassment, the Australian Democrats were receiving money from the Labor Party in a preference deal. In the 1996 election the party that said they would keep both sides honest in fact did a secret deal with the Labor Party. That is your embarrassment. Then, of course, the member for Dickson joined the Labor Party and she is now on their front
bench. No wonder you are embarrassed! So what is the Labor Party’s tactic today? They came in here today and they were acting so affronted! After the years of abuse which they have piled onto our side the Leader of the Opposition made an obvious statement, namely, that the Democrats—and in particular, because she was the leader of the Democrats, the member for Dickson—were involved in a deal to receive money from the Labor Party in an exchange of preferences. They waltzed in here full of fabricated and concocted concern, anger and angst about those particular comments. They had every opportunity to allow the member for Dickson to get up on her feet and explain herself. In fact, when it was obvious that they were so determined to have a debate on this matter we offered them the opportunity. The Minister for Employment Services actually moved a motion to suspend standing orders to provide her with the opportunity to speak.

Many things are said in this place. When you considered the matter yesterday at the end of question time, Mr Speaker, you took a different interpretation of what was said. No-one in this House could ask more of a Speaker than what you did yesterday: you stood up and honestly and decently said, on the basis of what you had heard—and no-one should forget that when you are sitting in the Speaker’s chair, with the babble that comes from the opposition side, you do not always hear every last word—that you had heard these words uttered and you thought they meant one thing and that you were therefore prepared to go away and have a look at the matter. Seriously, can anybody genuinely believe that any more could be asked of a Speaker? When the Labor Party was running this country and we had Labor Speakers we never had as fair a go as the fair go you yesterday provided to the opposition on this matter. Furthermore, you provided ample opportunities in giving the opposition the call this morning. They were up and down on their feet like yo-yos this morning. The Minister for Employment Services provided the context within which he made his remarks, and that basically was the end of it. But, of course, from the Labor Party’s point of view, it cannot be the end of it because so embarrassed are they by this matter, when they came in here and had the opportunity to put up the member for Dickson, what did they do? They attacked the Speaker. Instead of defending their own, because they do not trust her to get on her own two feet to explain herself, no, they fabricate an attack on you, Mr Speaker. Part of that fabrication was to say—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Melbourne Ports is not in his seat and I warn him. It is the third time I have had to draw his attention to what ought to be a courtesy extended to all members in the House.

Mr REITH—It is the old tactic, Mr Speaker: put up a straw man and say, ‘Oh, he alleged there was a bribe.’ What he alleged was that there was a deal for the passing of money between the Labor Party and the Democrats. Given the fact that the member for Lilley had in the House publicly disclosed and confirmed it—and we know that the Leader of the Opposition knows all about it because he has had them all in to explain themselves—how can it be contested? That was a fact on the record in the House, and it is a shame on you that you should attack the Speaker as a political defence on your own part.

A couple of other things need to be said. First of all, I mentioned the rulings. The fact is that the standing orders are the standing orders and you simply implement those standing orders. There are times and circumstances under the standing orders where it is necessary for you to exercise a discretion, and it is quite clear from reading the standing orders. For example, with respect to the closing of the doors—

Mrs Crosio interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Prospect is warned!

Mr REITH—It is only a small point but it again contradicts what the Leader of the Opposition claimed. With respect to the closing of the doors, that is not a discretion for the Speaker—an exercise to let a few in to suit yourself, which was the snide, unpleasant, totally unsubstantiated accusation. The fact is this is a requirement under the standing orders. This does not require an
exercise of your discretion. It is as simple as this: as the standing orders require, the doors are closed—full stop. Again, sure, it is a small matter in a sense, but it is typical of the Leader of the Opposition to make any claim, regardless of the standing orders and regardless of the facts, because he is fabricating a completely baseless, unjustified motion and arguments in support of it.

In respect of the four minutes and the one minute, I thought there was intervening debate. I am now not quite sure whether there was or there was not, quite frankly. But I know this: we had had at least two, if not three, divisions beforehand. I do know that the government won the election last time around, I do know that we do have the numbers on this side of the House and I do know that some members of the House were off to the Main Committee, off to their other job, if you like. If they had thought there was going to be another division, they would have been entitled to think and entitled to presume, as I think the Leader of the Opposition half admitted, that there would be a four-minute break. Well, there was a one-minute break and I saw some of them standing outside. Quite frankly, so what! It is hardly the biggest deal I have ever heard of. So what! (Time expired)

Mr McMULLAN (Fraser—Manager of Opposition Business) (11.31 a.m.)—This is a crisis that arises because of a failure of leadership of the Prime Minister. It is his responsibility to point you into line, Mr Speaker. He had the opportunity yesterday to not put you in this position because he could have and should have required the Minister for Employment Services to come in here and withdraw, and he did not. He spoke to him after question time, but it is clear he did not require him to come in and withdraw, as he should have done. It is ultimately the responsibility of the Prime Minister to ensure that these people who misbehave in such a childish, irresponsible, rude and continually arrogant manner get pulled into line, not earmarked for promotion. It is a failure of leadership.

There is an issue more serious—that is, the issue we raise with you, Mr Speaker, about your behaviour today and why we have a lack of confidence in it, accepting, as we do, that you have been put in an extremely difficult position by the irresponsibility of the Minister for Employment Services and the incompetence of the Leader of the House. We do understand you were put in a difficult position, but this is not a minor matter. When we have a division in this House, the Constitution of Australia says how it should be determined, and it has not been applied. Section 40 of the Constitution says:

Questions arising in the House of Representatives shall be determined by a majority of votes other than that of the Speaker. The Speaker shall not vote unless the numbers are equal, and then he shall have a casting vote.

That does not say, ‘Unless he feels like calling a second division.’ It does not say, ‘It’s a bit embarrassing, let’s have another vote.’ So what cover did you develop, on the best advice you had but on advice which was not good enough? That you would go for section 208 and say that there was an error or confusion. The Leader of the Opposition has clearly destroyed the potential argument that there was an error. There was nothing which occurred that was not known before the vote was declared. There was nothing that was known that did not establish clearly in advance that the vote was being conducted in a manner which you considered was proper and valid and in conformity with your decisions.

Had the rules been more precisely applied, the vote would have been carried, because the member for Mitchell and the member for Makin would not have been entitled to vote since they came in after the doors should have been closed. Okay, that happened. But there is another reason why the vote should have been carried—that is, if the standing orders were being consistently applied. One member on our side yesterday was suspended for 24 hours. The nature of her apology to you, Mr Speaker, was not sufficiently grovelling, so you suspended her for 24 hours. What she said and in light of what you now know was the provocation that led her to do it suggest that hers was a much lesser offence than that of the Minister for Employment Services—for which you gave him
the opportunity to repeat his remarks. You did not require him to withdraw them. You let him say, ‘No, I repeat them, I reiterate them, and then I want to move a motion to say that the person who is aggrieved should explain themselves.’ Not the aggressor, but the victim! He gets the chance to say, ‘The person against whom I made this slur should explain the basis of the slur but I shouldn’t have to withdraw it.’ So, Mr Speaker, if you had applied the standing orders consistently, the member for Fowler would have been here voting, the motion would have been carried and then we would have had a very interesting situation. You would not have had to worry about your casting vote. It would have been carried.

It is clear that there is no argument to support your position or the Leader of the House would have used it. But he did not use one. He thought he might get away with attacking the member for Dickson again. She must have had the temerity to win a seat they thought they were going to win. What a shocking thing! And this offence has been something for which she has served a penalty of two years of sustained attack from the Minister for Employment Services without justification or basis in fact. The things which he said yesterday were not only scurrilous and unjustified, they were untrue. They seem to be pretty good grounds for requiring them to be withdrawn. Let me refer you, Mr Speaker, to how you defended him against statements that were made about him. Yesterday I said:

No wonder David Oldfield left—you were not good enough for him!

It is true that I said that. I still believe it to be true, and it was not generic. Mr Speaker, you said that you wanted to apply high standards: you asked me to withdraw the remark and I did. I said:

Can I just seek clarification. I will withdraw—without qualification—

but are you seriously saying I have to withdraw something that I said to him—
the Minister for Employment Services—when he does not have to withdraw alleging that somebody took money?

How can that be a fair application of the standing orders? When we say, ‘He is lower than David Oldfield’—which is true—’and David Oldfield left,’ you say it is unparliamentary, but it is much less of an accusation than that which he made about the member for Dickson. I, unlike him, have the defence of truth. My statement is accurate; his is false. He preceded his statement by another false statement when he said that she ‘issued a press release. She did not do live media’. Even the presumption on which it was based was false, and then he went on to make false, unreasonable assertions which the standing orders say absolutely have to be withdrawn.

We understand that you initially misinterpreted his remarks and, critical as we are of what has happened subsequently, we did not criticise you for that. In fact, we bent over backwards to give you time to require him to withdraw. We said we wanted it done yesterday, but at the end of the sitting we accepted, reluctantly, your advice to us that he would come in this morning. We accepted that that put you in extremely difficult circumstances because of the character, personality and consistent pattern of behaviour of this minister—the only minister who has had to be thrown out of this place for his behaviour. That probably rescued him from something more serious if you had not which, in hindsight, we may regret, but you did the right thing then, Mr Speaker. But we bent over backwards to say, ‘Yes, let him come in this morning,’ even though that meant the member for Dickson was subjected to that unjustifiable insult for the whole of yesterday and it was reported last night. And while you were being advised that the minister was not available to withdraw it, he was out repeating it. But he said, ‘I am not available. I am leaving. I am interstate.’ He was out doing television interviews repeating the assertion. But even then we gave you time. Did you require a withdrawal? No, you gave him licence to reiterate.

It is an untenable position that you were put in but the standing orders say how you should resolve it. You should resolve it by requiring this person to withdraw. It needed to be withdrawn. Everybody in Australia knew it needed to be withdrawn, including
the Minister for Employment Services. He simply chose to defy you and you chose to accept that defiance. You should not have done so and it has led to this series of events, culminating in that motion so incompetently handled by the government but which led to the division which you sought to have recounted, without a skerrick of justification, merely because it was extremely difficult and embarrassing. That is not, Mr Speaker, an acceptable standard for us and we cannot accept it.

It would not be, in my view, an appropriate course, but we are being left with little other than for us to come in here and say that the scandal which took place with the Liberal Party’s behaviour during the Lindsay by-election was the responsibility of the Prime Minister. We have never said that, even though he took the state campaign director who was responsible at the time and promoted him into his office. We have never said that it was the Prime Minister’s fault. We believe it was a rogue element in his party doing the wrong thing. But perhaps it was not, given that he promoted the person who was running the campaign at the time and brought him into his office. But we have never made that allegation. We have never made the allegation about the very worrying claims raised by the Chief Government Whip last night about behaviour in the Penrith City Council, which is part of a chain of events directly linked to the office of the local member, the member for Lindsay. We have never even said that the member for Lindsay knew about that, even though everybody involved worked in their office. We have never said that she knew about it. We have never held her responsible. We have certainly never said it was the Prime Minister’s fault.

Those allegations would be equally as valid as the allegation the Minister for Employment Services sought to make and we have never made them and we will not unless we are forced to. But, can I make it very clear, there is a lot more if you actually want to go down this road. But we do not wish to do that and we do not wish your behaviour, Mr Speaker, to force us to do so. But let us make it clear: we will not sit idly by while this minister continually, rudely, arrogantly and untruthfully attacks one of our colleagues. It will not happen. Each time he comes in and, outside his portfolio, attacks our colleague, abuses our colleague and tells lies about our colleague we will not stand idly by. We will stand and fight. And if you do not stand up for the standing orders in that process, we will be forced to say that the failure which he started has flowed on to you. That is where we are today, the failure which this person started by his pattern of irresponsible, rude, arrogant, untruthful behaviour—

Ms Kernot—Serial.

Mr McMULLAN—The pattern that this serial offender started has flowed on and you have been caught up in it. That is not all your fault, but you had the capacity to resolve it and you did not. That is what has led to this motion. In our view you should have resolved it yesterday, and you did not. You should have resolved it this morning, and you did not. That then led into a debate, consequent upon that failure, and we got into a very serious situation where a vote of no confidence in you was put and the government could not deliver a majority in support of you, Mr Speaker. They could not deliver a majority and you had to spend minutes pretending that you did not know what everybody here knew, what the result of the division was. In my view, it is not consistent with standing order 203—which requires you to declare the vote—your sitting there pretending. I see no evil, I hear no evil, so I can speak no evil is not an acceptable position for the Speaker.

You had to accept that that vote had been counted and led to a result which was uncomfortable and difficult and caused by the incompetence of the Leader of the House, to which you should be becoming accustomed. But it is not an acceptable position to fail to declare that vote and then, when the vote goes in a manner which is unacceptable, to seek to have it recommitted with no provision in the standing orders which justifies that provision. It is a very serious matter. It goes to the heart of how this parliament works. The Leader of the House said, ‘It should not matter because we won the elec-
tion.’ Maybe we will just call the parliament off and he could rule for three years or perhaps he could come in here with rottweilers and a few people in masks. But we are not going to have the balaclavas and rottweilers in here, Mr Speaker. We are going to stand up for the standing orders and we are going to stand up for our colleague and for the requirement that the standing orders be fairly, impartially and consistently enforced. When that is done by you, you will have our support and when it is not, you will have our censure.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Minister for Employment Services) (11.46 a.m.)—Mr Speaker—

Mr Crean—Withdraw!

Opposition members—Withdraw!

Mr SPEAKER—The Minister for Employment Services will resume his seat. The Minister for Employment Services.

Mr ABBOTT—Thank you, Mr Speaker. Let me say at the outset of my contribution to this debate that, in my opinion, you have been the fairest Speaker that this parliament has seen, at least in the decade that I have been associated with it.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—I would remind members on my left that some of them have already been subject to warning. In fact, if the chair is to exercise the authority expected of it, they will be required to leave the chamber. The minister has the call.

Mr ABBOTT—Mr Speaker, the fact that members on this side of the House are from time to time accustomed to grumble about one or two of your rulings is a sign of just how fair you are. In declining to exercise the casting vote to which you are undeniably entitled, you were showing yet again the high sparks of honour which have constantly motivated your occupation of the chair. I have to say that I feel deeply for you, having to deal at this point in time with a feral opposition which is frightened of the truth—a feral opposition which is frightened of the truth.

Mr SPEAKER—The minister will resume his seat.

Mr Horne—Mr Speaker, I find the comment ‘feral opposition’ offensive and I ask the minister to withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Paterson will resume his seat. The member for Paterson has heard, I am sorry to say, a number of offensive remarks this morning, and I am allowing the member to continue because I do not consider that the comment he used was unparliamentary.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—If I were to be consistent—

Ms Gillard—Feral minister!

Honourable members—Feral minister!

Mr SPEAKER—I warn the member for Lalor! If necessary, I will issue a general warning if that is the only way that the Minister for Employment Services will get an entitlement to be heard. I warn the member for Lalor.

Mr ABBOTT—Thank you, Mr Speaker. What happened today in the House which sparked the behaviour of the opposition and which sparked the opposition’s motion is that I came in here and clarified a comment yesterday which had obviously been misunderstood, perhaps wilfully misunderstood, by members opposite. Having clarified my comments yesterday, I then sought to give the member for Dickson an opportunity to fully explain her role in the 1996 preference selling deal. The most important point which has emerged from all the proceedings in this House today is that the member for Dickson has been gagged by her own side. The member for Dickson has been gagged by her own side because her own side do not trust the member for Dickson to explain exactly what happened in the course of that 1996 preference selling deal. The most important point which has emerged from all the proceedings in this House today is that the member for Dickson has been gagged by her own side. The member for Dickson has been gagged by her own side because her own side do not trust the member for Dickson to explain exactly what happened in the course of that 1996 preference selling deal. What happened yesterday?

Mr Gibbons—Mr Speaker, this is a motion of no confidence in the Speaker. It has nothing to do with the member for Dickson. I would ask you to get the minister to keep his comments towards that objective.

Mr SPEAKER—I thank the member for Bendigo. In fact, the whole exercise in which the House is engaged this morning has a great deal to do with events that occurred
yesterday. I was endeavouring to listen closely to the minister’s remarks.

Mr ABBOTT—What I said yesterday was: ‘How can you keep the so-and-sos honest when you are taking their money?’ That is what I said yesterday. It was a reference to the fact that the Democrats slogan in 1996 was: keep the so-and-sos honest. At that time the member for Dickson was the leader of the Democrat party. There was a deal between the Australian Democrats and the Australian Labor Party. We know that there was a deal. We know that there was a deal because the member for Lilley has told us in this House.

Mr Leo McLeay—No doubt, Mr Speaker, the lack of confidence motion in you has been caused by this minister, but he cannot canvass that. What he should actually be doing is talking about why we should not censure you, rather than why we should be censuring him.

Mr SPEAKER—The Chief Opposition Whip will resume his seat. For reasons that should be obvious to everyone in the House, with more intent I suspect than anyone else in the chamber, I am listening closely to what the minister has to say. He has not at this stage said anything that is unparliamentary, and for that reason I have allowed him to continue. I, more than anyone else in this chamber, have a vested interest in the minister’s comments.

Mr ABBOTT—The member for Dickson was the leader of the Democrats at the time. There was a deal, the member for Lilley told us. There was assistance provided, because the Leader of the Opposition has told us that there was assistance provided.

Mr Leo McLeay—Mr Speaker, my point of order is that this is a motion of lack of confidence in you. What the government should be doing is saying why the House should have confidence in you. It is your responsibility particularly—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Denison will resume his seat.

Mr Kerr—I am making a point of order.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Denison will resume his seat.

Mr O’Keefe—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: already once this morning the government have failed to provide the numbers to support you and now, in this motion, they are not even prepared to talk to the issue of defending you. It is not relevant.
Mr SPEAKER—By any measure, the comments made by the minister refer to an unfortunate incident yesterday which has provoked—

Mr Leo McLeay—It was more than unfortunate!

Mr SPEAKER—The Chief Opposition Whip is warned. By any measure, the minister is referring to an unfortunate set of events yesterday which has culminated in the actions this morning. I could hardly, therefore, rule him out of order.

Mr Quick—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I would ask you to ask the minister to withdraw that comment about filth and drivel coming from this side. I find it very offensive.

Mr SPEAKER—I am the first to agree with the member for Franklin that it was an undesirable comment, and under my normal requirements I would require him to at least refrain from that sort of statement. However, I have sat here in the chair this morning and for a matter of 2½ hours now have heard a number of most undesirable remarks levelled at the minister.

Mr Leo McLeay—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the member has asked for a withdrawal. Are you going to ask the minister to withdraw or not?

Mr SPEAKER—I have indicated that I am not requiring the minister to withdraw because, if I were to be consistent in my application of the principles, we would have spent a great deal of time making withdrawals this morning, and I am simply seeking to facilitate the debate.

Mr Price—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I rise under standing orders 75 and 76. They are that the minister should not be able to impugn the reputation of the honourable member for Dickson or make remarks that the honourable member for Dickson found offensive yesterday and, under the guise of this motion, reiterate them today. I ask you to ask him to withdraw and enforce those standing orders.

Mr SPEAKER—If the minister were to say anything couched in yesterday’s remarks that reinforced the slur he had made on the member for Dickson’s reputation, I would be the first to require him—

Mr Crean—Why don’t you get him to withdraw it?

Ms Kernot—I simply asked him for a withdrawal.

Mr SPEAKER—The statement I have just made—as I imagine the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is aware because he will have conferred with the Manager of Opposition Business and the Leader of the Opposition—is consistent with my entire remark to all people who were in my office yesterday.

Mr Crean—Mr Speaker, my point of order goes to this debate. If in fact you have now admitted what he said yesterday was a slur, why don’t you require him to withdraw it as the standing orders require?

Mr SPEAKER—as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is well aware, if in fact the chair were to require all slurs made in this place to be withdrawn, sadly we would spend little time in debate. I have dealt as fairly as I can with this issue, and I want to use the remaining time to facilitate the minister, for obvious reasons.

Mr Crean—Mr Speaker, my further point of order is that withdrawal can come about through two courses: (1) through your requirement and (2) as a result of a request from the member defamed asking, which is exactly what the member for Dickson did yesterday. On every other occasion when a member has asked for statements slurring them to be withdrawn, you have required it of them. You have required it of us on every occasion. You were given the opportunity to reflect on this over 24 hours. Clearly that reflection has come to the conclusion it was a slur. She asked for it to be withdrawn, and it should be, on her request.

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

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, one of the marvellous marks of your speakership is that members opposite have not been able to bully you the way the Leader of the Opposition’s staff try to bully frontbenchers opposite. The Leader of the Opposition’s staff have got more ticker than the Leader of the Opposition. That is the problem: the staff
have more ticker than the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Kerr—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. I am entitled to have a point of order on relevance and not to be ignored. That is absolutely disgraceful behaviour.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, the one basic point that has emerged from all the proceedings this morning is that members opposite are in fear of their political lives. They are absolutely terrified that they will be consumed by the fire that is burning the Beattie government in Queensland. And, Mr Speaker, you are a marvellous Speaker and you fully deserve the confidence of this House.

Mr Speaker—The question is a motion of no confidence in the Speaker. I recognise the member for Dickson.

Ms Kernot (Dickson) (12.01 p.m.)—Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Slipper—Explain.

Mr Speaker—The member for Fisher is warned!

Ms Kernot—You ought to talk. Mr Speaker, I want to—

Mr Wilkie interjecting—

Mr Speaker—So is the member for Swan!

Ms Kernot—I am very happy to have the opportunity to speak, although I do not consider myself accountable to the Minister for Employment Services, the member for Fisher or anybody else sitting on that side of the chamber. In fact, I abhor the hypocrisy and dishonesty of the Minister for Employment Services and the way he calls himself a practising Christian.

Government members interjecting—

Ms Kernot—Mr Speaker, I make this point because you told me yesterday that the minister could not be asked to withdraw because he was in transit. In fact, he went straight from this House, scuttled out of this House, knowing that he had said something specific and not generic, and he repeated accusations in a doorstop of which I have a transcript. Amongst other things he said: ‘Where did the money go? Did someone pocket the money? Certainly Wayne Swan has admitted that the money was paid over.’ And this is where the connection takes place, Mr Speaker. He said: ‘What happened to it? Cheryl Kernot was the leader of the Democrats at the time.’ Make that connection, Mr Speaker. But the point—the reason that I mention my abhorrence of his hypocrisy—is that he went from that doorstop to Paul Lynneham’s funeral service. The Comcar drivers told me that he arrived at 4.30. Obviously, he thought it was more important to get out there and continue to defame me than to go to the funeral service. But I want to point out that I think I have a perfectly valid right to point to the hypocrisy of a man who willingly joins in the following words. This is the man who considers himself a specialist on Catholic doctrine. He goes into Paul Lynneham’s funeral and joins in the hymn:

Once to every man and nation
comes the moment to decide,
in the strife of truth with falsehood,
for the good or evil side …

Ms Kernot—It is perfectly relevant.

Mr Speaker—The member for Dickson will resume her seat. The member for Dickson has the call. The member for Dickson was not addressing the question that is before the House.

Mr Speaker—The member for Dickson will resume his seat. I merely wanted to indicate to the member for Aston that my intervention was the result of a genuine belief—in fact an observation—that there was someone on their feet.

Ms Kernot—Mr Speaker, we all remember what the Minister for Employment Services said about Greg Wilton’s funeral.
We all remember what he said in here and we all remember what he did less than two days after. I think the point that the Leader of the Opposition and the Manager of Opposition Business have made about this minister being a serial offender is a point well made. And it is where this issue began—and the comments that this minister made and which I asked to be withdrawn and which you failed to act on.

Mr Crean—Which he now admits is a slur.

Ms KERNOT—Yes, and which you now admit was a slur on my name. Mr Speaker, I regret that we have to have this debate today—but it was in your hands yesterday. You allowed a minister to say what he said with intent—with intent to smear. I am not accountable to him, but I am very happy to talk about the circumstances of the preference negotiations.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Tell us about the money.

Mr SPEAKER—Minister for Aged Care!

Ms KERNOT—The minister’s remarks about my role as Leader of the Australian Democrats obviously have nothing to do with his portfolio, but that has never stopped him before. I was the leader of the Democrats. I am grateful for the opportunity that afforded me to contribute to public debate in this country. And I resigned—unlike others, I resigned from parliament before recontesting a seat for the Australian Labor Party—and despite your best efforts to defeat me. As the leader of the Democrats I was travelling around the nation quite extensively but I did take part in some telephone conference hook-ups. I am aware that at the national executive a decision was made to direct preferences to like-minded candidates first and then...

Government members interjecting—

Ms KERNOT—No, you are wrong—and then in a split ticket to both the Liberal Party and the Labor Party. That was in the Senate. After that, conversations were held with members of the preference committees of both the Liberal Party in every state and the Labor Party in every state. The Liberal Party was not excluded from these conversations.

As a result of these conversations, I find myself in the ironic position of having been part of the decision which recommended preferences against the Leader of the Opposition, the then member for Brand. Then the Democrats announced that preferences were directed to X number of Liberal seats and a similar number of Labor seats.

It is as simple as that, Mr Speaker. I was not involved in the campaign for Lilley or in the state discussions about those allocations. I know nothing about any donations, and I join Gary Gray, Robert Ray and Meg Lees who speak with authority on this matter. I do know that Senator Bob Woods did approach Senator Vicki Bourne with all sorts of offers; I do know that. But I think the minister is being deliberately misleading in attempting to single me out as a member of a party. I was the leader. But, to use his argument, John Howard should then be responsible for the actions of former Senator Bob Woods in negotiating preferences and how-to-vote-card printing with the Shooters Party candidate in the by-election in Lindsay.

Mr Speaker, I categorically reject any association with this decision or with any money which may have changed hands. That is why I was extremely disappointed in you yesterday when you failed to require the minister to withdraw that statement. It was not a generic statement; it was a specific statement. It was said with intent to smear, as we know have been the actions of this minister ever since the day I joined the Labor Party and he began peddling his poison about me to the press—some evidence of which I have.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The member for Dickson said I poisoned people against her and I was doing this consistently, and she said she had evidence. Produce the evidence.

Mr SPEAKER—The minister will resume his seat. That is no valid point of order.

Ms KERNOT—Anybody listening and watching this debate would be asking why we are carrying on like this. I will tell you why, Mr Speaker: because it is about the style of John Howard’s government and the abuse of this parliament in lying and defam-
ing people almost on a daily basis. We on this side have had enough of it. We have particularly had enough of it from this Minister for Employment Services. Some old cynics would say that ‘twas ever thus.

There is a very big difference between the argy-bargy of daily politics and the use of this chamber to daily smear and slur the character and reputation of members on this side. It is your duty to uphold the rights of people on this side as much as you do of your government by virtue of the fact that they are ministers. I take great exception to people leering and jeering from the other side—this from a man who vilifies the unemployed, calls them ‘job snobs’ and says ‘You can’t trust politicians.’ I take exception to a person leering and jeering who presides over a crisis in aged care. I take exception to a minister involved in telecard rorting. I take exception to the many ministers who have failed the Prime Minister’s own code of conduct and continue to occupy the front bench on the government side. That is what it is all about. That is why we are passionate about it.

Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, your failure to defend my rights to have that slur against me withdrawn yesterday when I asked for that to be done—when the minister has misled you about his inability to come in here yesterday and do it by telling you that he was in transit—causes us to reflect on the way you have exercised your authority in that chair. I did come to see you—I am very happy to put that on the public record—and I am still dissatisfied with the result of the outcome because, Mr Speaker, this is the result: it has been repeated all around this country because you did not give me the protection that I asked of you. I object to that too, Mr Speaker—and I told you so.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, we do need to look at the way you have conducted yourself in this particular aspect of the debate. We do need new ‘fair to both sides’ standing orders which are relevant and where truth matters—where truth and relevance matter. That is why our passions are inflamed. That is why I talk about Paul Lyneham’s funeral. That is why I talk about the man or nation that chooses the darkness or the light. The Minister for Employment Services always chooses the darkness.

Mr SPEAKER—The question is that the House has no confidence in the Speaker. The Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation is seeking the call.

Mr Crean—TA rorter!

Mr McGauran—You are such a hypocrite. You paid back more than I did, Simon.

Mr Crean—At least I was there. You weren’t there.

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation have just illustrated the very remarks between each other that each other would want withdrawn and the difficulty the chair has had in intervening this morning.

Mr McGauran (Gippsland—Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation) (12.16 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, at the outset of speaking to this no-confidence motion, the first thing to say is that nobody believes you are anything other than nonpartisan, able, fair, balanced and decent in your behaviour in the chair and out of it.

Mr Crean interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—Mr McGAURAN

Mr McGauran—This is one of those occasions where political emotions on both sides run high, and the simple fact is that it is a grave mistake to attempt to shift the blame to the umpire. There is something of a John Kerr syndrome at work here in that the Labor Party will dump onto the person who refers it to the proper voting procedures or who processes the ultimate decision. So you are the subject of a no-confidence motion simply because you put the vote to the parliament. Where is the gravity of that error of judgment as alleged by the opposition? You simply left it to the parliamentarians to resolve the issue. I think it is odious of the opposition to bring this matter before you by way of a no-confidence motion.

It is interesting that the Labor Party, having run two years of shock tactics in the House—of organised disruption, calculated
noise and interference, interjections and points of order, so that they have overturned decades of established reasonable behaviour and restraint by parties on both sides of the House—now try to take the moral high ground. It simply does not work. It especially does not work to involve you in it. You have been a reformist Speaker of the parliament. You have faced daily provocation, at times from our side, and you have dealt with people on our side. I have been the subject of your warnings. Members on our side have been evicted from the House. We respect you for it, but the opposition do not, because they constantly test the boundaries of your authority. And when, Mr Speaker, you refer the final arbitration of this morning’s prolonged and at times complicated exchange, they cry foul. They cry foul because the parliament resolved the issue as it ought to properly.

Let us look at this matter sequentially. It started yesterday, when there was a dispute about the interpretation of the words used by the Minister for Employment Services. The fundamental issue is that you—if I understand you correctly—came to the conclusion that the minister was referring to the Democrats generically, or as a party. As you explained yesterday, you had a different interpretation from that put on the minister’s words by the member for Dickson, the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition at large. The dispute then arose about how to interpret those words and to what extent you would require withdrawal, but the minister was not in the House. You then, with typical fairness, balance and goodwill—for which you are rightly known—undertook to examine the record, which brings us to today.

The minister was spoken to. The minister gave an explanation, and points of order, in rapid fashion, followed. To try to resolve the matter, you then sought confirmation that the minister had not meant to reflect personally on the member for Dickson and that he withdrew any reflection on the shadow minister. As I understood the minister, he said that he was referring to the Democrats. This was not good enough for the opposition, because they wanted to stage-manage an attack on the Minister for Employment Services and, in doing so, were prepared to sacrifice the member for Dickson. They care not about her own personal position, because it was clarified this morning. Instead, they were prepared to trample on her standing, to confuse the issue and to muddy the waters, all for the purposes of attacking the Minister for Employment Services. You, also, were to be treated in the same fashion as the member for Dickson: as cannon fodder for their political opportunism and their political objectives.

The minister’s explanation and your acquiescing in it this morning should have been good enough for the opposition. But it was never going to be good enough, because they had a political agenda. Whatever the cost to the dignity of the parliament, yours has not been infringed or compromised in any way. I cannot say the same about the parliament, but the Speaker rose above it. You properly and faithfully adhered to standing orders. You showed extraordinary cool, calmness and patience under constant provocation for more than one hour. There were dozens of interventions directed your way by way of points of order and questions—and insults, make no mistake, Mr Speaker, and nor have you. But, with good grace, you have decided to ignore or overlook the personal barbs thrown your way. If anyone is to emerge well from the heated debate and conflict this morning, it is you.

Mr Speaker, to continue on the events of today, you have properly fulfilled your duty as a Speaker, which is to determine whether words need to be withdrawn. You did so; you took the minister’s word, as you do for all members. You were not affording the Minister for Employment Services any special treatment or favouritism—you dealt with him in the same way as you do all other members—but you had secured his withdrawal anyway. This will still not be acknowledged by the opposition—that the Speaker obtained the minister’s withdrawal and clarification in any event. So all the nonsense and attacks that have followed, culminating in this phoney no-confidence motion, were totally unnecessary.

In the divisions that followed the vote was tied. You had the right to rely on a casting
vote on the motion of dissent against you. Again showing the highest personal and professional standards, you did not give a vote in your own cause. It would have been the easiest thing for you to simply vote to strike down the malicious and contrived motion of dissent moved by the opposition. You did not do so. Instead you relied on your own judgment, in that you believed your ruling was correct, and indeed it was a correct ruling originally.

Speakers must make such decisions. It is not for oppositions or governments to complain if a decision that is fairly and properly reached by the Speaker goes against them. And that is what it is—the Labor Party will never accept the umpire’s decision. The simple fact is that you are now the target of the opposition because they seek to attack the Minister for Employment Services and the government at large. Never forget, all of this could have been curtailed if the opposition had agreed to the minister’s suspension of standing orders to allow the member for Dickson to state her case. It is as simple as that—this is a debating forum. But they did not want to let her.

I am sure the member for Dickson—not that I dare speak for her—like most members of this parliament, would have welcomed that opportunity. She has been boiling with frustration, understandably, and wanted her opportunity at the dispatch box to put her case and set the record straight as she sees it. Yet she was prevented from doing so from 9.30 this morning until midday—for 2½ hours the member for Dickson had to cool her heels because of the Labor Party. They ruthlessly exploited the member for Dickson’s position so they could attack the Minister for Employment Services.

Mr Melham interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Banks is warned.

Mr McGAUrán—In the end, Mr Speaker, you had to resolve this matter, after what you may well have considered a misjudgment or error in not allowing the four-minute division bells to ring, by calling for a fresh division. That is simply commonsense. Where there was—if there was—a mistake made in the length of time the division bells were rung which excluded a large number of members from participating in the division, as is their rightful responsibility, you called for another division. Why would the Labor Party object to a democratic vote in the House of Representatives?

Your action was courageous, Mr Speaker. The easiest thing for you to have done would have been to vote with the noes on the motion of dissent against your ruling. The simple fact is that you upheld the best traditions of that chair in taking the decision you did, which was to put it back to the members of this House. There is no escaping our responsibility to decide these matters. As the Speaker has said on a number of occasions, along with his predecessors, the conduct and behaviour of this House is in the hands of the members themselves. So it was a brave decision which, to any fair or balanced member of the House, has only enhanced your standing as Speaker of the parliament.

Who really in this chamber believes in this no-confidence motion? The opposition do not believe in it. We saw a number of your predecessors behave in an undisguised partisan way and trample on individual rights. There are very few in recent memory who have brought the same sense of fair play and nonpartisanship to the chair in the way you have—but, I hasten to say, I do not name anyone in particular. But we all know that not all Speakers have thrown aside their political bias. There are reputed to have been Speakers in the past with close relationships to the leaders of their party, to the point where some might have accused them of doing their party’s bidding. But I do not want to be deflected from the issue at hand, which is a motion of no confidence in you.

Mr Leo McLeay interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Chief Opposition Whip is already under a warning.

Mr McGAUrán—Every time a minister or one of our backbenchers rises to his or her feet there are family insults coming from that side. There are the most personalised attacks every day. We do not complain; we accept it as part of the culture and part of the moral corruption of the Labor Party. Then they
think they can, in an institutional sense, impose their warped values on the parliament. We will not tolerate that. It is one thing for the Labor Party to engage in your personalised fantasies but it is another thing to tear down the parliament’s traditions by way of a completely unjustified, completely unnecessary motion of no confidence in the Speaker.

Mr Speaker, you have acted in the rightful way all through this. Your track record in your two years in the chair is one that you should be proud of—not that you seek any acclaim or any congratulations—because you have brought a degree of balance and fairness to the conduct of this House that most, if not all, of your predecessors would envy. It is a sad occasion that the Labor Party, for political purposes, seeks to draw you into what is a parliamentary debate, fierce as it may be. It is unjustified, it is uncalled-for and it has potential ramifications for the parliament as a whole, whoever may occupy the government benches or the Speaker’s chair. Mr Speaker, the government and—in their hearts, if not in their consciences—the entire opposition reject this motion of no confidence.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. During the address just concluded, the Chief Government Whip made substantial reflections on the chair, and I ask that he withdraw. He was not a participant in the debate.

Mr Leo McLeay—Mr Speaker, I most happily withdraw any imputation that I made against the chair or any other member in this House—and it is a pity the minister does not too.

Mr Martin Ferguson—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the government obviously think so much of you and your position they have had you defended today by two rorters and a spiv. You demand more respect than that, Mr Speaker. Where is the Prime Minister, Mr Speaker? Why isn’t he here defending you, pulling that bullyboy into line?

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Batman knows that, as much tolerance as I have exercised in the chair, the remarks he made would not be acceptable by any Speaker at any time.

Mr Martin Ferguson—Mr Speaker, out of absolute respect for you and your position, I unconditionally withdraw those remarks. I only wish others would apply the same respect to you.

Question put:
That the motion (Mr Beazley’s) be agreed to.
The House divided. [12.36 p.m.]
(Mr Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

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<th>Ayes</th>
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Question so resolved in the negative.

AYES


NOES


albany, a.n. breer, i.j. byrne, a.m. cox, d.a. crosio, j.a. edwards, g.j. emerson, c.a. fitzgibbon, j.a. gibbons, s.w. griffin, a.p. hatton, m.j. horne, r. kernot, c. latham, m.w. lee, m.i. macklin, j.l. mcfarlane, j.s. mcguirk, r.f. morris, a.a. murphy, j.p. plibersek, t. quick, h.v. roxon, n.l. sercombe, r.c.g. smith, s.f. swan, w.m. thomson, k.j. zahra, c.j. downer, a.j.g.
Mr Pyne—I withdraw the statement, Mr Speaker.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr SWAN (Lilley) (12.42 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr SWAN—Yes.

Mr SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr SWAN—A report in today’s Courier-Mail suggests that, when I was the Queensland ALP campaign director for the 1989 Merthyr by-election campaign, I agreed to pay for the printing costs of the how-to-vote cards of an independent candidate to secure a preference deal which favoured the ALP candidate in that election. I deny absolutely that I offered any form of inducement in return for preferences. The facts, as I recall, are these: I recall a meeting with the independent gay law reform candidate, Ms Wilde, to discuss the then state Labor opposition’s attitude to gay law reform. In 1989 there was no prospect of the gay law reform candidate directing preferences to the conservatives.

I have asked the Queensland branch of the Australian Labor Party to conduct an urgent search of its records of that by-election campaign to ascertain whether or not any printing costs were paid. I state for the record that too long,’ was designed to make a commentary on her paranoia about the use of the microphones. But I withdraw that statement.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will withdraw that statement without qualification and resume his seat.

Mr Pyne—I withdraw the statement, Mr Speaker.

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Mr SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will withdraw that statement without qualification and resume his seat.

Mr Pyne—I withdraw the statement, Mr Speaker.
I have acted with complete propriety in this matter. I believe that the timing of this unsubstantiated allegation—more than 10 years after the by-election took place—and other allegations from a range of political sources in recent days are malicious and can only be designed to smear my name.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Lilley has indicated where he has been misrepresented and should resume his seat.

PIG INDUSTRY BILL 2000

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (12.45 p.m.)—I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Pig Industry Bill 2000 provides for the Australian Pork Corporation (APC), and the Pig Research and Development Corporation (PRDC) to be wound up and for an industry owned company to undertake the industry marketing and promotion, and R&D functions.

In addition, the industry company will be responsible for the strategic planning and industry policy development functions previously the responsibility of the Pork Council of Australia, the industry’s grower representative body.

These new arrangements will allow a more coordinated and commercial approach to the development of industry policy and delivery of services. Importantly, it will ensure for the first time that industry levy payers have direct influence and involvement in their industry body ensuring their levies are applied to best effect.

The progressive opening of the domestic market to pork imports in recent years has put pressure on the industry to become more internationally competitive and to develop niche export markets. The industry now sees that if it is to succeed in the face of stiff international competition its industry structure must be as competitive as its producers to enable it to meet evolving market challenges.

This restructure proposal is an industry initiative and comes to the government following extensive consultation and with an unprecedented high level of industry support.

The industry has already established and incorporated its new industry services company; a company limited by guarantee and operating under Corporations Law. The company is known as Australian Pork Limited (APL).

The new structure

This Pork Industry Bill 2000 enables the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to declare APL as the industry services body. The minister may enter into a contract with the industry services body detailing the arrangements under which it will manage and administer industry levies collected by the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth will continue to match R&D funds provided by the pork industry up to 0.5 per cent of the gross value of production, as applies to other rural industries. In 1999-2000 the Commonwealth’s matching contribution for pork industry R&D was $3.6 million.

The integration of the policy development and strategic planning functions with the marketing and R&D services will provide the opportunity for full exploitation of synergies between these activities.

Under the arrangements, all levy payers will be eligible to become registered members of APL, and therefore will be able to have a direct input into the management and application of their statutory levies. Registered levy payers will be able to exert their influence through voting rights, appointment of board members, and input to the company’s policy development and planning activities.

Accountability

The bill provides for the transfer of assets and liabilities of the two statutory corporations to the industry owned company. The detail of those arrangements will be included in the contract which will impose certain obligations and accountability requirements on the industry services body. In addition, details of the new industry services body’s accountability arrangements to its members
and to the Commonwealth will be outlined in its company constitution.

While the model allows the industry to have a greater say in the management of its affairs, there will also be increased responsibilities. The distancing of government’s direct involvement means the industry accepts responsibility for its activities and appreciates there is no automatic recourse to government assistance when the going gets tough. In short, more than ever before, the industry will be responsible for planning its own future, strategically seeking priority outcomes, and managing for risk.

The package contains a number of accountability arrangements which will be detailed in the company constitution and the contract with the Commonwealth. These are:

- comprehensive planning and reporting requirements with copies of plans and reports made available to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry;
- regular performance reviews to assess the company’s efficiency and effectiveness in meeting planned priorities;
- for the chair of the industry company to meet with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry or his nominated delegate on a regular basis to discuss industry issues and government’s priorities for R&D; and
- a requirement for a mix of producer and specialist skills based directors on the board of the company including a specialist in corporate governance.

If the company changes its constitution in a way considered unacceptable by government, becomes insolvent or fails to comply with the legislation or contract, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has the ability to temporarily suspend or terminate the payment of statutory levies to the company or rescind his declaration of APL being the industry services body.

**Transition and establishment**

The net assets to be transferred to APL are valued at around $8 million and primarily comprise reserves of statutory levies held by the statutory authorities on behalf of levy payers for marketing and R&D programs.

In addition the bill provides for recognition of accrued entitlements of employees of the statutory authorities who are transferring to the industry services body. These entitlements relate to annual and long service leave, maternity leave, sick leave, continuity of service and other employment conditions.

**Anticipated benefits**

There are a number of strengths associated with this new industry structure. These are to:

- provide an appropriate vehicle to promote a through-chain, demand driven, commercial focus for the provision of industry services, which will facilitate the building of strong linkages from producer to consumer;
- improve the industry’s competitiveness against imports;
- underpin the industry’s achievements to date and in the latter stages of implementation of the Commonwealth’s $24 million industry restructure strategy, and specifically to promote international competitiveness and export development;
- remove duplication and ambiguity about responsibilities between the three industry organisations which cause confusion for industry, government and trading partners;
- enable the industry organisations to be more flexible and responsive to the changing operating environment and priorities of members; and
- establish a single unified, professional and balanced board with the opportunity and capability to strategically develop and implement industry service arrangements.

This bill paves the way forward for the pork industry to look to the future with a more commercially driven, internationally focused and flexible approach. It will now have the capability to respond quickly, effectively and efficiently to emerging industry challenges. Ultimately this will mean consumers’ high expectations of quality Australian pork being consistently satisfied.
I commend the industry on how it has responded to recent challenges. Everyone knows that there have been very difficult times for the pork industry over recent years. The turnaround in the industry has been quite spectacular and I hope that that prosperity can continue into the future. I believe that the industry leadership has shown remarkable courage and determination to set the industry’s path for the future in a manner which gives the industry the opportunity to achieve its potential. In particular, I acknowledge the contribution of Ron Pollard, the president of the industry organisation, who has driven this legislation to reach this stage and has secured the overwhelming and virtually unanimous support of the industry for this package of legislation. I pay tribute to the work of the industry in reaching a stage where it is now putting in place for the future a modern and progressive structure to underpin its future.

The industry’s unity in bringing this proposal to government is another example of a maturing industry looking to secure its future in the global market. It provides me with great pleasure to be working with the pork industry in implementing these arrangements, and I am particularly impressed with the extensive levels of consultation both throughout the industry, with all stakeholders and with government.

This bill and the framework that hangs from it creates a turning point for the management of industry affairs, and for the potential for industry growth and development. It will establish a solid foundation for the industry to continue to challenge and secure global opportunities in the pork market. I commend the legislation to the House and I present the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mr Laurie Ferguson) adjourned.

Second Reading

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence) (12.54 p.m.)—On behalf of the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Communications and the Arts Legislation Amendment Bill 2000 will make a series of minor amendments to four pieces of legislation which relate to aspects of the Communications and the Arts portfolio.

The bill makes amendments to the Public Lending Right Act 1985 that provides the legislative framework for the Public Lending Right scheme. The Public Lending Right scheme is a cultural program that makes payments to eligible Australian creators and publishers in recognition that income is lost from the free multiple use of their books in public lending libraries. The PLR scheme also has a broader cultural objective whereby the existence of the scheme encourages the creation of books by Australians and the publication of books in Australia.

A recent evaluation of the Public Lending Right scheme found the scheme to be efficient and effective. However, it recommended strengthening the objectives of the scheme and streamlining and updating some operational procedures of the program. This bill puts these recommendations into effect by incorporating a statement of objectives into the Public Lending Right Act 1985 and making small minor changes to the processes for making final payments following the death of a creator. It also clarifies that a category of prescribed persons defined in the act is intended to apply to those who made an intellectual contribution to the creation of a book.

The amendments to the Telecommunications Act 1997 in this bill will provide immunity to carriers and carriage service providers in situations where they comply with a senior police officer’s request to suspend the supply of a carriage service in an emergency situation or where they are complying with a designated disaster plan. It is important that carriers and carriage service providers are
not subject to litigation as a direct result of compliance in either situation. There is some concern that the absence of immunity might result in them choosing not to cooperate with law enforcement agencies in emergency situations.

This bill, through amendments to the Trade Practices Act 1974, will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, ACCC, both in tackling cases of anti-competitive behaviour by telecommunications companies and in resolving access disputes through the arbitration process.

The amendments to the Trade Practices Act 1974 enable the ACCC to more immediately provide advice to telecommunications companies on remedial action they could take to cease any anti-competitive behaviour. The bill also introduces measures to allow a nominated member to exercise the procedural powers in an access arbitration rather than the whole commission. Procedural powers do not include the ability to make, vary or revoke determinations or give draft determinations. It thereby improves the efficiency of the arbitration process.

There are a number of other minor consequential amendments included in the bill which update various sections which refer to the Telecommunications Act 1997 to refer to the Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999. The bill also updates a reference to the Australian company number to the new Australian business number in the Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999. I commend the bill to the House and present the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mr Martin Ferguson) adjourned.

VETERANS’ AFFAIRS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (APPLICATION OF CRIMINAL CODE) BILL 2000

First Reading

Bill presented by Mr Bruce Scott, and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence) (12.59 p.m.)—I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill advances the government’s program to harmonise offence-creating and related provisions in Commonwealth legislation with the criminal code.

The criminal code will codify the most serious offences against Commonwealth law and establish a cohesive set of general principles of criminal responsibility.

The purpose of this bill is to apply the criminal code to all offence-creating and related provisions in acts falling within the Veterans’ Affairs portfolio, and to make all necessary amendments to these provisions to ensure compliance and consistency with the criminal code’s general principles.

While the majority of offences in legislation in the Veterans’ Affairs portfolio will operate as they always have, without amendment, there are some that will require adjustment.

Amongst the most significant amendments is the express application of strict liability or absolute liability to some offence-creating provisions. Under the criminal code an offence must specifically identify strict liability or absolute liability, as the case may be, or the prosecution will be required to prove fault in relation to each element of the offence. This is necessary to ensure that the strict or absolute liability nature of some provisions is not lost in the transition to the application of the criminal code’s general principles. If relevant offences are not adjusted in this manner many will become more difficult for the prosecution to prove, and therefore reduce the protection which was originally intended by the parliament to be provided by the offence.

The bill will similarly improve the efficient and fair prosecution of offences by clarifying the physical elements of offences and amending inappropriate fault elements.

This harmonisation of offence-creating and related offences in Veterans’ Affairs
legislation with the criminal code is an important step in the government’s program of legislative reform that will achieve greater consistency and cohesion in Commonwealth criminal law.

I present a copy of the explanatory memorandum to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Martin Ferguson) adjourned.

ROADS TO RECOVERY BILL 2000
First Reading
Bill presented by Mr Anderson, and read a first time.

Second Reading
Mr ANDERSON (Gwydir—Deputy Prime Minister) (1.02 p.m.)—I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

I have great pleasure in introducing the Roads to Recovery Bill 2000. This bill appropriates a total of $1.2 billion over five financial years for grants to local government for the purpose of construction, upgrading and maintenance of local roads.

It is fitting that on the eve of Australia celebrating its Centenary of Federation we have placed firmly on the agenda the task of rebuilding the transport network that is so essential to our economic and social well-being. The Roads to Recovery Program will greatly strengthen the grassroots of our road system and in doing so create job opportunities for a great many Australians.

For too long local roads have been Australia’s forgotten roads—the government’s Roads to Recovery Program changes this. This bill demonstrates that the government is serious about the renewal of local roads and recognises they are an essential element of the economic and social infrastructure of Australia’s communities—rural, regional and metropolitan.

The government is aware that councils, particularly those in rural and regional Australia, are faced with significant problems of maintaining local roads from within existing funding. The condition of local roads was a key issue discussed at the Regional Australia Summit. It was also a problem frequently raised with the Prime Minister during his recent fact finding tour of regional Australia earlier this year. It is an issue raised with me, I have to say, in all honesty, on a daily basis. The Moree Rural Roads Congress in March 2000 also highlighted the need for additional funding for road and bridge infrastructure in rural and regional areas—a meeting that I was at and the member for Batman was not, coming as he does from suburban Melbourne.

Mr Martin Ferguson—Ha, ha! Mugga Way!

Mr ANDERSON—Pretty good from a tit-for-tatter over here. He revealed his true colours and the nature of his character the other day.

Approximately $850 million of the funding will be allocated to councils in rural and regional Australia and around $350 million to councils in greater metropolitan areas, including urban fringe local government areas, that have extensive rural road networks.

The funds appropriated by this bill are, in their entirety, additional to the local roads funding already provided by the Commonwealth and represent a 75 per cent increase in the current level of those grants.

The program will commence immediately.

The government is concerned that this substantial injection of funds is not dissipated. The bill ensures that funding is tied to ensure every dollar is spent on local roads. The bill also requires local government bodies to maintain their own spending on local roads. Local government bodies must also provide the minister with a proposal for the expenditure of their grant and there will be a requirement for appropriate audit arrangements. Additionally, the Prime Minister has written to all premiers and chief ministers seeking their assurance that they will not reduce their own expenditure on local roads. Today I indicate that the government strongly believes the states and territories must go further. They must commit to matching the Commonwealth’s historic local road funding program. They must not just pay lip service to the needs of local government authorities across the nation. The government urges the opposition to support it in this call.
I really cannot see for the life of me why the opposition would not, in these circumstances, join us in our call to match us with this historic program.

Mr Martin Ferguson—Thanks for the adlibbing. Stick to the text.

Mr ANDERSON—He cannot help the poor old class warfare. I urge the parliament to pass this bill without delay so the funds can be paid directly and quickly to local councils, as soon as administrative arrangements are in place. This will mean road works can start as soon as possible in the new year, and on priorities nominated by councils. This is good news for local communities and local industry.

The government has been listening to regional and rural Australia—to local communities—and to local industry. They have made a cogent case for improved funding for local roads as a long-term investment in the future of this country.

The economic and social importance of local roads is increasing with the expansion and emergence of new rural industries—with higher transport demands, including higher mass limits—and with frequent lack of transport alternatives. Local roads are an essential feeder to other parts of the transport system and between rural, regional and urban areas. They are vital to the sustainability and recovery of rural and regional Australia. Access to education, health care, shops and amenities, as well as markets, overwhelmingly depends on local roads. Like capillaries that carry blood throughout a healthy body, our local roads are the essential network that must be sustained if we are to ensure the health and vitality of our local communities and industries.

A substantial proportion of the local road network was constructed in the 1950s and 1960s and has reached the end of its economic life, resulting in deteriorating levels of service, in the face of increasing demand and need for higher road standards. The capacity of many rural and regional local councils to meet increasing road needs is also limited, and often compounded by declining population and a falling rating base.

The local roads funding of the Roads to Recovery Program will help address these needs and concerns. Councils will now have the capacity to improve access to social amenities, to improve safety on local roads, and to address infrastructure impediments impacting on industry development, such as upgrading substandard roads and bridges.

In keeping with the coalition’s social policy of empowerment and partnering, it will be directed at devising local solutions to a national challenge. The three spheres of government represent the same electors and should serve them not on the basis of some assumed hierarchy of importance, but rather who is capable of best delivering services for people.

Local government will be a key player in developing priorities and service delivery under this program. We are tackling a national challenge with a local solution. And we acknowledge the intimacy of interaction citizens have with their local councils when it comes to local service delivery.

It is estimated the program will create directly up to 5,000 new jobs in rural and regional Australia, as well as many other jobs from industry expansion, as a result of improved road access.

The federal government is signalling its intent to end the tyranny of distance in Australia and to develop an integrated transport system. This involves greater connectivity between places of manufacture and agribusiness to markets, inland ports, railheads and the sea highways so vital to our export income. Roads to Recovery also supports broad Commonwealth policy objectives such as the Supermarket to Asia strategy, and its Regional Solutions Program.

The underlying principles of the Roads to Recovery Program is development of a redefined network of rural roads that will spearhead a regional economic growth recovery and create better transport synergies.

We must do this if Australia is to make a quantum leap in planning, building and maintaining roads that will serve the nation beyond 2020, and not just rely on an existing network that might not be adequate to future requirements. Given their lifespan of 20 to
30 years, the roads we plan and build now must take account of the infrastructure needs of industries that may themselves only be in their infancy.

In the Roads to Recovery Program the government has recognised that the historical methodology for allocating funding between states and territories contains inherent anomalies. Therefore we have rectified this by establishing a fairer allocation based on historical precedence, length of local roads and population. Allocations between councils within each state are strictly in accordance with formulae adopted by state grants commissions, established and applied under the previous government.

Any claims that suggest allocations to councils have been manipulated to favour the electorates of government members are, therefore, completely scurrilous.

Mr Martin Ferguson interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—Well, you ought to attempt to understand how it has been done.

I suppose it is inevitable, however, that when confronted with a sound, economically and socially responsible program of benefit to local communities, the only avenue of criticism left will be to make petty jibes about allocations.

The explanatory memorandum includes the full listing of local councils and their allocation under the program. The minister will only have the power to vary allocations within a state, where there are variations to council boundaries.

The Roads to Recovery Program has been made possible by the federal government’s sound economic management. Our stronger budgetary position allows the government to return a dividend to the whole community through this substantial investment in local roads infrastructure. This program is good news for local communities, for local councils, for motorists, for local industries. It is good news for Australia.

Farmer organisations, local government authorities, representative organisations, rural communities, industry groups and road transport operators have welcomed the government’s far-sighted initiative.

I commend the bill to the House and present the explanatory memorandum.

Leave granted for debate to continue forthwith.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman)

(1.12 p.m.)—In rising to speak to the Roads to Recovery Bill 2000, I indicate that at the conclusion of my speech today I intend to move an amendment to the motion for the second reading of this bill. That second reading amendment, whilst welcoming the additional road funding, clearly raises one of the most important issues in the Australian community at the moment. That issue goes to the fact that the coalition government broke its election promise going to the impact of GST on petrol prices and that, as a result of that clear promise that has been broken by the Prime Minister and all associated with the coalition government, it is no longer just a question of additional road funding; it is also a question of whether or not ordinary Australians can afford to buy the petrol to enable them to travel those roads around Australia.

I must say that that is an exceptionally important issue when you consider that next year is the International Year of the Volunteer. When I look around Australia on a regular basis, a lot of people in semireirement or retirement who live from week to week actually put their hands in their pockets to purchase petrol to enable them to carry out community services such as Meals on Wheels or, alternatively, to pick up some of our elderly citizens on a voluntary basis to take them to community events. For those people—and a lot of other people who live from week to week—who, unlike the Prime Minister, actually put their hands in their pockets each week to purchase petrol, there is really a requirement for reasonable roads in Australia but, more importantly, as the member for McEwen knows, there is now a real debate about whether or not they can actually purchase petrol.

On that very basis, in discussing this bill I am about ensuring that the member for McEwen and others on the coalition side actually have an opportunity, in accord with what they are saying in their electorates at the moment, to vote for relief with respect to
petrol prices and the impact of the GST on petrol prices.

*Fran Bailey interjecting—*

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—It is no longer acceptable to say one thing in your electorate and then do something entirely different when you get in the white car and catch the plane to Canberra.

*Fran Bailey interjecting—*

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Andrews)—Order! The member for McEwen!

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—That is what it is really about. It is not just a debate about Roads to Recovery; it is also a vote about integrity and honesty in government.

*Fran Bailey interjecting—*

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for McEwen, I note, is speaking next in this debate. I suggest she holds her remarks until then.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I understand why members such as the member for McEwen are rather tense and, I suppose, a bit sensitive about this issue. This debate really brings to a head the debate not only about roads but about whether or not coalition numbers are going to be honest in their electorates and actually, when they come to Canberra, vote with their feet and put up their hands in support of a proposal which is about giving genuine relief to ordinary Australians in electorates such as McEwen through a reduction in the price of petrol by taking the GST spike out of the potential increase in petrol from 1 February next year due to the application of the GST. It is for that very reason that Labor has many concerns about what many in the Australian community regard as an unfair, shabby legislative effort intended to meet those needs. The opposition shares with all taxpayers a contempt for seeing politicians bestow taxpayers’ money like it was their own to give.

The amendment that I will move today condemns the government for that very approach—a lack of honesty and integrity in government. It is condemned for failing to compensate motorists for higher fuel prices as a result of the GST in spite of its promises, something that the member for McEwen actually speaks about in her electorate but when she comes to Canberra fails to put her hand up for in this House. She says one thing in her electorate and does another thing in Canberra.

The government are condemned for having no national strategy for infrastructure development, leaving major transport and infrastructure projects and opportunities untapped or not determined in a fair and transparent way. They are condemned for a program that does not respect the infrastructure priorities of local councils and communities. They have pushed the money out into one transport mode, one infrastructure type, in a one-size-fits-all approach to fixing infrastructure needs. They are condemned for five years of neglect of regional infrastructure and development. And they stand condemned for a lack of transparency in the identification of road funding priorities under this bill. That is the nature of the second reading amendment.

I also challenge what the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services said today, that decisions on road funding should be left to local councils. We have evidence of members on the other side already ringing local councils and seeking to intimidate and direct them about what their local road funding priorities should be. The truth of the matter is that local councils have a capacity, free of political interference from Canberra, to determine their local government priorities.

In addressing these issues, I say at the outset that this bill smells like pork. If this package is as fair, equitable, generous and flawless as inferred by the minister, why has its presentation and its preparation to this House and the community been so sloppy, slapdash and deceptive? I will tell you why, Mr Deputy Speaker. Because that is part and parcel of the hallmark of the operations of this government, as evidenced by the unfortunate debate in this House today and the unfortunate attack by the government on the integrity and the honesty of the Speaker during this morning’s proceedings.

I inform the House that this bill had its first public viewing less than 24 hours ago. It was only late yesterday—as a result of an
approach by me as the shadow minister the previous day in a letter to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services to try to expedite proper public consideration of these matters—that the minister’s office actually granted my office an opportunity for a briefing on the bill. The problem was it was only late yesterday, despite my request and the so-called urgency with respect to this bill, that the department and the minister were able to provide a copy of the bill to the opposition and a briefing. The truth is that the substance of the bill was still being scribbled out less than 24 hours ago.

At the same meeting, we were told today’s timetable and soon found out that much of the detail was being held back or not revealed. The government also revealed at the last minute that every single council in Western Australia and South Australia—despite what it trumpeted earlier this week—was now receiving less funding than announced by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister on Monday of this week. It was only after 10 o’clock last night that we received the explanatory memorandum from the minister for an important bill that is supposed to distribute $1.6 billion not of the government’s money but of taxpayers’ money in a transparent way. What sort of shambles is operating on the other side of the House at this very point in time?

We are told that councils will receive funding quarterly in advance but that the minister will have absolute discretion over when in the four years the funding is allocated. We know what that smacks of: ‘You do what you are told and promote us and we will bring forward your funding in a highly political way.’ Talk about pork-barrelling. It is basically a threat: ‘If you do what you are told we will bring your funding forward.’ That is also reflected in the fact that the very letter advising members of parliament and local councils of the proposed road funding demanded that local council funding actually be diminished—reduced by a requirement that local councils pay for elaborate signs to promote the government. I would have thought that every available dollar and cent should be spent on infrastructure around Australia, if roads are so important, rather than this government wasting taxpayers’ money by demanding, in their letter advising members of parliament and local councils, that they had to promote the government. Where are their priorities? Where are their priorities on roads? Where are their priorities on railways and bridges and port developments? Where are their priorities when it comes to fulfilling a very deliberate election promise that the price of petrol would not increase as a result of the application of the GST? That is also central to the debate this morning—not just road funding but whether or not ordinary Australians beyond Kirribilli House, where the occupant never puts his hand in his pocket for petrol, are required to actually pay for petrol on a regular basis.

When I refer to the nature of quarterly payments being made in advance, I suggest that the minister is about timing his announcements to suit the political preferences of the government, using taxpayers’ money in a political way. You and I, Mr Deputy Speaker, know that this government are known for ensuring total political discretion on major infrastructure projects—a bit like, for example, their timing for the Sydney Orbital, and the Speedrail maybe. The government say that we cannot complain about how funding has been allocated between electorates because it is Labor’s formula. That was another blatant lie from this government. Without this bill and the departmental briefing, it was impossible to determine how they applied the old formula to get the result they did. At the briefing last night in my office they confirmed that the formula had changed. The allocation of money between the states is a totally new formula designed in the minister’s office. They could not tell us at the briefing last night how that new formula was designed or modelled, other than to say that it is something to do with historical precedent, population and road lengths. I suggest those factors had nothing to do with it. It was designed to rort the Australian political system to suit the political expediency of the coalition government, especially the National Party. There was no information on how these factors were considered, rated, scaled or measured. So much for transparency, honesty and integrity in government.
I ask the government right now to put up or shut up on the question of the formula. They should release the formula today and tell the House and the Australian people the truth about the development and application of the formula. I asked them for that last night when they sought to ram this bill through the House, and they could not answer that question. They now have further time to consider that fundamental question, to come into the House this afternoon and answer it—to remove any doubt in Australian electors’ minds that this is not only a political fix but also potentially a political rort to suit the needs of the coalition backbench. That is what it is about—in Aubin’s mind in government. And they could not answer to the question. What have they got to hide? If it is not pork I can smell, then frankly it is a rat.

The minister says that any accusation that this package favours coalition members and seats is outrageous, but let us look at the facts. Every one of the 17 seats that received $25 million or more belongs to a coalition member. We already have the National Party Importance Program—a program that is not known for its transparency—but now we have also the ‘Roads of National Party Recovery’. The Howard government cries foul when people question the honesty of the Howard government because the 17 top electorates under this package are all government electorates. No wonder the Howard government refuses to publicly release the formula for public scrutiny. How quick was the Prime Minister to publicly release the formula for public scrutiny. How quick was the Prime Minister to come out and say, ‘This is not a pork-barrelling exercise’? In fact, the Deputy Prime Minister came out and said, ‘This will not favour coalition seats.’ That is a quote. This desperate Howard-Anderson government, as the Minister for Community Services likes to describe it, has been exposed for what it is—a government that is simply not trusted by people in regional Australia. The truth is that the government stubbornly claims to have no money to provide relief for the motorists at the petrol pump, and then announces a local roads program. It has continued to bag the money from the higher fuel prices and the GST—ordinary Australians’ hard earned dollars. Now it is selectively sending some of the money back. But as our leader, Kim Beazley, has said on a number of occasions of late—and maybe the member for McEwen ought to explain this to her electorate—what is the point of having good roads if you cannot afford to drive on them?

I refer to a cartoon in the Northern Territory News, a newspaper I do not often get the chance to quote in this House. I believe the Northern Territory News had a great cartoon on Tuesday that showed two people driving along a road—I know the Northern Territory roads because I have worked in the Northern Territory extensively over a long period—and one says to the other, ‘It’s great! Now we can get to places where petrol is really expensive.’ That is what it is really about in some of those rural remote areas of Australia. Now we can get to places where petrol is really expensive—not Kirribilli but places like Katherine, Borroloola, Gove, Groote Eylandt and Rabbit Flat where it is really expensive. Those drivers were probably a bit too hopeful about how much further they could get because of the road package.

The Northern Territory, as the member for the Northern Territory will explain later today, gets a raw deal when it comes to the application of this so-called formula developed in the minister’s office. I think the drivers might have heard the rhetoric about the package and not seen the detail, as we have. The contempt this government have for the electorate is showing through. They thought they could stare down people’s demands for petrol relief. They thought they could stare down, for example, the National Farmers Federation. But the president of the National Farmers Federation clearly said this week:

The road package doesn’t settle the problem with respect to the broken promise and the application of the GST to petrol prices.

They obviously have not heard the concerns expressed all around Australia, including in the electorate of Menzies and not just in the member for McEwen’s electorate. They thought they knew best. They could only see the solutions as an either/or situation, but it is now clear they have made the wrong call.
The *West Australian* summed it up on Tuesday when it said:

… if Mr Howard hopes that Australians will accept this program as a political trade-off for cheaper fuel, he has underestimated the level of anger about fuel prices.

I have seen the reaction of the Bundaberg president of Queensland Cane Harvest. Quoted in the *News Mail* of Bundaberg yesterday was Mrs Sandra Waulk, who said:

… harvesters would not accept the funding as a trade-off for rising fuel prices. We can survive on bad roads but we are not going to survive on the current fuel prices.

Motoring and farming groups are not giving up either. The national president of the Farmers Federation, Ian Donges, has already said in Canberra in welcoming the road package that it was ‘not going to change their views on petrol prices. That is a separate issue and we will continue to talk about it.’

The government must realise therefore that these concerns are not coming from inner city or outer metropolitan areas. These serious reservations and riders about the scope of this major government announcement—remember we are talking about $1.6 billion of taxpayers’ money announced in one hit—do not come from the inner city or outer metro areas. They have come from the rural and regional heartland. The biggest beneficiaries of the program are the ones still not happy. I suppose they are the ones described as whingers by a member of the coalition government only a matter of a week and a half ago—farmers in regional Australia described as whingers by a frontbench member of the coalition government. I am waiting for the member for McEwen to attack that person. The member unnecessarily and without any proper right attacked our hardworking farming community and described them as whingers. Yes, they are from the rural and regional heartland and the problem is that the Minister for Transport does not even listen to people in the country areas whom he tries to claim as his own. The reaction to this package has shown just how out of touch he is. Perhaps that comes from living in upper Deakin or Red Hill for too long, whichever yuppie inner city suburb he resides in. I suggest he has been living there for too long and I now understand, because of the pressure on his own electorate, why he is actually moving back to his electorate. It is because he fears the electoral backlash at the forthcoming federal election. He has neglected living standards, infrastructure and services in regional Australia for the last five years and people will not be conned.

The slapdash way this bill has been presented is further evidence that the minister did not take care with the decision. The first copy of the bill surfaced only last night—not the real detail and not the answers to obvious questions—and now he wants to bung it through, if not today then on Monday, the first sitting day of next week. This is indicative of how the minister responded to community calls for some leadership and for transport infrastructure strategies, and also how he responded to the call for some backbone on fixing the Prime Minister’s broken promise on petrol. He has panicked, gone weak at the knees and rushed and offered a knee-jerk response to only part of the problem.

Let us go to the issue of the infrastructure strategy. Everyone recognises that our local roads need attention. Nobody on either side of the House disputes that. Local road funding, as we all know, has been a key issue for a long time. People, I suppose, are entitled to ask this afternoon why it has taken until a year before the next election for the Howard government to act. People are entitled to be a little bit suspicious. After all, for the last five years the Howard government has told local councils that local roads are not the Commonwealth’s responsibility.

This is a project that falls well short of a long-term infrastructure plan that regional Australia has been crying out for. Our nation has serious infrastructure needs. These are hard issues that we must sort through, such as how we work in partnership with the private sector and how we work with the local communities to give them a greater voice in their future. We know that that takes leadership, commitment and strength. It takes a fresh approach to how we plan for and develop our infrastructure.
In the same way we need to plan and develop our transport in this country. It is time that the minister did more than talk about national integrated transport planning. He has had long enough to deliver. We have heard nothing on how our railways can maximise the potential to ease the burden on the roads—projects like the dedicated freight line through Sydney. That is a project that has money allocated to it, but where is it? The minister will again try to blame the New South Wales government for that, I suppose.

It is the responsibility of government, through strong, thoughtful leadership, to bring these projects forward and to get them under way now, not to just sit back and wait for the right political opportunity. This government has to face up to leadership questions and the challenge of leadership to bring the respective parties together in partnerships, drawing on the expertise of government, industry and communities.

Therefore, Labor announced last Friday a national infrastructure advisory council, an obvious and achievable structure to share that leadership. Labor’s infrastructure council will advise a Labor government on strategic planning needs, data deficiencies, strategies for coordination within and between governments and how we move forward on public-private partnerships. Unfortunately, the Deputy Prime Minister has rejected it. He says the parties will not be able to reach agreement. Frankly, the role of leadership is to bring people together. It is not good enough to say we cannot handle the tough issues of infrastructure planning coordination. We have avoided them for too long. Everyone in the infrastructure community, local government and regional backbenchers agrees with Labor on the infrastructure council. The Deputy Prime Minister is on his own.

There are a number of elements to an infrastructure policy—as opposed to an election policy. That is the distinction the Howard government is yet to learn. One of these must be increased government investment. The only thing we can welcome about this package is the recognition of that. It has been totally neglected for five years. Everyone in this place knows that the infrastructure challenge is about more than investment. There is little dispute that infrastructure is critical to the development of our cities and regions and we know that many of our regions are lacking significantly. Infrastructure creates jobs and enhances business competitiveness and directly contributes to our quality of life as we access new opportunities, services and markets more rapidly than before.

There are important issues before the House. We all know that, but the problem is that the government is selective in working out what it is prepared to attend to. The Australian taxpayer demands that we spend our infrastructure money honestly. That is the message from a range of organisations. Without an overarching policy framework and with ad hoc announcements we will continue to be swamped by the broader effects of the market. I suggest the time has come for the government to make some hard decisions, not just on questions of local road funding and petrol prices but also on such important matters as the Scoresby bypass in Melbourne, where the Victorian government has actually offered to enter into a road of national significance agreement to try to assist its development, and also the development of the Western Sydney Orbital. The Prime Minister seems to claim that he knows all about this. He suggests that he knows the money is in the budget for the Western Sydney Orbital—he has been telling us all—but he has not told us why construction has not commenced or how long his transport minister has been sitting on the feasibility study. The study is done, the money is in the budget but the first sod has not been turned. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services should have taken his tie off and turned some dirt on either the Scoresby road or the Western Sydney Orbital rather than engaging in his cheap stunt at Canberra Airport earlier this week in announcing the Roads to Recovery package. Maybe this government is relying too much on its finance minister for strategic infrastructure advice. I would not. He has a record for getting it wrong when it comes to private partnerships. Just go to Sydney at the moment and try to get on the train from Mascot to the CBD and think about the...
waste of public money because he got it wrong.

At last year’s regional summit, the Prime Minister proclaimed his support for nation building by promising the Alice Springs-Darwin railway without any talk of an infrastructure strategy. One thing is clear from all of this: our infrastructure investments are being driven by short-term politics, not by any long-term plan. A renewed commitment to infrastructure is a key priority identified by last year’s regional summit. The summit delegates also stressed that it is just not about a few announcements on the Alice-Darwin railway or on local roads; it is about the need for an integrated, developed national strategy. That is important in the infrastructure community and it is important to the public at large. It also requires that we be transparent in setting and meeting our priorities so as to maintain public support for infrastructure investment, because people have had enough of pork-barrelling, political decisions and the waste of taxpayers’ money, as happens on all too many government policies at the moment.

It requires stronger planning and coordination and more transparent planning and regulatory processes. Labor’s infrastructure agenda will be driven by good economics, effective governments and our belief that all Australians should have the opportunity to participate in the economic and social life of our nation. It is about governing for all Australians, not some Australians based on the Howard government Sydney-centric approach that emanates from Kirribilli.

It is time that we made these hard decisions. Thirteen months ago the government invited people from across regional Australia to Canberra for a regional summit. It was promised that a report would be produced in October 2000, but it has not turned up. The government also promised a whole of government approach. It has not turned up. All we saw was an ad hoc announcement when the political heat was on. With the government having neglected living standards, infrastructure and services in regional Australia for the past five years, I know from the feedback this week that people will not be conned by this package. That does not say that expenditure on local roads is not important, but people have seen through this quick political fix to take pressure off on another front.

Labor will not deny this bill a second reading, because we support money going to rural roads, but there is no way we can point to it as a solution to Australia’s infrastructure needs. There is no way it can be seen as a solution to Australia’s transport needs and there is no way on earth that we see this as an alternative to petrol excise relief, and neither will the Australian public.

On that note, I wish to move the second reading amendment standing in my name. It is about welcoming the additional road expenditure but calls on this government to front up and take as a fundamental approach action to remove the effect of the GST from the fuel excise indexation adjustment in February 2001. I ask the honourable member for McEwen to put up her hand on this occasion and do what she can for her local electorate. I move:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words: “whilst not declining to give the Bill a second reading, the House notes the importance of the additional road funding, calls for the development of a national infrastructure strategy including a national transport plan; and as a fundamental part of this approach calls on the Government to remove the effect of the GST from the fuel excise indexation adjustment in February 2001.

(Time expired)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Horne—I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

FRAN BAILEY (McEwen) (1.42 p.m.)—For almost the past half hour, we have been listening to the honourable member for Batman. I was listening very carefully to what he said. In that entire half hour, I did not hear one positive response from him to probably the largest and best road funding package for local roads right throughout this country that we have seen in decades. Possibly it is the largest road funding package ever. I am pretty sure that I wrote down very carefully exactly what the honourable member for Batman said. This legislation provides $1.6
billion for road funding. $1.2 billion of which is going to local roads right across our country. He referred to that as an ‘unfair, shabby legislative effort’. He went on to say that this was pork-barrelling—that there were more coalition seats receiving funding than Labor Party seats. The fact is that there more of us representing very large areas of regional Australia.

The member for Batman also said that nothing had been done for rail. He very carefully chose to omit the diesel fuel rebate. He asked: where are the government’s priorities on roads? He had half an hour in which to concentrate on that because the priority is with this Roads to Recovery legislation, which represents a 75 per cent increase to local road funding from the Commonwealth. The government is actually showing that. We have 148 members of this House representing every community across our nation. I am sure that each and every one of the 148 of us who represent all of those communities have at some stage received representation about the state of local roads in our electorates. Presumably, there may be an exception to that because the member for Batman does not seem to know much about the need for local roads and how excellent a package this is for local road funding.

Many of the representations that we have all received have come from people concerned about the safety of a local road, concerned that one of their local roads is so bad that a local school bus cannot travel down it. Just recently, I was at the Ruffy Primary School in my electorate and parents with children at that school were concerned that Boat Hole Road, a crucial link in the school bus route, was unsafe for the school bus to travel on. This is just one small example, but a very important example, of how the current state of local roads affects the daily lives of people. I am going to refer to other examples a little later on if I have time, but that example is an important reason for just why this $1.6 billion Roads to Recovery funding program is so important not just to my electorate of McEwen but right across our whole nation.

This $1.6 billion funding is vitally important both for social and economic reasons. ABS data shows that the average age of Australian roads has increased from 16.3 years in 1983-84 to 18.6 years in 1995-96 and growing older. I might add that during that period those opposite never produced a package of road funding like this one to deal with the problems of the ageing road infrastructure. These figures that I have given are an average and I, like most members of this House, can readily identify many roads that are much older than the average and in fact are at the very end of their lifespan. They have been allowed to age and deteriorate because there has been a massive underinvestment in local roads for at least the past decade, largely because the states have abrogated their responsibility and because local governments simply have not had access to the level of funding needed to maintain the vast network of local roads and to keep them in good repair. This has had serious implications for communities because it is roads that link people with goods and services for work, for everyday essentials, for health, for education and for social and recreational purposes.

In the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services on rural and regional infrastructure, which I chaired, evidence was provided that poor roads increase the running costs of vehicles, length and travel time; influence the quality of goods being transported over them usually to our ports and airports; restrict access by tourists—and for those of us in regional areas, increasingly tourism is a very important and growing industry, and it is these local roads which are impinging on the development of tourism in many areas—and reduce access for local communities to supplies and services. So many of them are simply unsafe. I must mention here that the report I just mentioned made recommendations to government about the need to increase funding for roads. So as well as speaking here in this debate as the representative of my electorate of McEwen, I am also pleased with this road funding package on behalf of my committee.

The benefits of road funding to generating employment in regions and assisting in the growth of industry are substantial. I want to
refer to, and quote from, the report that I have just spoken about. A number of studies have been conducted over recent years both here in Australia and overseas and they have all established a very clear connection between judiciously targeted investment in roads and economic development. In their submission, the Australian Automobile Association summarised some of the findings from these studies. They said:

There is a significant positive relationship between investment in road and other infrastructure and private sector output.

They said that for every one per cent increase in investment in road infrastructure there occurs at the same time a corresponding increase in private sector output. Their study also said:

An additional $1 billion invested in roads would yield a long run annual increase in GDP ranging from $810 million for urban arterials to $270 million for rural arterials and $110 million for local roads.

The economic stimulation that this investment would produce would lead to a growth in employment of between 2,400 jobs for local roads and 19,000 jobs for urban arterials.

The Automobile Association also pointed out that the returns from investing in roads are higher than those for most other types of economic and social infrastructure. This means in real terms that new jobs will be created in my electorate throughout the shires of Delatite, Murrindindi, Mitchell, Strathbogie, Yarra Ranges, Whittlesea, Hume and Nillumbik. Conversely, it has also been documented that the benefits of industry and employment growth are lost without spending on road infrastructure. I want to give you just a quick example from my own electorate. The Shire of Delatite made a submission to our committee’s inquiry and were talking about the expanding timber industry. They said:

Industry analysts estimate that, in the absence of adequate road maintenance in Delatite Shire, transport costs in the timber industry will rise by up to 20 per cent. As up to 50 per cent of the cost of timber is made up of transport costs, a rise in costs of this magnitude will reduce the competitiveness of existing participants in the industry and reduce the incentive to make further investments in the industry.

There of course we are talking about jobs. This legislation, by providing $1.2 billion for local roads, will ensure that these benefits for industry and employment are captured but are captured importantly for our local region. I realise that I have got very little time left in this debate in order to let everyone have a say, so I will just mention very briefly two areas—the Tolmie Bridge in the Delatite shire and Kirwans Bridge in the shire of Strathbogie. The lack of investment in road infrastructure there has actually meant that people living in these communities have extremely poor access. The road conditions are hazardous, and it poses an emergency risk in many cases.

In stark contrast to the reaction that we heard here by the member for Batman, I have contacted every one of my shires, and I can tell you they are absolutely ecstatic about this. This morning I did a radio interview at Alexandra and spoke to the CEO of the Shire of Murrindindi, who cannot wait for the money to flow. So when the member for Batman asks: what is the need for the urgency to get this legislation through the parliament? The answer to that question is that we want to get the funding through to local government as quickly as possible so that they can start on this massive job of repairing these local roads and bringing them up to scratch. I would love to talk in this debate for much longer, but I know that my time has run out. So I will simply say in conclusion: I thoroughly commend this legislation to the House on behalf of all of the people I represent in my electorate of McEwen.

Mr HORNE (Paterson) (1.55 p.m.)—The member for McEwen identified what I consider to be one of the problems with this legislation when she talked about time and the fact that she has had very little time to speak on the Roads to Recovery Bill 2000. This legislation, I believe, shows one of the unfortunate aspects of this chamber: that is, it is an adversarial chamber of government and opposition, when everyone in this chamber believes that more money needs to be spent on roads. I want that you and I, Mr Deputy Speaker Nehl, in a former government both advocated that more money should be spent on the Pacific Highway, and
we were quite ecstatic when it did happen, and we are very proud of the fact that it is being constructed today.

Despite what has been stated by senators and some former members of this House, I certainly have not rejected the proposal of funding for roads in Australia under the Roads to Recovery program, nor would I. Having served as a deputy shire president in a small country shire and then as a shire president of Port Stephens, one of the fastest growing areas in Australia, I know only too well how difficult it is to get sufficient funding to build the roads that are needed by Australia’s expanding society. However, what I have done and what I will continue to do is question the priorities of this government and the fact that this government see that this is the only way to spend part of the bonus windfall that they have received from being the highest fuel taxing government in Australia’s history. I say that quite advisedly because I know that when this government came to power in 1996 the excise on petrol was 34.183c. It rose to 44.8c on 30 June this year and immediately, with the advent of the GST, the Treasurer dropped it back 6.7c to 38.81c a litre, as it is now. It is still higher than when they came to power, plus the GST. This is the only response this government can give to the people of Australia who have had to put up with deteriorating road conditions and increasing fuel prices and increasing fuel taxes.

Anyone who saw the front page of the Daily Telegraph on Tuesday of this week would have seen the Prime Minister standing there, the lollipop man with the stop/go sign. That epitomised what this government have done to road funding in five years. In five years they have slashed the funding for regional roads. They have slashed the funding for the Pacific Highway. The program that they delight in telling us about is the black spot funding program. They love to tell us about that because it allows the Deputy Prime Minister to come into my electorate on the odd occasion, as he did last April, and announce $277,000 for a black spot. That was done in April. The funding was released by the budget in May. Have we seen the road fixed? The answer is no, and I would invite him to come back. I also remind him what happened on that day. I challenged him to match the state government for funding for one specific road, Buckets Way. He said, ‘I would love to be in a position to if only the funding was there.’ Deputy Prime Minister, under this program the funding is there, but you still have not responded to the challenge because there is not enough money in this program for the local government areas concerned to pay the $62 million to reconstruct the Buckets Way. I look forward to continuing my comments after question time.

Debate interrupted.

STATEMENT BY MR SPEAKER

Mr SPEAKER (2:00 p.m.)—For the information of the House and in response to a variety of inquiries on the matter, I wish to clarify the circumstances in which I recommitted a vote to the House this morning. I wish to stress to the House that, in the series of divisions that occurred during the morning, it was proper that a number of them were one-minute divisions. The division in question was called under the one-minute provision but, given that there was intervening debate, it ought to have been called under the four-minute provision—a matter later noted by the member for Dobell. The division did not result in a majority either way, and I was not prepared to exercise my casting vote in favour of my own ruling. As the question of the time for the ringing of the bells had been raised and there was the possibility of confusion, standing order 208 I decided to submit the question once again in division in order to determine the will of the House.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Centrelink: Job Seekers

Ms KERNOT (2:01 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Employment Services. Minister, can you confirm that your department told Senate estimates last Thursday that it offers a $6 million bonus to Centrelink if they can exceed a minimum quota on breaching the unemployed? Minister, why did you hide this $6 million breaching bonus from the Australian public? Will you now remove the breaching bonus as well as the
quota, which requires that ‘60 per cent of Job Network breach notifications are applied’?

Mr ABBOTT—As of the current financial year, Centrelink is able to get an extra $5 million from my department if it meets all of 12 key performance indicators. There are 12 key performance indicators: 10 of them relate strictly to service to job seekers and two of them relate to breaching. The two key performance indicators relating to breaching are designed to ensure that (a) Centrelink and Job Network members have a common understanding of what reasonable behaviour is and (b) Centrelink will not breach anyone without following due process and ensuring that natural justice applies. Let me point out that Centrelink is able to not meet the breaching KPIs and still get more money, or it could meet the breaching KPIs and not get more money. The simple fact is that, yet again, there are no targets. The number of breaches is not set by the government; it is set by job seeker behaviour. What this government is on about is ensuring that people obey the rules, and what the opposition obviously seem to want is the old days when almost any excuse would do.

Illegal Drug Use: Diversion Program

Mr CADMAN (2.03 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister advise the House on the progress with drug diversion agreements with the states and territories?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the member for Mitchell for this question. It gives me an opportunity to report to the House on the considerable progress that has been made since the COAG meeting in April of last year to adopt a national approach to illicit drug diversion. Diversion means that drug users can either commit to treatment and rehabilitation or take the consequences of their action in the criminal justice system. When this national approach to diversion was announced by the government, it received widespread support in the Australian community. We allocated $220 million to this initiative, including funds for treatment, education, law enforcement and research. In November of last year, I launched a detailed national diversion policy framework following its endorsement by all state and territory governments. The approach is built on a partnership between governments, community organisations, health professionals and local communities. It is a very good example of the social coalition at work.

In December 1999, the Minister for Health and Aged Care and the Tasmanian Premier jointly launched the first diversion agreement. In May of this year, I announced a Commonwealth-New South Wales diversion agreement with the New South Wales Premier, and I launched a similar agreement with the Victorian Premier in August of this year. The Commonwealth expects to launch an agreement with Western Australia in a matter of days and to conclude agreements very shortly with both South Australia and Queensland. Can I record my immense gratitude for the bipartisan approach that has been adopted by state governments working in partnership with the federal government to try to make significant inroads into this dreadful social scourge of drug abuse.

Can I say in passing that the national drug statistics released yesterday contained the very pleasing news that there has been a significant drop in heroin overdose deaths in New South Wales to a figure of 296 in 1999-2000 from 491 the year before. That may be only some kind of statistical interruption to a pattern that has caused a lot of concern over the years. We all hope it is not. I take the opportunity of congratulating all concerned in that, both those working for New South Wales agencies and also those working for the Commonwealth.

One of the dangers of this debate is for there to be a sense of hopelessness that nothing can be done and that everything that has been tried to date is a failure and is of no use. That is a mistake. There is a wide area of agreement in the community on what ought to be done to tackle the problem. The areas of disagreement on such issues as heroin trials and heroin injecting rooms, although they are significant, mask the fact that in most areas there is enthusiastic cooperation across the political divide between all people concerned in trying to bring about a reduction in drug abuse in the community. I do not think it is a cause that any of us should resile from. We should continue the
campaign, and there are some signs that in some areas that campaign is beginning to bear fruit. Certainly the diversion programs are a good illustration of that, and I thank the premiers of the states of various political complexes for their cooperation in the public interest in tackling this very serious problem.

Centrelink: Job Seekers

Ms KERNOT (2.07 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Employment Services. Minister, in question time on Tuesday and again in your previous answer to me, you said that breaches are not driven by government policy, they are driven by the behaviour of job seekers. Can the minister by that logic explain the 250 per cent increase in job seeker misbehaviour since 1997 and isn’t the truth, minister, that the 250 per cent increase in fines levied against the unemployed is explained by your behaviour of demanding a quota of fines on the unemployed for Centrelink to fill?

Mr ABBOTT—There has been a significant increase in the number of breaches, no doubt about that. The reason for that is that this government is serious about enforcing the rules. This government believes that the social security rules should be upheld. The reason for the big increase since the years when Labor was in government is not our harshness; it is your slackness. It is the slackness of the Labor government and the appropriate rigour that this government has put into place which explains the situation.

Economy: Current Account Deficit

Mr ROSS CAMERON (2.08 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Could the Treasurer outline to the House the outlook for the current account deficit in 2000-01, following the release today of the outcomes of the September quarter by the Australian Bureau of Statistics?

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for Parramatta for his question. I can inform the House that the September quarter current account figures show significant improvement in Australia’s current account position, registering a deficit of $5.5 billion or only around 3.4 per cent of GDP. As I have previously informed the House, the September figures are boosted, of course, by the Olympics, but what they show is that the volume of exports grew 3.8 per cent in the September quarter. Elaborately transformed manufactured exports rose 5.1 per cent in the quarter, rural commodities exports rose 5.6 per cent in the quarter and services exports rose 14.4 per cent in the quarter. So this shows a return to strong growth in exports to a round trend following two years below trend coming out of the Asian financial economic crisis.

Notwithstanding that strong growth in exports of 3.8 per cent in the September quarter, the volume of imports grew only slightly at 0.4 per cent. As a result of this, net exports will contribute 0.7 percentage points to GDP growth in the September quarter when we get it. Today’s outcome is a significant improvement in Australia’s current account. The government is forecasting a significant decline in the current account through the year to 4¼ per cent from the 5.4 per cent which was recorded last year. Most importantly, net exports will make a contribution of about one percentage point to Australia’s GDP growth.

I do not think we should get complacent about the current account deficit, and it is something that we must keep a very firm policy handle on. One of the reasons why it is important to run budget surpluses is to build up savings. Can you imagine where Australia would be today if we had not paid off $50 billion of Labor’s debt, which would just gone on to the debt figures and would have made things that much worse. But the government can say that, since it was elected, it has turned away from Labor’s wanton fiscal irresponsibility of $10.3 billion deficits and $80 billion rack-ups of debt over five budgets and has made a positive contribution. I think, now that the government has been successful in that, people can give it credit.

I would not normally mention him as an economic adviser, but I was rather taken by the comments on the Graham Richardson show, made by the man himself, Mr Graham Richardson. He referred to yesterday’s trade figures which of course are not in the September quarter; they will go into the Decem-
ber quarter. He said, ‘It’s very good news,’
He was a bit political. I will not read that
out—well, he said it was very good news for
John Howard and, since you ask me, pretty
bad news for Kim Beazley. Some mothers do
have ‘em. He just comes in every time, the
old member for Hotham. I was going to
spare your leader but, since you insisted,
Graham Richardson said ‘pretty bad news
for Kim Beazley’—or maybe he wanted me
to read that little bit out. I tell you, Malcolm
Farr has been getting some good telephone
calls.

Mr SPEAKER—The Treasurer will
come to the question.

Mr COSTELLO—The old advisers over
there are isolating him from bad news. I sup-
pose Chris from Warramanga is one of those
advisers. Anyway, to come back to Graham
Richardson, you did get that admission out
of me that it was bad news for Kim Beazley.
This is what Graham Richardson said of
Mr Howard:

He promised us some sort of economic revival
and looking at the figures, it is happening. You
can make your own judgment as to how much to
do with it he is having but one thing is for sure,
this is the best trade result Australia has had in
decades and I mean decades. It is unequivocally
good.

From Graham Richardson, Mr Speaker.

Economy: Foreign Debt

Mr CREAN (2.14 p.m.)—My question is
also addressed to the Treasurer and it refers
to foreign debt, the figures for which also
came out today. Do you recall promising
when you launched the debt truck that cut-
ting the nation’s foreign debt would be your
first priority? Isn’t it true that foreign debt
today hit a record $294 billion, up 52 per
cent since you became the Treasurer? Isn’t
this $15,480 for every man, woman and
child, according to your own preferred
measure, and hasn’t credit card debt in-
creased 137 per cent over the same period?

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of
the Opposition is advancing an argument.

Mr COSTELLO—Some mothers do
have ‘em, so I think we ought to put it into
context. When we came to office, foreign
debt was 38.7 per cent of GDP—which, ad-
mittedly, is too high. In 1983, when Labor
came to office, foreign debt as a percentage
of GDP was 14 per cent. Over those 13
years, the foreign debt as a proportion of
GDP went from 14 per cent to 38 per cent.
Just to put the number on it, because the
member for Melbourne does not seem to be
able to work it out, under the Labor Party the
increase of foreign debt to GDP was 668 per
cent. As I said, under the coalition it in-
creased 24.7 per cent—so 24.7 per cent
compared with 668.8 per cent. I said at the
time—and I will say it now—that probably
the most irresponsible period of Australian
economic management was from 1983 to
1996. Not only was Australia plunged into
awful recession, with budgets in deficit and a
build-up of $80 billion worth of debt; but
also, if you want to look at it in terms of for-
eign debt, as a percentage of GDP it in-
creased by 668.8 per cent. So the good news
is that we have arrested the acceleration of
increase in foreign debt, which was started
by the Australian Labor Party.
The second good point is that the debt servicing ratio has fallen and is now at one of its lowest levels ever. The debt servicing ratio—the amount of exports required to pay the interest on net foreign debt—is now 9.8 per cent. So the percentage of your exports which you are required to pay in relation to foreign debt is 9.8 per cent compared with its peak under the Labor Party of 20 per cent in the September quarter of 1990. You will recall, Mr Speaker, that the Labor Party boasted that it would produce a recession as a consequence of its mismanagement in 1990.

The last point I want to make about foreign debt is that this government can make this claim: it has not added a dollar to foreign debt, because this government has not borrowed a dollar since it came to office. In fact, having paid back $50 billion of Labor Party debt, what that means is that, whatever it is now, it would be at least $50 billion higher had the Labor Party still been in office. That would be the case, even leaving aside the fact that they would still have been running deficit budgets right into 2000-01. The Labor Party may not be able to acknowledge it, but as even Graham Richardson said—Graham Richardson, their ideological mentor, the man who taught them all of their tricks; the man who knew even more about electoral matters than the member for Lilley himself—this is 'equivocally good news, the best trade result Australia had in decades, and I mean decades'.

**Roads: Funding**

Mr BARTLETT (2.20 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Would the Deputy Prime Minister advise the House of the social benefits associated with the federal government’s $1.2 billion Roads to Recovery Program?

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honourable member for his question.

Mr Howard interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—The Prime Minister asks whether I have got time to outline the social benefits, and I have not really, but I will make a bit of a go at it and cover some of them. I attended the first National Rural Roads Congress in Moree earlier this year. That was a landmark event in highlighting the importance of local roads not just to economies but also in local social benefits. It brought together some of the best thinkers on road infrastructure in this country. I should note in that circumstance that I did not see the member for Batman there. The congress revealed that rural roads support the social fabric of rural communities and regions, and the efficiency of local roads makes a very significant contribution—and I think this is important—to education and health standards in rural communities.

Interestingly, a survey conducted by the Country Women’s Association of Australia, the CWA, in conjunction with the Office of the Status of Women, found that, when women were asked their priorities for government spending in rural areas, 69 per cent believed that roads should be the priority—a quite surprising figure; indeed, one that one would not normally have expected to have been the case. The reason given was that improved rural roads were most important to women of all ages, in places of all sizes, whether in remote localities or large country towns, because, as they explained, there is an intrinsic relationship between such things as good roads and a good education. Indeed, the inadequacy of rural roads is a disadvantage to attracting teachers to rural areas; it reduces attendance at schools, in some cases quite dramatically; it forces parents to send children to boarding school at an early age; and it forces families to relocate to larger centres in the interests of their children’s education.

An Australian Local Government Association survey into the effects of poor access in wet weather on school attendance of Australian children showed that one-third of the nation’s rural and regional council areas are affected. Surprisingly—and, I would have to say, of some concern as well—the survey also demonstrated that, in around a third of our rural councils, school buses still operate on roads that are closed to heavy traffic during and following wet weather. So there can be no doubt that poor roads contribute to a reduction in educational opportunities—at a time when those educational opportunities are more important than ever to all Austra-
lian children, particularly those in some of the more remote parts of the country.

In the survey, 25 per cent of councils indicated that poor road access had serious implications for the delivery of health services. Councils indicated that on average there were five instances each year when it was not possible to get a patient to a hospital by road in the event of an emergency. These points touch on this very real issue of the social benefits provided by rural roads to health, to education, to the normal running of a decent social life and to interaction with people in your community. In that circumstance, I have to say that it is just impossible to fathom the Leader of the Opposition’s belief—it really is—that the federal government’s $1.2 billion injection into local roads is unnecessary or trivial.

Illegal Immigration: Woomera Detention Centre

Mr SCIACCA (2.24 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Is the minister aware of allegations involving the alleged multiple sexual abuse of a 15-year-old boy—and that is not the 12-year-old boy—inside Woomera, who was so distressed and traumatised by the abuse that he would burn holes into himself? Are you further aware of the boy’s claim to having developed trust in one of the centre’s nurses and agreeing to speak about the abuse with centre manager Mr Meakins on the proviso that she would accompany him? Are you further aware that Mr Meakins prevented the nurse from attending the meeting and effectively stopped the boy’s story from being told? Minister, in light of the growing flood of allegations being presented and the obvious reluctance of witnesses to come forward, why won’t you establish a full judicial inquiry into the mismanagement of the Woomera Detention Centre?

Mr RUDDOCK—I am aware of the allegation. The allegation was investigated thoroughly by Family and Youth Services in South Australia. They interviewed all of the parties involved, undertook a thorough investigation and found that no further action was required—no charges to be brought. It seems to me that what the member is doing is impugning the professionalism of the authorities who have the capacity to make a judgment in relation to this matter.

I said yesterday in relation to the matters that were raised by the honourable member for Bowman that, in relation to each and every one of the issues that I assume he will continue to raise, there are appropriate authorities for those matters to be raised with and where thorough and proper and professional investigations can be brought. What is particularly relevant in relation to the matter that has now been raised is that it is obviously predicated upon advice from the party that he referred to specifically—one of the nurses—and nurses have a quite clear legal obligation in relation to what they should do.

Mr Brereton interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—Member for Kingsford-Smith!

Mr RUDDOCK—No, I am concerned that people who under state law have a moral and a legal responsibility to report those matters seem to be pressing those buttons now, rather than reporting them at a time when reasonable steps could have been taken, if they believed the child was at risk, to provide that protection.

Roads: Funding

Mr NEHL (2.28 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Would the minister advise the House how the New South Wales mid-North Coast will benefit from the $1.2 billion Roads to Recovery Program to upgrade the nation’s local roads network? Is the minister aware of enthusiastic support for this program, especially from the electorate of Cowper and the Shires Association of New South Wales?

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honourable member for his question. He, of course, is a person who pushed so very hard for the Pacific Highway—I seem to recall a $3 billion program. In fact, this is the biggest exercise that governments in this country have been engaged in in infrastructure since the Snowy Mountains Scheme. The area that you are asking about is the Central Coast, represented in part by the member for Paterson, who, I seem to remember, was not very en-
thusiastic in his support for the Pacific Highway. He really did not support it at all. But it is no wonder that in this case people on the mid-North Coast have been very keen to support the package. Port Stephens has around $2 million and Hastings around $4 million. We have had the Labor mayor for Hastings saying, ‘The road funding package will have tremendous economic spin-offs for our region. It will help to boost economic growth and employment opportunities in the Hastings’—not a bad endorsement. The Greater Taree City Council is receiving well over $4 million. The response from the mayor there, Councillor Mick Tucker, was:

It is absolutely marvellous news for the needs of our local roads network.

He added that council had already set aside an additional $1.6 million in this year’s budget for roads and bridges. So he said that we have a major roads program under way. Then there is the Great Lakes council. It is receiving $2.3 million. Mayor John Chadban was very happy not only with the funding but with the fact that the payment will be coming direct from the Commonwealth. He thought that was a very good idea because he had a bit of a concern about the sticky fingers of state governments getting in the way. I do not think he was referring to Queensland, but he certainly had that concern. I have to say that I have another quote in relation to this, and this is a favourite of mine. I will read it to you:

Roads are one of the most important issues in regional Australia today. In an area like Great Lakes, which has a burgeoning population and tourism as a mainstay of its local economy, the state of roads is not important, not significant but paramount.

Do you know who said that? It was the member for Paterson.

Mr Horne interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—He wants more money; he has just confirmed it.

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The minister will address his remarks through the chair.

Mr ANDERSON—The member for Paterson has a problem and that is quite clearly that the Leader of the Opposition says that these works are trivial and unnecessary. So the member for Paterson is saying local roads are important and ought to get more funding. He gets funding from the Commonwealth government, but his own leader will not acknowledge that they are important. He still regards them as unnecessary.

Mr Martin Ferguson interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—For that matter the member for Batman does not have much impact either. He was actually with the member for Paterson when the member for Paterson said we ought to be spending more money because it is of paramount importance. But it obviously has not yet registered with the Leader of the Opposition that this is an important issue, because I want to quote something he said the other day as well. Ian Mickel, the president of the Western Australian Municipal Association, was a caller to radio 6PR last Tuesday. He called to welcome the federal government’s $1.2 billion Roads to Recovery local road funding package, but he was not too impressed with the chief boondoggle opposite. He had this to say:

Here in Esperance we have been arguing for more road funding from the Feds for a long, long time. He went on to say:

It was rather interesting, and I am particularly concerned, we have not been able to tie in the federal opposition to this issue because, with a four-year program and just a year to go to a federal election, it is absolutely essential that we get...
a clear commitment from the Labor Party that this program will be ongoing. Otherwise it is not worth much to us at all.

Mr Beazley, when he was in Esperance last week, I tackled him on this and—wait for it—three times I brought him back to the question of the commitment of his party, if they were elected to government, committing to these rural road funds, and he didn’t. He just talked—well, he does do a lot of talking—away from the subject. He did not give me a response at all. I note he is still making statements about fuel prices. He is not talking about road funding at all. I think road funding is absolutely essential to us in Esperance.

Esperance happens of course to be in the Leader of the Opposition’s home state. So three times—I have been there several times—the Leader of the Opposition was asked to commit his party to supporting this package, and three times he turned down the opportunity. He refused to commit himself. I wonder just how the member for Paterson feels about that.

Goods and Services Tax: Draught Beer

Mr CREAN (2.34 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, do you stand by your claim that you never promised the price of ordinary beer—draught beer—would increase by only 1.9 per cent as a result of the GST? Are you aware that 850,000 Australians have signed a petition circulating in Australia’s hotels and clubs saying that you did make that promise and that you broke it? Are you aware that this is the biggest petition ever presented to parliament and, Prime Minister, why won’t you keep your promise on ordinary beer?

Mr HOWARD—This matter has been the subject of numerous questions in the past and I have no reason to resile from anything I have said in answer to questions in the past. Of course people who are offered the opportunity to sign a petition for cheaper beer would do so. That is a thoroughly and characteristically Australian thing to do. I would be perfectly astonished if they had not signed the petition.

Education: Schools Funding

Mr GEORGIOU (2.35 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Would the minister inform the House about support from parents organisations for the government’s schools funding legislation. How do these views contrast with alternative strategies?

Dr KEMP—I thank the honourable member for Kooyong for his question. Parents are speaking out now, loudly and clearly, about their support for the government’s $22 billion school funding package. Unfortunately the Leader of the Opposition does not want to listen to these parents. The New South Wales Parents Council, representing over 332,000 children attending non-government schools in New South Wales, have, I believe, written a letter to all members in which they say:

We urge you to support the immediate passage of the bill without amendment.

The South Australian Independent Schools Board says:

The winners will be parents and families now able to better choose the education that best suits their children.

And they go on to point out the regional dividend:

Thirty South Australian regional and rural schools from Ceduna to Mt Gambier will benefit.

Parents and parents organisations are being treated with contempt by the Labor Party and the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition is playing games with the lives of families and preventing schools planning properly for next year, and every day that he delays signals his contempt for Australian parents. In a famous example of Beazley speak, which is becoming very popular on the backbench of the Labor Party,
he says he does not want to shoot the hostages, but he certainly does not mind roughing up the hostages a little bit. He does not mind making life difficult for them. As I have said in the House on many occasions, the Leader of the Opposition has form in this area. His strategy at the last election, which we remember—engineered by Pezzullo and Angley, as the team was then—cost him his shadow minister, who now sits up there like a vulture on the back bench, hanging around just waiting to see what happens. We remember what the member for Werriwa said at the last election campaign about the Labor Party and Mr Kim Beazley’s education policy. This is what the member for Werriwa said:

Mike Pezzullo, Chief Policy Adviser, and John Angley, who wrote for Kim as Finance Minister and had no involvement in the education area, rewrote the bloody thing—
that was the member for Werriwa’s term—so they stuffed it up.

And the same advisers have done it again with schools policy. The Daily Telegraph summed it up very well this morning. It said: ‘Save the hostages Kim and shoot the brains trust’. The Leader of the Opposition should stop treating Australian parents with contempt and get on and pass the bill.

Roads: Funding

**Mr HORNE**—Prime Minister, if your own backbench are trying to save their skins by campaigning against your petrol tax in their electorates, why should struggling Australian motorists believe your promises?

**Mr HOWARD**—I get a lot of emails and I see a lot of material pass across my desk. I have got to say I have not seen that one. Let me simply say to the honourable member for Paterson that when the government’s announcement in relation to road funding was foreshadowed to the joint party rooms earlier this week I can assure you that the reaction was little short of rapturous in terms of the welcome that was extended by all my colleagues to something for people in rural and regional Australia and the cities.

The take-out this week of the road funding announcement is the complete fool the opposition leader has made of himself on the subject. His great line was that this was going to be totally skewed towards rural electorates. As soon as we talked about road funding, without any thought as to how the government might do it, he raced in immediately and said, ‘Oh, this is going to be entirely for National Party electorates. It’s going to be entirely for rural electorates.’ The reality is that this money is being distributed in accordance with a Labor Party formula: it is being distributed in accordance with the formula established by state grants commissions in the early 1990s when the Keating government was in office here in Canberra. So, once the state gets the money, it is then distributed not in accordance with who holds the electorate, but in accordance with the formula worked out; a formula worked out by state grants commissions. That has left the Leader of the Opposition, who regards road funding as trivial and unnecessary, in an absolutely ridiculous position. There is not a member opposite who does not want this road funding for their electorate. There is not a council anywhere in Australia who is not grateful to this federal government, because we are providing a 75 per cent increase.

Might I observe that next week the annual meeting of the Local Government Association of Australia will be held here in Canberra. Not surprisingly, I have received an invitation to address that gathering, and not
surprisingly I have accepted the invitation. I will have something to say at that gathering about this government’s record on road funding—a record of which we are immensely proud.

Mr Horne—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table the email that the Prime Minister has not yet opened and read.

Leave granted.

Companies: Employee Entitlements

Mr Barresi (2.43 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Would the minister outline what the federal government is doing to help workers who have lost their jobs because of their employers’ insolvency, leaving some of their entitlements unpaid? Is the minister aware of any alternative proposals in this area?

Mr Reith—I thank the member for Deakin for his question. As the House draws to a close for the year, it is timely to look back on the introduction of a significant extension of the safety net for the benefit of Australian workers. I thank the member for his question because he and members on our side of the House have been strong supporters of putting in place a scheme to ensure that, when workers find themselves out of a job and without their entitlements, there is assistance in their hour of need. We also amended the Corporations Law to deal with people who have been in breach of the Corporations Law. In terms of practical help, the fact is that, when you lose your job and do not get your entitlements, rather than having to wait on the possible chance of some recovery two or three years down the track it is very important that support be provided to workers in that situation as quickly as can be achieved.

I am pleased to say to the House that, since the introduction of the scheme and in respect of insolvencies starting on 1 January this year, 1,125 employees in 70 insolvencies have been helped. In the most recent case, for example, which was Victoria Knitting Mills Proprietary Ltd in New South Wales, 19 employees were helped with $70,000 to go towards their entitlements. If the New South Wales state Labor government had supported those employees and likewise matched us on a dollar for dollar basis those employees would be getting nearly 80 per cent of their entitlements. That is real assistance when people need it.

I have been asked whether there are any alternative policies. The fact is that the Labor Party has not only opposed this policy; it has opposed supporting workers in their hour of need. Furthermore, it has used what little political influence it has to encourage the state governments not to support our policy because it is a coalition idea. For the basest possible political motives you have turned your back on workers in their hour of need. Are there any alternative policies? There are no alternative policies. The things that you have said, to the extent that they are coherent, would cost a packet, have no international precedent and would impose costs on good businesses to pay for bad businesses. Even the ACTU has called on the Labor Party to support the scheme that is in operation. It is the only national scheme.

As we go to Christmas, it is a national disgrace that the Labor Party turns its back on workers when they need a bit of help. I conclude by saying that the scheme has not happened by chance. It has happened because for 13 years when the Labor Party was in office it never lifted a finger to help workers in this situation. It took a Howard led government to ensure workers were helped. I conclude by paying a tribute to the people within my own department who have worked very hard to make the scheme a reality and who I know are dedicated to ensuring that we help workers when they need it. It is about time the Labor Party stood up to be counted when it comes to helping workers.

Roads: Funding

Mr Martin Ferguson (2.48 p.m.)—My question without notice is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Minister, is it not a fact that, in a briefing last night by officers of your department to my staff, it was confirmed that the formula for allocating road funding under Road to Recovery between states is not the same as the current formula? Minister, given that you claim your road funding package is not biased towards
coalition seats, why do you refuse to publicly disclose the new formula for the allocation of road funding?

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honourable member for his question. He has been railing on about it in this place, trying to make a mountain out of a molehill. As the Prime Minister has made quite plain, allocations between councils within each state—let me come to that aspect first—are strictly in accordance with the formula adopted by the States Grants Commission as established and applied under the previous government. For that reason, as I said earlier in my speech introducing this landmark reform and initiative, any suggestion that the allocation to councils has been manipulated to favour the electorates of government members is completely scurrilous. The outcome is the same as it would have been under your formula. It is your formula. It is your approach. The only other comment I have to make is that, in relation to the historical methodology for allocating local road funding between states and territories—

Opposition members interjecting.

Mr ANDERSON—This is the answer.

Mr Martin Ferguson—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The question went to between states, not between councils in any given state.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Batman is aware that the obligation of the chair is to ensure that the answer is relevant to the question. The Deputy Prime Minister’s answer is entirely relevant.

Mr ANDERSON—And this is a member who was in here this morning casting ‘dispersions’ on my educational background. I am just coming to it.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—They are obviously not interested in the answer. The historical methodology for allocating between states and territories threw up a couple of not major but significant anomalies that we felt needed to be acknowledged. The key one to my way of thinking was that, even on the most superficial glance, South Australia was being done in the eye in terms of what we thought were important—population and road distances. In terms of the claim that the member for Batman has been running around this place, I make the observation that, so far as I know, there are no members of my party in South Australia. I just make that point on the way through, in light of what he has been saying.

Mr Howard—That’s dead right. They’re all good Liberals.

Mr ANDERSON—We’ll have a go at it if you like. We’ll see if we can do something about it.

Mr SPEAKER—It would be appropriate at this stage for at least the Speaker to interject and say that it would be helpful if the minister were to come to the question.

Mr ANDERSON—The allocation is based on historical precedence—in other words, the long-term approach that has been adopted—but the minister responsible for local government has been indicating some concerns, particularly in relation to South Australia. But the allocation is based on historical precedence and on the entirely legitimate considerations of the length of local roads and of population. I think it is scurrilous, absolutely without foundation and, most significantly, without credibility to claim that this package is a pork barrel any more than it is a boondoggle.

There is no doubt about it: it takes one to know one. The local governments—to whom this is directed—have instantly recognised that this is a very valuable program and one that they want. When it comes to knowing the ALP’s capacity to look after people wherever they live in Australia, it certainly takes one to know one. And, since I am talking about South Australia, down there they have the Country Labor Association. South Australians presumably know about it.

Mr Downer—I have never heard of it.

Mr ANDERSON—Oh, well, that is a pity, because their highly regarded chief, Bill Hender, has just resigned. He resigned because, he said of the ALP:

The machine does not like policies which have competent, practical solutions. He went on to say:
When I resigned as president of the Country Labor Association they had every opportunity to ask me why, but not one of them bothered. Country representatives know why.

I am just quoting in part—

Ms Macklin interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—Well, it takes one to know one. He said:

People who think they can get a better deal with Labor are in for a shock.

He said:

Labor was full of citycentrics—

But he corrected himself.

Mr SPEAKER—The minister will come to the question.

Mr ANDERSON—He said:

No, not even that. They are so full of their own self-interest, I do not think they are interested in the city either.

Private Health Insurance: Gap Payments

Dr SOUTHCOTT (2.54 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Health and Aged Care. Would the minister advise what the government is doing to minimise and ultimately to eliminate private health insurance medical gaps? Would the minister also inform the House of any alternative policies to assist Australians who have private health insurance?

Dr WOOLDRIDGE—I thank the honourable member for his question. When we came to government there were no gap cover schemes available or operating in Australia. The gap, along with price, is one of the two biggest disincentives people have to taking out private health insurance. We have been able to address price with the 30 per cent rebate and from having had two years where health fund premium increases have been very low.

I have just received some very good news from the Private Health Insurance Administrative Council. We have never before kept figures on gaps. I have asked PHIAC to do so, and they have given me their first report. In the September quarter, nearly two million medical services were provided in hospital with no gap whatsoever; that is, 60 per cent of all in-hospital services around Australia were on a no-gap basis in the September quarter. About 12 months ago, the best estimate we could have was less than 10 per cent of in-hospital services with no gap; in the June quarter, around 50 per cent. So this number is going up exponentially.

In Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia, 70 per cent of in-hospital services are on a no-gap basis; no state has less than half of its hospital services on a no-gap basis. Queensland and Tasmania doubled the amount of no-gap services in just one quarter. We estimate that it will plateau at about 70 per cent of services on a no-gap basis before the recent changes to gap cover schemes that passed through the parliament in August come into place. Those will start to show in the March and June quarters next year, and we believe that we can approach 80 per cent of all hospital services in Australia with no gaps whatsoever.

The good news is that this has come at no increased cost to premiums. Funds representing 70 per cent of all members in Australia have already advised me that they will not be applying for premium increases next year—that is, they will be at least zero for 70 per cent of members covered, and I hope the final number will be much closer to 100 per cent. So this new gap cover scheme that, as of the last quarter, provided 60 per cent coverage across Australia is at no increase to premiums whatsoever.

The honourable member asked me if there were any alternative policies to assist Australians who have private health insurance. We of course are still waiting for this. We have had from the opposition 31 press releases against the 30 per cent rebate and not one in favour. We are happy to be judged by our record.

Roads: Funding

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (2.57 p.m.)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Minister, I refer to the road funding formula you use under the Roads to Recovery Program. Minister, can you explain to the people of Tasmania why Tasmania receives only 3.3 per cent of the allocation under Roads to Recovery, whereas it receives 5.5 per cent under identified local road grants?
Mr Tuckey interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Minister for Forestry and Conservation was not asked for an opinion.

Mr ANDERSON—Because we took proper account of road distance, population and historical factors. And we will also be explaining to the good people of Tasmania that it was we who delivered it, while the Leader of the Opposition does not believe that they should get anything more for their local roads.

Work for the Dole: Program

Mr HAWKER (2.58 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Employment Services. Is the minister aware of recent conflicting public statements concerning the Work for the Dole program? What is the government’s response to these statements?

Mr ABBOTT—I thank the member for Wannon for his question. I note that unemployment in his area has fallen from 14.1 per cent when the member for Hotham was the relevant minister. It is now 7.5 per cent, which is obviously far too high, but it is a lot better than it was in the bad old days of the Labor Party’s government.

On Monday, the member for Dickson said:
Labor has stated it will not abolish Work for the Dole.
Labor has said it, but it has not meant it. In February, the member for Dickson said:
There are a lot of things, like Work for the Dole, which actually could be reformed to make sure that they provide proper training.
In May she said:
We do support some equivalent of the Work for the Dole scheme but the current system is severely flawed.
In June she said:
Probably we would change the name ... On Tuesday of this week, a day after saying that she would keep the program, she said:
If the same money had been spent on training and proper work placement programs many millions could have been saved.
The member for Dickson wants to change the structure of the program, she wants to change the name of the program and she wants to redirect the funding elsewhere—in other words, she wants to abolish the program. It is a different name, it is a different structure, and there is no funding for it so it will not exist under Labor.

Mr McMullan interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT—Mr Speaker, if I have got things wrong, if I have misunderstood the much wronged member for Dickson, perhaps she could call a full press conference this afternoon and clear things up.

Roads: Funding

Mr BEAZLEY (3.01 p.m.)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. Deputy Prime Minister, are you aware that your media documentation allocates for the City of Brisbane $29 million as new road funding for the seat of Oxley? Minister, is this the same $29 million that your media documentation claims as new funding for the seat of Ryan? Minister, is this the same $29 million that your media documentation claims as new funding for the seat of Brisbane? Minister, is this the same $29 million that your media documentation claims as new funding for each of 11 Brisbane seats? Minister, why are you misleading the people of Bowman, Brisbane, Dickson, Fadden, Griffith, Lilley, Moreton, Oxley, Petrie, Rankin and Ryan by telling them that they are all getting the same $29 million?

Mr ANDERSON—We have not misrepresented the size of the package. It is a $1.2 billion package which you will not commit yourselves to and to which, we note, to this point in time, not one of you has committed to joining us on in insisting that your friends in the state governments of places such as Tasmania actually match what we are doing for them. We have documented—

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order that goes to relevance.

Mr ANDERSON—How can that possibly be not relevant?

Mr Beazley—It goes to relevance. He has been asked a question as to why his government has allocated the same $29 million in its propaganda for every one of the Brisbane seats, and he will not address it.
Mr SPEAKER—I noted the question. The Deputy Prime Minister had been on his feet for a matter of 20 seconds. He had been talking about the question of road funding, and that was relevant to the question asked.

Mr ANDERSON—There is no trickery in this at all. The fact is that we have listed every local government area in the country. Many of them do indeed overlap federal electorate boundaries. What is so amazing about that? Surely everyone knows that they have local government areas that overlap. Unlike you, and unlike what some of the state ministers have suggested we do, we have not gone into the business of telling local governments where they will spend that money, that it must be allocated within the boundaries of such and such a federal electorate. We have not gone down that road. Quite simply, every member, including those opposite, has a simple list—and I have not noticed any of them sending it back; none of them will want to deny the money—pointing to the councils which fall within their electorates or, in the case of councils which overlap with other electorates, pointing to the sums of money that each of those councils will receive direct from the Commonwealth government. I would have thought that that was perfectly easy to disaggregate and perfectly easy for responsible members everywhere to accurately reflect in this very widely and very well received program. Of course, it remains the fact that the ALP leader has refused to endorse the package, to commit himself to it. He still believes that this a boondoggle and unnecessary. In addition to that, they have done nothing to join us in what I would have thought would have been a spirit of commonsense, a commitment to economic and social reform by calling on the state governments to match what we are doing.

Corporations Law: Commonwealth Responsibility

Mr ANDREWS (3.05 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Financial Services and Regulation. Would the minister advise the House of the consequences of the failure of the states to agree to referring Corporations Law responsibility to the Commonwealth? What effect will this have on the progress of the government’s corporate law reform program? Finally, what are the consequences for business confidence?

Mr HOCKEY—I would like to thank the member for Menzies, who certainly is a very competent lawyer who will have a keen interest in this matter. When it comes to the Corporations Law, the Commonwealth has the same objectives today as it did when an agreement was made with the states in 1990. We want Australia’s one million companies to have one rule of law, whether they be in Bendigo or Bathurst; we want Australia’s millions of company employees to have the same protection under company law whether they are based in Fremantle or in Fairfield; we want Australian industries such as building and construction, transport and storage, tourism and health, to have the same single law applied for companies across Australia; and, when it comes to Australia’s seven million shareholders, we want them to have the same information in the same prospectus with the same investment returns whether they live in Launceston or Fitzroy Crossing.

We ask: why are the states determined to now put in place a new Corporations Law scheme that could end up with six different laws applying across Australia? Why are they prepared to do it? The states with their current proposal want the ability to cherry pick any new corporate law scheme to suit their individual purposes. At a time when trillions of investment dollars move into companies around the world each day, we have Premier Beattie wanting the 90,000 companies in Queensland to face investment uncertainty as a result of some political stunts. In Victoria, where the member for Menzies is based, Premier Bracks wants 174,000 companies to worry more about political stunts on industrial relations than the certainty of incorporation or the cost of issuing different prospectuses with different laws right around Australia.

The Commonwealth has bent over backwards to try to accommodate the states and their concerns in relation to the referral of powers. We have put in place every practical, workable safeguard they have needed to protect the intention of the referral. We have
gone further in the corporations agreement to protect state rights than ever before, and the time has come for commonsense to prevail. The Commonwealth stands ready to continue to negotiate with the states in good faith but, ultimately, if the states are not willing to trade, we are left with no option but to implement our own laws based on our own powers. One hundred years ago the states could not agree on a railway gauge across Australia. Today the Corporations Law is as significant. It is vital that we have one system for one nation.

Roads: Funding

Mr BEAZLEY (3.09 p.m.)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. Deputy Prime Minister, do you recall denying that your road package favours government members? Can you confirm that there are 17 seats that receive funding of $25 million or more? Is it not the case that every one of those 17 seats is held by the government? Is it also not a fact that the Northern Territory is bigger than all but one of them and Capricornia bigger than most of them? Minister, how can you stand by your statement that this package does not favour coalition seats?

Mr ANDERSON—The fact is that, as I said, the distribution within the states is based on the States Grants Commission formula. Who was it that operated that exactly as it is now for decades? They did, the ALP did.

Mr Beazley—Who gave it to the Northern Territory?

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

Mr ANDERSON—There is no unfairness in this. As I have quite clearly indicated, both our approach and that of the States Grants Commission plainly seek to weight appropriately population and road base. The fact of the matter is that those opposite do not hold a lot of the larger seats in this country where you have a small population base, very large areas and long road distances. You do not hold much of that country across the nation, and I do not think it is very hard to find the reasons why. Our good old friend Bill Hender identified them pretty well.

Mr Beazley—I take a point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. He is clearly moving away from answering this specific question. The Northern Territory has a larger population than any other seat and the second largest—

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. By any measure, the Deputy Prime Minister was being relevant to the question asked.

Mr ANDERSON—I really did not have much to add except that it is very obvious that the Leader of the Opposition has still not got the message that local roads in this country need attention. There are economic and social reasons for giving them attention. The member for Paterson understands that, but he has not been able to convince his leader. We do not know whether he has not been able to convince Martin Ferguson, the member for Batman, of the case but the member for Batman has not been able to convince the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr McGauran interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister needs no assistance from the Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation. He will come to the question.

Mr ANDERSON—Our good old mate Bill Hender really hit the nail on this one as well when he said, ‘I’m getting awfully sick of the self-named Labor machine. It’s shooting the messenger rather than accepting the message.’

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister was asked to come to the question. Has the Deputy Prime Minister concluded his answer?

Mr ANDERSON—Yes, absolutely.

Renewable Energy Legislation

Mr CAUSLEY (3.13 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister representing the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. Would the minister outline to the House the benefits of the government’s renewable energy bill? Is the minister aware of proposals to build cogeneration electricity plants in rural towns like Condong on the North Coast of New South Wales? What are the implications for jobs, small businesses and the envi-
ronment in regional towns if the bill is not passed?

Mr TRUSS—I thank the honourable member for his question because it draws attention to the government’s very important renewable energy bill. I am sorry to say that Labor and Democrat senators are seeking to block this important legislation which has the potential to create between 5,000 and 10,000 jobs, many of them in regional Australia, and to result in investments of $2 billion to $3 billion in renewable energy plants. These plants will particularly benefit regional communities because that is where the jobs will be created.

A lot of them will be dependent—one in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales and one in my own electorate—largely on sugar cane for gas, but obviously that is not available 12 months of the year because of seasonal factors. So they need to get some alternative feedstock. In many instances, that alternative feedstock will need to be sawmill waste or some other residue. It seems that it is the unwillingness for sawmill waste to be used in these renewable energy plants that is causing a problem for Labor and the Democrats. They would prefer to see this waste burnt or lost altogether than it to be used in any kind of constructive way. It would be a tragedy if this important legislation, this pro-environment legislation, this legislation that is about recycling and renewable energy, was to be blocked by Labor and the Democrats.

There are a lot of concerns in communities like my own and the Northern Rivers that this proposal could be lost. In fact, there was a delegation from the sugar industry in the parliament a few days ago. In my own electorate, in a couple of days more than 2,000 signatures were collected demanding that Labor and the Democrats support this legislation. And I certainly join those calls.

But I am not the only one who thinks the legislation should be passed. I am sure the honourable member for Page would also be interested to know that in the Maryborough newspaper yesterday, under the headline ‘Listen Canberra: we want the plant’, the Labor candidate for Maryborough is quoted as demanding that Labor and Democrat senators not put the cogenenerational plant and local jobs in jeopardy when voting next on the renewable energy bill. So many people in the Labor Party want this passed as well. I ask the member for Paterson: what is his approach to this issue? One of these plants, as he pointed out earlier, is proposed for his electorate. Is he prepared to sacrifice those regional jobs over some silly deal about green preferences? We have heard a fair bit about Labor Party preference deals lately. This is a deal about green preferences that is prepared to sacrifice country jobs. They could get on to it, pass this bill and allow this tremendous investment to proceed in regional Australia.

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

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy: Foreign Debt

Mr COSTELLO (Higgins—Treasurer)

(3.17 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek to add to an answer.

Mr SPEAKER—The Treasurer may proceed.

Mr COSTELLO—In percentage terms, the growth in net foreign debt between March 1983 and March 1996 was 668 per cent and from March 1996 to September 2000 was 52 per cent. As a proportion of GDP, the growth between March 1983 and March 1996 was 176 per cent and between March 1996 and September 2000 was 20 per cent. In relation to the current account, I should inform the House that, as a percentage of GDP, for the first time in nearly 30 years Australia now has a smaller current account deficit in percentage terms than the United States. This is a point which has been made—

Mr Tanner interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—Member for Melbourne.

Mr COSTELLO—in the BT report put out today by Chris Caton, who after making the observation that—

Mr Tanner interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—Member for Melbourne!

Mr COSTELLO—for the first time in 30 years—
Mr Tanner interjecting—

Mr Speaker—The member for Melbourne is warned!

Mr Costello—for the first time in nigh on 30 years, as a percentage of GDP Australia’s current account is smaller than that of the United States, went on to say this: An ex Prime Minister told me that the trade accounts will whirr further towards balance over the next year.

That is what Mr Caton put in his report today. I am happy to make that available.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr Lieberman (Indi) (3.19 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr Lieberman—I do.

Mr Speaker—Please proceed.

Mr Lieberman—In an article in the Age today headed ‘Road fund claims are dishonest: ALP’, reference is made to me and my electorate and some other members and the announcements made by me and others on the $1.2 billion Roads to Recovery program. I believe that the article draws an inference that the statements made by me as the local member for Indi were inaccurate and did not correctly state the amounts granted. In fact, my news release carefully stated the amounts granted, and it was $23 million for north-east Victoria.

Mr Speaker—The member for Indi has indicated where he was misrepresented.

Mr Lieberman—Yes. The article goes on and say that some members were careful to correctly state it, and by inference and omission, omitting my name there, they therefore misrepresented my position.

Mr Speaker—The member for Indi has indicated where he was misrepresented.

Dr Stone (Murray—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage) (3.21 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Dr Stone—Most grievously.

Mr Speaker—The member for Murray may proceed.

Dr Stone—in question time today, the member for Paterson referred to an email he received from three people from the electorate of Murray. The member claimed this email was evidence of my not supporting our government’s response to fuel prices. What the member failed to mention was that the email included a petition directed against me, precisely because I am very actively and publicly supporting and explaining this government’s policy. I am well and truly on the public record, including the media, supporting our policy.

Mr Speaker—The member for Murray has indicated where she has been misrepresented.

Frank Bailey (McEwen) (3.21 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Frank Bailey—I do, indeed.

Mr Speaker—Please proceed.

Frank Bailey—Today in the same article that the member for Indi referred to, the article by Annabel Crabb, I have been misrepresented on two counts: one in relation to an inference about the $26 million road funding that was made available across the shires in my electorate. I went into great detail to say that my electorate had access to that funding. This article also indicated that I have 10 councils. In fact, I have eight, and I can tell you that all eight think that this funding package is fantastic.

Mr Speaker—The member for McEwen has indicated where she has been misrepresented.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Speaker—The member for Burke is only being denied the call by the antics of some on my left. The member for Hunter might confer on the other side of that aisle. I call the member for Burke.
QUESTIONS TO MR SPEAKER

Standing Order 78

Mr O’KEEFE (3.22 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, yesterday after question time I took a point of order. In the discussions that ensued when you were faced with a number of points of order, you did not actually comment on the point of order I raised with you. It is in relation to standing order 78, which states:

When the attention of the Speaker is drawn to words used, he or she shall determine whether or not they are offensive or disorderly.

I pointed out yesterday that, whenever a member had asked the Speaker to take action because the member found a particular term offensive, it had been my longstanding experience that the Speaker always required the offender to withdraw as a courtesy to the member. The events that have taken place today lead me to wonder whether or not you have actually now moved in your interpretation of that practice by the Speaker. That is the question I am asking you.

Mr SPEAKER—When I responded yesterday, from memory, I was responding to both the members for Newcastle and Burke. But if I did not respond accurately to the member for Burke’s inquiry, I am happy to indicate to him that there has been no change in my attitude or approach. Obviously if I consider a term is by precedent unparliamentary—Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—There seems to be an instant judgment from the member for Lyons so that no matter whether one has completed a statement or not he determines guilt or innocence regardless of the completion of the statement. If a term is unparliamentary, clearly there is an obligation on anyone who uses that term to withdraw it. If a term causes offence, it is up to the occupier of the chair to determine whether or not it is appropriate that that term should be withdrawn, depending on the nature of the term. That is not a new rule. You will find that my predecessors made similar rulings, and I am happy to check the ruling and come back to the member for Burke. But to answer his question as briefly as I can, obviously I will require all unparliamentary terms to be withdrawn and, as is often the case during my stewardship of this chair, I have asked members who have used terms that are not unparliamentary but that I have deemed to be undesirable to simply exercise a little more restraint.

Standing Order 78

Mr O’KEEFE (3.25 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, may I ask a further question of you in respect of that, and I appreciate the fact that you are going to come back to me on it. I want to refine what it is I am specifically asking concerning the practice in the past. As happened in this situation yesterday, as you explained and everybody accepted, you actually misinterpreted the comments that were made and therefore were not in a position at that point to determine whether they were offensive or not. The situation that occurred was that the member, in this case the member for Dickson, was offended and drew your attention to the fact that she was offended and asked for the words to be withdrawn. It has been my experience that in that situation the Speaker has always asked the offender to do that. That is what I am specifically asking. Are you now moving away from that common practice that in a situation like that the Speaker generally insists that the words be withdrawn?

Mr SPEAKER—I refer the member for Burke to his statement generally; that is, if a member finds words offensive I would require that they be withdrawn. In the instance he cites, as every member in the House is aware and as the public ought to be aware, the minister made those particular remarks but when I became aware of the possible inference in those remarks the minister was no longer in the chamber and it was for that reason that I required him to return this morning. I did not necessarily require him to withdraw the remarks. I would draw the attention of all members of the House to the Hsandsd of this morning’s comments by that minister. I will come back to the member for Burke because it is not my intent that anything that causes as much offence as that caused to the member for Dickson should remain on the record.
Thursday, 30 November 2000

DIGITAL CLOCKS

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (3.28 p.m.)—
Mr Speaker, I wonder whether you would consider introducing digital clocks into the chamber to assist members and staff to clearly and quickly determine the time. Such clocks exist in the Main Committee and are much easier to read than the clocks in this chamber.

Mr SPEAKER—I understand the member for Braddon’s inquiry and I will respond to him when I have an opportunity. In my experience as an occupier of one of the seats in this House, I did not find the present arrangement at all inconvenient. I am therefore not inclined to facilitate a change. But if he were to raise the matter with the Procedure Committee and they were to make such a recommendation, I would consider it.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Reports Nos 18 and 20 of 2000-01

Mr SPEAKER—I present the Auditor-General’s audit reports Nos 18 and 20 of 2000-01 entitled: No. 18—Performance audit—Reform of service delivery of business assistance programs—Department of Industry, Science and Resources, and No. 20—Performance audit—Second tranche sale of Telstra shares.

Ordered that the reports be printed.

PAPERS

Mr REITH (Flinders—Leader of the House)—Papers are tabled as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the papers will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

Motion (by Mr Reith) proposed:

That the House take note of the following papers:


‘Bringing them Home’ Report—Progress on Commonwealth Initiatives.

Debate (on motion by Mr McMullan) adjourned.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Immigration Reception Processing Centres

Mr SPEAKER—I have received a letter from the honourable member for Bowman proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The continuing failure of the government to establish a judicial inquiry into the growing revelations concerning Australia’s Immigration Reception Processing Centres.

I call upon those members who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.

More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—

Mr SCIACCA (Bowman) (3.30 p.m.)—This is not an issue about politics. It is not an issue about point scoring, as no doubt the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs would like to make people think. This goes to the very question of whether Minister Ruddock has the capacity to manage his portfolio. Let us put aside the minister’s inaction and his blinkered attitude to date on the numerous allegations that have been made with respect to the alleged incidents at the Woomera Detention Centre. On this occasion, I would implore the minister to put aside his pride, to put aside his blind adherence to bureaucratic processes and to start to think seriously about the numerous allegations that are surfacing with respect to the incidents at the Woomera Detention Centre on a day-to-day basis. The people who are making these allegations are brave, credible people who obviously feel so strongly about what has happened that they are prepared to put their credibility on the line and, if you are to believe some of them, even expose themselves to possible retribution. I am aware that there are many others who would be prepared to come forward and tell similar stories if it were not for the confidentiality clauses in terms of their employment and the fact that they are concerned about what could happen to them.
The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs defends these allegations by saying that there are avenues available for people with complaints. He says that they should report matters to the police or to Family and Youth Services in South Australia. If he really thinks that—and he again said that today here in this House—he is living in fairyland. Minister, if this were one allegation, I could understand your view. Of course then you go to the appropriate place where you can complain. If it were two allegations, again you would go to one of these state instrumentalities or to some other organisation. Even if it were three, I put it to you that maybe your answer would be appropriate. But, Minister, we are now at a point where there seem to be allegations of systemic abuses at the Woomera Detention Centre. People are frightened of retribution and are not making reports. Given what we are hearing about the culture at Woomera, is it any wonder that they are frightened of making these reports?

To date the opposition, believing that the minister has erred badly in his handling of these issues, has pursued these matters in the parliament. For instance, the minister has had to be dragged in, kicking and screaming, to establish a limited inquiry with very limited terms of reference. Indeed, he acted only when the media broke the story. Even then, it was eight months after a document—evidently an incident report was made. He found out about it supposedly eight months later. I believe him that he found out about it eight months later, but I say to the minister: someone has let you down badly. The fact is that you made this decision to have these limited terms of inquiry only after you were forced into it by the fact that the media reported the alleged rape of a 12-year-old boy. Then, having found that document, having been made aware of that document, you decided that you would call for a limited inquiry.

We were also led to believe during the week that the minister had not received a letter dated 18 April that was sent by a Mary Lindsay by fax to Mr Smith, the director of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in Adelaide. In that letter, Mary Lindsay specifically made the assertion that she had heard that there had been some problems with respect to a young boy. Again, I accept that the minister did not see that letter until the day that I tabled it in this House, which was a couple of days ago. But, Minister, what was the result of that inadvertence? What was the result of whoever it was, either the department or one of the officers in your own office, not giving you that information? Somebody either covered up this incident report or, for some reason, did not give it to you. Was the result of that? It is not just one of those matters where you can say, ‘Oh well, these things happen.’ The result is that a 12-year-old boy was left in the environment where he was being sexually abused, and in the custody of the person allegedly abusing him, for another eight months. This is what we are talking about here. This is why I started off my MPI by saying that this is not about whether I am having a go at the minister or whether the minister is trying to protect somebody. The fact is that this is about real people. In fact, this is about a little child who is 12 years old. The result of this inaction, this inadvertence, this cover-up—call it what you will—is that this young kid was left in the hands of the person who allegedly raped him for an extra eight months. I am not blaming you for that, Minister—not personally. But I am saying that something is terribly wrong and needs to be looked at.

I think those of you who are involved in any sense in, say, family law or in problems between husbands and wives will know that, if any allegations at all are made to a judge that one party or the other is somehow molesting one of the children, immediately the benefit of the doubt is given for the welfare of that child. That child is taken away and put in some sort of custody. You do not take risks. In other words, I would presume that, if that incident report of the time had been made known to the South Australian Police and to the authorities, most probably they would have given it the benefit of the doubt and they would probably have put that young child in protective custody, where I understand that he was taken last Monday week.
Even after all of this, even after the minister has been made aware of all these facts—reading about it in the newspapers on a day-to-day basis, even after this—the minister calls some sort of a press briefing and extols the virtues of, and heaps praise on, Australasian Correctional Management and says that they are doing a wonderful job under the circumstances. In fact, journalists rang me to say, ‘You’ve got no idea how effusive the minister was in heaping praise on Australasian Correctional Management.’ The fact is: why are these people all coming out? We will pursue these issues at a later time, Minister. But for now, what is at issue is the minister’s ability to handle the situation. He must, if he has any idea of doing the right thing, set up an inquiry with full powers, including compulsion and protection of witnesses. Even though the results of that inquiry may be embarrassing to you, Minister, to other people and perhaps to your government, it is the right thing to do. It is not just the opposition calling for this; it is a lot of people out there in the community. I just want to read into the record a few of the editorials that I have seen today. One from the Adelaide Advertiser—

**Mr Ruddock interjecting—**

**Mr SCIACCA**—The minister laughs. This is not a laughing matter, Minister. I am trying to be—

**Mr Ruddock**—Ill-informed.

**Mr SCIACCA**—Ill-informed as far as you are concerned, but this is what these editorials say. This is the Adelaide Advertiser of today, Thursday, 30 November. It is headed ‘The fair go should apply at Woomera’, and I quote:

The allegations about criminal behaviour at the Woomera detention centre where illegal migrants are held are deeply disturbing. But their veracity is yet to be tested.

This is Australia, and the most excited complainant deserves a fair hearing. When the accusations are, in effect, about rape and brutality, posturing and half-measure responses are simply inadequate.

The basic approach of federal immigration minister Phillip Ruddock marks him as a follower not a leader in this matter.

And it goes on. I say to the minister: be a leader on this issue. If you do not think that there is anything to worry about, what are you frightened of? Why are you giving this inquiry that you have set up, this investigation, such limited terms of reference without any real powers?

I now go to the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial of today, Thursday the 30th, headed ‘Inefficient inquiry’. It says:

Even before it begins the inquiry prompted by allegations of child abuse in the Woomera immigration detention centre is flawed. The terms of reference announced by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Mr Ruddock are too narrow.

It goes on to talk about questions of bias, which I do not particularly want to read. Then it goes on:

Mr Flood’s inquiry will also be fatally flawed by its limited powers. It will not, it seems, have the power to compel witnesses to appear and answer questions and—most important—to protect them. Already, potential witnesses have reportedly said they would not appear before the inquiry out of fear of possible retribution.

The announced terms of reference are narrow, confined to the “processes” for “identifying, dealing with, reporting on and following up allegations, instances, or situations where there is reasonable suspicion, of child abuse in immigration detention centres”. The inquiry will look at the “manner in which these processes were followed in cases during the past year”.

The editorial goes on to say:

But Mr Flood has not been asked to determine whether the serious allegations of criminal behaviour at the Woomera detention centre—of rape and sexual abuse of a 12-year old boy and sexual abuse of women—have substance.

It is imperative to establish these fundamental questions, especially in view of the persistent suggestions that the allegations are baseless or arise from confused complaints from the boy and the young women concerned that are really the result of being traumatised by other factors, such as the harrowing experience of their journey to Australia.

It continues:

In the terms of reference “the case currently under investigation by the South Australian Family and Youth Service” is mentioned. This appears to mean the case of the 12-year old boy—
and it goes on. Later it says:

The public must have confidence in the operation of the Woomera centre, run by the Australasian Correctional Centre Management. The public needs reassurance that the policy of privatising such a function as immigration detention is working and the principle of detaining asylum seekers is sound. For that, a wider and more powerful inquiry is needed. Anything less will simply store up trouble for the Government. As well, of course, an incomplete inquiry may also leave at risk the health and wellbeing of people in custody for whom the Government ultimately is responsible.

The Sydney Morning Herald’s article is spot-on, mainly because it is talking about the people—and I am talking here about the possibility of the problems that we have with under-age children. There is little doubt now that there is a major crisis in the management of Australia’s immigration detention centres, and in particular the Woomera centre, by Australasian Correctional Management. ACM contracts, for instance, stipulate the provision of clothing, yet the company went to St Vincent de Paul seeking free garments, disadvantaging both the charity’s needy clients as well as the detainees. I will not have the time to read it today but there was a very good article in yesterday’s Advertiser by political reporter Suzie O’Brien reporting that:

‘The company managing the Woomera detention centre approached charity groups last year for free clothing for detainees.’ It goes on and says at the end:

But Mr Ruddock acknowledged it was contracted to provide complete service including food, clothing and shelter.

So we have a situation here where these people are going with the begging bowl to St Vincent de Paul trying to get free clothes which they are getting paid for by this government—and this government says that they are fantastic. It just beggars belief that this minister is that gullible that he would actually believe that.

On the matter of ACM’s failure to provide properly trained medical staff to treat detainees, we saw in yesterday’s lead story on the ABC news where a nurse who worked at the centre said that psychiatric nurses—or people who were supposedly psychiatric nurses but did not have the appropriate qualifications—were giving out poison S4 prescription drugs; administering them. It is just unbelievable, Minister, that you say that there is nothing wrong.

I want to make this point before I close: I know that there is not a lot of sympathy out there in the Australian community for people who jump queues, who come here unlawfully. I know that. And I know now that for some time this minister has believed that his treatment—demonising a lot of these people, giving them these temporary protection visas and not giving them any services, et cetera—might have been popular out in the Australian community. He may well have been right at that time. But I put it to you, Minister, that the Australian public has a heart: they do not like to read reports about young children being abused and they do not like to see human beings being treated in this way.

Now that you have the opportunity to renegotiate your contract with Australasian Correctional Management, I put it to you that you should look seriously at their performance. I put it to you that these people who are making these complaints have a right to have their grievances aired before a full judicial inquiry with all the powers available to them to compel witnesses and to protect witnesses. If you do not do that, Minister, you are failing in your obligation as minister for immigration. (Time expired)

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra—Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Reconciliation) (3.45 p.m.)—I would have hoped that honourable members who are so enthusiastic about these matters might have waited to hear some more balanced discussion. It is a pity to see so many of them scurrying out so quickly.

Mr Sciacca—At least they sat around for me.

Mr RUDDOCK—They want one side of the story. I will just deal with the issue of agendas. I have been thinking very seriously about why these issues are being raised in the way they are and why the opposition is pursuing them in the way in which it is. The opposition makes it clear that it sees mandatory detention as an important public policy.
I think the reason for this shadow minister taking that view is that he believes it would be electorally unpopular were he to do anything else. I do not know that it is in his heart to keep before him the reasons why these policies are pursued. The reasons why these policies are pursued are to ensure that there is a system of integrity in relation to the way in which people enter Australia and stay here and to ensure that we are able to look after the most needy people in our refugee and humanitarian program.

Why? The shadow minister made it clear the other day in answer to an interjection. His agenda is to unwind the privatisation, as he sees it, of the detention system. He made it very clear that that is what his agenda is. He asks why other people should have any other agenda. I do not want to speculate as to what all the agendas might be. But, when I know that something like 63 nurses have been at Woomera and one or two people are pursuing matters and have pursued them over a long period of time, I ask myself whether they do have any other agenda. Have they sought other positions and been disappointed? Are there issues of the character we see so often in the industrial movement where people believe that, if you pursue a matter in this way, you can get a particular outcome?

The evidence will be seen in terms of the nature of the allegations that are being made—and I will deal with those in detail in a moment. The shadow minister said that I had been dragged kicking and screaming in relation to the establishment of the Flood review. The reason that I established the Flood review was that, on the evening of the day before I made the announcement, I learned that there was a document that should have been before Family and Community Services, which they said was germane to their inquiries but which was not before them at that time—and I certainly believe that the procedure is deficient and in need of examination. That is why the inquiry has been launched.

But I will go to the substantial issues that have been raised, because I think it is important to characterise the allegations that have been made to date in terms of all of the statements in the press that I have read and all of the statements from the member opposite.

Mr Sciacca—There are a lot more to come.

Mr Ruddock—he says that there are a lot more to come. If you have allegations and information before you that relate to the safety of individuals and they are of a substantial character and you have not put them before the police or the relevant authorities and you are holding it up for a drip, drip, drip, that would be the most highly irresponsible, and I think the most callous, approach that any member of this parliament could take. It demonstrates that what you are about is a political agenda. That is what it is about: drip, drip, drip. That is what he said. He knows—drip, drip, drip. Let us look at the substance.

Mr Sciacca—Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. I seek his withdrawal of those statements about ‘callous’. The reality is that the statement I have made is on the basis that people are coming to me every day and giving me new information.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nehl)—Order! Let it be quite clear that the decision as to whether anything is offensive rests with the chair, and on this occasion I do not require the minister to withdraw. The minister has the call.

Mr Ruddock—I want to deal with the substance—the allegations that are in the public arena. First, in relation to a young boy, 12 years old, there is the allegation: raped by his father and sold to other detainees for cigarettes. An allegation relating to the boy was referred to the South Australia Police. They investigated the matter and found no basis upon which charges could be laid or the boy removed into care. The matter was reopened two weeks ago and the investigation remains current—and, quite frankly, it is the only matter that is presently under investigation. While I do not know the result of that inquiry, I suggest that it would...
be far better for the honourable member to wait until it is available. Let me say, if the inquiry does show that the initial decisions were right, you have not got a feather to fly with.

Mr Sciacca interjecting—

Mr RUDDOCK—No, the inquiry by Family and Youth Services—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Bowman has had his chance. The minister will ignore the interventions from the member.

Mr RUDDOCK—By competent officers, well trained, who are taking a great deal of care in relation to this matter. The matter of the 15-year-old male being sexually abused was referred to the South Australia Police and FAYS, who found no basis for charges. They are the appropriate authorities. The matter of the report of a young girl being sexually abused in April was investigated by police who found no basis for charges. Police and FAYS are the appropriate authorities. There was an allegation that young girls were being engaged in a brothel. No names, dates or any information have been offered to authorities to investigate it. In the matter of a nurse raped by an ACM officer, not on site but presumably in Woomera, no report or complaint was made to the police by the alleged victim. According to the member for Bowman, colleagues knew of the attack. The police are the appropriate authority to deal with it.

Let us deal with some of the other statements that have been picked up, because this gives you the genesis of the sorts of complaints we are dealing with. Do you remember the speech two days ago about babies being fed rice and cabbage and treated in hospital for malnourishment?

Mr Sciacca—I said they were the allegations.

Mr RUDDOCK—You said they are the allegations. That is right. Let us deal with the allegations in that matter. No child has been admitted to Woomera Hospital or to other hospitals suffering malnourishment.

Mr Sciacca interjecting—

Mr RUDDOCK—Yes. No children have been admitted to Woomera or Roxby Downs for gross malnourishment, ostensibly as a result of poor quality food provided. But as I was there yesterday—and I am supposed to be vigorously defending ACM—I will quote before him what I would have put if he had asked me a question on the matter. The handwritten menus for the period of 1 January 2000 detail the sorts of meals people get. At breakfast they get cereal, toast, milk, tea, jam—

Mr Sciacca—What about infants?

Mr RUDDOCK—You can go through and you can deal with it in relation to infants. Infants get infants’ food or they are on their mothers’ breast or they get bottled food.

Mr Sciacca—What do they give them—cabbage and rice?

Mr RUDDOCK—No. They give them the appropriate food. There are the menus. And not only do they have a menu for November but also they have a menu for Ramadan, which I table. There is enormous sensitivity in the way in which these issues are dealt with. Then there are the statements about unqualified nurses treating patients: 63 nurses have been employed at Woomera, 52 have been confirmed as registered in South Australia and checks are being made on the balance. When they advertise they ask for registered nurses. Some of those that come forward are from interstate and there is a short interregnum before people get their qualifications transferred to the relevant state in which they are working. But unregistered nurses can still perform medical tasks provided they do not contravene the registration requirements. Then there is the intimidation of contracted staff wanting to report child abuse.

Many staff have both a legal and a moral obligation to report. There is no option. Reports to the abuse line of Family and Youth Services—and the pamphlet is here, which I table—make it very clear that the people who report to that line are anonymous; that is, the person reporting is not revealed to the accused. That information is quite clear. If people are claiming sexual abuse, why didn’t they report it? Why have they left it, as the
honourable member says, for eight months? If these are professional people making their judgments in these matters, they have a lawful responsibility to bring that information forward. And, eight months down the track, the judgments you want to put on me you are saying are totally unreasonable to ask of anybody else.

Mr Sciacca interjecting—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The honourable minister will resume his seat. The member for Bowman has exhausted his deposit of goodwill from the chair. From now on he will be silent or he will leave the chamber. The minister has the call.

Mr RUDDOCK—Let me deal with the final matter—information withheld or removed from files. That is the one matter that I think Mr Flood would be able to deal with. If it involves particularly medical malpractice, those are issues that can be reported to relevant health authorities—others like the ombudsman and the like. I make these points because, if you look at the evidence and you go through it, there have been reports and they have been investigated. Let me make it very clear: I am not trying to protect anybody in relation to the people who have a responsibility for dealing with these matters. If the police and Family and Youth Services believe charges should be brought, whether they are against detainees or others, those charges will be brought, as they were in Curtin in Western Australia.

In the time that remains I want to deal with some allegations that were repeated today on which the eight months was based—that is, the letter from Mary Lindsay. There is some information that has come to me from the head of the firm Macpherson and Kelley that employed her when she was in Woomera. She is one of the principals informing the member opposite. I will read from the letter because the letter understandably deals with the issues that are germane to this very question. He said:

It is, I think, relevant for you to know that Ms Lindsay was contracted by my firm between April 4 and 12 to assist us with Taskforce 32 at Woomera. That was the first and last occasion on which we have used her services. I was present at the Woomera IRPC during the processing of this taskforce and although Ms Lindsay had complaints about the inability of detainees to communicate with their families she did not then, nor at any time later, mention to me any concern about the sexual or other abuse of children in the centre. I understand that Ms Lindsay took it upon herself to speak to the DIMA manager at the Centre on that occasion about improving the facilities for detainees to communicate with their families. She contacted me after the taskforce and informed me it was her intention to write to you about these concerns. I wrote to you at that time disassociating my firm from any comments she may have made concerning conditions at Woomera IRPC on the basis that she was not authorised by my firm to make comments that had not first been cleared by me.

To the best of my knowledge Ms Lindsay did not raise any concerns about maltreatment of children with any of the other members of the team which handled Taskforce 32. Had she done so we would have immediately taken the matter up with the DIMA manager at the Centre ... Until the current allegations arose in the media none of us at Macpherson + Kelley had received any information (from detainees or from any other source) about child abuse at Woomera or any other immigration detention centre.

I note also that the letter allegedly written by Ms Lindsay claims that she heard about the alleged sexual abuse ‘last Friday’ which Mr Sciacca calculated was April 14. This was two days after Ms Lindsay’s return to Adelaide and consequently the source of this information is to be questioned. She also apparently noted that other “reps” at the camps had genuine concerns about children being sexually abused yet on bringing these concerns to the notice of “heads of firms” they had been advised not to get involved. As I have mentioned, no such report was made to me at any time.

I also note with interest that Ms Lindsay’s claims to have expressed her grave concerns to the head of ACM at Woomera when she heard about a ‘similar case’ involving a young boy. In my opinion it is not likely that Ms Lindsay spoke to an ACM officer or anyone else about such a matter given that she did not mention it to me, and admits that she did not become aware of the matter until April 14 when she was back in Adelaide.

I mention those matters because this goes to the credibility of the sources that the member wants. There are motives involved in this—the member has admitted that he has a motive. Why does he want this sort of inquiry? Because he wants to parade a whole host of
unsubstantiated allegations in the public arena for the purposes of discrediting a whole lot of professional people whose careers and futures depend upon them carrying out their obligations professionally and appropriately. (Time expired)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)—Before I call the next speaker in the discussion, I noted during the address of the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs that he tabled several documents for which he should have sought leave. I understand he implied that he should seek leave.

Leave granted.

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (4.01 p.m.)—I rise to speak on this matter of public importance concerning the government’s failure to establish a judicial inquiry into the revelations concerning the immigration reception centres around the country. Behind the issue that the House is considering today is one very important concern. It is a concern that I am sure that the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs does not take lightly—nor should he. The Minister proudly wears his Amnesty International badge, a badge whose symbol is barbed wire. Yet at any given time he is responsible for the wellbeing of thousands of people who have been deprived of their liberty—people who have not committed a crime, people who have been forced here by circumstances that few of us here could ever begin to understand, people who have sought shelter from oppression, people who have sought sanctuary in Australia and people, we should not forget, of whom 90 per cent will become permanent residents of Australia.

The minister has a responsibility to those people. He has a responsibility for their wellbeing, he has a responsibility for their safety and he has a responsibility to ensure that they are treated fairly in having their case heard before the tribunals. The fact that he wears the badge of Amnesty International makes those responsibilities personal as well as legal. When you deprive a person of their liberty—when you lock them away behind barbed wire—you take away the ability for them to help themselves, you take away their rights to access help and you make them totally dependent on you for their care. You cannot pass the buck—if something happens to them while they are in your care, you are responsible.

That has to be the principle under which the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs operates. You have to be open about it; you have to be accountable. You have to be accountable to the parliament and the people of Australia and, because the people you are dealing with are not citizens of Australia, you have to be accountable to the international bodies. Accountability means being open. It means allowing the people of Australia and the world access to what is going on behind the barbed wire of the detention centres. Accountability is not something you can contract out with a commercial-in-confidence clause. It is not something that you can hand over to a public relations firm. These are the snivelling excuses that a coward hides behind. And when it comes to being accountable you cannot get away with a whitewash investigation.

In Australia the standard for accountability is a judicial inquiry. Only the judiciary has the credibility to conduct an inquiry into matters which may involve the serious breaches alleged to have occurred. Anything less will be seen as a whitewash. If that happens, Australia’s immigration practices will be rightly seen as a sham by the international community. But any investigation of alleged incidents must be seen against a backdrop of the development of detention centres—or, to give them their quaint title, ‘immigration reception processing centres’. It is true that such centres have been a reality of immigration policies throughout the term of many successive governments, but this government and this minister have taken the development of detention centres way beyond anything we have seen in this country before.

Why is it that we now have thousands of people detained in the most remote parts of Australia—thousands of kilometres from the tribunals which will hear their case, far from the legal representatives who will argue their case and far from the cities in which 90 per cent of them will eventually settle? It is part of a deliberate policy designed to pander to a racist minority in the Australian electorate. In a government driven by opinion polls the
comments coming out of the focus groups provide the basis for this government’s policy. This minister, despite his appeal to the principles of Amnesty International, is the willing servant of the government in implementing this policy.

I am sure members will be familiar with the solution proposed by some citizens to deal with people seeking refuge in Australia. There are those who would send out the Navy to sink the boats and drown their occupants before they reached our shores. The minister does not go that far, but this government’s policies are the nearest thing. When it comes to people arriving in Australia without the required authority this policy makes life so difficult and uncomfortable that it is a deterrent to anyone considering it. Having visited—along with the member for Hindmarsh—a number of detention centres, including those in Port Headland Broome, Curtin, Darwin and Villawood, I would have to say that they would be best described as deterrent centres rather than detention centres. So while the great majority of people detained in those centres have committed no crime, while they have not been sentenced as punishment, the government has to use the centres as a deterrent to those who would seek to come to Australia.

While the department put together videos—we all remember the videos that the department put together—showing sharks, crocodiles, snakes and spiders, the real deterrent, it hopes, is that word will get back to the countries from which asylum seekers come describing the detention centres as horror camps. If that is what the minister intended, then for some he may have succeeded. As anyone who has spoken to refugees would know, they have to put up with much worse. Many have already risked their lives in unsafe and overcrowded boats to get here, so just how far will the minister go to deter asylum seekers? What horrors can he dream up that will cause asylum seekers to avoid Australia? Given the sorts of responses he must get from his opinion polling, he probably thinks he can get away with anything. But I wonder if those same Australians would see things differently if they or a member of their family were to be treated by a foreign government in the same way that this government treats asylum seekers.

Some years ago I had the misfortune to have my passport and travel documents stolen while I was overseas. I can tell you that it can be quite frightening trying to convince officials that you are a tourist. Fortunately, I was able to get my passport back and continue on my journey. I was grateful that the people I dealt with were helpful, but I can imagine the difficulty I might have faced, because there are some people in the world who would not have allowed it. Listen to this, Minister: those thoughts crossed my mind when I visited a detention centre recently. I noticed a young woman, about the same age as my daughter, who had arrived in Australia by air, not by boat, without documents. When I saw the conditions in which she was being detained—and the member for Hindmarsh saw them as well—I could not help but think that if this were happening to the daughter of an Australian citizen there would be a great outcry against this uncivilised treatment of one of our own. And this really is the whole point of this debate. While we set out to deter asylum seekers, we create conditions which are totally unacceptable in a civilised world. For some this is justified, but that justification amounts to nothing less than racism. We are prepared to treat others in ways that we would condemn if they were suffered by one of our own. To avoid such accusations we must make it clear to Australians and to the world that when we deprive people of their liberty we do so only on reasonable grounds and that, having detained them, we apply the highest standards of care. To show that we are accountable, we need to have our system open to credible investigation: no cover-ups and no public relations firms putting the big spin on events. We need to examine any allegation openly. In short, we need to have a judicial inquiry into these events in our immigration reception processing centres.

In the short time that I have, I say to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs as a mother to a father, to a grandfather: I would not like to see what happened to that 12-year-old boy happen to any child of mine of yours; you would not like to see
that happen either. So, please, on behalf of this government, allow a full judicial inquiry.

Mrs GALLUS (Hindmarsh) (4.11 p.m.)—
Before I address some of the shameful allegations by the shadow minister for immigration, Mr Sciacca, I should like to refer to the speech by the member for Fowler, who—did I hear it right?—just condemned the facilities that she said she had visited. Yet I have in front of me a report signed off by the member for Fowler, which says:

The Committee—

of which, I believe, she was a member—believes that Australia’s detention administration is appropriate and professional. It is currently handling the demands of unprecedented numbers of arrivals as well.

Is there a minority report from the member for Fowler disagreeing with this? Is there one dissenting voice from the member for Fowler? No, there is not. What about page 84, paragraph 12.10. It says:

Overall, the Committee believed that the facilities provided were adequate, and that the cultural sensitivities of detainees were being accommodated. The Committee was convinced that Australia was taking seriously its responsibilities for those in its care, whether or not they were expected to gain visas for Australia.

Paragraph 12.11 says:

The Committee was aware that some facilities and services made available to detainees represented a desire—

I notice the member does not want to hear the words she signed off on. She has left the chamber, ashamed that she should now, in the light of political expediency, deny her own words in this report, a report she signed off on, which said everything at the detention centres is fine. But now she is backing up this shadow minister at the table, the shadow minister who shamelessly has brought forwards totally and utterly unsubstantiated allegations. He has brought this country into disrepute on the basis of nothing that has been proved. If you went into the community right now, you would hear beliefs in the community based solely on what this shameless shadow minister has done for purely political reasons. Let us look at the speech that he made in this House—this hypocritical, incredibly dangerous shadow minister. What were the charges he made? He said:

The minister and his government, however, are guilty of fostering a culture of mistreatment of detainees ...

He also said:

Asylum seekers in detention are being treated worse than the most dangerous criminals in our jails.

This is what he is saying to the people in this community. But worse than that, this shadow minister made specific allegations in this parliament against the detention centres. He made an allegation about a 15-year-old boy. He raised that question again today: an allegation that a 15-year-old boy had been sexually mistreated and raped. And yet that has already been investigated by the South Australia Police and by South Australian Family and Youth Services, and they said there was no reason for action.

He has raised a case that has been investigated and thrown out. What else has he raised? He has raised the story of the 12-year-old boy. That has already been investigated but, as the minister said, it has been returned to the South Australia Police to be reinvestigated, having already been investigated by FAYS and SAPOL. Then there was the allegation that a brothel had been run. That was an allegation by the shadow minister with absolutely no evidence, and no proof has come up. Let us now take the shadow minister’s own words:

No baby food at Woomera until July this year, if young infants were not breast feeding, they were given cabbage and rice. Many would not eat because it was so horrible.

Let us look at what is actually happening.

Babies are either breast fed or bottle fed. When infants commence on solids, they are provided with typical baby food, such as rice cereal, stewed fruits and custards.

I am also informed by the department, whom I rang and got the information from—the same way the shadow minister could have done if he wanted real information and not just to come in here and raise these false allegations—that Woomera has carried canned baby food and infant formula since it was established and, of the 12 nurses on staff,
four or five have special child nursing qualifications. What other allegations did this shameful man make, this shameful shadow minister?

Mr Sciacca—Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. I find the word ‘shameful’ offensive, and she has repeated it two or three times. I know that she does not know what she is talking about, but at least she could play the issue and not the man.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Order! To progress this discussion, I ask the honourable member for Hindmarsh to withdraw that remark.

Mrs Gallus—There was no remark against the shadow minister—I refer to shameful allegations, and they are shameful. To progress this debate, to use your words, Mr Deputy Speaker, I withdraw the remarks. The second allegation was that some young children were admitted:... into Roxby Downs Hospital because of gross malnourishment. They were officially admitted for ‘anaemia’... He says they were officially admitted for anaemia. The truth is that no such admissions ever happened. This is a shameful, base allegation by this shadow minister. He talks about what has happened here as if somehow this government has changed a process that was set in train by the Labor government. The member for Fowler referred to the setting up of Port Hedland and Curtin as being ‘so far away from everywhere’. Who set them up, Minister? Wasn’t it the Labor Party?

Mr Ruddock—Yes, definitely.

Mrs Gallus—The Labor Party set up Port Hedland and Curtin. So much for the member for Fowler. Let us have a look at some of the newspaper articles. Let us have a look at March 1992 when an article read:... 180 Cambodian refugees at a holding camp at Port Hedland in north-west Australia have begun a protest rally and hunger strike... An article a couple of days later read:
The Chinese, detained at Port Hedland, have been conducting what immigration officials say is a rostered hunger strike. The hunger strike follows a similar campaign by about 240 mainly Cambodian detainees... I will read this article from 2 February. The shadow minister should listen to this because this happened under his government. The article says:
The four boat people looked pale and downcast as they talked of their shattered dreams... “Under Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, I lived for three years, eight months and 20 days... Here I have lived for almost three years. In both places it’s the same.”
The article goes on:
Villawood detention compound is a hot, barren place. Among the 100 Cambodians inside, there have been several suicide attempts in the last two and a half years. Further on it says that a welfare officer who worked at Villawood:... was sacked two months ago after sending officials in the Immigration Department a paper criticising the policy of keeping boat people locked away for years waiting for their cases to be resolved.
He claimed:
... it’s a slow mental torture. In the case of many Cambodians, the Immigration Department has achieved where Pol Pot failed: to break their resolve.
On 24 June a group of boat people complained to the United Nations over the policy. On 16 August 1993 the federal government admitted in the High Court that it had unlawfully detained a Cambodian teenager seeking refugee status, and the immigration department conceded that the 14-year-old Cambodian boy was held unlawfully for more than two years. So much for this member’s hypocrisy. Let us face it: this is a distraction from what is happening in his own seat in Queensland and what he knows about those things that are rorting in the seat which he should be answering for. (Time expired)

Mr Sciacca—Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. I definitely find the remark of the honourable member for Hindmarsh to be absolutely offensive. She has just accused me of rorting my seat. I find that very offensive and I want it to be withdrawn.

Mr Ripoll—She accused you of organising the allegations to take away—

Mr Sciacca—Whatever it was, I find it very offensive, and I ask for it to be withdrawn.
Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! Can we settle this. If the honourable member for Hindmarsh has in fact accused the honourable member for Bowman of, in some way, rorting something to do with his seat, I am forced to ask her to withdraw. I apologise because I was distracted and did not hear exactly what was said. The way the honourable member for Bowman presented it has made my job even harder. If the honourable member for Hindmarsh did make some form of accusation that would require a motion of the House, would she please withdraw it?

Mrs GALLUS—I could ask what it is that I said but, in respect for you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would not want to say anything in this House that was unparliamentary, and I certainly would not want to be one to make allegations that cannot be substantiated in this area. I have answered. In respect for the Deputy Speaker, I withdraw anything that would bring disrepute to this place.

Motion (by Mr Ronaldson) proposed:
That the business of the day be called on.

Dr Theophanous—I rise on a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. This motion from the Chief Government Whip is the second time in which there has been an attempt to prevent an Independent member from contributing to an MPI.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—The honourable member for Calwell will resume his seat. There is no point of order.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

COMMITTEES
Public Works Committee
Reports

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (4.24 p.m.)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, I present the 11th, 12th and 13th reports for 2000 of the committee relating to the construction of mixed residential dwellings at block 87, section 24, Stirling, ACT; the ABC Perth Accommodation Project, East Perth, WA; and the Reserve Bank of Australia proposed head office building works.

Ordered that the reports be printed.

Mrs MOYLAN—by leave.—The first report is in relation to the Defence Housing Authority, Stirling, ACT, and it is on the construction of mixed residential dwellings at block 87, section 24, Stirling, ACT. The committee has recommended that the proposed development proceed. The proposed development, estimated to cost $11.5 million, will comprise 50 detached and semidetached dwellings. The project is needed to partially meet overall Defence needs for additional Defence Housing Authority dwellings in Canberra and to meet the imminent expansion of the Australian Defence College. Defence intends to co-locate its three single service command and staff colleges at the Australian Defence College.

While the committee supports the proposed development, the inquiry raised a number of process related issues that need to be addressed. The inquiry highlighted a number of deficiencies in the liaison process between the Department of Defence and the Defence Housing Authority, particularly in relation to the Australian Defence College. The committee has recommended that, at the earliest opportunity, the Department of Defence make DHA a party to all discussions which may impact on Australian Defence Force personnel housing requirements. The committee received evidence challenging the sincerity and adequacy of the consultation process engaged in by the Defence Housing Authority. The committee is strongly of the view that it is essential for all Commonwealth agencies sponsoring public works to consult with the wider community. Such involvement gives legitimacy to a proposed public work. In relation to the Stirling project, I simply note that it would have been better if DHA's community consultation process had been more transparent.

The second report is in relation to Carey Street, Darwin. Members may recall that the committee in its 10th report did not approve the development by the Defence Housing Authority of 90 apartments in Darwin. The committee recommended that the Defence Housing Authority report to the committee when it had complied with all the recommendations contained in its report. The committee has received a response from the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence on
its recommendations and advice as to Defence Housing Authority planned actions. The committee has resolved that DHA proceed with the issue and evaluation of tenders and obtain an updated market appraisal; the committee accept DHA’s response in respect of recommendation 6; and that the construction of the proposed work not proceed until the committee’s recommendations—with the exception of recommendation 6—have been met. I will report again to members in relation to this matter. The committee welcomes DHA’s responses to its recommendations and trusts that, in relation to future projects, the inquiry will serve to assist DHA to achieve improved levels of transparency and accountability.

The third report is in relation to ABC, Perth. This report that I have tabled relates to the development of new accommodation for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Perth. The proposed development is estimated to cost $25.7 million. It will replace the ABC’s existing facilities, which it has occupied for more than 40 years. The proposed facilities will comprise a two-level office and technical zone, with undercover parking; an acoustic zone; an area for technical workshops and stores; a communication tower; and parking for radio and television outside-broadcast vehicles. The committee found existing facilities to be poorly configured, inflexible and outmoded. In many instances, substandard buildings resulted in dysfunctional, inflexible and potentially dangerous facilities. The committee is of the view that the new facilities will allow for improved operational efficiencies and will enhance the ABC’s capabilities. The committee has concluded that the project should proceed. Moreover, we see that the construction of the proposed facilities represents value for money. The facilities offer the potential to provide long-term benefits to the ABC and its current and potential clients.

The ABC’s existing facilities accommodate not only the ABC but also the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra, more commonly referred to as WASO. Unfortunately, the site for the new development does not include accommodation for WASO. The future location of the orchestra proved to be the most contentious issue of this inquiry. While the committee was of the view that it would be physically possible for the ABC to include accommodation for WASO in the proposed development, it found that this would significantly impact on the way the site functioned as an ABC facility; also, that the ABC would suffer a significant financial penalty for WASO to be considered in the final preferred development option.

The committee examined this matter in some detail. We found that there had been ad hoc consultation by the ABC prior to formally advising WASO that it intended to sell the current premises and relocate. We also found a lack of credibility in the rationale for the level of assistance that the ABC had factored into project cost estimates and financial analysis to assist with the fit-out of alternative WASO accommodation. The committee welcomed advice from the Western Australian government that there is a compelling argument for a tripartite arrangement whereby the University of Western Australia, the federal government and the Western Australian government contribute to the relocation of WASO.

The committee is of the view that the treatment of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra represents a precedent in relation to the level of funding for the relocation of ABC orchestras generally. Accordingly, the committee has recommended that the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra receive from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation relocation funding commensurate with that received by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and that federal, state and relevant local governments consider funding options for the permanent housing of the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra in the proposed Music Access Centre, in an arrangement with the University of Western Australia, on land to be provided by the University of Western Australia. (Extension of time granted)

The third report I have tabled relates to a proposed work at the head office building of the Reserve Bank of Australia at 65 Martin Place in Sydney. The Reserve Bank wishes to reconfigure its head office building and free up 7,000 square metres of underutilised
floor space for commercial lease. This equates to six floors of standard commercial office space. The project is the result of a steady decline in staff located at the head office since the early 1980s, which is due to the use of improved technology and organisational changes. The cost of the project is estimated at $21.5 million. Revenue generated from tenants will be approximately $3.5 million a year. Resulting profits will return to consolidated revenue.

The committee welcomes the commitment of the Reserve Bank to this entrepreneurial project. The committee looks forward to examining other building proposals that display similar initiative. The Public Works Committee has consistently paid attention to heritage and environmental issues. They must continue to be given priority of concern in any works proposal submitted to the committee—they can never be an afterthought. Features of cultural and historical significance attached to major public buildings should be, as far as practicable, preserved and bequeathed to future generations.

The Reserve Bank’s building forms a part of the Martin Place ‘heritage precinct’ that is included on the Register of the National Estate. The committee also understands that the building is described on the Central Sydney Heritage Local Environmental Plan as being ‘of historical importance for its ability to exemplify a postwar cultural shift within the banking industry’. Some of the features of interest raised by the National Trust of Australia and the City of Sydney are a squash court, the bank’s staff cafeteria and a shooting range. While sympathetic to the preservation of heritage items, the committee was not convinced how features such as the bank’s squash court warranted preservation. However, the committee has recommended that, before work proceeds, the Reserve Bank photograph and carefully document all relevant features. I commend these reports to the House.

Public Works Committee
Approval of Work
Mr SLIPPER (Fisher—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration) (4.33 p.m.)—I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: RAAF Base Edinburgh, South Australia.

The Department of Defence proposes to undertake a redevelopment in the technical area at RAAF Base Edinburgh near Adelaide, South Australia. This base is the home of one of the frontline combat capabilities of the Royal Australian Air Force, the Maritime Patrol Group, which operates the P3 Orion maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft. The Maritime Patrol Group conducts a range of operational and surveillance roles, including its prominent search and rescue activities, and comprises both operational and support units that provide logistic support and maintenance support to keep the aircraft operational. The base also provides flight line and technical support for the Aircraft Research and Development Unit. The role of this unit is to extend the capabilities of the Australian Defence Force aerospace systems. Tasks undertaken are mainly in the advanced technology area and entail applied research, engineering development, test and evaluation and electronic warfare operational support. The proposed scope of the works is in direct support of this role.

New facilities are required in the base technical area to accommodate administrative and technical personnel at the Aircraft Research and Development Unit. This unit is currently located in dispersed facilities that were constructed in the 1940s, are not suitable for the function, are remote from their aircraft hangars and are in urgent need of replacement. In addition, it is proposed to provide aircraft shelters for six aircraft, provide additional electrical power in an existing aircraft hangar, provide some additional workshop and shelter facilities, and refurbish a test rig facility. The progression of this element of the works will enable the disposal of Defence property and will lead to efficiencies by co-locating the unit near its hangar and its main client base. Also proposed are new logistics facilities comprising office accommodation and warehousing for a number of logistics units that support the Mari-
time Patrol Group and the base. These facilities are to be sited in the technical area of the base in close proximity to the hangar flight line and will replace existing dispersed, inefficient and poorly located facilities, some of which do not meet modern standards.

The units to benefit from these new facilities are the Maritime Patrol Logistics Management Squadron, 92 Wing Logistics Operation and Joint Logistics Unit—South. The Joint Logistics Unit—South, which also supports other Defence elements in South Australia, is a part of an Australia-wide support organisation. The procurement, stock control and warehousing functions of this organisation are currently being market tested as part of the commercial support program of the Department of Defence under the Defence Integrated Distribution System project. The outcome of the market testing is to be considered by the government later this year.

Because Joint Logistics Unit—South provides critical support to the Maritime Patrol Group, the market testing tender specified government furnished facilities on RAAF Base Edinburgh. Nevertheless, there may be an option for the successful contractor to provide these facilities. This would reduce the capital cost of the project. In keeping with the recommendation of the Public Works Committee, the Department of Defence has agreed to defer the affected elements of the Joint Logistics Unit-South requirements from the proposed logistics facilities until the outcome of the market testing is known.

To avoid unduly delaying the other elements of this important project, the Department of Defence intends to tender the construction works with an option to include or exclude elements of the works that may be affected by the logistics market testing. An upgrading of the engineering services infrastructure, mainly in the technical area of the base, is proposed. The basic engineering services at RAAF Base Edinburgh date from the time each area was developed, generally in the 1940s and 1950s. Although some improvements have taken place, the systems are in need of replacement as they have reached their capacity, they are increasingly unreliable and major repairs and replacement of deteriorated systems are necessary. It is also proposed to demolish and/or remove facilities in the area to be developed.

The estimated cost of the proposal identified in the reference motion was $37.7 million. This estimate was based on December 1999 prices. With the project not expected to be completed until April 2003, this figure needs to be increased to an outcome estimate of approximately $39.9 million. It should also be noted that there is a potential for reduction in capital investment costs should a non-government owned facilities option be progressed for the logistics element currently being market tested. Subject to parliamentary approval, construction will start mid-next year and be completed by April 2003. In its report, the committee has recommended that this project proceed subject to the implementation of the recommendations of the committee. The Department of Defence agrees with the recommendations of the committee. On behalf of the government, I would like to thank the committee for its support, and I commend the motion to the House.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ROADS TO RECOVERY BILL 2000
Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr HORNE (Paterson) (4.41 p.m.)—I rise to finish my comments on the Roads to Recovery Bill 2000, and I must thank the Deputy Prime Minister for the commercial during question time when he was, above all, quite happy to quote me and indicate how hard I have fought for road funding. I do know how important it is but, again, I keep coming back to this question: is this the best result that Australia could have had? The answer is a resounding no. I was earlier pointing out how this government has over-seen the highest fuel taxes ever in Australia. At the same time that it has been prepared to collect that funding, it has slashed road funding, particularly for regional and local roads.

I am quite happy to turn to black spot funding, because it is something that is often thrown up by this government. They always come back to black spot funding. It was our...
program and, sure, we took it away. Bob Collins was the minister back in 1994, I believe, when we took it away. Why did we take it away? I guess the government should go and have a yarn to people like Jeff Kennett, the Hon. John Fahey, who was then Premier of New South Wales, or maybe Mr Borbidge, who was Premier of Queensland. They know that when they received road funding from the federal government they would spend it on anything but roads and then they would come to the federal government and say, ‘Give us some black spot funding.’ We did that, and they were simply relying on the black spot funding. So along came the Howard government in 1996 and they reinstated black spot funding, but did they reinstate any other form of funding? The answer is definitely no.

I also remember quite vividly and passionately Laurie Brereton and Michael Knight visiting Raymond Terrace. It was a historic agreement in November 1995 when the federal government and the state government of New South Wales agreed to reconstruct the Pacific Highway. That is something that is also thrown up in this parliament by the Deputy Prime Minister, but what he does not tell us is that, at the time that Laurie Brereton offered that money and offered to participate in that program five years ago, the federal government was putting in $750 million. What is it putting in today? $600 million. This is a government that has pulled $150 million out of the Pacific Highway funding and many parts of it have stalled. Mind you, it does not stop the Deputy Prime Minister from announcing the money. I think he has announced the Cindera to Yelgun bypass about 16 times.

I can also recall the then minister for transport, the Hon. Mark Vaile, going to a public meeting in Karuah in early 1998. At that public meeting there was some debate about whether or not the town of Karuah should be bypassed. The then minister for transport said, ‘I know there are a few people here who are friendly to my side of politics and who don’t want the town to be bypassed, so I’m pulling the funding out.’ It is ironic that this week four lanes of continuous divided highway from Sydney to Karuah will be completed. They have not even started work on the Karuah bypass yet. It will be another four years before that work is done.

I use these as examples to show the sorts of games that this government has played with transport, the sorts of games that this government has played with roads. It is all very well for the Deputy Prime Minister to come in here and beat his breast now about school kids and buses on country roads being unsafe. Where has he been for the last five years? Is he going to tell us that this is something new? Is he going to tell us this is something that has just happened? I can assure him, as a representative of one of those electorates in which my kids went to school and travelled over those sorts of roads, that they have been around for years, they have been around for generations, because we never built the proper roads in the first place. It is nothing new. So do not come in here now and preach to those people who have had to live and put up with it.

I indicated that this legislation should be about roads, about the vital infrastructure that this country needs. It is not. It is about a government that is trying to convince the people of rural and regional Australia that it cares about them. It wants those people to forget the last five years of neglect. It wants those people to ignore the fact that they are paying the highest prices for fuel that they have ever paid. It wants the people of Australia to forget that they are paying the highest fuel taxes they have ever paid. This is the only response that the government is prepared to give them. $1.2 billion sounds a fantastic sum. It is a big sum of money. Where does it come from? Over the same period, how much will the government take out of the pockets of the fuel consumers? It will take over $2 billion. In other words, at the end of the four-year period, when this road building program is under way or completed—it should be completed by then—the government will still be in credit with fuel taxes it has taken from the Australian people, and we will still not have the road network that we really need as a modern country going into the next millennium.

This government has failed Australia with its carte blanche acceptance of high fuel
prices without its ability to think what we can do. I will give you an example. I have attended a few hearings of the caucus committee that is going around Australia talking to people who are adversely affected by high fuel prices. One group particularly that have a grudge—and I believe they justly have a grudge—spent a couple of thousand dollars converting their petrol consuming car to LP gas or went out and paid an extra $800 to get one of these new Falcons that only uses LP gas. When they first came out LP gas was worth about 40c a litre around my area; people are now paying 59.9c or more. I had one couple convince me that they are now running their gas-altered car on petrol because they think it is probably cheaper. They wonder why they spent the $2,000.

But where this government has missed the point is that Australia essentially is self-sufficient in LP gas. Australia has developed technology—and there is a whole industry out there of mechanics that fit LP gas converters to cars. LP gas actually gives our nation an advantage as far as fuel is concerned. But the shame of the Howard-Costello-Anderson government is that it is the government that put a tax on it. Up until 1 July this year, there was no tax on LP gas. I would have thought that the government might have come in here and said, ‘We are going to do the right thing. We are going to let the world know that we are pretty resourceful and pretty cunning and we are going to take the tax off it.’ I tell you what: I would support it. I would support it and I would love that to be included in the amendment. I might have to go and have a word with the member for Batman about that.

What about our trucking industry? We hear lots about the trucking industry. Again, the Deputy Prime Minister stands up and tells us how things are going so swimmingly for truck owners and drivers and operators. He must be talking to a different group from the group I talk to. I have plenty of them in my electorate. They know that, despite the 24c a litre rebate they are getting, they are still paying more for their diesel today than they were paying on 30 June, before the GST came in. This was traditionally an industry made up of small business people. To the government that claims to be the representative of small business people: what are you doing to the trucking industry? Within another couple of years the trucking industry will be made up of three or four major operators and that is all. The owner-driver operators, the small organisations—the husband and wife organisations—will be gone. Where will your competition policy be then? It will not exist. What does this legislation do about it? Absolutely nothing.

Why isn’t there a code of conduct included in this legislation for our trucking industry? They have been negotiating long enough, and this government simply turns a deaf ear to it and ignores the need. That is why this piece of legislation really is a con job. It is all about trying to convince the people of Australia out there: ‘We care about roads; come and vote for us.’ I will give you another example to show that. In a question on Monday from me to the Prime Minister I mentioned the adverse effects of fuel prices on Meals on Wheels, and I am sure every member of this House would agree that that is a vital service to ageing members of many of our communities. The Prime Minister answered and spoke about local councils. He said:

…but the fact that they have extra money to spend on roads means that there will be less pressure on other areas of the budget, including the provision of many charitable and welfare services. As a result, it is a good deal all round.

When we have a look at the conditions that apply to this money being given out to local governments, what do we find? Clause 7 states, under ‘funding conditions’, that they must use the grants for expenditure on roads, that they must account for their expenditure properly—that is fair enough—and that they must maintain their existing road expenditures. The whole point is: what the Prime Minister told me on Monday is completely false. It will not bring any relief anywhere for the councils at all because they have to maintain their funding for roads as if they were not getting this money. So there will be no relief. There will be no added services like the Prime Minister said. Let us have a look at some of the other things because this
is what this legislation really is all about. This legislation says:

It is expected that these conditions will cover the following administrative aspects of the program:

Proposal

A local government body is to provide the Minister with a proposal for the expenditure of the grant.

In other words, big brother is watching. Centralised government will be telling the local government authorities, ‘Yes, that is acceptable. No, it is not,’ because you have to submit it to the minister to get it approved. I would have thought in this day and age government was all about allowing local communities to determine their priorities. Not with this piece of legislation it is not. But how about this one, because this is the one I like—I hope they are going to put a picture of the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business maybe walking his dog on it:

The conditions will ensure that the Commonwealth receives appropriate recognition for its contribution to the roads concerned. The conditions will require that the local government body must erect signs acknowledging the Commonwealth funding along the road works being funded from the grants.

I hope it is not on the side of the road. I hope it is not a danger to travellers. But I guess it will have to be a minimum size and I guess it will have to have the coat of arms and all the rest of it on it. Obviously, it is about parading that this federal government gave some money to roads. Are they going to have to put it on every pothole? It will cost you more money for signs than it will for tar patching. What a ridiculous statement! But that says it all and that is what this government is about. It is not about building a decent road network. It is about being out there and getting the accolades for putting more taxpayers’ money in the government’s pocket and giving them less back and building a road system that, at the end of four years, despite $1.2 billion, will still be inadequate. That is the charade that the government expects us to accept.

As I said when I started, I always welcome funding for roads because I know we do not get enough. If this government thinks it has gone far enough with this legislation, it really does not understand the needs of rural and regional Australia. It really does not understand what the people out there are asking the government to do. Governments should show leadership and this government certainly is not doing that.

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (4.56 p.m.)—I welcome the opportunity to talk on the Roads to Recovery Bill 2000 and I welcome it for a number of reasons. I have been a member of parliament at state and federal level now for 13 years. I drive approximately 100,000 kilometres plus per year over the roads for the electorates that I have represented and currently represent. Because of that movement over those roads, I have seen the state of our roads for that period of time and know what is required to get those roads up to standard. It was interesting to hear the comments of the member for Paterson who at no stage during his contribution to this House made any reference to not wanting the money that he was given by the government, nor indeed did he make any reference to the need for New South Wales, as an example, to make a similar contribution to road funding as the Commonwealth has done.

The issue of the state of the roads was well recognised when I was a member of the Greiner government that was elected in 1988. At that time the Greiner government introduced a 3 x 3 tax at the bowser for road funding, 60 per cent of which went into rural roads in New South Wales and was graciously and gratefully received by the local shires and the local councils. The road infrastructure that they had in their shires at that time was as it is today, breaking down at an astronomical rate because the roads had been laid down for 50 or 60 years, five or six decades. They needed an enormous injection of funds to bring them up to scratch and make them safe for motorists. It is interesting to note that since the Carr Labor government came in, they have reversed that formula. They increased the state petrol tax to 4c a litre for four years and reversed it to the extent where the 60 per cent portion of it went to the metropolitan area at the expense of rural roads. It was not long before there were visible signs of the progress that had been
made in catching up on the repair to those roads had started to fall back again.

About a fortnight ago, I released a press release with regard to the announcement of the $1.2 billion Roads to Recovery program. I cautioned the government to ensure that road funding was distributed fairly, equitably and based on a needs priority. I said in that press release, as a rural based member who regularly travels on roads within the electorate of Hume, that I am well aware of the atrocious state of local roads, which have rapidly deteriorated following unusual, constant wet weather. I also said, more importantly, that these conditions have accelerated the breakdown of road infrastructure to the point where roads are becoming extremely dangerous and beyond the capacity of local government resources to maintain, let alone reconstruct. In relation to the distribution of this special road package, which is in addition to the annual local roads grants, the shires association and the shires right throughout Australia are very grateful for the contribution that has been made.

In the electorate of Hume over the four-year period that this package covers, there will be $21.65 million allocated to 14 shires. That is an average of about $1.43 million in annual grants over those 14 shires or an annual grant to each shire of $388,000. That is a significant contribution, and it has been acknowledged in some memos that I have received from shires and, indeed, from the Local Government and Shires Association of New South Wales, for example through their G division. I received this facsimile yesterday from the chairman of the G division of the shires association, who I know required about $50 million or $60 million to repair and reconstruct roads within the G division of the shires association. The chairman, Mayor Paul Braybrooks of Cootamundra Shire, said:

Dear Mr Schultz,

Re: Funding for local roads

Please accept G division’s appreciation for your efforts in representing the needs of rural areas for local road funding and for the recently announced Roads to Recovery Program. Enclosed herewith please find a copy of a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon. John Anderson MP, expressing the division’s appreciation and requesting a meeting to directly convey such to him.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Braybrooks

It is well known in this place and outside this place that I sometimes do not make too many favourable comments with regard to my coalition partners on some issues, but I have to say that the way in which this road funding has been handled is exemplary, exemplary inasmuch as it has met the concerns that I raised with regard to fairly and equitably distributing the funding. I will quote from the letter that I received, as everybody did, from the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. John Anderson, on 27 November, when the funding formula was released and the amount of funding for each individual shire was released. In the second sentence of the third paragraph, he said:

We are now in a stronger budgetary position that allows the Government to return a dividend to the whole community through this substantial investment in local road infrastructure.

The Federal Government has chosen to invest in the local road network because we understand its importance to the Australian economy and to the social amenity of all Australians. The Roads to Recovery Programme will provide a substantial investment boost to local roads, allowing widespread upgrading and maintenance work to be undertaken and providing additional employment opportunities in local communities.

What he said in that letter to me was absolutely right. Of course, he did not say that just by chance, because he has had an opportunity over the past 12 months to read the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services headed Time running out: shaping regional Australia’s future. And wouldn’t you know it? Paragraph 75 on page 146 of that document said:

‘Roads are the lifeline for rural and remote Australia’. This statement in Austroad’s 1997 report encapsulates the importance of roads to regional Australia. In brief, roads play a very significant role in the social and economic life of the nation. They are a vital element in the transport chain on which Australia’s international competitiveness depends. With the loss of many services from small towns and the need to travel to regional
That report goes on in relation to responsibility for roads and talks about all three levels of government sharing the responsibility. That in itself is a true indication of what actually happens, and it is one of the reasons why I am amazed that the member for Paterson did not call upon the New South Wales state government to match the funding that the federal government have given in addition to the funding that they allegedly still supply to local government. The sad reality of it is that, at the last budget, the New South Wales government removed $111 million from road funding in rural New South Wales. That gives you an indication of the commitment that they have, despite all the rhetoric that comes from them and despite the rhetoric that comes from Country Labor about its commitment to rural New South Wales. It also proves that they have absolutely no knowledge of how vital the restructuring of our road system is to the people out there who need to get their produce to market and to country people who drive considerable distances to get to work safely.

I would also like to make the point that it is, in my view, very important for me to talk in this chamber about the need for rural road funding in shires right across Australia but, more specifically, about the need for additional funds in the Hume electorate, which I represent—an electorate which some of my parliamentary colleagues covet prematurely before the redistributed boundaries take effect. But, in the Hume electorate alone, there is a need for approximately $70 million just to get all of the roads in those 14 shires in a rural electorate up to a standard that you, I and everybody else would expect to be safe for the community, whether it is for businesspeople or ordinary people on the street from those communities and from those many small villages, towns and cities in rural Australia who need to carry on driving over those roads to get to their places of work and to deliver their produce.

I welcome the announcement by both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister on this very worthwhile and gratefully accepted road package. I thank them for listening to the concerns that I have raised on behalf of my constituency and, indeed, on behalf of the constituencies of all of the members across Australia, regardless of their political persuasion, for the fair, equitable distribution on the basis of needs for each of those groups of shires that needed some additional funding. In closing, I look forward with anticipation to a decent contribution to the repair of the road infrastructure in New South Wales by the New South Wales Labor government and I hope and sincerely request that they will make a contribution to match the federal coalition government’s contribution to roads as quickly as possible in the interests of road safety for everybody in New South Wales.

Mr Snowdon (Northern Territory) (5.08 p.m.)—I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to this debate for one reason in particular, and that is to point out to the government, to the Deputy Prime Minister in particular, the contradictions and the inequity within the way in which this funding package has been put together and distributed.

I was impressed this afternoon when I heard the Deputy Prime Minister during question time regale us with the social benefits that accrue to the community as a result of better roads. He made a number of points. Included among them was the importance of road infrastructure to improving educational outcomes for people who live in rural communities. He also made the point about the importance of road infrastructure for improving health outcomes for people who live in rural communities. Frankly, I agree with him. But the plain fact is that in the context of the Northern Territory this money will go next to nowhere towards improving or providing social benefits to people who live in rural communities. Frankly, I agree with him. But the plain fact is that in the context of the Northern Territory this money will go next to nowhere towards improving or providing social benefits to people who live in rural communities. I say that knowing full well that the $20 million which the Northern Territory is to receive is going to be welcomed by those 70-odd community councils and local government councils that will receive funding. The fact of the matter is that the average distribution of these funds to rural communities outside of Darwin and Alice Springs will be around $10,000 per
community over four years. The sum of $2,500 per year is the average amount that local government authorities will get in the Northern Territory.

You have to ask yourself: does that sound fair or reasonable? I have before me a list of those 17 or 18 electorates that received the bulk of the funding. It comes as no surprise that the electorate to receive the most funding was of course that of the member for 'Connor. The member for Gwydir, the Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party, was the second or third highest beneficiary of this money. I make this observation: we have heard a lot today about the way in which this money has been distributed. We have not seen the formula that has been used. We have heard about population, we have heard about road length and we have heard about historical circumstances. Let me ask you this question: what strikes you as peculiar? In the case of the electorate of Gwydir, its area is 114,000 square kilometres. It has 72,930 voters on the roll and at the 1996 census had a population of 111,146 people. That electorate received $42,386,389. I did two simple calculations. I divided the population into that amount and got the following amount: $381 per head, $581 per voter and $372 per kilometre.

What I did then was use those figures and apply them to the Northern Territory. What we discover when we apply those figures to the Northern Territory—using the population ratio, the population figures of the Northern Territory, bearing in mind that the population of the Northern Territory is 190,000 and there are 105,000 voters—is that, if you use the population criterion alone, the Northern Territory could expect to receive something in the vicinity of $72,457,000. We got $20 million. If you use the voting population we could have expected to have received $61,053,000. If we use the area figures on their own, the Northern Territory could have expected to have received $409 million. The fact is we got 20. The fact is that the most isolated people in Australia, those people who need road access most, live in my electorate.

They are the people who have been disowned by this government. The people the government have made it very clear they have no concern for are the people who live in my electorate. I am not alone in saying this. I have in front of me an extract from the Northern Territory News, dated 29 November. The headline is ‘$20 million for NT roads is just nonsense’. You would expect me to be saying that, and I have done it. But you would not expect the Northern Territory Minister for Transport and Infrastructure Development, Mick Palmer, to be saying it, but he has. He said—and I quote here from this extract:

‘It is extremely disappointing; it is just nonsense.

It is nonsense for a number of reasons. Unlike the member for Gwydir, the National Party leader and Deputy Prime Minister, who sits in the cabinet room and, with his colleagues, orchestrates where this dough goes, unlike the member for O’Connor, also a minister who sits in on the deliberations of where these moneys go, we are in a situation where the formula concocted by the government has created a very unequitable distribution of these resources. It means $1.2 billion of taxpayers’ money flushed down the drain, effectively, in terms of my electorate because it will do nothing—nothing—to materially advance the state of the road infrastructure in the Northern Territory.

Let us make it very clear: not only does this package not do that but also it does nothing to alleviate the problem of high fuel prices—and high fuel prices are something I have experience of. I want to use the example of a couple of communities. Mr Deputy Speaker, you may or may not know where the community of Numbulwar is. You may or may not know where the community of Ngukurr is. They are both in the Northern Territory. I am sure the Deputy Prime Minister has no damn idea where either of those communities is. But those communities, between them, have roughly 3,000 people and there is a road length of some 156 kilometres. They join the Roper Highway, and the Roper Highway goes to Katherine. These two communities are in south-east Arnhem Land. For around six months of each year, they are inaccessible by road. Why are they inaccessible by road? Because, of course, in
the wet season the rivers flood. What do these communities need to ensure that they get all-year-round access? They need a bridge: a bridge across either the Wilton River or the Roper River, or both. Also, they need roadworks done to give them an all-weather seal on the road.

The cost of just bringing the road up to a reasonable standard is $3 million. Understand this, Mr Deputy Speaker: the community of Numbulwar will receive $282,000 over four years out of this program; the Yugul Mangi Community Council will receive around $307,000. These two communities also have local roads they have to look after. The connecting roads between these two communities are not their responsibility; they are the responsibility of either the Northern Territory government or the federal government. But nothing in terms of the contribution being made out of this road money will assist in the development of an all-weather road for these two communities. Let me tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, what this means. The people at Numbulwar pay $1.83 per litre for diesel. I understand that it has been estimated that, if they had an all-weather road to Numbulwar, their freight costs would come down by something like 70 per cent. The reason for this, of course, is that during the wet season, for most of six months of the year, they have to barge from Darwin.

I hear the Leader of the National Party, the Deputy Prime Minister, come in here and proselytise about the importance of rural communities. I accept that they are extremely important. My heart goes out to all those farmers in northern New South Wales who have been ravaged by floods. But understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, the communities in my electorate are not made up of farmers; predominantly, they are Aboriginal communities. They have the lowest incomes of all Australians, they have the lowest level of infrastructure support of all Australians, yet they pay the highest costs in Australia for fuel and transport—and their roads are miserable.

But what do we get from this government? We get a maldistribution of these resources to the extent that $42 million goes to the electorate of Gwydir. I will go back and use the figures for the electorate of the member for O’Connor. If we use the population ratio of the Northern Territory for the seat of Gwydir, the seat of Gwydir would receive $13.8 million, not $42 million. I would think, in terms of my own communities, that is a far better distribution of the resources. Give us the $42 million in the Northern Territory and, Mr Anderson, you take $14 million—because, on any measure of disadvantage, on any measure of inequity, the people who are most disadvantaged in this whole process are the people who live in rural communities in the Northern Territory. Yet not one jot of notice is taken of that issue by this government.

If this government wants to illustrate that it is actually working for all Australians, the Deputy Prime Minister would go back to the formula which he has created in his little mind back in his office here in Parliament House and come up with something which is fair and reasonable. He would come up with something which says of that $1.2 billion, ‘We accept that the electorates of Kalgoorlie and the Northern Territory, just by their nature, must get the lion’s share of these resources which are being made available.’ But we do not find that at all. While the electorate of Kalgoorlie is high up on the list, as it should be, where does the Northern Territory rate in the hit parade of those communities, those electorates, which will receive money from this government for this purpose, for these roads? It is almost off the screen. The persons responsible for making these decisions are, of course, the Deputy Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues.

So when I hear the Deputy Prime Minister talk about the social benefits that can be garnered from improving roads in rural and remote areas, I say to him: yes, I agree. Of course I agree that if you can get kids to school across roads it is very important. But did you know that in the community of Umbukumba on Groote Eylandt there are no teachers resident? They live something like 70 kilometres away from Alyangula and Angurugu—two other communities—on a dirt road. It is not an all-weather dirt road. This program will not provide them with suffi-
cient resources to fix their roads. As a result, there are often times when neither teachers nor nurses can visit that community. So the kids go without education on those days and the community goes without the benefit of the medical service provided by the registered nurses. Is that fair or reasonable? If the Deputy Prime Minister were concerned about improving the social benefits that accrue to people who live in rural areas, he would have allocated this money on a needs basis, not on some airy-fairy formula made up in his office based on historical circumstances. I think the historical circumstance he was talking about was who won the last bloody election. Given they won the last election, he said, ‘We will make a determination of what the priorities will be on the sort of formula we will create for ourselves.’ The Leader of the Opposition has been 100 per cent on the money about the use of these funds ever since it became clear where they were going to go.

Because this money has been distributed in this particular way, there is no recognition of the strategic importance of developing infrastructure in regional Australia. We have $400 million from the National Highway Program yet to be distributed. This afternoon I had occasion to talk to a constituent of mine who is the Director of the Australian Trucking Association. I asked him what he thought of this program. He said that they were extremely disappointed. He said that it was a slap in the face for Territorians. He is 100 per cent correct. It is a slap in the face for Territorians. The Northern Territory government is not a friend of mine but is supposedly an ally of the coalition. It has Senator Tambling, who sits in the Senate with the National Party and is a parliamentary secretary. What influence does he have on this government? Clearly none. We have seen that they have made decisions which, as Mr Cooper has said, are a slap in the face for the community of the Northern Territory. Whilst I would like to see some of that $400 million go to upgrading the highway between Katherine and Darwin, Highway 1, I would also like some of that money to go to Highway 1 from Borroloola to Burketown. I bet it will not.

Mr Tuckey—Of course it won’t. It is not a local road.

Mr Snowdon—The $400 million which is coming from the National Highway Program, which I am talking about, which is yet to be announced—I bet we do not get one cent of that. Even if we do, it will not go to addressing the huge need that is clearly obvious in the Northern Territory.

It is important that I say all of these things because in 1996, when the Howard government were first elected, they canned the regional road program in the Northern Territory, a regional road program which was based on strategic roads around Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. They canned that program: $15 million over three years—gone. As it happens, the roads which it was earmarked for—the Daly River and Port Keats road covering 128 kilometres at $2 million, serving a population of about 3½ thousand people; the Arnhem Link Road covering 393 kilometres at $5.3 million, serving a population of 3½ thousand people or thereabouts; the Ngukurr-Numbulwar road, which I have spoken of previously; the Angurugu-Umbakumba road, which I have spoken of previously; the Papunya and Kin tore Road, which I have spoken of previously—are strategic roads identified by a collection of people, including the Northern Territory government. Aboriginal people through the land council in the Northern Territory require that funding, funding which was identified by the previous Labor government and made available for this purpose, funding which was knocked on the head by the Howard government as soon as they came into office. You cannot believe how aggrieved I am that this money which has been made available across Australia has not been done on a strategic basis, has not been done on a needs basis, to develop the infrastructure that is required in the Northern Territory in terms of roads.

This is failing the needs of my communities. This is failing the needs of the Northern Territory. This is failing the needs of Australia. This is not done on a strategic basis or on a needs basis; this is done on the whim of the government. You only have to see the distribution of funds to understand that that is a
fact. The people who are being most disadvantaged in Australia in terms of access to infrastructure, access to resources, access to good education, access to good health—those things which have been identified as the sorts of social outcomes which the Deputy Prime Minister is trying to achieve—are Aboriginal people who live in remote communities of the Northern Territory. Whilst they will receive some moneys—70 communities will receive smaller amounts of money for their local roads—nothing is being done to make a reasonable fist of doing a strategic analysis of what money should go into roads in the Northern Territory and that money being provided.

Debate (on motion by Mr Leo McLeay) adjourned.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Motion (by Mr Leo McLeay) agreed to:

That leave of absence for the remainder of this year be given to the honourable member for Bass (Ms O’Byrne) for maternity purposes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion (by Mr Tuckey) proposed:

That the House do now adjourn.

Aboriginals: Stolen Generations

Mr SNOWDON (Northern Territory) (5.29 p.m.)—It gives me great pleasure to use this short time available during the adjournment debate to read to you a letter from a year 8 student from Jabiru Area School in the Northern Territory. This letter has been written by Miranda Tapsell, a 13-year-old girl who attends the Jabiru school. Recently the year 8 students from Jabiru Area School completed a unit of work on argument and persuasion. At the end of the unit, the students had to write a letter to the editor on a topic that interested them or about which they felt strongly. The subject matter was entirely up to them. This student wrote a letter about apologising and the failure of the Prime Minister to apologise. The views which she expressed in this letter I am sure go to the heart of many arguments which have been had in this place about the necessity for the Prime Minister to apologise on behalf of the government and people of Australia. I would like to read this letter from Miranda Tapsell, entitled ‘Sorry’. The letter states:

Dear Editor

I am ashamed of the way our Prime Minister, John Howard consistently refuses to say sorry to the Stolen Generation. These people have literally been taken away from their family because the government of the day believed that the Aboriginal children of mixed races would have a better education by being removed from parents and relatives. Because of that, hundreds of Indigenous Australians have lost their culture and language. They do not know where they come from and most importantly, many of them do not know who their family is.

Of course John Howard himself may not feel that he should say sorry because he personally did not do anything. But he is the Prime Minister, the head of the government and he should have the compassion to apologize for the actions of previous governments that have caused this terrible trauma for these innocent victims. Stop and think how you would feel not ever having known your parents because you were taken away from them. How would you feel having been told that your parents died a month ago when you had finally found out where they lived? Mr Howard, if you were not the Prime Minister and you were part of the Stolen Generation, you would be in there pouring your heart out on the subject.

Some citizens of Australia may ask, “What will saying sorry change?” Saying sorry always helps. This apology is like any other one.

On behalf on the Stolen Generation, I beg you to say one simple word that will heal the rift between black and white. Come on, John Howard, make the effort to apologise now.

Yours sincerely

Miranda Tapsell

Mr Deputy Speaker, you would have to say that is a heartfelt plea from a young Australian who feels deeply about the subject—a young Australian who clearly understands the hurt being felt by members of the stolen generation and a young Australian who, I know, knows many people who are members of the stolen generation. That heartfelt plea she is making is shared by the majority of Australians, but it is something which our Prime Minister cannot confront. He cannot accept the legitimacy of the demand that he should say sorry on behalf of all of us. I
think he will have a very good opportunity next year in the Centenary of Federation when this parliament will sit in Melbourne. I make a plea to the Prime Minister to accept the requests by so many Australians of goodwill for you to apologise on behalf of the people of Australia and use the occasion of that meeting of the parliament in Melbourne on the Centenary of Federation to say sorry.

Work Experience: Dean Little

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (5.34 p.m.)—Tonight I rise to read a speech prepared for me by Dean Little, a Year 10 student from St John the Evangelist High School in Nowra, who is sitting in the gallery. He has been doing work experience with me this week in his own time. His first week of work experience with us was performed at the electorate office in Nowra and this apparently infected him with such interest that he has decided to spend another week with his local federal politician. I asked him to prepare a five-minute speech on his work experience and any other topic, and this is what he wants to say:

Work experience this week has been a wonderful insight into the effort that goes on behind the scenes to keep this country running. Before I thought I knew roughly how much work politicians did or didn’t do. Now I fully respect and admire them. Politicians put in almost a whole day’s work, with little sleep and no time just to sit down to breathe. Politicians are constantly running to meetings or trying to get into the House of Representatives or Senate before they are locked out. I especially admire the dedication MPs have for representing their electorate. During this week, I have enjoyed the many privileges and learning experiences given to me by everyone in the House. I was fortunate enough to meet and shake hands with people that I previously thought were untouchable. I have learnt information that not many others would know, like why the doors behind the Speaker in the House of Reps are so tall and why the clocks are so high. I will cherish this week for a long time indeed.

Finally, I would like to thank not only the people with whom I have worked but also the people who showed me the way around and the people who taught me the details of government that I did not know. The people in the Library were all too willing to help and the part of the speech you are about to hear would have been 100 times more daunting without their help.

He says:

Racism in Australia has been a big issue ever since Federation. The people subject to this most are the Indigenous. At the school I attend in Nowra I hear quite a lot of racism, which I find strange, because the students from whom I hear these remarks don’t have a lot of interaction with the Aboriginal community. At our school there are less than a handful of Aboriginal people. Given such little interaction with Aboriginal people how can students who are 14 to 17 years of age make informed racial remarks, especially since they have a negative edge? I feel that my peers are becoming more racist but the racism that is displayed is not true racism. I believe these acts of racism don’t sprout from hate or contempt but rather ignorance, greater social acceptance of negative comments and the early learning from parents.

The main way we can put an end to this in my opinion is by raising awareness and education. Although these acts of indecency are not being conducted in front of our Indigenous students, due to their small numbers, it is still having negative effects. With each joke, comment or racial remark that is negative to our Aboriginal community the children listening feel more superior, because through these jokes etc we are putting the Aboriginals of Australia down and projecting the ‘Anglo’ up higher in the social minds of my peers. With more children having an idea of superiority in their heads more jokes will be told and the situation will snowball.

The quicker we can start to educate people to understand that even the smallest racist joke is not okay, the quicker we can melt this snowball. I feel that to start educating my peers we must show them the effects of their actions and also make them realise what they are doing, because society does not condemn such insensitive speech and therefore not all children realise what it is they are doing. I find it quite strange that 0.01% of our genetic make-up is responsible for it is they are doing. I find it quite strange that 0.01% of our genetic make-up is responsible for the situation will snowball. Given such little interaction with Aboriginal people these remarks don’t sprout from hate or contempt but rather ignorance, greater social acceptance of negative comments and the early learning from parents.

And that is what it boils down to. We all have the same colour blood that runs through our veins so why should colour matter? We are all human, after all. We should celebrate the one thing that unifies us and not try and find ways to separate different cultures. We are not black or white. We are the display of our genes, which we should all
have the right to show and not be subject to different rules or standards. Those with darker skin should not feel intimidated when walking into a room full of people who have fair skin and vice versa. A white skinned person should not feel intimidated when walking into a room full of people with dark skin. We need to stop seeing each other as black and white. We need to get past that and see people as humans, fellow man and try to see things from their perspective. I think it would be better if we were all colourblind.

Those are the words of Dean Little, sitting up in that gallery.

**Member for Swan: Entitlements**

Mr WILKIE (Swan) (5.39 p.m.)—Last week I received information relating to the use of entitlements in my office. Since then I have searched the records of my office. I have examined relevant entitlement guidelines and I have questioned my staff. I have also sought advice from senior parliamentary colleagues about the most appropriate way to proceed. I have decided that circumstances warrant me making a voluntary repayment to the Department of Finance and Administration. I am conscious of the precedent set by the now Special Minister of State, Senator Ellison. In 1998, Senator Ellison made a repayment to DOFA of $9,063 for charter allowance claims over which some doubt existed as to their compliance with guidelines.

I have also decided to put this matter on the public record, given the high level of public interest in matters relating to MPs' entitlements. Accordingly, I inform the House that this afternoon I have sent the following letter to the General Manager of Ministerial and Parliamentary Services in the Department of Finance and Administration:

> Mr Roger Fisher  
> General Manager  
> Ministerial and Parliamentary Services  
> Department of Finance and Public Administration  
> Canberra ACT 2601  
> Dear Mr Fisher  
>  
> It has recently come to my attention that a member of my staff has lodged three claims for reimbursement of private vehicle usage in my absence from the electorate office without appropriate authorisation. This has led me to review my office procedures for the administration of this allowance. I have consulted the guidelines on the use of this entitlement, examined my office records of such claims and questioned my staff in relation to these claims.
>  
> I have regretfully come to the conclusion that the verification procedures I have employed have not been sufficiently rigorous. I have also discovered, in consulting the Guide to the Members of Parliament Staff Certified Agreement that I am required to authorise an employee to use a private vehicle for official purposes in advance of travel. I have been authorising the claims after the travel has been undertaken.
>  
> I note that the guide is dated 23 December 1999 and I am unsure whether advance authorisation was a requirement prior to this date. However, even if it was not, there are sufficient defects in the administration of these claims in my office from the time I became a member of parliament to undermine my confidence in my office systems.
>  
> In the circumstances I would be grateful if you would advise me as a matter of urgency of the total amount of Private/Motor Vehicle Allowance which has been paid to staff in my office, since October 1998. It is my intention to repay this amount. Depending on the quantum, I may need to do so in instalments, which I will discuss with you subsequently.
>  
> I have also informed my staff that I will no longer be authorising any claims for reimbursement of expenses for private vehicle usage. Instead I have recommended that any such expenses, duly documented, be claimed as tax deductions for work-related expenses.
>  
> I am also considering what disciplinary action might be appropriate in these circumstances and will advise you further following discussions with my staff.
>  
> I have consulted with senior members of the Opposition on this matter and have taken their guidance into account in writing to you.
>  
> Yours sincerely
>  
> Kim Wilkie
>  
> 30 November 2000

**Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry: Corporate Work and Family Awards**

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (5.41 p.m.)—Two weeks ago the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business addressed the 2000 Corporate Work and Family Awards of the Australian Cham-
ber of Commerce and Industry. One of the winners of an award was the Hollywood Private Hospital in Nedlands in my electorate of Curtin. It is a 350-bed private teaching hospital employing some 850 people, and it won the award in the large business category for over 100 employees. Hollywood Private Hospital was cited by the minister as a paramount example of the economic and social virtues of innovative and flexible workplace relations. In fact, Hollywood Private Hospital was the winner of the national gold award for the highest performance overall in these corporate work and family awards.

At the core of the hospital’s family friendly policies is a flexible approach to their employment conditions that allows employees to control their working hours to their advantage and to the advantage of their employer. The hospital offers flexitime, job sharing, part-time work, access to single days annual leave, annualised hours and many other initiatives, including arrangements for full-time ward managers to work at the hospital during the school hours of their children and then from home outside school hours. That offers an extremely important consideration for many parents and families. A high proportion of the nurses at Hollywood are employed on a part-time basis; not, as the opposition would have it, because they somehow are economic victims, but rather because that is what they want according to their requirements and that is what they expect from their employer. As the minister described it:

The hospital gets the skilled and experienced nurses it needs, and the nurses get the hours that they want.

This is 21st century workplace relations at their best. It is easy to forget that, if those who opposed industrial relations reforms had had their way, these kinds of flexible and innovative arrangements would never have seen the light of day; not because such arrangements are not supported by workers, by management and by business, but because they are opposed by trade union leaders and their delegates in the parliament.

Only a commitment to flexibility, efficiency and reform on the part of successive Liberal and coalition governments has allowed workplaces to be transformed from calcified battlegrounds into places where efficiency and productivity go hand in hand with family and personal responsibilities. But having achieved great reforms is no guarantee to the community that those reforms will endure, for in my state of Western Australia the Australian Labor Party actively threatens the labour relations achievements of that state. Under the coalition government led by Premier Richard Court, the adult minimum wage in Western Australia has increased by $21.30 to $368 a week. The introduction of the Workplace Agreements Act in 1993 created an alternative industrial relations system that has delivered more flexible and productive arrangements for employers and employees. There has been an increasing acceptance of workplace agreements over awards and industrial agreements—more than 254,000 since their introduction. Employees not previously covered by awards, other than those renumerated by commission or piecework, now have their wage rates protected under the Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993, the first of its kind in Australia.

Pre-strike ballot laws came into effect on 1 January 1998, allowing Western Australian workers to vote democratically on potential strike action, while preserving confidentiality and privacy on the part of workers placed in this situation. The results have been impressive. Western Australia consistently outperforms the other states in most labour market outcomes. It is consistently amongst the best states for job creation, low unemployment and youth unemployment and has had relatively high wages growth. In the past decade there has been a steady decline in industrial disputes and Western Australia’s average number of working days lost remains below the national average.

Yet the twin dangers that federal Labor and Western Australian Labor pose to these achievements is very real. Back in August, the leader of the Labor opposition in Western Australia was steamrolled by his federal colleagues at their national conference into supporting the outlawing of individual agreements, despite his own public admission that these agreements are of benefit to
Western Australian workers, particularly in crucial industries like our mining industry. The state Labor leader admitted publicly that he held the cause of Labor Party unity and union amicability as a priority—obviously in higher regard than the interests of Western Australian workers and business. Not that we should have any sympathy for state Labor in Western Australia. They may have thought that they were only being collegiate in backing what had actually been federal Labor policy back in 1998, but they themselves are a threat to good workplace relations in Western Australia. Plainly, Western Australian Labor is cut from the same cloth as that of Queensland Labor, where Queensland work agreements have been ‘neutered’ by the Labor government, despite their pre-election posturing on a pseudo-commitment to the principle of individual agreements. (Time expired)

Capricornia Electorate: Bowen Basin

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (5.46 p.m.)—I have spoken before about the concerns held by people living in the mining communities of the Bowen Basin in my electorate in relation to what they see happening to the communities where they have built their lives and homes. Over the past few years there has been an increasing mood of insecurity fuelled by industrial disputes and downsizing. There has been a lack of trust between the companies and the workers and their families, due to the failure of companies to communicate effectively and openly with their employees. There has been a population decline as a result of redundancies and, more often, the shift of companies to contract labour instead of a permanent work force. Twelve-hour shifts have also encouraged families to move to the coast while dad stays in the mining town for his shifts and comes home on his days off. These factors are having a big impact on the mining communities. Families are anxious about their future and under pressure. The decline in the population is affecting the viability of small businesses, local community organisations and important services such as schools and hospitals. People are sick of feeling as though their communities have been forgotten by governments and that they are simply at the mercy of mining companies. The people I have been talking to in the mining towns want some reassurance that there is a general commitment to the life of their towns so that they can be confident about building their families’ futures there.

As a result of this call from the community, the state Minister for Rural Communities gave the go-ahead for a local committee to organise a forum sponsored by the state government. Participants were invited to discuss the problems causing anxiety and anger in the mining towns and spell out how they see their futures and what support is needed to achieve those goals. The ‘Positive futures in mining communities’ forum in Moranbah brought together local councillors and CEOs, state government department representatives, union delegates, community people, mining company representatives and small business owners from across the Bowen Basin. There was an acknowledgment that the coal industry is under more pressure today than in the past, but even in the current environment there is no justification for the constant threats by the companies of imminent disaster which undermine the confidence of these towns. It is now time for communities, companies and governments to agree that these towns do have a future and they deserve the commitment of each of those partners to strengthen that future.

It is good to see that at least one of the mining companies sees a role for itself in that process. I quote from the Daily Mercury of 29 November, in which Ian Dymock from BHP said:

However, there is a future in the coal business and the communities, and it is great to see everyone participating, the government, the unions, and the local residents to try to, as a community, come up with the answers.

The state Minister for Mines and Energy, Tony McGrady, announced a significant state government measure. It will now require companies opening new mines to give undertakings about local jobs. Of course, the industrial relations policy announced by the ALP at its recent national conference will also help to bring some security back into the industry from the employees’ point of view.
I want to support the initiative of the people who pushed for the idea of the forum and who worked to make it possible. Lynda Pollock and Joy Deguara I name in particular. Although I know that many others were involved, it was their baby from the start, and it was a success.

I thought the forum was a valuable exercise and a very positive one. I know how hard groups in the individual mining towns are working to pinpoint opportunities that can diversify the economic base of the towns and promote a positive view of the mining communities. I know there are also groups that are challenging the mining companies to accept their responsibility for the wellbeing of the towns and the people in them. The forum was a chance to support those people in those individual communities, to bring them together, to build partnerships between communities and to get mining companies talking to the communities they work in. I hope that the forum will prove to be a first step towards putting an end to the environment of insecurity and uncertainty that has stifled the mining towns of central Queensland, and that the new relationships created by the forum will provide a strong platform for capturing future opportunities identified at the forum this week.

Australian Labor Party: Queensland

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom) (5.50 p.m.)—They say a week is a long time in politics. I wonder exactly what the Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie, is thinking after the revelations this week at the Shepherdson inquiry into electoral fraud. Just a fortnight ago, Premier Beattie and his deputy, Jim Elder, arrogantly closed state parliament down for the year, packed their bags and set about heading overseas on government business. Premier Beattie flew to Japan and Mr Elder prepared to go to Africa. Mr Beattie made it to Japan; Mr Elder, on the other hand, feigned illness and stayed at home. However, instead of going to the doctor, Mr Elder paid a very discreet visit to the Queensland Criminal Justice Committee. The rest is history, and I am sure the actual events will be embedded in the minds of senior Labor officials for quite some time. I am sure, too, that the specific events of the last two days will leave bitter memories in the minds of many ordinary Queenslanders.

Yesterday, state member for Springwood, Grant Musgrove, admitted to witnessing four false electoral enrolment forms. Today, former Deputy Premier and Labor member for Capalaba admitted to enrolling some of his brothers and sisters at his Brisbane home when they did not permanently live there. Mr Elder also said his brother Phillip and then wife Linda were enrolled at his sister’s home but did not live there.

But that is not all. I am led to believe that, in evidence this afternoon, high profile Ipswich Labor councillor, Paul Tully, admitted also to fraudulently filling out enrolment forms. Unfortunately, I suspect the list does not stop there. Already the inquiry has heard evidence about the involvement of a number of other state and federal Labor MPs in electoral fraud. It has also brought to the surface allegations about the $1,400 payment from the honourable member for Lilley to the Australian Democrats.

These are all very serious allegations and the people of Queensland have a right to be concerned. Worse still, they have a right to be outraged. For well over two years, Premier Beattie has used every opportunity to extol the virtues and integrity of his government. Well, Mr Speaker, the truth speaks for itself, and history will record that the Beattie government was full of fraudsters and rorters. A question mark even hangs over the Premier himself. As we know, Premier Beattie was State Secretary of the Labor Party and has been around the traps for a very long time. It is quite unbelievable to think that he was unaware that his deputy, the chairman of his legal and constitutional review committee, his successor as state secretary and other prominent members of the party were up to no good. I think that if blind Freddy were a member of the Labor Party, with as much involvement and experience as Peter Beattie, even he would have been able to see that there were problems with rorting.
But Mr Beattie’s problems do not end there. Just today, his government was plunged back into minority status with the resignation of Jim Elder and the imminent resignation of Grant Musgrove from the Labor Party. Fortunately for Mr Beattie, Mr Elder and Mr Musgrove have indicated they will continue to support the government in parliament. However, in my view, if the Premier accepted this support, he would be a fraud. To say that he will not tolerate rorters and cheats in his party and then to turn around and accept their support to stay in office is nothing but hypocrisy at its worst.

This is a farce. The Premier is saying that he is not only happy to have had the support of rorters to get elected but he is happy to have the support of rorters to stay elected.

A government for rorters, by rorters, with rorters. If Mr Beattie is serious about cleaning up rorting in his party, he should reject the support of rorters and send a clear signal that criminal behaviour will not be tolerated in the Australian Labor Party. Mr Beattie must also answer the question about how many more elected members of the Labor Party are going to be embroiled in this scandal. Hopefully, for the sake of Queensland people, the Shepherdson inquiry will help in answering this question and restore integrity to the electoral process.

Statement by Mr Speaker

Mr SPEAKER (5.55 p.m.)—Before I recognise the member for Fowler, I would just like to make a brief comment to the House following events in the House earlier today and yesterday. The member for Burke raised with me his concern about whether it was consistent to allow a request for the withdrawal of a remark that someone found offensive and then that that request was not pursued by the Speaker. I just want to indicate before the House rises today that, in the last hour or so, the Clerk has found many instances where Speakers have been asked to require someone to withdraw a statement and the Speaker has chosen not to do so.

Health: MRI Machines

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (5.55 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, do I have three minutes or five minutes to address the House?

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Fowler has until 6.00 p.m., at which time the House will automatically adjourn, unless anything she might say were to provoke the minister at the table to require the debate to be extended.

Mrs IRWIN—Thank you, Mr Speaker. The electorate of Fowler is regarded as the safest Labor seat in Australia, so it is unusual that a Liberal government health minister should promise something for Liverpool Hospital in the electorate Fowler. But Liverpool Hospital serves a much greater area of south-western Sydney, including the marginal seat of Macarthur, held by the Minister for Finance and Administration, Mr John Fahey. So when the Minister for Health and Aged Care announced in a press release dated 1998 that he and the member for Macarthur supported the placement of an MRI scanner at Liverpool Hospital, it seemed like a sure thing. The minister said at the time:

I expect the hospital to have an MRI as soon as possible.

Well, Mr Speaker, we are still waiting out there in Liverpool. Two years ago, the minister described Liverpool Hospital as:

The largest new teaching hospital in Australia, located in a rapidly growing area which already serves seven hundred and fifty thousand people.

He went on to say:

Liverpool Hospital has established its case as an underserviced region and is clearly eligible for assistance under the federal adjustment and relocation scheme and, subject to the New South Wales government providing the necessary supporting documentation, I expect the hospital to have an MRI as soon as possible.

But here we are, two years down the track, and no sign of the scanner.

Now we all know how the Minister for Health and Aged Care likes to help out his
mates when it comes to getting an MRI scanner for them. And his media release gives credit to his mate, the member for Macarthur. The original announcement praised the member saying:

Mr Fahey, who has worked hard to secure the new technology for the south west Sydney population said his constituents and the people of Sydney will receive enormous benefit from an MRI scanner at Liverpool Hospital.

Since then or, rather, since the redistribution which makes the seat of Macarthur less safe for him, Mr Fahey has bailed out. He has taken his carpetbag off to the seat of Hume. He does not care about Macarthur any more. There is no sign of the promised MRI scanner and no sign of the hardworking member for Macarthur either.

But while the member for Macarthur is no longer around, the need for an MRI scanner at Liverpool Hospital remains. Patients at Liverpool Hospital who need an MRI scan are forced to go to a privately operated centre. They are required to pay the difference between the fee charged and the Medicare rebate. Patients can expect to pay up to $500 from their own pocket for essential scans, that is, when the centre is open. When it is not open, this major teaching hospital has to send patients requiring scans to Westmead Hospital. So patients with brain and spinal cord injuries, including road accident victims, face an ambulance trip of 40 minutes each way to access this life saving technology.

The dedicated work of health professionals at Liverpool Hospital is building its reputation as an excellent teaching hospital. However, without an MRI scanner, Liverpool Hospital cannot achieve its full potential as a teaching hospital. By now, patients at Liverpool Hospital should have had access to an MRI scanner. Instead, they have to pay through the nose for private scans or be shunted all over Sydney to access this service. They have the hardworking member for Macarthur to thank for their wait. John Fahey, thanks for nothing. The people in Macarthur, or Hume, when they cast their vote at the ballot box at the next federal election, will remember what John Fahey has done for them.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

House adjourned at 6.00 p.m.

NOTICES

The following notice was given:

Dr Theophanous—to move:

That this House:

(1) expresses its concern at the hardship created by the implementation of the Government policy of granting three year temporary visas to refugees arriving without papers, even after they have been accepted as genuine under Australia’s refugee determination processes;

(2) recognises that the provision in the three year visa which prevents the unification of those persons granted refugee status under the new policy with their spouse and dependent children, is inhumane and unacceptable under international human rights provisions, and is likely to prevent these refugees from seeing their spouses and children for more than the three year period; and

(3) calls upon the Government to abolish this excessively punitive provision for those persons granted refugee status and to allow them to sponsor their spouses and dependent children to be with them for as long as they are given protection under Australia’s international obligations.
Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl) took the chair at 9.40 a.m.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Hunter Electorate: Allandale Aged Care Facility

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (9.40 a.m.)—This morning I want to raise an issue involving my electorate and which I have spoken about in this place on a number of occasions. I refer to an aged care facility in Cessnock known as Allandale. Allandale has traditionally been one of Cessnock’s major employers and a source of apprenticeships and all sorts of training in the electorate. It was established in 1962 and has operated as an aged care facility for most of that time. For all of that time it has been owned and operated by the New South Wales state government.

The CEO of the Hunter Area Health Service, Professor Katherine McGrath, is determined that that should not be the case any longer and is determined to privatise Allandale. I do not take an ideological approach to privatisation. In fact, I think privatisation should always be considered on a case by case basis. If governments can make out a case for privatisation, so be it, particularly in circumstances where a huge injection of capital is required to keep the facility viable or competitive. Professor Katherine McGrath has not made out a case for privatising Allandale, and I am very concerned about the implications of privatisation for residents of the facility and their families. In particular, for those who work at the facility, I think employment numbers will decline significantly. I do not think there is anything in it for the Cessnock community.

Professor Katherine McGrath says that the privatisation of Allandale is about enhancing the standard of care at Allandale and, indeed, attracting a greater amount of Commonwealth funding. As you would understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, in the early nineties the Commonwealth agreed to take over all funding responsibilities for aged care because of concerns regarding inconsistencies in standards of care across the country. It was also agreed that the Commonwealth would not pay the capital component of bed funding for those homes that were operated by the state government. In other words, the New South Wales government has a lesser ability than a private provider to attract Commonwealth funds.

Professor Katherine McGrath’s plan to privatise Allandale is no more than an exercise in shifting costs from the New South Wales government to the Commonwealth. It is about saving her budget $3.5 million each year. Professor McGrath says that if she can make savings of $3.5 million in relation to Allandale each year, that represents more money that she has available to put into acute care. I say that if Katherine McGrath has identified shortfalls in acute care funding she should take her case to the government and secure additional funding. She should not be seeking, at the expense of the local community, to embark upon a cost shifting exercise by privatising Allandale. (Time expired)

Conference of Members of Parliament of Italian Origin

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (9.43 a.m.)—I rise today to say how privileged and honoured I was to attend the conference of members of parliament of Italian origin, along with the member for Bowman and the member for Prospect, in Rome last week. The conference was held at the Palazzo Montecitorio, in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic. It was a conference of parliamentarians of Italian origin who had been elected to parliaments in foreign countries where Italian communities are based. The conference was part of the enactment of Act 138 of 24 May 2000 which put together this particular conference.

Mr Slipper—How many were there?
Ms GAMBARO—There were roughly 350 parliamentarians of Italian origin. There were 43 from countries in Europe, 49 from North America, 249 from South and Central America, and about five from Oceania, which covers our region as well. It was a wonderful privilege to be able to stand in the Italian parliament on the first day of the conference and speak on parliamentarians and globalisation and how we as nations can work together, particularly on economic, cultural and other issues, to ensure that a network and dialogue can be established that will help all parliaments where members of Italian origin are based.

It is quite interesting that most of the migration occurred from the southern parts of Italy. A number of the delegates at the conference were from the southern parts of Italy, including the region where my family came from originally—Calabria and Sicily. They fled Italy in times of great economic turmoil and disadvantage. Now Italy is the fifth largest and one of the strongest economies in the world.

The second day of the conference was also a very important highlight. I think the member for Bowman made a very good contribution about establishing a database that could be used by members of parliament from around the world for networking purposes and for helping each other in our very different aspects of life. I commend the member for Prospect for her great contribution on that day too.

The conference left me with many glimpses of life overseas. It was a relatively short time, but it gave me a great understanding of what a wonderful country we are based in. When you hear the Colombian members of parliament speaking about the fear they have of passing legislation because the drug lords will kill them, you realise that we, as members of the Australian parliament, have wonderful privileges. We have democracy, we have freedom and we have the ability to speak about any subject without fearing for our lives. (Time expired)

Canberra Electorate: Art Exhibition

Ms ELLIS (Canberra) (9.46 a.m.)—One of the privileges of our jobs as federal members is to have the opportunity to be out in our electorates and to see the wonderful level of community that occurs within our own electorates. I had that experience again last Saturday when I was asked to open a particular art exhibition. The special part of this art exhibition was the participants.

The art exhibition was called A Good Red and could in fact have been interpreted in many ways—maybe that we were showing paintings of bottles of red wine. That was not the case. The art exhibition was held at the Tuggeranong Community Arts Centre in the southern part of my electorate—one of the most well-used community facilities one could ever wish to visit. I take this opportunity to commend everyone concerned—Evol McLeod and her whole team at the Tuggeranong Community Arts Centre—for the wonderful and vibrant use that the centre is experiencing through members of the community.

Let me get back to the art exhibition. Katherine Alexander is a local arts teacher who has made it her task to involve as many people in the community as possible in art. On Saturday there were 35 artists exhibiting over 70 works of art at the Tuggeranong Community Arts Centre. The uniqueness of it was that none of these 35 people believed that they were artists. This was the first time that any one of them had had a piece of their work hung in a public place. In many cases, the piece of work hung was the first thing they had ever done. These art classes have all been under the auspices of Katherine Alexander and two of our local colleges that have assisted her in running these art classes.

The thrill for me was to see the 200 or 300 people there all connected in some way with these 35 artists and the joy they got out of seeing the achievement these 35 people had reached by actually going to an art class, learning something about expressing themselves, actually exposing themselves by putting their efforts into a piece of art and then being convinced that they should display it publicly for other people to see. The age range of these
35 people was from the early 20s to the late 70s. Some of them had learnt art despite having had a stroke or having had to face some other problem or difficulty.

As federal members of the parliament, we sometimes need to reground ourselves by going to a function like this and actually connecting with the efforts that individuals put into their own development within our community. I say to Katherine Alexander and to every one of those 35 artists—I believe they are artists; these people are very good; I could not draw a circle if you paid me—that they deserve encouragement and congratulations. I also congratulate the Tuggeranong Community Arts Centre for putting on the display.

**Australian Labor Party: Queensland**

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration) (9.49 a.m.)—We have been mesmerised, shocked, horrified, maybe even transfixed, as has the Australian community, by the continuing revelations of institutionalised electoral corruption, false enrolment and voter fraud being disclosed through the proceedings of the Shepherdson inquiry in Queensland. All of us believe that this is appalling, that it is entirely out of order and that it contributes to the sense of disillusionment with the political process felt by many in the Australian community.

All of us read the *Courier-Mail* assiduously each day, and I want to refer to an article in ‘The bottom line’ edited by Brian Williams on 28 November. Under the headline ‘Probe goes on’ it says:

We hear yet another federal politician is being investigated whose electorate is far removed from the Gold Coast address on their driver’s licence.

We do not know who was actually being referred to in ‘The bottom line’ article but I am led to believe that, for some time, the member for Dickson has owned residential property on the Gold Coast, which is more than an hour and a half’s drive from her electorate. With this latest allegation and the payments by the member for Lilley, allegedly to purchase Democrat preferences, at a time when the member for Dickson was the Leader of the Democrats, I am sure that there are a few questions that need to be asked of, and answered by, the honourable member for Dickson.

I must say I was also interested to hear that the campaign was launched for the member for Springwood, Grant Musgrove MLA, who yesterday admitted to witnessing four false enrolment forms, by the honourable member for Dickson. So the member for Dickson launched Grant Musgrove’s campaign for the seat of Springwood, which he won by a very small margin, and no doubt the member for Springwood has admitted that he has been a party to voter fraud and to false enrolment. The member for Dickson really ought to explain whether she was aware at the time she launched that campaign that the member for Springwood was indeed participating in such nefarious activities.

Premier Beattie is the one constant throughout all this. He has been the state secretary, a backbencher, a minister, the Labor leader and now he is the Premier of Queensland, yet he is the one who is professing that he knows nothing. The Premier of Queensland is either dishonest or he is stupid. The simple fact of the matter is that he is the constant, he knows what is happening and he ought to come clean. *(Time expired)*

**Canning Electorate: Adopt a Politician**

Ms GERICK (Canning) (9.52 a.m.)—On Sunday I was very pleased to attend a picnic in the Tom Bateman park in my electorate of Canning to celebrate the first anniversary of the Adopt a Politician scheme. I am sure many members have joined this scheme and have benefited from it in the same way that I have. The Adopt a Politician scheme was developed to assist members of parliament and community leaders to be more aware of the problems that families who have children with a disability experience on a day to day basis. I have certainly
enjoyed my 12 months of getting to know the Cassey family much better. Heather, Ray, Joanne, Stuart and Jack have been kind in letting me into their family circle and in helping me develop a better understanding of the difficulties that they face.

Stuart, who has an acquired brain injury, has many challenges that he needs to face for the rest of his life. Yesterday, Stuart celebrated his 17th birthday. An average young Australian male would be celebrating getting ready to leave school, getting his driver’s licence and perhaps going on to university. Sadly, these are not the exciting adventures that Stuart is looking forward to. He will be going back to Corpus Christie College next year, but he is going to need the ongoing support of his family and the community for the rest of his life.

One of the groups that has offered support to the Cassey family and others is a group called Teen Spirit. Stuart’s mum, Heather, has played a key role in the development of this group. They organise holiday activities for children with disabilities, but these kids cannot go to the movies by themselves or take on activities without supervision. The group has been fundraising and seeking ways of making sure that their kids have good school holidays the way the rest of the community does. In the previous 12 months they have had success in getting some funding, but unfortunately it soon runs out. It is one of the issues that we need to have a good look at to make sure that groups like Teen Spirit, which have a really important role—they do good work—get the support they need.

One of the successes of groups like Teen Spirit is letting children with disabilities not only make friendships outside the schools or the areas they attend but also develop friendships with children who do not have a disability. You see all the children forming friendships, and children who do not have a disability develop a greater understanding and sympathy for the problems that these young people are experiencing. I congratulate Heather for the great work she has done and wish Stuart a happy 17th birthday—one day late. I am sure that all members will enjoy this program. (Time expired)

McPherson Electorate: Paralympics

Mrs MA Y (McPherson) (9.55 a.m.)—Last month Australia hosted one of the most inspiring sporting events ever staged—the 11th Paralympic Games. As a parliamentarian for the Paralympics, I was proud to support this pinnacle event and witness the way in which the human spirit is able to triumph over physical adversity in an awe-inspiring spectacle. I have also taken an interest in the Paralympic Games on a more personal level in my electorate. I have already spoken in this place of the Gold Coast’s local swimming champion Shane Walsh and the challenges he overcame to make it to the Paralympic Games. I am proud to be able to report that Shane Walsh delivered the goods for his community and his country. Shane was a member of the Australian men’s 4 x 100 metres relay team that scooped silver at the games. He was also placed fifth in the 50-metres freestyle and seventh in the 100-metres freestyle.

I met up with Shane shortly after he returned from the games and naturally he is thrilled at his medal win. Although Shane deserves every ounce of credit for the countless hours he spent training at the Bond University pool, he is the first to admit that no-one can achieve such a feat alone. So, on behalf of Shane Walsh and myself, I would like to put on the parliamentary record our immense gratitude and respect for the residents, businesses and community organisations that believed in Shane’s dream and helped him achieve it. The first donor to come on board to help out our home-grown hero was local developer Nifsan Gold Seal Homes. I would particularly like to thank the general manager, Ian McLean, and the quality control manager, Ken Philips, for donating the price of an airfare to Sydney so that Shane was able to have a loved one there to support him.

The following businesses and individuals also helped Shane achieve his goal: Bob Binks from Surfside Ford, John Gardner from Strand Resorts, Roger and Lyn Campbell from Palm Beach Super Cycle, Glen Ferguson from Credit Union Australia, Tracey Douglas from...
Connect the Coast, the Gold Coast Coalition for Aged Persons Physical Activities, Tricare, David Travers and his team at the Landmark Parkroyal in Sydney, Mr and Mrs Richards from IM-Press Promotions, Diane Smerdon from Palm Beach, Lana Robertson from Elanora, Jim Sherry, the Lewis family from Burleigh Heads and an anonymous donor of the Palm Beach Chamber of Commerce. Although I could speak for hours on the way in which each one of these people made a difference to Shane achieving his goal in Sydney, there is not the time. Shane and I thank all those community supporters for helping him achieve his goal in Sydney.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)**—Order! In accordance with standing order 275A, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Motion (by Mrs May) proposed:
That the House do now adjourn.

**Christmas**

**Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (9.58 a.m.)—**Merry Christmas, Mr Deputy Speaker! But what do those two words mean? Christmas is the single most celebrated and happy feast day of all the Christian churches. Whether Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox, all Christian faiths recognise the ultimate significance and joy that is in the very word ‘Christmas’.

The origin of the date of 25 December is unknown, but it is by tradition attributed to an adaptation of the old pagan Festival of Light. Some think of Christmas as presents, Christmas trees, mistletoe, yule logs, wassail bowls and a roast turkey dinner on Christmas Day. The use of a Christmas tree is of relatively recent origin—first appearing in Strasbourg, France, in the 17th century. The celebration of the coming of Santa Claus is actually a tradition introduced by Dutch settlers in the United States who knew him as Sinterklaas, although his feast day is actually 6 December. St Nicholas was born in Patara around AD 280 in Asia Minor and became Bishop of Myra, now Demre, in Turkey. He attended the first council of Nicea in 325 AD.

These traditions are all diversions from the ultimate purpose of Christmas and why it is celebrated. For the two billion Christians around the world, Christmas is about the birth of Jesus Christ. It is timely to recite the relevant truths contained in just one of the four gospels that corroborate the testimony that is the very basis of the feast day of Christmas. I cite the gospel of St Luke, chapter 2, verses 8 to 13, which describes the account of that momentous event of the birth of Jesus Christ. It says:

And in that region (of Bethlehem) there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.
And the angel said to them,
“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you tidings of a great joy which will come to all the people;
for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.
And this will be a sign for you; you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger”.
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God saying:
“Glory to God in the highest, and on
Bible historian Jules Lebreton notes in his text *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* that, using certain milestone dates such as the death of Herod, being 4 BC, the baptism of John, the date of the enrolment by Quirinius, the Governor of Syria, et cetera, we can estimate the most likely actual birthday of Jesus Christ to be 12 March, 4 BC. But the feast day of Christmas transcends mere empirical analysis. Contemporary society seeks to reduce the celebration to an eclectic festivity of consumerism, encroachment and hijacking by other festivals and events, and an outright denial of the truth that is Christmas—the celebration of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the World.

The truth in the gospels is a testimony of Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. It is solely for this reason that Christmas is Christmas. The gospels are not chronologies; they are oral traditions put to writing long after the events they describe. They lack factual details. Some seek to discard them for this very reason. Subsequent documents in history attempt to destroy the very meaning and existence not only of Christmas but of the pre-eminent position of Christ himself. If there is a reason why the testimony is to be believed, then it is to be found in the humility of the scene. This is not the story of a great king performing fantastic deeds and miraculous works. What the nativity of Jesus is about, as Bible historian Jules Lebreton further notes in his text:

We do not find, in the (Gospel) pages, those puerile and fantastic fantasies that show that the imagination has been at work ... From his birth on, we find the same surroundings of poverty and humility—a hired stable, a handful of straw, swaddling clothes ... It is not this kind of magnificence that would have been imagined by the mind of a man.

In concluding this reflection on Christmas, I can find no other words that best describe the true meaning of Christmas than those of the great theologian Saint Augustine in his famous *Sermon on the nativity*:

Hear what you already know; reflect upon what you have heard; love what you believe; proclaim what you love.

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A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 10.02 a.m. to 10.26 a.m.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)—A quorum not being present, the chair will be resumed at 10.28 a.m.

Sitting suspended from 10.26 a.m. to 10.28 a.m.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—A quorum not being present, the Main Committee stands adjourned until a day and hour to be announced by the Deputy Speaker.

Main Committee adjourned at 10.26 a.m.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

**Marriage Celebrants and Ministers of Religion**

(Question No. 1751)

Mr McClelland asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 14 August 2000:

1. For each Statistical Local Area (SLA), (a) how many authorised community based civil marriage celebrants are located in that area, (b) how many ministers of religion of recognised denominations who are registered under Division 1 of Part VI of the Marriage Act are located in that area, (c) how many state or territory government civil celebrants are located in that area and (d) what is the population of that area.

2. How does he determine whether there is a need for civil celebrants in a particular area.

3. In respect of the special needs category of authorised civil marriage celebrants, (a) how many community based civil marriage celebrants are currently authorised in this category and (b) in respect of each celebrant so authorised, what is the relevant special needs community.

4. How many community based authorised civil marriage celebrants are there and how many of these celebrants possess a relevant civil marriage celebrant qualification.

5. How many written complaints were made to his Department about community based civil marriage celebrants in 1999-2000.

6. How many complaints were resolved with no formal action taken against the relevant celebrant.

7. How many members does each association of civil celebrants recognised by him have.

8. When will the review which was announced in April 1997 be complete.

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

1. (a) A Statistical Local Area (SLA) as defined by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification is the base spatial unit used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to collect and disseminate statistics. There are 1336 SLAs covering the whole of Australia without any over-lapping. SLAs are used for the collection of all kinds of statistics, not just demographics. SLAs vary in size and the total population in them.

   A list detailing the number of authorised community based civil marriage celebrants in each SLA has been sent by mail to Mr McClelland.

   (b) Ministers of religion of recognised denominations are registered under Part IV of the Marriage Act, not Part VI. There are approximately 20,000 ministers of recognised denominations registered as marriage celebrants. They are registered by the State and Territory Registrars who do not classify them by SLAs. It would not be reasonable to ask the registrars to supply the data requested.

   (c) State government civil celebrants are authorised in accordance with agreements between the Governor-General and the State Governor. The Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory have different arrangements which are not identical. The states and territories decide where they want celebrants and do not use SLAs in making these decisions.

   (d) The number of state or territory government civil celebrants in the states and territories are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>CAPITAL CITY</th>
<th>ELSEWHERE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data on the populations of each SLA has been sent by mail to Mr McClelland.

(2) In urban areas, data is obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics to calculate the total number of weddings likely to occur in the area each year and the number likely to be performed by civil marriage celebrants. The crude rate of marriages per 1000 head of population is 6.0 overall in Australia but this varies from 4.6 in the NT to 6.4 in NSW and Queensland. In 1999, community based civil marriage celebrants performed 43.6% of all marriages in Australia though the percentage varied from 41.4% in Victoria to 51.8% in Tasmania. Where possible, this data is compared with the actual number of weddings reported by existing celebrants in the area.

The workload guide for a civil marriage celebrant living in an urban area is 100 weddings per year if the celebrant has other employment and 200 weddings if the celebrant has no other employment.

In rural areas, celebrant workload is less relevant for assessing need than it is in urban areas because total demand is usually low. Factors considered in deciding if more celebrants are required in a rural area include the need to provide communities with access to a choice of celebrants, the need to provide back-up for existing celebrants, distance to an alternative celebrant, difficulties travelling because of terrain and whether the people living in the area see themselves as a distinct community.

(3) (a) There are 60 authorised civil marriage celebrants currently classified as authorised primarily to meet special needs of groups within the community.

(b) A list of the above celebrants has been sent by mail to Mr McClelland.

(4) There are 1676 authorised civil marriage celebrants. Formal courses for celebrants have only recently become available in Australia and so far there have been 17 graduates but of these only 5 are civil marriage celebrants.

(5) My Department received 10 complaints against civil marriage celebrants in the year 1999 – 2000.

(6) My Department seeks to take a mediatory approach when it receives complaints. I am advised that in all cases the celebrants were formally invited to respond in writing to the complaints. In eight cases the celebrant either gave satisfactory responses or made reasonable efforts to rectify the cause of the complaint. Two cases have not yet been finalised.

(7) Civil marriage celebrant associations are not formally recognised by the Government. There are currently 14 celebrant associations. The executive members of these associations reported the approximate membership figures listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>MEMBERSHIP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Australian Federation of Civil Celebrants Inc</td>
<td>470</td>
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<td>The Association of Civil Marriage Celebrants of Victoria Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Association Combined Civil Marriage Celebrants A.C.T. and NSW</td>
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<td>Association of All Authorised Civil Marriage Celebrants Nationwide</td>
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<td>Association of Civil Marriage Celebrants of NSW and ACT</td>
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<td>A.C.T. and Southern NSW Association of Civil Marriage Celebrants</td>
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<td>Association of Civil Marriage Celebrants Sydney City and Suburbs</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Australian Federation of Civil Marriage Celebrants</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising Affiliated Alliance of Authorised Civil Marriage Celebrants</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanist Celebrant Network</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The National Federation of Associations of Civil Marriage Celebrants of Australia includes three of the above associations viz. the Association of Civil Marriage Celebrants of New South Wales and ACT, the Association of Civil Marriage Celebrants of South Australia Inc. and the ACT and Southern NSW Association of Civil Marriage Celebrants.

(8) The current review of the civil marriage celebrant program is the most extensive and thorough review undertaken since the Marriage Act 1961 (the Act) came into force. It has involved a careful examination of every aspect of the civil marriage celebrant program including the continued relevance of parts of the Act and a survey of the views of all stakeholders.

There are a number of problems with the present system. First, as a general rule, no new celebrants can be appointed where statistics reveal that there are sufficient numbers of existing celebrants. This is particularly the case in metropolitan areas where a large number of celebrants reside. Second, while celebrants are appointed on the basis of regional need, there is no requirement for those celebrants to remain in those regions. Celebrants occasionally change their residence resulting in a skewing of areas of need. Finally, there is a large degree of discrepancy in the standard of celebrants’ services.

A large number of celebrants was appointed by the Labor Government rapidly in 1994 and early 1995, when limited standards were applied to applications. Currently, the only statutory requirement is that a celebrant be a “fit and proper” person to perform the role.

The review is addressing all these issues and is expected to be finalised in 2001.

**Goods and Services Tax: Prime Minister’s Portfolio**

(Question No. 1763)

Mr Hatton asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 14 August 2000:

1. Is the Minister’s Department and agencies within the Minister’s portfolio compliant in respect of the Goods and Services Tax.
2. What action did the Minister’s Department and agencies within the Minister’s portfolio take to ensure that they were GST ready by 1 July 2000.
3. Is the Minister able to guarantee that no agency within the Minister’s portfolio will suffer negative impacts on its budget or services due to the GST; if not, or if the guarantee was subsequently proved incorrect, would the Minister be prepared to resign.

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

I am advised by my department and portfolio agencies as follows:

1. In June 2000, the chief executives of all agencies within my portfolio were asked to provide me, or the relevant Ministers Assisting, with written confirmation that they would be able to comply with The New Tax System from 1 July 2000. Such assurances were received from each agency.
2. The following action was undertaken by my department and portfolio agencies to ensure GST compliance by 1 July 2000:

**Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet**

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has successfully managed the introduction of the GST. The following tasks were undertaken:

- established GST project team, project manager and sponsor responsible for managing the GST implementation;
- developed project plan;
obtained the Department’s Australian Business Number (ABN) and registered for the GST; adopted Department of Finance and Administration (DOFA) GST project implementation strategies and met audit requirements; reviewed the effect of the removal of Wholesale Sales Tax; provided GST information sessions for staff and circulated information to management and relevant staff explaining the effect of GST; reviewed all contracts that spanned the commencement date; analysed system requirements; implemented GST into Financial Management Information System (FMIS); reviewed reporting requirements to meet accounting and government requirements; and trained relevant staff in new business processes.

Australian National Audit Office

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) has successfully managed the introduction of the GST. In summary, the work undertaken has included:

- the registration of the ANAO for its ABN and GST;
- a review of all critical business transactions including contracts and audit engagement letters;
- the upgrade of financial information systems to be GST compliant;
- the completion of an internal price review in accordance with agency pricing guidelines and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) guidelines and the development of appropriate contingency arrangements;
- analysing the effect of the GST and the removal of Wholesale Sales Tax on the cash flow of the ANAO; and
- updating the financial reporting within the ANAO to comply with Urgent Issues Group (UIG) Abstract 31 – Accounting for the Goods and Services Tax.

Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman

In June 2000 the agency’s external auditors completed a review of the agency’s ability to comply with the GST legislation. The review concluded that all reasonable steps had been taken to enable the agency to accurately record GST related transactions and prepare Business Activity Statements in a timely manner.

Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General

Actions taken by the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General were in keeping with the project implementation strategy recommended by the DOFA against which the Office reported its progress on a regular basis for whole-of-government reporting on GST readiness. Areas of specific focus were:

- financial system development and testing;
- development of administrative procedures;
- supplier awareness; and
- staff training.

Office of the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security

The Office of the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security (OIGIS) has successfully managed the introduction of the GST. The following tasks were undertaken:

- attended GST seminars hosted by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and the DOFA;
- liaised with The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), its portfolio department, to ensure all procedures were followed;
arranged for inclusion on Finance 1 system that is managed by PM&C; applied for and received an ABN; and registered for GST and installed necessary software.

**Office of National Assessments**

The Office of National Assessments (ONA) has successfully managed the introduction of the GST. The following tasks were undertaken:
- established GST project team, project manager and sponsor responsible for managing the GST implementation;
- developed project plan;
- obtained ONA’s ABN and registered for the GST;
- addressed mandatory GST implementation questionnaires for DOFA;
- circulated information to management and relevant staff explaining the effect of GST;
- reviewed all contracts that spanned the commencement date;
- analysed system requirements;
- implemented GST into ONA’s FMIS; and
- trained relevant staff in new business processes.

**Public Service and Merit Protection Commission**

The Public Service and Merit Protection Commission (PSMPC) undertook a rigorous implementation process, to ensure it was GST ready by 1 July 2000. This included:
- registering for an ABN and the GST;
- re-configuration of the Commission’s finance system to manage financial and reporting requirements;
- analysing the effect of the GST on the Commission’s cash flow;
- implementing a revised pricing policy to comply with Government pricing policy; and
- raising staff awareness and amending internal policies and procedures to comply with GST requirements.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission**

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) has undertaken a number of major initiatives to ensure a successful transition to the New Tax System for the Commission, Indigenous organisations, businesses and clients.

To ensure that the change process was properly managed ATSIC:
- established a Taxation Reform Implementation Unit;
- established a Taxation Reform Steering Committee and Reference Group; and
- engaged a professional consultancy firm to provide assistance and to complete an ATSIC taxation reform implementation plan.

The major tasks completed and oversighted by the Taxation Reform Steering Committee and consultancy firm were:
- all necessary amendments to the Commission’s business practices and financial systems;
- the provision of training for staff; and
- development of an ATSIC Tax Manual, tax help desk facility and a dedicated ATSIC tax reform intranet site.

A quality assurance review of tax reform conducted by DOFA concluded that ATSIC had satisfactorily implemented all aspects of the New Tax System.

ATSIC has electronically lodged the July 2000 Business Activity Statement (BAS) with the ATO.
ATSIC has also undertaken a vital role in ensuring that indigenous organisations, businesses and clients have the same access to information and assistance offered to the wider community, including the delivery of 92 tax seminars to commission employees. Other major initiatives undertaken were the publication and distribution to potential 2000–2001 grant recipients of:

- A Tax Reform Action Plan;
- A Wall Chart;
- GST Notes for Remote Community Development Employment Program (CDEP); and
- GST Notes for Non-Remote CDEPs.

In April and May 2000, ATSIC wrote to all potential 2000–2001 grant recipients reminding them of their obligations under the New Tax System and providing copies of:

- GST & Business Skills an Action Guide;
- Interactive CD: The GST & Business Skills; and
- Video: The GST & your business, GET STARTED TODAY – an Action Guide, Helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prepare for the introduction of the GST.

ATSIC continues to work with the ACCC, GST Start-Up Assistance Office and ATO to ensure that ongoing taxation assistance and support is available to indigenous organisations, businesses and clients.

(3) The implementation and ongoing management of tax reform by agencies is the responsibility of their respective Chief Executive Officer or boards of management (as applicable). While the Government will continue to monitor the impact of the implementation of The New Tax System, the reforms are not expected to reduce the level of funding for agencies in this portfolio in real terms.

**ComSuper: Superannuation Entitlements**

(Question No. 1978)

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Finance and Administration, upon notice, on 3 October 2000:

1. Did ComSuper in the 1970s and 1980s (a) formulate guidelines for Departments to enable them to fully inform resignees of their superannuation entitlements, (b) train personnel staff in agent Departments to ensure consistent application of the guidelines and (c) regularly monitor Departments to ensure adherence to the guidelines; if so, can documentation be provided to prove that it did so.

2. What percentage of resignees eligible to defer did so between (a) 1977 and 1987 when for S2A was in issue, (b) 1988 and 1992 when there was some awareness of the deferred benefits option and (c) 1993 to 2000.

3. Is the percentage referred to in part (2)(a) low compared to the percentage in part (2)(c); if so, is he able to say why.

4. Was Form S2A redesigned; if so, (a) why and (b) was in considered inadequate.

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

1. Yes. On the introduction of the preservation rights under the Superannuation Act 1922 (the Act) instructions were issued on 27 May 1971 to all Departments and Approved Authorities. These instructions formed the basis of the guidelines for preservation. The Superannuation Manual for personnel areas was updated in January 1972 to reflect the changes to the Act. As a result of the introduction of a new scheme on 1 July 1976 ComSuper provided Departments and authorities with information regarding the administration of the Superannuation Scheme through instructions contained in a Superannuation Manual and in Superannuation circulars.

2. Yes. General information about the courses conducted is contained in the Commissioner for Superannuation annual reports.
(c) Yes. Regular monitoring of Departments practices through analysis of information provided to ComSuper was conducted. Most documentation has been destroyed in accordance with the Australian Archives Disposal schedules. Some information has been retained on individual files.

(2) (a)

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(3) (a) Yes. (b) No. Surveys of resignees were not undertaken on this issue.

(4) Under ComSuper’s policy of continuous improvement changes were made to the form including an outline of the preservation option. Further revisions of the form have been made from time to time. The form was also redesigned to accommodate input data required following the introduction of an automated superannuation benefits payments system.

**Waterfront: Robot Operated Container Staddle Carriers**

(Question No. 2091)

**Mr Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business, upon notice, on 30 October 2000:

(1) In the lead up to, and during, the waterfront dispute of 1998, is he able to say whether a driverless robot-operated container straddle carrier was being developed by Patricks with the specific purpose of disposing of a significant fraction of the waterside workforce.

(2) Was prototype machine being tested with a dummy driver’s cabin installed to mislead the workforce at the Patricks dock where the prototype was being trialed.

(3) Did a previous model of this machine that had been built in the United Kingdom have serious problems with its control system that led to the machine running out of control and driving around in circles.

(4) What would be the possible workplace consequences of a driverless robot-operated straddle carrier loaded with a 24 tonne container running out of control.
(5) Is he also able to say whether Patricks, in negotiations with the Maritime Union of Australia in 1998, denied an intention to introduce a driverless straddle carrier; if so, what is stated in the Workplace Relations Act in relation to actions of this kind.

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

(1) to (5) These questions traverse matters which are at issue in proceedings currently in the Federal Court of Australia. In addition, they seek answers to questions about the business of a private company that should be directed to that company and not the government. For both reasons, it would not be appropriate to answer those questions.

Botany Bay Foreshores: Restorative Work
(Question No. 2092)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Finance and Administration, upon notice, on 30 October 2000:

(1) Has his attention been drawn to negotiations involving the Sydney Airport Corporation Limited, the Rockdale City Council, the NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation and the Sydney Ports Corporation with a view to reaching an agreement to fund restorative work in and around the foreshores of Botany Bay as a result of wave action due, in part, to changed wave patterns following the construction of the third runway at Sydney (Kingsford-Smith) Airport.

(2) Is the Sydney Airport Corporation not prepared to finalise an agreement in respect to the provision of such funding unless and until it receives a release from any further potential liability.

(3) Will he examine the matters which are the subject of the negotiation with a view to the removal of any conditions that are impeding a resolution of the matter.

Mr Fahey—The answer to the honourable member’s questions are as follows:

(1) I am aware of the negotiations as a result of the honourable Member’s questions and subsequent advice from my department and Sydney Airports Corporation Limited.

(2) Sydney Airports Corporation has advised that these matters are the subject of ongoing negotiation with the parties concerned. I am advised that there are a number of matters to be resolved before an agreement can be finalised.

(3) No. This is a commercial matter for Sydney Airports Corporation who have an independent Board of directors overseeing its operations. It is not appropriate for me as shareholder to intervene in a specific business matter of this nature.

Relationship Counselling: Funding
(Question No. 2105)

Ms Livermore asked the Minister representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, upon notice, on 1 November 2000:

(1) What is the basis for the funding of approved non-government organisations involved in delivering family and relationship counselling under the provisions of the Family Law Act.

(2) To what extent is the present allocation of funding based on (a) historical factors, (b) a funding formula or standardised performance-based criteria and (c) decisions made on the basis of services put out to tender.

(3) How does the Minister’s Department propose to revisit the funding of non-government organisations involved in providing family and relationship counselling services with a view to achieving more transparent funding mechanisms.

(4) When was the last comprehensive review of funding for organisations involved in providing family and relationship counselling services conducted.

Mr Anthony—The Minister for Family and Community Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:
(1) The basis for the funding of approved non-government organisations involved in delivering family and relationship counselling is outlined in Part II, Sections 13A and 13H of the Family Law Act.

(2) (a) There are 41 counselling organisations that have been funded on an historical basis.

(b) In recent years needs based planning models have been developed for the Family Relationships Services Program to identify areas of need. This involves an estimation of the demand for service, consideration of the current levels of service delivery and mapping of related family, income, legal and support agencies.

(c) When funds are available for a specific purpose in the Family Relationships Services Program they are provided through a tender process, in which organisations must meet certain criteria and program approval requirements. Advertising for new services is conducted in areas of high need.

(3) Current contracts with organisations finish in 2002. Over the next 6 months the Department of Family and Community Services will review current arrangements in relation to funding mechanisms, and give organisations a year’s notice about proposed new arrangements.

(4) An evaluation of marriage and relationship counselling services was conducted in 1996. However, the whole basis of the FRSP was examined in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs inquiry into aspects of family services “To Have & to Hold” published in June 1998.

FamNet
(Question No. 2121)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, upon notice, on 2 November 2000:
(1) What is the purpose of the FamNet database.
(2) When did the Government establish FamNet.
(3) From which sources and how is data collected for FamNet.
(4) Have there been any difficulties reported with respect to the operation of FamNet; if so, what are those difficulties.
(5) Is the Minister or her Department taking any steps to improve the operation of FamNet; if so, (a) what are those steps and (b) how long will it take to complete that process.
(6) How are the figures for ‘average cost of intervention’ and ‘average cost of session’ for family and relationship counselling services calculated and what data has her Department relied upon in calculating those figures.
(7) Has the quality of that data been affected by difficulties with FamNet.
(8) Will the Minister review those figures by means other than through data which is part of the FamNet system in order to more accurately calculate the figures referred to in part (6).

Mr Anthony—The Minister for Family and Community Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:
(1) The FAMnet database holds information about the operation of the Family Relationships Services Program (FRSP). It is intended to allow the Department of Family and Community Services and all the organisations that are funded to deliver services under the FRSP to share information about the program and monitor its performance.

(2) FAMnet was approved for development in June 1996, when the FRSP was the responsibility of the Attorney-General’s Department. It underwent extensive consultation with the family relationships sector during its development. After a pilot conducted with 10 organisations in mid-1998, FAMnet was fully implemented from July 1999.

(3) Most of the data in FAMnet comes directly from organisations funded by the FRSP. The data is collected by organisations and entered into FAMnet using the Internet.
(4) Some difficulties have been reported with the operation of FAMnet. The principal difficulties have been that data entry has been slow and it has been difficult to obtain some reports from the system.

(5) (a) Action has already been taken to improve the performance of FAMnet. In July this year, the database was moved to an improved computer environment. Provider organisations reported experiencing a much-improved response time and faster data entry as a result. The Department is also developing updated data entry and reporting mechanisms to improve both performance and the functionality of the system.

(b) The updated data entry and the reporting mechanisms are to be piloted in December 2000, with full implementation early in 2001.

(6) Figures for the average cost per session and per customer by service delivery type will be calculated using data derived primarily from FAMnet.

(7) The data in FAMnet appears sound and not to have been affected seriously by the above difficulties. However, testing of quality continues.

(8) Yes, where a calculation of this sort is required.

Monash University: Physics Faculty
(Question No. 2123)

Mr Danby asked the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, upon notice, on 2 November 2000:

(1) In the week preceding the week of "Science meets Parliament" was the Monash University Physics Faculty closed.

(2) How does the closure of the Monash University Physics Faculty accord with the Government’s commitment to science and higher education.

Dr Kemp—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The Monash University Physics Faculty did not close but was merged with the Department of Materials Engineering to form the new School of Physics Materials Science and Engineering.

(2) As indicated above, the Monash University Physics Faculty did not close. The Government has taken a number of initiatives to promote science in higher education. A notable example is the Science Lectureships Initiative. This programme provides funding of $25 million over the period 2000-2002 for 28 projects, a number of which involve the promotion of science through creating stronger links between university programs and schools.

Macedonia: Embassy in Australia
(Question No. 2124)

Mr Jenkins asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, upon notice, on 2 November 2000:

(1) Further to the answer to question No. 2000 (Hansard, 4 September 1997, page 7972 attached below), does the Government plan to change the non-resident accreditation basis of diplomatic relations between Australia and Macedonia.

(2) What are the preconditions for the establishment of a residential embassy by Macedonia in Australia.

(3) Have the preconditions changed since his last answer.

(4) What is the current status of Australia’s diplomatic representation to Macedonia.

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

(1) The Australian Government has no plans at present to change the basis of its non-resident accreditation to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

(2) and (3) The conditions which would attach to the establishment of resident diplomatic representation in Australia by the FYROM remain essentially as set out in the answer to question
No.636 (Hansard, 4 October 1996, page 5146). The Australian and FYROM Governments have recently had further informal discussions on this question. I would note that the contentious issue concerning the FYROM flag, which was one of the pre-conditions, appears now to have been resolved.

(4) Australia has non-resident accreditation to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia from its Embassy to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in Belgrade.

Honours and Awards
(Question No. 2144)

Mr Hollis asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 8 November 2000:

(1) Which heads of state and government have visited Australia since the answer to question No. 878 (Hansard, 22 August 1991, page 465).

(2) Which of the persons referred to in part (1) have been honoured by an award in the Order of Australia.

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

I am advised by my department as follows:

(1) The following heads of state and government have made official visits to Australia since the answer to question No 878 (Hansard, 22 August 1991), listed in chronological order, by year

1991
Rt Hon Rabbie Namaliu, Prime Minister, Papua New Guinea
HE George Vassiliou, President, Cyprus
Hon George Bush, President, United States of America

1992
Hon Sir Robert Rex, Premier, Niue
Hon Maxime Carlot Korman, Prime Minister, Vanuatu
Major-General the Hon Sitiveni L Rabuka, Prime Minister, Fiji
HH the Amir of Kuwait
HE Mary Robinson, President, Ireland

1993
HE Kiichi Miyazawa, Prime Minister, Japan
HE Vo Van Kiet, Prime Minister, Vietnam
HE Censu Tabone, President, Malta
Hon Sergei Tereshchenko, Prime Minister, Kazakhstan
HE Richard von Weizsacker, President, Federal Republic of Germany
HE Patricio Aylwin, President, Chile
HE Amata Kabua, President, Marshall Islands
HE Khamtay Siphandone, Prime Minister, Laos People’s Democratic Republic

1994
Rt Hon Paias Wingti, Prime Minister, Papua New Guinea
Hon Francis Hilly, Prime Minister, Solomon Islands
Rt Hon Paias Wingti, Prime Minister, Papua New Guinea (W)
Major General the Hon Sitiveni L Rabuka, Prime Minister, Fiji (W)
Rt Hon J B Bolger, Prime Minister, New Zealand (W)
HE Lars Emil Johansen, Premier, Greenland
HE Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister, Singapore
Rt Hon Sir Julius Chan, Prime Minister, Papua New Guinea
Mr Albert Reynolds, Taoiseach, Ireland
HE Dame Catherine Tizard, Governor-General, New Zealand
HE Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, President, Chile
HE Kim Young Sam, President, Republic of Korea

1995
His Holiness Pope John Paul II
Hon Maxime Carlot Korman, Prime Minister, Vanuatu (W)
HE Vaclav Havel, President, Czech Republic
HE Maumoon Gayoom, President, Maldives
HE Dr Franjo Tudjman, President, Croatia
HE Do Muoi, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Vietnam
HE Fidel V Ramos, President, Philippines
Hon Maxime Carlot-Korman, Prime Minister, Vanuatu (W)
Hon Edward Fenech-Adami, Prime Minister, Malta (W)
Hon Edison James, Prime Minister, Dominica (W)
The Rt Hon Jean Chretien, Prime Minister, Canada
HE Glafcos Clerides, President, Cyprus

1996
Rt Hon J B Bolger, Prime Minister, New Zealand (W)
Rt Hon Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, Prime Minister, Malaysia (W)
Rt Hon Sir Julius Chan, Prime Minister, Papau New Guinea (W)
Major-General the Hon Sitiveni L Rabuka, Prime Minister, Fiji (W)
Hon William Jefferson Clinton, President, United States of America
HE Nursultan Nazarbayev, President, Republic of Kazakhstan

1997
HE Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat, President, Mongolia
HE Ryutaro Hashimoto, Prime Minister, Japan
HE Helmut Kohl, Chancellor, Germany
Rt Hon Sir Kamisese Mara, President, Fiji (W)
Mr Wim Kok, Prime Minister, Netherlands

1998
Hon Jenny Shipley, Prime Minister, New Zealand (W)
HE Carlos Saul Menem, President, Argentine Republic
HE Janez Drnovsek, Prime Minister, Republic of Slovenia
HE Mart Siimann, Prime Minister, Estonia (W)
Hon Bill Skate, Prime Minister, Papua New Guinea
HE Mary McAleese, President, Ireland
HE Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, President, Italy
Major-General the Hon Sitiveni L Rambuka, Prime Minister, Fiji
1999
HE Arpad Goncz, President, Hungary
HE Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister, Singapore
HE Phan Van Khai, Prime Minister, Vietnam
HE Jiang Zemin, President, China
HE Kim Dae-jung, President, Republic of Korea
HE Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister, Bangladesh

2000
Rt Hon Helen Clark, Prime Minister, New Zealand
Mr Bertie Ahern, Taoiseach, Ireland
Hon Mahendra Chaudhry, Prime Minister, Fiji
(W) Working visit

(2) No heads of state or government on this list have received honorary awards in the Order of Australia.