COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Official Hansard

No. 2, 2002
MONDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2002

FORTIETH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
INTERNET
The Votes and Proceedings for the House of Representatives are available at:
Proof and Official Hansards for the House of Representatives, the Senate and committee hearings are available at:

SITTING DAYS—2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>14, 15, 16, 27, 28, 29, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 6, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>11, 12, 13, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RADIO BROADCASTS
Broadcasts of proceedings of the Parliament can be heard on the following Parliamentary and News Network radio stations, in the areas identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CANBERRA</td>
<td>1440 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYDNEY</td>
<td>630 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWCASTLE</td>
<td>1458 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRISBANE</td>
<td>936 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MELBOURNE</td>
<td>1026 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADELAIDE</td>
<td>972 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERTH</td>
<td>585 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOBART</td>
<td>729 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARWIN</td>
<td>102.5 FM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HANSARD CONTENTS

MONDAY, 18 FEBRUARY

Authority to Administer Oath or Affirmation ....................................................... 301
Members Sworn .................................................................................................... 301
Questions Without Notice: additional answers —
  Higher Education: Funding ............................................................................. 301
Governor-General’s Speech—
  Address-in-Reply ............................................................................................. 301
Statements by Members—
  Macedonian Orthodox Church ........................................................................ 314
  Dunkley Electorate: Scoresby Transport Corridor .......................................... 315
  Western Sydney Orbital: Toll .......................................................................... 315
  Cancer Support: Truck and Motorbike Convoy ............................................... 316
  Cricket: Ricky Ponting .................................................................................... 316
  Illegal Immigration: Unauthorised Arrivals .................................................... 316
  New South Wales Bushfires: Volunteer Firefighters ....................................... 317
  Insurance: QBE Insurance ........................................................................... 317
  New South Wales Storms ................................................................................ 317
  Redcliffe Citizen of the Year: Mr Les Boby .................................................... 318
Condolences—
  Cash, Mr Earl Douglas .................................................................................... 318
Questions Without Notice —
  Governor-General ............................................................................................ 318
  Year of the Outback ......................................................................................... 318
  Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair ....................................................... 319
  Economy: Productivity Growth ....................................................................... 319
  Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair ....................................................... 320
  Small Business: Employment .......................................................................... 320
  Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair ....................................................... 321
  Illegal Immigration: Unauthorised Arrivals .................................................... 321
  Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair ....................................................... 322
  Illegal Immigration: People Smuggling ........................................................... 323
  Illegal Immigration: People-Smuggling .......................................................... 323
  Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair ....................................................... 324
  Customs and Justice: Mr Enniss ....................................................................... 326
  Workplace Relations: Legislation ..................................................................... 327
  Rural Australia: Medicare Funded Health Services ........................................ 327
  Foreign Affairs: Cambodia .............................................................................. 328
  Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair ....................................................... 329
  Wool Prices ....................................................................................................... 329
  Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair ....................................................... 330
  Veterans: Entitlements ....................................................................................... 332
Questions Without Notice: Additional Answers —
  Rural Australia: Medicare Funded Health Services ........................................ 333
Petitions—
  Immigration Asylum Seekers ........................................................................ 334
  Immigration Asylum Seekers ........................................................................ 334
  Health: Prostate Cancer Research ................................................................... 334
  Goods and Services Tax: Roll-back .................................................................. 334
  Parthenon Marbles ............................................................................................ 335
  Telstra: Privatisation ......................................................................................... 335
  Aeropelican: Long-term Viability .................................................................... 335
  Health System .................................................................................................. 335
  Goods and Services Tax: Funerals ................................................................. 335
CONTENTS—continued

Migration Amendment Bill 2001 ................................................................. 336
Immigration: Asylum Seekers ................................................................. 336
Immigration: Border Protection Legislation .......................................... 336
Airline Services: Rural and Regional Australia: Airline Services .......... 336
Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Independence and Funding ......... 337
United Nations: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of
Discrimination Against Women ............................................................... 337
Human Rights: Falun Dafa ....................................................................... 337
Afghanistan: Withdrawal of Australian Military and Political Support .... 338
Iraq: Withdrawal of Australian Military and Political Support ............... 338
Telstra: Privatisation ......................................................................... 338

Committees—
Selection Committee—Membership ....................................................... 338

Grievance Debate—
Afghanistan: Death of Sergeant Andrew Russell .............................. 338
Alternative Energy: Geothermal .............................................................. 340
Howard Government: Ministry ............................................................... 342
Australian Labor Party: Trade Unions .................................................... 344
Media: Cross Media Ownership Rules ................................................. 347
Family Law Act ...................................................................................... 349
Insurance: Public Liability Premiums ..................................................... 350
Broadcasting ......................................................................................... 353

Governor-General’s Speech—
Address-in-Reply ................................................................................. 354

Yirrkala Bark Petitions ........................................................................ 380
Registrar of Members’ Interests—
Appointment ....................................................................................... 380

Committees—
Selection Committee—Membership ....................................................... 380
Membership ......................................................................................... 381

Governor-General’s Speech—
Address-in-Reply ................................................................................. 381

Adjournment—
Isaacs Electorate: Awards for Young Achievers ................................. 407
Eden-Monaro Electorate: Closure of Bombala Softwood Mill ............. 408
Burma: Karen People ........................................................................... 409
Gold Coast: Police Shortage ................................................................. 410
Insurance: Public Liability Premiums .................................................... 411
National Ocean Outfall Policy .............................................................. 412

Notices .................................................................................................. 413
The SPEAKER (Mr Neil Andrew) took the chair at 12.30 p.m., and read prayers.

AUTHORITY TO ADMINISTER OATH OR AFFIRMATION

The SPEAKER—His Excellency also presented to me an authority to administer to members the oath or affirmation of allegiance. I now lay the authority on the table and propose to swear in the member for Hughes. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs was representing Australia overseas last week when the parliament was opened, and she will now be sworn.

MEMBERS SWORN

Ms Danna Sue Vale made and subscribed the oath of allegiance.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: ADDITIONAL ANSWERS

Higher Education: Funding

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Minister for Education, Science and Training) (12.32 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek the indulgence of the chair to add to an answer to a question.

The SPEAKER—The minister may proceed.

Dr NELSON—Last Wednesday, 13 February, in answer to a question from the opposition, I said that 19 per cent of university students came from the bottom 25 per cent of income earning families in Australia. That quote is based on a 1999 publication of the department of education entitled Does HECS deter? The figure cited is that 19 per cent of university students in 1997 came from the bottom 25 per cent of income earning families for the age cohort 17 to 24.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 14 February, on motion by Ms Ley:

That the address be agreed to.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call Mr Farmer, I remind honourable members that this is his first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.
admitted to the Coast Hospital at Little Bay, where in time she recovered from the physical aspects of the fever. But nothing, not even the birth of three more children in Australia, my own mother included amongst those, would compensate her for the distressing price that she paid for a new life in a new country.

With the sacrifices of their own parents foremost in their memories, my mother and father taught me that nothing is ever impossible—a message that has been a constant inspiration to me throughout my own life. Despite the challenges that my parents faced, they never faltered in their love for, and commitment to, me and the rest of my family, a virtue which I am proud to try and emulate in my own life with my own children. While my childhood was not without hardship as my mother and father struggled to keep their seven children fed, clothed and educated, my fondest memories of my childhood are of the love and support that was always given to all of us. My grandmother and grandfather and my mother and father taught me that the destinations that are worth reaching are often those at the end of the harshest journeys.

My dear wife, Lisa, who was a pillar of support and strength to me right from our early teenage years, taught me the most important message of all: the message of love—not only love for her as my wife but love for all people, a love that was demonstrated through the many organisations we were both involved in, such as Rotary, Lions, Rotaract and ITC, and many more, through our fundraising and charitable works. Since my wife’s death I have turned to my two young children, Brooke and Dillon. I turn to them each and every day of my life to teach me honesty and love in its purest form. My family has always been, and still remains, a source of inspiration in my life. It is my firm belief that a strong family unit goes to the heart of every successful society.

Today we see the family unit in Australia continuously under greater threat than ever before, and with it those values that underpin Australia’s history. We must support and nurture the family in whatever form it takes in our modern world, and we must ensure that it remains the foundation of this great country that we all call home. I see in my electorate the effects of unemployment on families, and I want to do things to assist them. As a child from a generation that could roam the neighbourhood in safety, I now see the effects of crime in the community and the caution that has to guide parents whenever their children want to go out to play. We must strive to make our streets safe again and to bring peace again to all Australians, young and old.

I know that every struggle I have ever made and every ounce of energy I have ever expended are a small price to pay for the honour of living in this great country. As an apprentice motor mechanic, I lived in Granville. I learned that those who work hard in this country will be rewarded. This became very clear to me when Cliff Young, a man who, at the age of 63, raced on foot in an event that pushed him day and night for almost 1,000 kilometres. He took on the best in the world and he won. The sportsmen and sportswomen of this country have inspired me, and the lessons of sport are directly related to the lessons of life. The never say die attitude that was shown by Cliff Young embodies the principles that I have applied to my own life. I was so inspired by this great Australian that I went on to become an ultramarathon runner as well, and I used this talent to raise funds for many charities and to promote many worthwhile causes.

However, none of these was more worthwhile than uniting all Australians during my Centenary of Federation run around this country. During my run, I experienced all the elements that this land has to offer. The majestic beauty also brings with it the harshness of the extreme heat and cold. I had my skin burned black from the sun, my lips were split open and my ears were bleeding. During all this, I pushed on towards my goal of uniting all Australians by simply putting one foot in front of the other and never, ever giving up on my dream. That goal stays with me today, and it is one that I intend to continue pursuing here in this very place over the coming years.

As I ran into Broome, I was welcomed by Aboriginal leaders and I was called
‘brother’. The Aboriginal people are part of this land and it is a part of them; it flows in their veins. Through the experiences of thunder, lightning, floods and drought and through the unbearable heat and freezing cold, they learnt that to survive the elements of this land they needed to be at one with the land and for it to be one with them. During my Centenary of Federation run around Australia, I had one message for every person in this country—a message that is equally important regardless of which corner of the globe any of us come from or whether we are the original inhabitants of this country, the Aboriginals. My message was simple: it does not matter whether or not we are the original inhabitants, we are all united, we are all in this together and we are all Australians.

In my travels over the years I have listened to, and spoken with, hundreds of thousands of Australians of all colours and creeds—young and old and rich and poor; Australians living in areas as diverse and as stifling as the heat of the Simpson Desert to the beautiful green pastures of Macarthur. When I stood for election before the people of Macarthur, I stood before them as one of them. I was not able to offer the people of Macarthur a pedigree from a renowned educational institution or the political experience that many of my colleagues here today have brought to this House. I did not grow up in the arena of politics but in the arena of life. I am not a graduate of any learned school, other than the school of hard knocks. But when I was elected to this House, what I had to offer was a commitment to work hard and to work with the people of Macarthur to improve the area in which we all live. It is from this foundation that I draw my credentials as their member of parliament. I bring to this parliament integrity, honesty and a willingness to work hard. For all my constituents, regardless of their political or religious beliefs, I promise to work hard. To the people of Macarthur, you elected me as your voice in Canberra, and you have bestowed on me a great honour. It is an honour that I will never, ever take for granted.

The people of Macarthur believe me to be a representative with a vision for the future, someone with the determination to work with the community and, indeed, all levels of government to improve the available transport options, the employment opportunities and the general welfare of all. My aim will not be to find bandaid solutions, but, instead, long-term solutions for the betterment of all Australians.

I wish to welcome to the Macarthur electorate, due to the redistribution of the boundaries, the people from the suburbs of Eagle Vale, Eschol Park, Kearns, Blairmount, Claymore, Airds, Blair Athol, Englorie Park, Kentlyn, Leumeah, Ruse, St Helens Park, Wedderburn, Woodbine, Greendale, Luddenham, Wallacia, the City of Campbelltown and the Aboriginal people of Tharawal. I would like to thank everyone who gave me their support and voted for me for showing their confidence in me that I could do this job.

Many people told me that, if I were elected, I would not be able to get things done. They told me that I would change from being a grassroots family man to being someone who is out of touch with reality. They told me that I would be only one voice amongst many. To my fellow colleagues, to the Australian people and most especially to the people of Macarthur, I say to all of you that being only one voice and being only one man has never stopped me before.

I would like to express at this point in time my sincere gratitude to my colleagues in the Liberal Party for the support that they have given to me. They have provided me with the strength and confidence to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead to enable me to be all that I am. I am proud to be part of the Liberal Party team led by John Howard. I am proud to be part of a team that encourages all members to stay true to their beliefs and to their electorate.

I have spent time over the last few weeks—and a great deal of time before that as well—walking through cemeteries, and I have noticed that there is a mark on our headstones that goes between the dates of our life. That mark looks the same regardless of who we are or where we come from, but that little mark represents the blood and sweat in the form of effort—the effort that
we all put into our lives to make our lives worth living. I intend to make my mark in this, the 40th Parliament of Australia.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand) (12.49 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your re-election to high office. I also congratulate the member for Macarthur on his first speech in this place. There have been some magnificent contributions on both sides of the House from new members of parliament. One of the refreshing issues at this time of the year is that we have a chance to listen to those entering this place with idealism. There is no doubt at all, as the former speaker will find out, that this is an honourable place to find yourself. It is the best place to be—the best place to contribute to the life of this nation. But you have tasks when you get into this place and one of those tasks is to look critically not just at what your opponents do but also at what you do yourself.

If Harold Wilson’s statement about a week being a long time in politics were true, it was demonstrated once again last week. At the beginning of that week, the government were in high triumphalism and high pomp. By the end of it, every person in this country knew that they had a tarnished victory; every person in this country knew that they were deceitfully misled; every person in this country knew that they could have had better. Many began to be convinced of that, I think, when they listened to the Governor-General’s speech, to which we are now preparing an address in reply. The Governor-General’s speech was completely absent of vision; it was completely absent of a clarion call to the nation to address the problems that exist within us and to build on the strengths that we have. Completely missing from it was a program for three years; completely missing from it was anything that you would normally expect of a government coming into office, still relatively youthful in years—it was only 5½ years or so before the last election that it came into office. It was a depressing, deprived document which followed a campaign that had been fought not as campaigns are normally fought by a government, on a total picture of the economy, the nation and society, but on one single issue alone—that of border protection.

I want to make one thing absolutely clear at the outset, because I notice that the Prime Minister, in full deception mode in the course of question time, has called into account our bona fides on this issue—would you believe that? After all that we have seen over the course of the last few days, he calls into account our bona fides on our undertakings to the Australian electorate. Let me make this absolutely clear: if I had been elected Prime Minister of this country, the government that I would have led would have protected the borders of this nation. We protected them when we were in office. Sometimes that requires hard decisions and hard actions. It requires tough legislation. If you believe, as I do, that the continuation of a massive immigration program is necessary for the success of our society, in order to sustain public support for that you cannot afford for the Australian public to believe that you are a soft touch—nor were we. The mandatory detention of those who come into this country was a policy of the Labor Party, put in place when we were in office. We ran tough policies, which succeeded. The avalanche of people crossing our borders illegally was not a problem when we were in office; we were tough enough to deal with it.

Why wasn’t it an issue when we were in office? Why didn’t people know that, when it came to people who entered illegally, we had a hardline policy of inspecting their bona fides to work out who they were, to see whether or not they posed a health threat or a legal threat to this country? Why was it not an issue? It was not an issue because we simply did not seek to exploit it. We did not seek to base our credentials on undermining what is one of the fundamental requirements of good government. When we were in office, we did not attempt to twist the tail of the racial tiger, however subtly, for our political benefit. We could conduct decent border protection policy without having to resort to lies, deception and subtle racism, and we could do it standing on our heads.

During the campaign it became clear, on 8 November, that we as a people had been lied to, although the Prime Minister maintained the fiction for the next couple of days. You do not have to lie to protect your borders. I
will add one thing to that: you do not need to trash the reputation of your country to protect your borders. It is not a requirement of protecting this nation that, as we pursue our border protection concerns, we express ourselves in such a way that gives grave offence to the neighbourhood in which we live and gives grave offence to decent people not only in this country but elsewhere. That is not a requirement of proper border protection; it is a requirement that that not be the consequence of the way in which you talk about protecting your borders.

National security is a very broad issue, and part of national security is the reputation of your nation. With our tough border protection measures, we left office with Australia’s honour enhanced in international councils. Make no mistake about it: to put it at one of its most basic levels, we would not have had the Olympics in this country if we had the reputation as a nation that we now have. The Prime Minister was seen running alongside every successful Australian athlete and cheering them on, but that Prime Minister would never have produced the Olympics in this country. That Prime Minister was the beneficiary of a change in the perception by the rest of the world of the character of the Australian people—a people who rejected racism, a people who sought a multicultural society, a people who sought to draw on the strengths of every single Australian, no matter what their background might be. That was the reputation of the nation that John Howard inherited. That is the reputation that he has trashed.

This government is in trouble on the basis of a report that is a whitewash. That report, from beginning to end, is a whitewash. But the government is not in trouble because it is a whitewash; it is in trouble because even a whitewash document cannot paint over the stain of deception that has been perpetrated on the Australian people. I know a fair bit about how government is done; I was a minister for 13 years. As a result of the efforts of many in the Australian Labor Party—not least their leaders, Hawke and Keating—it is my privilege to be, together with about three other people, the longest serving federal Labor minister in Australian history. I know a thing or two about bureaucracy, and I still have a few teeth in my head and a few friends downtown, as Jack Nicholson said in Chinatown, and I know this.

The world painted in that report does not exist. The world painted in that report of Chinese walls on a policy issue that is out there in the public—it is not a tender document or something like that—does not exist. Knowledge from a department going into a minister’s office reaches the minister. It might not reach them on day one, but you can bet that it reaches the minister by day two, three or whatever. So the ‘Chinese walls’ picture perpetrated in this whitewash document does not exist. It is more likely to exist under this government, I do concede, than it would have under us. When we were in office, relationships between bureaucrats and ministers proceeded through proper advice. Properly processed documents appeared before ministers. There were notes to file, there were memos, there were Public Service minutes. There was a paper trail behind every great public policy issue.

In the world of Max Moore-Wilton and John Howard, which involves the suborning of our great Public Service as it involves the suborning of our defence department, I suspect that there are fewer paper trails. However, there are conversations, there are sighs and whispers, there is movement of the fingers across the throat indicating cut-throats in certain circumstances and there are circular hand movements. There are ways in which information gets conveyed, no matter how inappropriately. I believe that the manner of such information being conveyed produced this situation.

On 10 October, the Prime Minister knew. He may have known by a process of osmosis. He may have known by a process by which documents did not necessarily appear before him. These things do happen to leaders in election campaigns. I, for example, knew the state of our polling on the first weekend, though I was deprived of it by those who advised us; I simply knew it because bad news cannot be concealed in the faces of those who love you. The bad news was not concealed in their faces, and I knew I had an uphill battle on my hands.
When the Prime Minister, Mr Ruddock and Mr Reith first made their statements about the kids having been thrown overboard, I believed them. Why did I believe them? Because I am a fool? No. I believed them because for 13 years I was a minister in a great set of Labor governments. I was Minister for Defence for five or so of those years, and I knew that when an operational report comes to ministers it has been properly massaged; there are no barrack room tales in it. More senior officers have had a chance to look at the incident that has occurred; they bring their own judgment to bear and they massage contradictory opinions that are expressed. If it needs to get to you fast, then they have made at least the appropriate caveats on the document that goes before you.

I assumed that, give or take a bit of exaggeration by the ministers, the document was likely to be correct. I assumed that until 7 November. The Prime Minister ceased to assume that on 10 October. He defends himself now in this place by saying to us all that on 10 October he was simply responding quietly to the questions that were put to him. Look at the transcript, at the repeated questions being put to him, and look at the things he said a couple of days beforehand. Look at what he said then—and we should all have been tipped off—that not all was well in the kingdom of Denmark, let alone the office of the Prime Minister of this nation. He knew he had misled the Australian people. Whether he lied is another matter. He misled them from 7 November. From 7 November he lied.

I knew that, whatever happened in this election campaign, I was safe in my own constituency when I flew home because the Australian newspaper had its billboard out and its last billboard before the election was, ‘Howard blames Navy’. So the good sailors in my electorate walked into those polling booths absolutely determined to tell the Prime Minister what they thought of him. While their offence was great, it had not yet penetrated through to the rest of the Australian community. Remember this on the Wednesday of that vote. We were catching up at a rate of knots. Indeed, our pollsters told us we were about to win. I cannot believe that the Liberal Party pollsters did not tell them that they were in the same situation. None of us would know on that Wednesday evening which way this horrible story would break. As it happened, the reintroduction of the issue massively benefited the Liberals. But you could not have known that. Therefore, the Prime Minister continued to mislead the Australian people for a particular purpose. As somebody who represents a substantial proportion of the Australian Navy in parliament, as someone whose proudest service in this place was as defence minister of this nation, I cannot accept the way our defence forces are now being treated, and neither can they. I cannot accept that they are made the political tools of a government of the day. It is one thing to seek political advantage and praise for a selection of a particular item of equipment and having that displayed in a constituency where work will be obtained. It is one thing to be doing that; that is all part of the warp and weft of Australian politics. But it is another thing to take that sense of honour, which applies to those who serve this great nation, and trash it by making them your political servants during a political campaign.

They cannot stop. Yesterday, to defend his wretched hide, the Prime Minister trotted out yet another serviceman to come out and say that the minister’s office had received only the pictures that they put out to the public.
They cannot help themselves! By the end of the day, they corrected themselves and said, ‘No, there were at least 11 pictures that went across to the minister.’ But Howard had them out there contradicting that so he would not be embarrassed when he did the Sunday programs. This is a wretched performance for somebody who is supposed to lead this nation—a wretched performance. That wretchedness continues in a lack of responsibility to our defence forces.

What indulgence that trip to the United States by the Prime Minister since the election. We are engaged in an international war against terrorism. The ANZUS alliance has been invoked. Australian soldiers, naval and air personnel are in the field as we speak and have been since the latter part of last year with their lives on the line. The head of the alliance is the United States. Determination as to the fate of our soldiers in the field is being made in Washington and in Tampa, Florida. They are being made by civil personnel in the Department of Defense of the United States, led by their Secretary of State and junior officials to him, and by the chief of their armed services and their subordinate commanding the operation from Tampa, Florida. If you are an Australian Prime Minister, with your soldiers thus engaged, that is where you find yourself if you happen to be visiting the United States.

As you fly over to Jakarta, the one worthwhile part of the visit, you do not stop for a two-day holiday in Singapore—you stop at Bahrain where the commander of the Australian forces in operation happens to have his headquarters. That is what you do when you honour the people who serve this nation. That is what a proper Prime Minister does. He has a view of what needs to happen and he gets out there and he ensures that the Americans understand it and he takes from them what it is that they understand their task and role to be. We know that there is an intention to take this war further afield so there is an absolute requirement that we have clear understandings of it. There we have the picture: the service personnel doing their duty by the Prime Minister. There we have the picture: the Prime Minister failing to do his duty by them, but exploiting them continually through the campaign and as late as yesterday.

The Governor-General’s speech would have been very different had we been elected. The first week of parliament would have been different too. For starters, the first week of parliament would not have been last week; it would have been in December. It would have involved, firstly, an apology to the indigenous people of this country who found themselves part of the stolen generation, so we could actually move on from that issue as a united people, and not tweak the racial tail on that as well to see whether or not there is a bit of political advantage in it.

Secondly, you would have had the introduction into this place of a bill to protect workers’ entitlements, all their entitlements—workers who depend desperately on those entitlements when they find themselves out of work when a company has collapsed without proper provision being made for them. You would have seen the introduction of a bill to remove the money from the category 1 schools and its distribution among the needy primary schools and secondary schools in the public system of this nation so that all could benefit from a Knowledge Nation; it would not simply be a question of privilege.

You would have seen a government engaged on getting an Ansett outcome that actually restored decent competition to the airline system of this country. You would have seen a bill in this place to restore the ability of the arbitration commission to deal fairly with all the industrial relations issues that come before it so that there is an understanding amongst the Australian people that they are fairly treated in that most basic area of their requirements: what happens to them in the workplace. You would have seen too a program to support our public hospitals with a Medicare bonus. You would have seen a hundred million loans going into the construction of our nursing home capital facilities so we could start to address those phantom beds so beloved of the government. You would have seen the beginnings of our Knowledge Nation plans: the education priority zones, the extra literacy and numeracy teachers, the extra training. You would have
seen a total social agenda for the Australian nation. But, above all, what you would have seen was a government committed to the unity of all our people, the dignity of all our people, and a determination to use that unity and dignity to enhance our reputation and therefore our security as a nation. But that was not to be.

I do not claim that we ‘was robbed’; that is not my view of life. That reduces politics to the personal and not the national. The Australian people were robbed by deceit. Our Australian reputation has been robbed by chicanery by our political opponents. They will pay a penalty for that, and that penalty will come sooner than this government thinks. *(Time expired)*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—Order! Before I call the honourable member for Flinders, I would like to announce to the House that the Hon. Alan Hunt AM, who is seated on the floor of the House with us, who served as a minister in the Bolte, Hamer and Thompson Victorian governments, also held the three top roles as government leader, opposition leader and President of the Victorian Legislative Council. I remind honourable members that this is the first speech of the honourable member for Flinders. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.**

**Mr Hunt (Flinders) (1.09 p.m.)—**It is a great pleasure to speak in the debate on the address-in-reply so soon after such a courageous Australian as the member for Macarthur and on the morning after the story of Australia’s first Winter Olympics gold medallist, Steven Bradbury.

Australia’s story is the story of a thousand communities, from the first inhabitants to the most recent.

My community is the seat of Flinders. It comprises Western Port and the Mornington Peninsula.

It is where I was born, it is where I was raised and it is where I have returned. What I have rediscovered is that Flinders is not the story of geography, beautiful as it is; it is the story of people, great people, many of whom have touched my life and have taught me the true meaning of community spirit—people whom I call friends.

So it is the story of Sarah Meredith, an 18-year-old woman from Blind Bight, who has overcome a hearing disability not only to have achieved academic success but to have made such a contribution as to be named the City of Casey’s Junior Citizen of the Year.

It is the story of Steve Brockwell, a fisherman from San Remo, who battles not just to provide a livelihood for himself and his family but also to represent the future of all those who work the sea with him.

It is the story of Wanda Tearle, a woman who has given her heart and soul to making the Crib Point Community House a place where the lost and the hurt can find both solace and hope.

It is the story of Tom McGann, a courageous eight-year-old from Mount Martha, who has overcome the shackles of muscular atrophy and reached out to the world by designing and building his own web site.

And it is the story of Gil Mulling, who has for many years now, along with a team of dedicated volunteers, managed Vinnies Kitchen in Rosebud, providing both food and hope to some of the most needy people of the peninsula, all of whom have their own stories to tell.

Named after Matthew Flinders, who first sailed through Port Phillip Heads 200 years ago, the seat of Flinders is, then, a celebration of human achievement. But Flinders is also a work in progress, and there are clear challenges in education, employment, environment and health.

In education we have limited opportunities for tertiary training. At age 18, students either have to leave the area or look for unskilled labour. There is, then, the need to develop practical educational opportunities; opportunities such as an IT skill centre for Phillip Island, a maritime college for Hastings, an upgrade of the Rosebud TAFE and creation of a secondary college at Somerville—all about providing opportunities for our young.

In employment we have closed the gap between the Flinders area and the rest of Australia. But in order to improve further we
need to develop both our education and our infrastructure through projects such as expansion of the pier at Phillip Island to allow cruise ships to dock, which in turn will bring tourism, which in turn will bring employment; establishment of a trans-Tasman ferry for Western Port; consideration of a port for Hastings; and planning for a second Melbourne airport, perhaps at Monomeith, a decade or so from now. All of that is about planning for the future. Significantly, all of these projects can be delivered by the private sector.

Transport, too, is critical if the people of Flinders are to be fully integrated into the broader Victorian community. Completion of the Bass Highway project, duplication of the Western Port Highway to Hastings and inclusion of the peninsula in the Metropolitan Transport System are all key needs if the people of Flinders are to prosper.

It is not hard to be passionate about the environment in an area of such diverse and sweeping natural beauty. To my mind it is, then, both vandalism and reckless waste to discharge over 400 megalitres of only partially treated sewage daily in the seas off Gunnamatta Beach. The real challenge is to encourage the Victorian government to utilise the creative market solutions which already exist. Slightly further west of Gunnamatta Beach, as the Department of Defence vacates the spectacular hills and cliff tops of Point Nepean at the east head of Port Phillip Bay, I reaffirm my commitment to doing all that I can to ensure that this area becomes available not for the few but for all people, not only within our community but in the broader community and for all time. It is a beautiful area.

In health, there is a heartfelt need for general practitioners, whether it is in Lang Lang, in Pearcedale or in Corinella. I am hopeful and confident that the government’s initiative to attract doctors to rural and urban fringe areas will assist people. There is a great sense of anticipation about that initiative. Similarly, I think there is more that can be done to help upgrade emergency services at Rosebud and Koo Wee Rup hospitals. One of the factors placing pressure on these hospitals is the growing number of people seeking aged care facilities within Flinders. I therefore welcome the appointment of the first Minister for Ageing and look forward to working with him on improvement of facilities for Flinders for the frail elderly and on incentives for self-funded retirees.

These are Flinders’ challenges. Many of those challenges are common to the broader Australian story. That broader Australian story is about the values we employ in meeting our common challenges. One of our guiding values must be compassion, and the heart of compassion is the expansion of people’s liberty, for there is no compassion in a future confined to welfare dependency; there is no compassion in a future confined to poverty traps. There is absolutely no compassion in a system which, as Menzies described it, ‘discourages ambition, envies success and distrusts independent thought’.

So the expansion of people’s liberty is about creating both opportunity and the capacity to exercise that opportunity. With that liberty comes aspiration: the capacity to dream and to hope. And hope is arguably the greatest of all freedoms. That is why William Hazlitt said, ‘The love of liberty is the love of others.’

While there are two great traditions represented in this House, liberalism and social democracy, and I respect the motives of those on the other side, I am for liberalism—clearly, simply, unequivocally. Both parties do share two fundamental values. Both believe in freedom and equality, or, as liberals prefer, fairness. But the real difference between the two parties is an ordinal one. Liberals choose freedom first; Social Democrats choose equality. Yet the history—whether it is Locke or De Tocqueville or Thomas Friedman—tells us the same thing: liberalism leads to greater fairness but enforced equality never liberates. Never.

Indeed, those who have chosen equality over liberty have produced societies that few would call attractive, whether they be the crushing collectivism of the failed Communist experiment; the enduring unemployment, bloated bureaucracy and social dependency of the European left; or simply the grinding elitism of Sussex Street, which proposes a benevolent vanguard of government,
friends and union leaders. The whole notion of a benevolent vanguard underestimates middle Australia. It underestimates the farmer in Lang Lang, the business owner in Dromana, the nurse in Koo Wee Rup and the chicken processor in Somerville. This middle Australia is above all else the heart of the nation and they are truly forgotten in a system where the state moves from being the facilitator to the provider, the decider and the powerbroker.

So how do we ensure that middle Australia rightfully takes its place at the heart of the nation? The answer is that we have to have an open society. We have to believe in our capacity to reform, to adapt and to embrace the future, not to cling to outmoded ideas and structures. If we are to move to an open society, how do we get there? In just the same way as Flinders is a work in progress, Australia is a work in progress. There are great tasks on both the economic and the social side. It is important to recognise that economics is not the end but the indispensable means. It is the indispensable means because a job is the single best answer to overcoming the trap of both material poverty and the loss of hope.

I believe, then, we have five great national economic goals, and these guide my time in the House. First, to encourage free trade, because new markets allow rural communities to prosper and they allow our industries to compete globally. To that end, I stand squarely behind the goal of ending tariffs at the earliest practical time.

Second, we have to encourage the flow of investment and I therefore support an ongoing decrease in the level of capital gains and corporate taxation—not because these in some way benefit those who invest, though I have no problem with that outcome, but because in the end nothing generates more jobs, which in turn break down poverty, faster than new investment.

Third, we must attract and retain our share of the best and brightest thinkers and doers. High marginal tax rates are a disincentive in a time of global labour flow. What we need instead are incentives to attract the innovators and the job creators.

Fourth, we must prepare for an ageing Australia, so eloquently spoken of by the member for Ryan in his own first speech. We must do that by bolstering our productive middle and maintaining a sustainable ratio between those who are working and those whose working days are finished. I support the setting of national targets to pre-empt our ageing baby boomers—a term which of course could never apply to the Minister for Foreign Affairs—and recognise that this must mean greater levels of migration, but particularly amongst those most skilled and able to contribute to the productive future of Australia.

Fifth, we must unleash the power of our companies and our people. That simply means two things. It means that it is unwise to deny our greatest telecommunications asset the chance to compete effectively in a global market. It needs equity to acquire core technologies such as cable assets to participate in deals and not to have its hands tied behind its back. If it participates in deals which bring cable assets, these in turn bring the broadband we need. If we deny those, so much for the notion of a knowledge nation! Also, developing our companies means ensuring that laggards—those who would abuse the system—are no longer paid unfair dismissal bribes with money that could best be used for rewarding the most effective workers and at the same time overcoming the barriers which prohibit real democracy within the union movement. In all of these areas I am proud to lend my support to the work of the government. But economics is not the end goal of the Australian story.

I believe that there are also five key social imperatives facing Australia over the next 20 years. The first is building on the achievements of the last six years, which have seen private health care coverage make the extraordinary leap from 30 per cent of Australians in 1998 to 45 per cent of Australians in 2001. The next expansion in private health coverage is, I believe, through employer incentives for the inclusion of health care in workplace arrangements—perhaps through creative ways of excluding employer health care from the fringe benefits tax regime. The result of this, the freeing of resources which
private health care generates—it is not about some special system of privilege, it is about freeing resources for the rest of society—will allow even greater funding to be directed to our elderly, who, as the then new member for Bennelong said in his first speech in 1974—when, incidentally, I was eight years old—‘face the twin threats of loneliness and alienation’. The same threats and challenges are with us today.

Our second social task is broadening the very nature of what education means in Australia. That means providing incentives for lifetime training, and it means providing concrete alternatives for those who seek education outside of the traditional academic path. Our third task—and I am very passionate about this—is protecting and preserving our environment. There are many environmental initiatives, of which the government’s national salinity strategy may be the most important. Personally, I want to make it a crusade to help establish a national ocean outfall policy aimed at ending the routine, destructive and wasteful discharge of effluent into our seas by 2025. It is a great task, but if we partner with the private sector and create incentives for re-use then I believe it is achievable. That really would be something for us to achieve as a nation.

Fourth, we need to continue bridging the divides. At home, as the Prime Minister said in his acceptance speech after the 1998 election, there remains much to be done in the reconciliation of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. These two stories have run parallel for far too long. Abroad, we also have a role, realistically focused, in bridging the divide between those who have and those who have not, and also between those who remain implacable foes of one another. We cannot and must not be passive when there is evil afoot. Bridging divides leads ultimately to building a national sense of unity—for a unified nation, based on inclusive decision making, can achieve immeasurably more than a divided one. Fifth, we must continue to renew our institutions of governance. I am one of those who believe that four-year terms for the House, linked to a two-term cycle for the Senate, is a step forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I turn from the parliament back to the story of my community. I have been granted the opportunity to serve in this chamber by the grace of the electors of Flinders. I thank them for their trust and I pledge to serve as a representative for the whole community. I also wish to thank my illustrious predecessors in Flinders: Sir Philip Lynch, whose family I knew well and who represented the area with a passion and served the nation with great dignity; and, of course, his successor, Peter Reith, whose legacy will be the end of sclerosis on our waterfront. Moreover, within Flinders, he made an enormous contribution to individual lives, just one example of which was in helping to found Newhaven Christian College.

I particularly thank all those supporters and members of the party who volunteered their time and their efforts to my election, led by the wonderful Julie Heron, my electorate chairperson. I have special thanks for my friend and mentor, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who taught me that in both politics and life tenacity counts above all else—although a good sense of humour always helps.

Last of all I thank my magnificent friends—all of you—and my family. My mother is passed, but she would be happy—I think. For my father, who served in another chamber in another place, I wish only to live out the values you taught me: service, integrity of spirit, and generosity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the story of Australia is the story of a thousand communities, and the story of Flinders is the story of Sarah Meredith, Tom McGann and Gil Mulling. In weaving their stories together, the goal is hope, the vision is an open society and the path is along policies that encourage liberty. If I can assist my constituents and the wider community towards those ends then that will be enough. Thank you.
be starting my fourth term as the federal member for Franklin. The result in Tasmania on 10 November 2001 was, as it was in the election of 1998, a perfect score: five out of five for the Labor Party. All Tasmanian House of Representatives seats remain in safe hands for another three years. I would like to congratulate my Tasmanian colleagues—Michelle O’Byrne, the federal member for Bass; Sid Sidebottom, the federal member for Braddon; Dick Adams, the federal member for Lyons; and Duncan Kerr, the federal member for Denison—on their victories.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as you would well know, each election is different. It is a bit like being at the birth of each and every one of your children. The first victory in 1993 was so special, as the Labor Party regained the seat of Franklin after 17 years in the Liberal fold. I was then part of the Keating Labor government. The victory in 1996 in Franklin was tinged with sadness, as we lost government and I lost so many of my party colleagues. The victory in 1998 was somewhat of an anticlimax—so close to victory but so far away from gaining government again. The 2001 result in Franklin was for me a really special occasion. It was disappointing that we once again failed to win the government benches, but for me personally it was so gratifying. As young Jinny, a friend of mine, said, ’It was the bestest of all.’

I feel so honoured that the electors of Franklin have placed their trust in me for another three years and that they were not seduced by the mountain of pamphlets and dirt sheets put in their letterboxes by my opponent. The 2001 result in Franklin saw the Labor Party regain the seat of Franklin after 17 years in the Liberal fold. I was then part of the Keating Labor government. The victory in 1996 in Franklin was tinged with sadness, as we lost government and I lost so many of my party colleagues. The victory in 1998 was somewhat of an anticlimax—so close to victory but so far away from gaining government again. The 2001 result in Franklin was for me a really special occasion. It was disappointing that we once again failed to win the government benches, but for me personally it was so gratifying. As young Jinny, a friend of mine, said, ’It was the bestest of all.’

Tasmania is a state, but increasingly Tasmanians are realising that they are now being treated by all and sundry as just another region of Australia. The withdrawal of services and the transfer of decision making to Melbourne and Sydney offices by federal government departments, Telstra, the banks and insurance companies has resulted in middle management opportunities being almost nonexistent in Tasmania, and this is providing a real challenge for Tasmania’s leaders.

So many of our young people have now realised that, in order to gain a foothold on the employment ladder, it is now best to leave Tasmania and pursue a degree at a mainland university. My two daughters, Sarah, now working in London, and Hannah, undertaking a postgraduate education degree at Melbourne University, are typical of the young people I am alluding to. If you are in your mid-20s, possess an excellent degree and show real potential, then the earning capacity and job opportunities are just not in Tasmania. As a young person, why would you think about returning to make a contribution to your state’s wellbeing if this is the case? Employment prospects in Tasmania are

...
further damaged by Qantas scheduling smaller aircraft that service Hobart and the demise of Ansett.

The Bacon Labor government in Tasmania is doing what it can—and it is doing it very well—in spite of the federal Liberal government’s failure to assist with providing for the needs of Tasmania. One wonders whether Tasmania really registers on the radar of this federal government because there are five members in the House of Representatives and each and every one of us are federal Labor members.

Unless the Howard government starts to work with the Bacon Labor government to financially support infrastructure development, educational innovation, better aged care facilities and aged care packages and more funding for public hospitals, I guarantee that the federal Liberal Party will never, ever regain any of the House of Representatives seats in Tasmania.

One way this federal government can help Tasmania and regional areas of Australia is to change elements of the eligibility for youth allowance. Tasmania, unfortunately, has a fragmented university campus structure that is unable to offer a full range of academic courses at any of its locations. The history of the decentralised campus structure can be told elsewhere, but it means that prospective nursing or primary teaching students must travel from the capital city, Hobart, to Launceston, a regional country town. These students need to pay for accommodation and living away from home expenses that would not be incurred if the courses were available in Hobart. Other students take the view that an interstate university is a more attractive proposition than Launceston, so we see another reason for an exodus of young people from Tasmania. Parents who are keen to see their children educated are prepared to make sacrifices to achieve that end, but not all parents are able to afford the cost of travel, rent and other living away from home expenses that are incurred when a student is forced to leave home and establish a base elsewhere.

This government has a policy that discourages families from sending their children to study away from home and it is called the youth allowance. A student from a family with three school-aged children all over 16 and all full-time students can be eligible for approximately $60 a week youth allowance and rent assistance if the parents’ combined income is around $50,600—that is, if the student has to live away from home. A combined income of $50,000 could comprise one $30,000 income and one $20,000 income—not high income bracket earners by any stretch of the imagination. How many families on a combined income of $50,600 a year can afford to pay the added travelling costs, top up the living allowance and rent, and still survive financially? Very few families can do this.

The mean combined income for a couple with three dependent children for 1999-2000 was $1,163 per week or $60,600 per annum. Roughly adjusted for CPI, that equates to $63,000 in today’s figures. The medium income for that demographic was $957 a week for 1999-2000. It means that families on and well below average income get very little assistance to educate their children when these children are forced to move away from home to study.

Like many other Tasmanian members of parliament, I have constituents who are struggling to support children at university simply because they fall into the middle gap of earning too much for the allowance but not enough to pay for the extra costs. I have constituents whose children have not been able to go to university simply because the parents could not afford to send them. As an ex-teacher of primary school children, I would dearly love some of the $200 million spent protecting our shores from unarmed boat people diverted to properly funding the education system in Tasmania. I would dearly love some of the money spent on the Pacific solution being used instead to ease the eligibility criteria for youth allowance so that more students are able to live away from home in the circumstances forced on them by the University of Tasmania’s—dare I say it?—stupid campus structures.

I have mentioned the issue of refugees and asylum seekers—an issue that is dividing our community. Since we have been back in this place with allegations of unused or misplaced photographs continuing the whole
issue of refugees, I would like to make some comments on this issue from my perspective. Australia is a very tolerant society. It is a real melting pot of communities that have come from almost every country in the world, yet the tolerance of this country has been sorely tested over the past six months, fuelled by many in the community, many in the media and by those on the other side of the House. As a primary teacher, I sought to inculcate in my pupils an understanding of the need to work with their fellows, to understand their strengths and weaknesses, differences and commonalities, and to try and work towards a common purpose.

Over the past 200 years, Australia has opened its arms to millions of people from overseas, each with their ethnic diversity and cultural backgrounds. So many Australian families—and I assert, many in this House—can now lay claim to the fact that many of their in-laws have come from overseas. My mother-in-law, Jadwiga, living in Canberra, fled with her family from Lithuania towards the end of the Second World War. She came out here with her family in 1949 to make a better home for her children, to provide them with a decent education and to enable them to make a real contribution to this wonderful country.

We have successfully absorbed and assimilated groups from almost every region in the world—from Greece, Italy, China, Britain and Europe to name but a few. The boat people who arrived here from Indochina in the 1970s are now productive and successful members of our community. There are many in this House who attended their churches on the weekend and I am sure that many of them have heard sermons about, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ One of the things that is missing in this whole debate is the fact that we do not really realise who our neighbour is. I would assert that these people fleeing from persecution from far-flung countries—the asylum seekers—are our neighbours and we should treat them accordingly.

There are many in the churches of Australia who are actively working for these asylum seekers and who are challenging us to look at what we did prior to 10 November last year and what we did not say in this place and publicly about the issue because we were either too ashamed or too fearful of political retribution from some of the racist and bigoted people in our various electorates. One would hope, as this tawdry part of our Australian history is finally and clinically looked at and addressed, that those of us who did not speak out, for whatever reason, can stand up publicly in this place and nail our colours truthfully to what we believe. Unless we do that, we are selling those people who are our neighbours in the true Christian sense of the word, the people who are despised and rejected of men, who are in need of our compassion and support. I would like to think that many in this place will use the opportunity in this debate or in other debates in the House to truthfully and honestly discuss the issue, throw away our political coats and come to a realisation that this is an issue that needs to be addressed once and for all, not just for political gain but for the betterment of this wonderful country. It is a bit embarrassing in some cases to stand up here and say that Jesus clearly commanded that we care for our neighbours. He closed with this: we not only have a moral obligation to look after these people; we have a direct request from Him to do so.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 1.45 p.m., the debate is interrupted in accordance with the resolution agreed to on 13 February 2002. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for a later hour this day.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS
Macedonian Orthodox Church

Mr SERCOMBE (Maribyrnong) (1.45 p.m.)—I would like to take this opportunity to draw the House’s attention to a very distinguished visitor to this country at the present time—Archbishop Stefan, the head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Archbishop Stefan is a remarkably young man to be the head of one of the great families of orthodox churches, and it really is a matter of great joy for the Macedonian community in Australia that the head of their church is visiting. In the time that he is here, I understand that he is visiting Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. He is meeting tomorrow with the Premier of Victoria, Steve Bracks, and I am hoping that
Minister Ruddock at least will agree to meet the archbishop during his time in Australia, which extends for another couple of weeks.

He is visiting Australia at a time when there have been some divisions within the Macedonian community in Australia. I join with all members of that particular community in wishing him great success in contributing to bringing about a reconciliation within that community so that they can devote all their energies to promoting the welfare of that particular ethnic community in Australia rather than engaging in internecine conflict, which seems to characterise the community unfortunately at this time. I wish Archbishop Stefan great success in his visit.

Dunkley Electorate: Scoresby Transport Corridor

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (1.47 p.m.)—Friday, 15 February was a great day for the citizens of Dunkley and for those in eastern and south-eastern Melbourne. Forty-five million dollars was approved by Minister Anderson as the first instalment of the federal government’s $445 million commitment to the construction of the Scoresby Transport Corridor. Mr Speaker, you and other colleagues in this place, would have heard me wax lyrical about the virtues of this project for about 4½ years. The good news is that something is happening. It is a bit like Pantene hair conditioner: it does not happen overnight but it will happen. We are slowly getting there with the Scoresby Transport Corridor.

The nervousness with which we have to look at the state government’s commitment to this is that the $45 million from the Commonwealth needs to be matched by $45 million from the Bracks Labor government. I have mentioned in this place before how Minister Peter Batchelor has said so much about the Victorian Labor government’s commitment to this project but as that movie said, ‘Show me the money.’ They have not coughed up any cash for this project. We are nervously awaiting some advice on how the Bracks Labor government will match the initial $45 million instalment and, frankly, we are quite interested in how the Bracks Labor government is going to match the $445 million that this project receives.

It is disturbing that so little is known about the Victorian government’s funding intentions. They have signed a memorandum of understanding but do not have the cash to back that up. I know they are looking at private sector-public sector partnerships, which they derided when the Commonwealth was looking at them. What are the Bracks Labor government going to do to meet their share of this commitment? (Time expired)

Western Sydney Orbital: Toll

Mr MOSSFIELD (Greenway) (1.48 p.m.)—At the conclusion of this statement I will table a petition of over 700 signatures of Western Sydney residents opposed to the proposed toll on the Western Sydney Orbital. The Western Sydney Orbital will be the last link in the national highway system that stretches over 18,500 kilometres around Australia. If the toll goes ahead, it will be the only section of the entire highway system that has a user-pays charge placed on it. The federal government has the responsibility to build and maintain the national highway, and it can fund the entire Orbital without a toll if it chooses to. It chooses not to, however. Western Sydney is already surrounded by tolls—on the M2, M4 and M5. We do not need, nor do we want, yet another cost burden placed on us to travel to and from our own homes. I understand the member for Chifley will also be tabling a similar petition of similar proportions later today. The level of anger over the issue runs high throughout Western Sydney. This government would do well to heed the calls by local residents regarding the imposition of the toll.

The petition I will table was organised by Blacktown City Council, which have taken a leading role in the anti-toll campaign, and I thank them for their efforts. It is time that the government owned up to its responsibility and built this vital national highway link without disadvantaging Western Sydney residents with the imposition of an inequitable and unnecessary toll. I hereby table the petition.

The petition read as follows—

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in the Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:

The Western Sydney Orbital (WSO) will provide an essential link road for many Western Sydney motorists.

The WSO is part of the National Highway route. It is the only part of the National Highway route that is proposed to be a toll road.

Western Sydney motorists already pay tolls on the M2, M4 and M5. Further tolls in Western Sydney impose an unacceptable burden on motorists.

The rest of the National Highway route has been constructed without any toll imposition. It is not equitable for the residents of Western Sydney to pay a toll for use of the WSO.

Your petitioners believe that by imposing a toll on the Western Sydney Orbital, the government is not meeting its obligations and commitments to the residents of Western Sydney or to the wider community.

We therefore pray that the House will immediately implement a “toll free” Western Sydney Orbital in recognition of the needs of the community.

Cancer Support: Truck and Motorbike Convoy

Mr Nairn (Eden-Monaro) (1.50 p.m.)—Last Saturday, the ACT Eden-Monaro Cancer Support Group conducted their annual truck and motorbike convoy, which runs from Canberra through to Queanbeyan. It is a great function and has now been held about five or six years in a row. It gets bigger every year. This year we saw over 400 trucks and something like 150 bikes participating. Each truck pays and each bike pays, plus there are auctions and things like that at the Queanbeyan Showgrounds at the end of it. Last year the convoy raised in the order of $45,000. We hope that last Saturday’s convoy will in fact beat that.

Ken Kirchner Transport put in $5,000 to have the privilege of being the first truck in the convoy. Peter Webb, the state member, the Deputy Mayor of Queanbeyan City Council, Sue Whelan, and I travelled in the convoy. I went with Joel from TJS Transport. They have their depot in Queanbeyan, and they carried me very well. Peter Webb was in one of their trucks also, and Sue Whelan was on one of the Deane’s Buslines vehicles. Patrons Marty and Erica from 104.7 got things under way at the Queanbeyan Showgrounds, and I want to say well done to Yvonne Cushcieri who runs this wonderful organisation providing great support for kids with cancer not only in the ACT but also right throughout the electorate of Eden-Monaro. The number of people they are looking after gets bigger every year, and this is a major function that they do every year to get the money to be able to do that. (Time expired)

Cricket: Ricky Ponting

Ms O’Byrne (Bass) (1.51 p.m.)—I will take the opportunity now to say how proud I am of one of our local boys. Ricky Ponting has been announced as the one-day captain of Australia’s cricket team. He is a local Lonny boy and we are terribly proud of him. He has the honour of following Steve Waugh, Australia’s finest cricket captain—and I take the opportunity to wish Steve Waugh continued success as the test captain. But for now let me talk about a fine young product of Bass.

Ricky is a Launceston boy born and bred. He has been an incredible cricket player, an incredible supporter of local and community organisations. He is always out there volunteering his time and donating things to raise funds for local clubs. I would like to extend my congratulations to him as a fantastic young man from Tasmania. I wish his family the very best I can. They have fought very hard to provide Ricky with these opportunities and they are so justifiably proud.

Illegal Immigration: Unauthorised Arrivals

Mr Randall (Canning) (1.52 p.m.)—I would like to bring to the attention of the House a poll in the West Australian newspaper last Saturday. This poll was conducted, at last, by the West Australian to find out what the people of the state actually think about mandatory detention, rather than trying to create the news themselves. It reported that Western Australians overwhelmingly support the government’s policy for asylum seekers in this country. It says that more than three-quarters of the people polled supported the government’s policy on detention. The pollster is Keith Patterson of Patterson Market Research and, interestingly for the Labor Party—they may well wish to take notice of
this—the policy has bipartisan support, according to this poll. It said 87 per cent of Liberal voters and 72 per cent of Labor voters supported mandatory detention centres—an average overall of 77 per cent. In fact, to be fair, it also says that, if the government addressed some of the conditions at the centres, 83 per cent of people polled said that they would support the mandatory detention of illegal immigrants to this country. I would like to put on the record the way people really think rather than what the media are trying to drive in their agenda.

**New South Wales Bushfires: Volunteer Firefighters**

*Ms KING (Ballarat) (1.54 p.m.)*—During the recent New South Wales bushfire emergency, many firefighters from the Ballarat electorate joined colleagues from Victoria and across the country in the fight to save lives and property. From my electorate, firefighters from over 50 volunteer brigades, together with local professional officers and a large contingent of DNRE and Parks Victoria staff gave up their time with their families to help out other Australians in need. I want to recognise and thank these firefighters for their selfless and valuable contribution. Many men and women travelled with little or no notice, sacrificed time with their loved ones over the new year period, and used up their annual leave in service to the community. Flexibility on the part of many local employers also allowed volunteer firefighters to fulfil their duties. I extend my thanks to the firefighters from Ballarat, Stawell, Halls Gap, Daylesford, Hepburn, Creswick, Sebastopol, Miners Rest, Kingston, Wendouree, Learmonth, Windermere, Buninyong, Ballan and many other western Victorian towns for their remarkable contribution. As the member for Ballarat, I am pleased to extend the heartfelt thanks of our own community for their bravery and dedication over the new year period. I know their efforts will not be forgotten by the people of New South Wales.

**Insurance: QBE Insurance**

*Mr PROSSER (Forrest) (1.55 p.m.)*—I wish to draw to the attention of the House and of the general community the questionable ethics of QBE insurance. QBE have taken a pensioner couple’s money, which was paid in good faith, and have refused to pay their claim. My constituents, the Horners, took out travel insurance with QBE on 20 June 2001. On Monday, 23 July, the Horners paid $5,200 for their holiday, which they had saved for. However, on recommendation from a medical specialist, the Horners cancelled their holiday on Monday the 30th, due to Mrs Horner requiring surgery. The need for this surgery and the seriousness of Mrs Horner’s condition was only revealed to the Horners by their specialist on the Friday before they cancelled the trip. The Horners subsequently made a claim on their insurance for refund of moneys. QBE rejected their claim, saying they believed Mrs Horner had a pre-existing ailment for which she had received treatment. Asking for a review, my constituents were told that Mrs Horner had received treatment for a lesion on her nose 60 days prior to taking out the policy. QBE claimed this substantiated the fact that she had a pre-existing ailment. QBE then sought to justify their decision by using pathology reports from the surgery. The facts are that no treatment or diagnosis was received at the time QBE claims. It was not a pre-existing ailment and this was substantiated by the pathology report produced on 24 July, at some shock to Mr and Mrs Horner, some five weeks after taking out the policy. Mrs Horner did not have a pre-existing ailment. Her doctors believed it was a sunspot. It is a sad irony that the Horners’ private health insurance fund determined it was not a pre-existing ailment and extended cover to Mrs Horner.

**New South Wales Storms**

*Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (1.57 p.m.)*—Last Saturday, areas of Western Sydney experienced one of the worst storms in recent memory. It may seem strange that, in the week when we have been discussing the recent bushfires in the same region, we now have suffered an excess of rain. The storms caused widespread damage and power failures and it may be some days before businesses and commerce return to normal in areas of the Fowler electorate. One event which suffered was the celebrations of the lunar new year, an important date for Asian communities in the Fowler electorate. Ap-
apparently, rain during the Tet celebrations is a good omen for a prosperous year to come and we certainly hope this is true. One victim of the rain at the celebrations was the minister for immigration, who was trapped in his car during the storm. Fortunately for him it was not a leaky boat—although several people offered him a life jacket, had he needed to abandon his car. Can I wish the many members of the Asian community in Fowler a happy new year. Chúc Mung Nam Moy! Kung Hey Fat Choy!

Redcliffe Citizen of the Year: Mr Les Boby

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (1.58 p.m.)—I would like to honour and acknowledge Redcliffe Citizen of the Year Les Boby. He is from Rothwell. Old Les is very famous in the Redcliffe area. Every year, he sells 1,400 Christmas cakes for Lions and I have been the recipient of many of those wonderful Christmas cakes. He was honoured, ahead of 11 other nominees, at a function at the Redcliffe Entertainment Centre on Australia Day. I also want to pay tribute to Les for his wonderful work on the Redcliffe and District Cardiac Rehabilitation Support Group. He had his own heart problems in 1994 and he had to have a pacemaker inserted. He was on his way to a Lions meeting when he had the problem. Most people, when they have those sorts of incidents, just get on with their respective lives—but not Les. He decided to become an active member of the Redcliffe and District Cardiac Rehabilitation Support Group. He organises guest speakers; he quite often has people coming along to their meetings to talk about cardiac treatments. I have to honour and pay tribute to him for the wonderful walk that they have every single Wednesday morning on the Redcliffe foreshore. He not only ensures that he is there every Wednesday but makes sure that he mans the water station and makes sure that there are plenty of people on hand to assist other people who have been through serious cardiac problems and help them to maintain a very healthy lifestyle. For that I must pay tribute to him. (Time expired)

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 p.m., the time for members’ statements has concluded in accordance with the resolution agreed to on 13 February.

CONDOLENCES
Cash, Mr Earl Douglas

The SPEAKER—I inform the House of the death on Friday, 15 February 2002 of Earl Douglas Cash, a member of this House for the division of Stirling from 1958 to 1961. As a mark of respect to the memory of Mr Cash I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The SPEAKER—I thank the House.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Governor-General

Mr CREAN (2.01 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister would be aware of the most recent and serious allegations that have been made concerning the management by His Excellency the Governor-General of child sex abuse allegations during his prior service as Archbishop of Brisbane. Has the Prime Minister discussed both these and earlier allegations with His Excellency? What further action or inquiries is the Prime Minister intending to take in relation to these matters?

Mr HOWARD—The answer to the first part of the question is yes I have, and I also understand that His Excellency has had discussions with the Leader of the Opposition, certainly about the allegations surrounding the Toowoomba Preparatory School. Let me say that those allegations—that is, the ones regarding the Toowoomba school—were, I believe, responded to by His Excellency. In relation to the other allegations, it is my understanding that His Excellency will, in addition to the appearance on the Australian Story program tonight, be releasing a detailed statement replying to the allegations made on the Sunday program. In those circumstances I have nothing further to say except that His Excellency continues to enjoy my confidence.

Year of the Outback

Ms LEY (2.03 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Would the minister outline how the government is supporting the Australian Year
Monday, 18 February 2002  

of the Outback 2002? What benefits will this program provide for rural and regional Australia?

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honourable member for her question. The outback in Australia is perhaps one of the last great frontiers, and this is a year when we are urging all Australians to put it on their travel itinerary—to visit it, to see it, to experience it, to seek to understand it—and I think we will all be the richer for that. It was launched in 1999 with an initial contribution from the Commonwealth of some $2 million. During the election we increased that amount. I am delighted to say that all states and territories across political lines have strongly supported the Year of the Outback and that right across the board, including in this place, the year has very strong support.

Two weeks ago I was in Alice Springs with the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Clare Martin; the Chairman of the Year of the Outback, Bruce Campbell; the Mayor of Alice Springs; See Australia’s Graham Perry; and the effervescent Ernie Dingo, amongst others, to launch this event. Alice Springs is one of four major centres in terms of population—Alice Springs, Mount Isa, Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie—covering an area that extends across most of the land mass of Australia. It probably has of the order of 200,000 people across it and yet, as I mentioned earlier, it is one of the most fascinating regions on earth.

At that particular event three young outback people were farewelled to commence a journey to Sydney to invite their metropolitan and provincial cousins to visit them in outback and regional Australia. Sally Saint, a student from St Phillip’s College, Glenis McBurnie, who is a horticulturist at the Alice Springs Desert Park, and Lyall Woodbury, a student from the Gap Youth Centre, are taking that invitation to Sydney. I certainly hope that schoolchildren there and their parents will respond positively. There are no less than 550 events already listed for inclusion as events centring on the Year of the Outback across that vast area of Australia. There are exhibitions, festivals, shows, concerts, talk-fests, cattle drives, camel treks and paddle-boat trips.

Mr Costello—I’ll come.

Mr ANDERSON—I hear the Treasurer saying he’ll come—and with his family I hope—setting a good example, and that would be just terrific. There is a whole range of events. I urge all members of the House and their families to get behind this and visit the outback. I think we will all be the richer if we come to understand this marvellous part of our economic and social fabric.

Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair

Mr EDWARDS (2.06 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Defence. I refer her to the Minister for Defence’s admission this morning that 13 photos of the SIEV4 incident were sent to the former Minister for Defence’s office during the election campaign and were copied to numerous staff in that office. Can the minister advise the House of the names of all staff members in the former minister’s office who received these photos? Who in other offices received them, and will the minister now release publicly the file names and captions of all 13 photos?

Mrs VALE—I will have to take that specific question on notice.

Economy: Productivity Growth

Mr BALDWIN (2.07 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Would the Treasurer inform the House of the benefits of productivity growth to the Australian economy? Treasurer, what policies does the government have in place to support ongoing productivity growth?

Mr COSTELLO—I am sure the whole House would join me in welcoming back the member for Paterson. There were a few people who thought that, when he lost his seat, he might just fade away; but he is back, bigger than ever and better than ever. Mr Speaker, you will be pleased to know, I think, that the House printing bill will be a bit more moderate this year as a consequence.

In response to the member for Paterson, productivity is very important to the growth of the Australian economy. One of the reasons why the Australian economy has done comparatively well over the course of the
1990s, particularly over the last five years, is the strength in productivity growth of about 2.4 per cent under this government, compared with an average of 1.4 per cent under the Labor Party.

I saw a new convert join the ranks of those who believe that the government has been doing well on productivity. The member for Fraser wrote in the Australian newspaper today, telling us how important productivity is, how important it is to the economy and how the economy is ‘doing quite well’ at the moment. Of course, it is all the result of the Keating government’s work back in the early 1990s. That is pretty funny because last year the Australian Labor Party were telling us that the Australian economy would head for a recession and that it was all our work. Now, as the Australian economy outperforms most others in the world and does better, it is all their work. Last year there was a recession and we had ‘Whelan the Wrecker’ trying to put forward economic policy; now they get a new spokesman and, because things are going so well, it is all their good work, even though it sort of happened 10 years ago. What a fine ‘McMuddle’ they are getting themselves into now. He is trying to have two bob each way in relation to his economic policy. What does he say has to be done to run a strong economy? Listen to this from the Australian Labor Party—

Government members interjecting—

Mr Costello—It is his first speech on economic policy, which means that he has outperformed his predecessor by one speech. This is what the Labor Party now say is important: stable interest rates and low inflation. And get a load of this: disciplined budget policy, openness to international trade and competitive domestic markets. Over the last five years the Australian Labor Party fought us every step of the way as we balanced Australia’s budget after they had left a legacy of $80 billion of accrued deficits when they went out of office. They fought us all the way on low interest rates.

Mr Sidebottom interjecting—

Mr Costello—This is well known down at the Penrith RSL, based on what the Penrith ALP told Neville Wran down at the RSL. I quote from a very authoritative source, Mr Glenn Milne. He said that, according to the minutes down at the Penrith RSL—and I am not sure whether the member for Parramatta was there—one of the Labor Party members said:

... ‘people remember Labor’s 17 per cent interest rates. Compare 6 per cent and 17 per cent interest rates and that is why aspirational voters deserted us.’

The Penrith RSL and the Penrith ALP got it right. We will watch with interest to see if this new found support for the government from the Australian Labor Party can withstand the first whiff of heat. We will watch very carefully now that they have discovered that the government’s economic policies which they tried to defeat have brought benefits to aspirational voters. On this side of the parliament, we will continue to deliver good outcomes to the people of Penrith, Parramatta and Australia generally.

Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair

Mr Crean (2.13 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. It refers to the answer just given by the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, representing the Minister for Defence. Prime Minister, given the confused and conflicting stories emerging hourly from your ministers relating to the ‘children overboard’ photographs, will you now undertake to release the filenames and captions of the 13 photos mentioned by the Minister for Defence this morning and the names of all ministers and their staff who received them?

Mr Howard—That is a question that is appropriate for me to take on notice and discuss with the Minister for Defence.

Small Business: Employment

Mr Randall (2.14 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Is the minister aware of growing support for the government’s forward program of helping small businesses create jobs? Minister, what is the government’s response?

Mr Abbott—I thank the member for Canning for his question. Along with all other members, I welcome him back to this
Monday, 18 February 2002

Representatives

I am aware of growing support for the government’s campaign to liberate small business, including support from some unlikely quarters. No lesser person than the shadow minister for workplace relations now thinks that small business should be freed from the shackles of unfair dismissal laws.

According to the Australian newspaper of last Thursday, the shadow minister took to the Labor caucus a package of measures to help small business, but he was rolled, says the paper, after complaints from New South Wales senator and former union official Steve Hutchins. It is understood that ACTU President, Sharan Burrow, was furious about the package that the shadow minister brought, and she called on the ALP to reject outright any move to help small business.

The big question here is: why is it that the President of the ACTU is able to use the parliamentary subsidiary of the union movement over there—the Labor Party—to block important reform for small business? There are two reasons for this. Since 1996, the 10 largest union donors have given no less than $27 million to the Labor Party—those are 27 million reasons why union money speaks louder than democratic principle. The second reason is that more than half of the Labor Party frontbench comprises former union officials. In fact, to his credit, the member for Barton is about the only member of the shadow cabinet who was not a union official, a parliamentary staffer or a public sector employee before entering this parliament.

It is well known that the ACTU treats this parliament as a retirement village for superannuated union heavies. In the case of the member for Throsby, who is my former constituent and a resident of Manly, this place was actually her third choice for a retirement village, after the New South Wales upper house and lower house.

I congratulate the member for Barton on his campaign to try and break the power of the union bosses. The member for Barton is a third generation Labor member of parliament, a blue-blooded Labor peer and is living proof that the hereditary principle is not all bad. If he really wants to help small business, he will persuade his colleagues to pass the government’s fair dismissal law so that small business can create 50,000 new jobs.

Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair

Mr Snowden (2.17 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his statement yesterday in which he said of the additional photographs of the alleged ‘children overboard’ incident: It’s the first I knew of their existence.

Prime Minister, given that you have said today that you reread the Powell and Bryant reports over the weekend, why did you yesterday seek to deny your prior knowledge of the existence of additional photographs when these photographs are referred to in Major Powell’s report? Prime Minister, how can anyone believe anything you say?

The Speaker—Before I recognise the Prime Minister, the latter part of the question is out of order. I will allow the Prime Minister to respond to the former part.

Mr Howard—I understand from recollection—and I will have to check the transcript—that I was asked a question about the photographs released on the Sunday program—the disk. I do not remember the disk being referred to in the Powell report.

Opposition members interjecting—

The Speaker—The Prime Minister has responded to the question. The House will come to order!

Illegal Immigration: Unauthorised Arrivals

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop (2.19 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. Minister, are you aware of strong support for the government’s policy on asylum seekers? Minister, could you tell us what other policies exist in this area?

Mr Ruddock—I thank the honourable member for Mackellar for her question. I am aware of the strong support that has been forthcoming for the government’s policies on unauthorised arrivals. In fact, it would be fair to say that there was very strong support apparent from the opposition for the policy taken by the government on these issues be-
fore the last election. The strongest measure of support, I think, came in the outcome to the federal election, if you put together the government’s position and the support it had from the opposition. Those who took a contrary view appear to have come from minor parties that received a very insubstantial degree of support.

I welcome the Leader of the Opposition’s comment about truth in these matters, because it is apparent that this view has not always been universally shared. I am aware of criticism coming from a number of sources, including the New South Wales Labour Council, undertaking campaigns to dismantle the policy of mandatory detention. I am also aware of the presence of trade union leaders at rallies supporting the dismantling of that policy.

I looked to see where there are alternative policies, and I have not seen them. In fact, looking to see an alternative policy from the Labor Party before the last election, we saw them endorsing the government’s position in relation to border protection and advancing some novel approaches in relation to a coastguard, which I have to say would not have altered the situation one iota and certainly would not have led to us locating any more unauthorised arrivals than we do now, because most of them are located.

It was difficult to find any other policies. I looked hard and long. I do not mean to look too much to the back row to see my friend the honourable member for Bowman. I was looking forward to the Labor Party producing some policies on immigration and multicultural affairs in the last election. In fact, the honourable member for Bowman was even suggesting that I might expect to see one. He criticised the government for having a policy on multicultural affairs and thought it did not go far enough. He said:

... the promotion of multiculturalism in Australia requires real commitment, leadership and long-term vision ... Labor will make further announcements on these issues later in the campaign.

I waited and waited, and of course in the campaign there were no policies on immigration or multicultural affairs. If one looks to see where there was any real deception on these matters, I think it was in the Labor Party, which was not prepared to have the courage of its convictions on these issues that we have seen after the election. In fact, you only have to look at what is being said now on these matters. We have numbers of frontbenchers speaking on this. For instance, the member for Fremantle said at a rally outside Parliament House:

It provides a further review of the issue of mandatory detention. The wall has been broken on this issue. Keep persuading not only the members of the opposition but the government too.

Then we had the member for Denison, who said on radio 3AK that Australia should allow the detainees, whilst their claims for asylum are being assessed, into the community, released with reporting conditions. That is not detention. It would not work. If you look at the United Kingdom, with an admitted 120,000 people at large that they cannot locate, you see the truth in what I have said about such policies being proven unworkable.

In the context of those remarks by his colleagues, the Leader of the Opposition has the audacity to be out there—as he was on 6 February—saying:

No-one that I have heard has argued for the abolition of mandatory detention.

Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair

Mr CREAN (2.24 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Has the Prime Minister seen reports in this morning’s press that his senior foreign policy adviser, Miles Jordana, was advised twice that the ‘children overboard’ allegations were in doubt, first on 9 October and then again on 7 November? Prime Minister, did Mr Jordana bring these doubts to your attention? In light of these reports, have you checked again with Mr Jordana and other staff in your office whether anyone sought to confirm the allegation that children had been thrown overboard?

Mr HOWARD—The answer to the first part of the question is no. At no stage did Mr Jordana indicate to me that he had been given advice that the original information was wrong. Have I had discussions with him
and other staff? Of course I have. As a result of those inquiries, I have been informed that at no stage did I receive any advice from any member of my staff casting doubt on the veracity of the original report. Moreover—

Opinion members interjecting—

Mr Hatton interjecting—

The Speaker—Member for Blaxland! The Prime Minister has the call. Standing order 55 is quite specific.

Mr Howard—In addition, Mr Jordana has specifically informed me that he at no stage received any indication to that effect. Not only did he not tell me that he had been given advice contradicting the veracity of the original report; he also indicated to me that at no stage had he been given advice to that effect which would have given rise to any such discussion.

Illegal Immigration: People Smuggling

Mrs Hull (2.26 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister update the House on increasing levels of cooperation with Indonesia on the issue of people smuggling?

Mr Downer—I thank the honourable member for Riverina for her question. I know she joins with all of her colleagues on this side of the House in being totally opposed to the practice of people smuggling and utterly determined as a government that we do nothing to give people smugglers comfort or the opportunity to make profits.

The Australian government is working very closely with the Indonesian government in a number of practical ways to address the problem of people smuggling. Naturally enough, with the problems that beset Indonesia at the moment—with a new government, with an economic crisis and with some problems in some of the regions of the country—this has not been Indonesia’s first priority. But, following the visit that the former defence minister, the minister for immigration and I made to Indonesia in early September last year, as time has gone on we have been very impressed with the strength of the Indonesian response to this problem within the confines of the resources they have available to them.

There is no doubt that the Indonesians now are taking measures which are working to break the back of what is a major criminal conspiracy which, amongst other things, undermines the sovereignty of states. Next week, on 27-28 February, I shall be co-hosting with my Indonesian counterpart, foreign minister Wirajuda, a Regional Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling. I am optimistic that by getting together ministers from so many countries around the region real progress can be made collectively to address this problem. Already we have 31 ministerial-level representatives who have accepted to go to this conference, from 27 different countries. Representatives from the International Organisation of Migration, the UNHCR and other organisations will also be present. The conference is a very good opportunity for us to consider all aspects of the problem and to put together a broad framework for how to address it.

It may also interest the House to know that Indonesia has established some separate working groups with Australia to discuss effective cooperation in a number of areas—in the areas of immigration, legal cooperation and police cooperation and on defence issues, as these all pertain to the issue of people smuggling.

There is substantial cooperation between Australian agencies and a range of Indonesian government authorities on people smuggling. The work we have been doing together, as well as the very strong and determined stand this government has taken against people smuggling, is beginning to have some effect. That is not to say for a minute that we are claiming there will never be another arrival in the future of the kind we have had in the past. We could not make that claim. However, there have been no arrivals in Australia since early November. Honourable members may be interested to know that there have been well over 3,000 potential unlawful arrivals who have been detained in Indonesia. That simply underlines the cooperation between Australia and Indonesia and the progress that we are making as a government and as a nation in addressing this issue.
Illegal Immigration: People Smuggling

Mr Rudd (2.32 p.m.)—My question is also to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and it also relates to people smuggling. Minister, did your department receive information from the Australian embassy in Jakarta containing information from Indonesian authorities alleging any people-smuggling activities on the part of a Mr Kevin John Enniss? Has your department ever received any communications from Mr Enniss?

Mr Downer—I cannot say whether my department has or has not received such information.

Opposition members interjecting—

The Speaker—The minister has the call. The minister is responding to the question and I will not tolerate interjections.

Mr Downer—I have indeed had a discussion with them about Mr Enniss. Certainly in relation to the issue of people smuggling, I understand that there was an allegation on a television program yesterday that Mr Enniss was some sort of informant for the Australian Federal Police, not for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. We have had some contact with Mr Enniss, so that is why I am choosing my words very carefully.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Downer—I know. It's a bit of a set up, isn't it? We had a consular problem with him some years ago and the consular officials from the Australian embassy in Jakarta gave him some assistance. He was in some difficulties in Kupang. To the best of my knowledge, that had no relationship to or association with the issue of people smuggling. It was over a dispute that he had over some fisheries project, or whatever—I am not entirely sure. But it was a project of that kind. In relation to the story that has appeared, this is a matter for the Australian Federal Police. The minister for justice has said that the police are establishing an inquiry into the allegation that has been made.

The only point I would make in conclusion is that, in stark distinction to what the honourable member said in a statement that he made or was quoted as saying, whatever the facts in relation to Mr Enniss are—and I would not purport to try to establish those—I do know that in a broad sense, particularly in the investigation of criminal matters in this country, the police obviously try to make contact with people who might be able to give them information about criminal activities. That is the normal practice of police nationally. Obviously, it would be the normal practice of police anywhere around the world. If you want information on people smuggling, I don't suppose you would go and talk to the Canadian fisheries agency. You would talk to people who might have specific information in relation to people smuggling. You would try to get that information and use it. In relation to Mr Enniss, and any role he may have played as an informant, that is entirely a matter for the minister for justice. It is not a matter for me. As I said, my department has had contact with him in relation to a consular matter.

Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair

Mr Lindsay (2.35 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. I refer to the ‘children overboard’ claims. Would the minister confirm that the unauthorised arrivals sabotaged their boat, resulting in its sinking and forcing overboard all occupants, including the children?

Mr Ruddock—I thank the honourable member for Herbert for his question. If honourable members are interested in this matter, they might care to examine the advice of Major General Powell because Major General Powell and his advisers put together a detailed chronology of the significant events. That was constructed using the operational message traffic and email records and written statements provided by key personnel. Last week I quoted extensively from this document because I thought it was helpful in understanding the nature of the circumstances under which naval personnel were working. It was a very demanding situation, as the major general records. It makes it clear that in a difficult environment—and if you read the chronology you can see that—which, after the vessel was first located and boarding parties were prepared, there were a number of events of very significant concern to
any Australian. I note after first light there was the reference that I made last week to a number of the intended unauthorised arrivals threatening to commit suicide and throw children overboard unless they were taken to Australia. That was recorded in a signal from the *Adelaide*—that there was a disturbance on the vessel, an aerial ripped from the mounting and thrown over the side.

There was a boarding party at 8.40 that prevented a number of people from jumping over the side. At 8.43 there was a ‘man overboard’ declared by the boarding party, and they found five people in the water. And then you had six more at 8.49 overboard. And then you had the later situation in which there was recorded these particular events on the top of the coach-house:

A man dressing a small child in a life jacket, preparing to throw the small child overboard.

*Mr Latham*—So this is what you should have said at the press conference?

*Mr Ruddock*—It said:

Child not thrown overboard. Child and father returned to the wheelhouse.

*Mr Latham*—This wasn’t what you said during the election campaign.

*Mr Crean interjecting*—

The *Speaker*—Member for Werriwa! Leader of the Opposition!

*Mr Ruddock*—It said:

Boarding party officer advised child and father under observation in the coach-house.

Some other people were then returned to the vessel from overboard. The boarding party then went on board the vessel further and—

*Mr Latham*—Choking on the truth!

The *Speaker*—If the member for Brisbane quite finished answering the question? The minister has the call!

*Mr Leo McLeay*—He can put it better than the minister!

The *Speaker*—The member for Watson is warned!

Opposition members interjecting—

*Mr Ruddock*—Yes, I will, because it is quite illuminating. It went on, and said further:

At 10.49 *Adelaide*’s damage control team embarked upon the vessel to repair the main engine. Repairs to the main engine completed.

Then they found at 12.57 a small fire on the forward end of the deck, which was extinguished. At 1.30 the boarding party was extracted.

*Mr Bevis interjecting*—

The *Speaker*—Has the member for Brisbane quite finished answering the question? The minister has the call!

*Mr Leo McLeay*—He can put it better than the minister!

The *Speaker*—The member for Watson is warned!

*Mr Ruddock*—There was then a report at 9.08 that steering capability had been lost on the vessel:

Further investigation appears steering sabotaged by unauthorised intended arrivals. Rods bent.

It then says there was:

... a man, a male, in view of the wheelhouse, threatening to throw women and children overboard. This did not occur. Main engine disabled—

*Mr Crean interjecting*—

*Mr Ruddock*—Because it was not made available to me at that time.

*Mr Crean*—What was?

*Mr Ruddock*—The advice I have already given.

The *Speaker*—Leader of the Opposition! The same courtesies I expect extended by the Prime Minister to you, I expect extended by you to the Prime Minister and the minister at the dispatch box.

*Mr Ruddock*—At 10.28 it records:

Main engine disabled by the unauthorised arrivals. Cooling lines slashed and fused to engine casing. Rags and plastic thrown on the casing to produce toxic thick smoke.

And then you see the final man overboard returned to the vessel. And then it goes on further:

At 5.11 the vessel displayed a distress signal.
The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition persists in defying the chair!

Mr RUDDOCK—And:

engine damaged, cooling hoses slashed and melted onto engine casing. Oily rags and plastic on engine manifold caused more smoke in the engineroom. It was then found that there was water in the fuel and the starter motor damaged.

And, as you go on, you find that the vessel lost power:

Water in greases. Pumps provided by Adelaide.

And it goes on then to record that at 3 o’clock on the following day on the vessel which was still under tow the bilge levels were increasing and pumped by Adelaide.

I would not want to draw unnecessary conclusions, but it is quite clear vessels of this type only remain afloat if they have power, if the pumps continue to operate and the engine capacity is there for them. When that was removed by the sabotage that was clearly reported, that led to a situation in which the lives of the unauthorised arrivals and their children were clearly put at risk.

Customs and Justice: Mr Enniss

Mr McCLELLAND (2.42 p.m.)—My question is to the Attorney-General, representing the Minister for Justice and Customs. Attorney, how much money have the Australian Federal Police and other agencies paid to Mr Enniss for his services as a supposed informant, and is it true that the amount paid to Mr Enniss was $2,000 per month?

Mr Ross Cameron—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The very first provision of standing order 144, being standing order 144(a), prohibits the reference to individuals’ names in questions. As you know, Mr Speaker, the reasoning for that is twofold: firstly, to preserve the principles of natural justice in this forum and, secondly, to avoid prejudicing a citizen’s opportunities before an Australian court should the matter subsequently be adjudicated in that forum. I suggest to you that both of those concerns are raised by this question, and it ought to be ruled out of order.

Mr Swan—Mr Speaker, on the point of order, the person’s name has already been mentioned by ministers opposite. But, secondly, standing order 144 is clearly subject to standing order 142, the broader question, the cornerstone of question time, which is why questions such as this have always been ruled in in the past.

The SPEAKER—I allowed the question to stand because, as the member for Lilley has mentioned, the identification of this person already has been referred to in both a question and an answer earlier. And, in addition to that, there has been a good deal of publicity about the matter, so I did not believe the question was prejudicing the gentleman’s opportunity to be fairly represented. Furthermore, in order to identify the question precisely, it did not seem like a mischievous use of a gentleman’s name.

Mr WILLIAMS—There is very little that I can say in response to the member for Barton’s question that has not already been said by the Minister for Justice and Customs in his media release yesterday and by the Minister for Foreign Affairs today. But I can add one point. I did not see the Sunday program in which Mr Enniss’s activities were investigated. I have had a brief look at part of the transcript and it is evident there that Mr Moses, the director of operations of the AFP, who was interviewed for the purpose of the program, neither confirmed nor denied that Mr Enniss was an informant. This is consistent with police operational practice and it is something that I think should be adhered to in ministers’ answers on behalf of police matters.

On that basis, I will say that the AFP has neither confirmed nor denied whether Mr Enniss, or for that matter any other person, is an AFP informant. It needs to be borne in mind, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out, that the police must use intelligence methods to gather information. This involves obtaining information from people who associate with those engaged in criminal activities. Some of these people may be more savoury than others. I make no comment about Mr Enniss, except to repeat that the minister for justice has said the AFP will conduct an investigation and the matters raised in the program are currently the subject of that investigation.
Workplace Relations: Legislation

Mrs MOYLAN (2.46 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Small Business and Tourism. Can the minister please advise the House of any recent developments in workplace relations legislation? How would these changes affect the interests of small business in my electorate of Pearce?

Mr HOCKEY—I thank the member for Pearce for her question. In Western Australia, the Gallop Labor government has released a draft workplace relations bill. This Labor Party bill has the potential to close down new and existing employment in Western Australia’s 116,000 small businesses. There are many significant changes covering union access to the workplace and a range of ‘mates rates’ type issues. But if you just take one example of the impact of this bill you can see the sort of effect it will have on Western Australia’s small businesses.

At the moment, a worker has 28 days to make a claim for unfair dismissal. Under the Labor Party’s bill the time limit is removed and a worker can make a claim whenever they want. For example, say you run a hot bread shop in Northam in the electorate of Pearce and one of your workers is consistently late for work: after warning them, you terminate their employment. Under the Labor Party’s new bill in Western Australia you could face an unfair dismissal claim in six months, in a year, in two years or in 10 years. This is a permanent ball and chain on Western Australia’s small businesses.

The Leader of the Opposition said—and I believe it was in good faith—on 26 November last year that he really wants to ‘develop policies that support small business’. I say to the Leader the Opposition that in his first policy workshop he can pick up the phone to his mate the Premier of Western Australia and tell him to stop this job destroying bill. If the Labor Party is serious about creating jobs and helping small businesses then the Leader of the Opposition can do something now about it and stop Western Australia’s small business job destroying bill.

Rural Australia: Medicare Funded Health Services

Mr WINDSOR (2.49 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party. At the recent regional forum convened by the minister in Tamworth last year, it was highlighted by Gunnedah based medical director for the Barwon Division of General Practice, Dr Grahame Deane, that rural Australians are being short-changed by having reduced access to Medicare funded health services to the tune of $149 per person in capital cities compared to $61 per person in rural Australia. What are you and the National Party doing to ensure that rural Australians receive their equal share of the Commonwealth Medicare dollars? Do you support the geographic allocation of Medicare provider numbers as a means of creating equity?

The SPEAKER—I allowed the question to stand because the member for New England is a new member. But the question did in fact advance a little more argument that may be tolerated in some questions. I ask him to bear that in mind in future questions.

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honourable member for New England for his maiden question. I am not altogether surprised that it came to me. He raises a very important issue indeed, which is the question of the shortage of supply of doctors in particular, but also of other allied health suppliers, in rural and regional Australia. The reason that there is an underspend in rural and regional areas on health through Medicare is the shortage of those GPs and specialists. In other words, this particular part of the economy is supply driven, perhaps in contradistinction to other normal economic parameters in different parts of the economy.

I am delighted to be able to tell the member for New England that this government has been the first that I ever recall seriously seeking to address this very serious problem. In fact, the previous minister for health, Dr Michael Wooldridge, and I started to address it in the member for New England’s home centre of Tamworth. Mike Wooldridge came out with me. We went to Tamworth, Gunnedah, Mudgee, Moree, Ashford and a
whole range of places to look at everything—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—I am very interested to see that the opposition is not interested in rural health. I will come to them in a moment. The origins of the problem lie more than anywhere else in the neglect under Labor of this critical issue, but I will come to that in a moment.

Mr McMullan—So it’s our fault?

Mr ANDERSON—Yes, since you ask it. The opposition Treasury spokesman says, ‘So it’s our fault?’ To a very large extent, yes, it is, and there has been no attempt on your part to redress the problem. I have looked at the issues surrounding base hospitals, inasmuch as they are federal responsibilities. I note that the member, of course, is a recent arrival here from the New South Wales parliament. If ever there was a government in Australia that neglected rural and regional health it is the one you came from! That is the sphere that you came from. I note your great effectiveness in persuading them to take seriously the needs of rural and regional health. I note it. I remember some work done by the previous minister for health, which established that, in all regions of Australia and all the capital cities, the Australians who expressed the greatest concern about neglect of health by their state government were regional New South Wales people.

More than anything else, the genesis of the problem that the member for New England refers to lies in the fact that, for years, grossly insufficient numbers of country kids were trained in medicine. The intake in our medical training institutions from country areas slipped to minuscule levels. That became a real issue, because if you accept that around 25 to 30 per cent of Australians come from rural and regional areas, and if you accept the conventional wisdom that overwhelmingly country kids are the ones who will go back to the country after they have trained in a professional area, you need to get your intake of country kids through our medical schools up to at least 25 per cent, preferably 30 per cent. In some of our institutions when Labor were there, the country intake had slipped one, two or three per cent. Under the scholarships and other arrangements that we have put in place, it is now running at around 25 per cent. That is a proud record.

The final two points that I want to make—I could spend a lot of time on this—are that we have committed some $700 million of resources in this very important area. I would like to see the New South Wales state government reflect a similar commitment to the health of rural and regional New South Welshmen. The next point I want to raise is this: unfortunately, you cannot train medical practitioners overnight, so the immediate shortfall is proving very difficult to meet, although I enjoy a very constructive working relationship with people like the chairman of the Barwon health division. We work together, but, unfortunately, while we have set the foundation for recovery in place, it will be some years before the increased numbers of rural kids trained in medicine start to ease the supply in the way that I know we all want to happen.

Foreign Affairs: Cambodia

Mr HUNT (2.55 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Can the minister update the House on progress to establish a tribunal in Cambodia to prosecute Khmer Rouge leaders accused of human rights atrocities? What role has Australia played in assisting this process?

Mr DOWNER—I thank the member for Flinders for his question. It is very appropriate that his first ever question in the House of Representatives should be about Cambodia, because he led the Australian Observer Group to the elections in Cambodia in, I think, 1998 and has shown a strong commitment to Cambodia. I know—if I may add this—he will make a very fine member of the House of Representatives. Call me biased, but I think he will!

The Australian government, as members know, is very committed to the long-term restoration of peace, stability and democracy in Cambodia, and we are very committed to the establishment of a credible international tribunal to bring to trial the Khmer Rouge
leaders for atrocities committed during the 1970s. The Australian government very much regrets the decision that was made by the United Nations on 8 February to withdraw from negotiations with Cambodia on the establishment of a Khmer Rouge tribunal. We were particularly disappointed with the suddenness at which the decision was made and the lack of consultation with key players, including ourselves and other countries that belong to what was called the Friends of Cambodia Group, including the United States, France and so on. We have strongly supported the establishment of this tribunal. We provided over a quarter of a million dollars to fund research and policy advice in setting it up. We are prepared to provide additional financial support and legal expertise once the tribunal is established.

I very much hope in the next few days, after a number of countries, including ours, have made representations to the United Nations, which is what we are doing at the moment, that the United Nations will resume negotiations with Cambodia and we may see this tribunal established. All members of this House would agree that no member of the Khmer Rouge should be able to escape from the terrible deeds that they committed during the 1970s. This tribunal is an opportunity to bring those people to justice and it is very important that the United Nations just does not abandon altogether discussions with the Cambodians but continues to work with them, so we will certainly be encouraging that.

Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair

Mr CREAN (2.58 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Have you seen the statement today by the head of your department, Max Moore-Wilton:

I don’t think anyone has yet established whether children have been thrown overboard or not.

Prime Minister, do you agree with him? Isn’t this completely at odds with the findings of the Bryant report that states unequivocally:

The commanding officer of HMAS Adelaide reported to both Commander, Northern Command, and the Maritime Commander that it was apparent to him that no children had been thrown in the water.

Prime Minister, how can anyone associated with the government still be claiming these events may have occurred?

Mr HOWARD—The answer to the question is: I have not seen the statement. I assume that it has been made at the Senate estimates since this House began to sit. Therefore, I will take the opportunity of having a look at the context in which the statement attributed to Mr Moore-Wilton has been made. Of course, I have read the report, but I will wait and see the context in which Mr Moore-Wilton made that statement.

Mr Speaker, while I am on my feet, can I add something to an answer that I gave to the Leader of the Opposition?

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister may proceed.

Mr HOWARD—He asked me about Mr Jordan in my office and I said—and I repeat, because it is the case—that Mr Jordan at no stage raised with me any concerns about the veracity of the original reports. I repeat that. I have checked with my staff and, for the record, I have also checked with the head of my department. He conveyed, during the relevant period, no indications of any advice that he had received which contradicted the original advice. Mr Jordan did tell me that he believed that he may have been told by someone in the former defence minister’s office, and perhaps by Jane Halton in Prime Minister and Cabinet, that there were unsubstantiated rumours in Defence regarding the juxtaposition of the dates on the photographs. He has indicated to me that he believed that was very late in the election campaign, around the time that press reports appeared concerning those same matters. He has also indicated to me—which is the fact—that, as those were simply unsubstantiated rumours, he did not raise the matter with me.

Wool Prices

Mr HAWKER (3.01 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Minister, can you update the House on the trend in wool prices, and what impact will China’s increase in the Australian wool quota have on our industry? Furthermore, what contribution has this government’s reforms made on the current mar-
ket and how does this compare with previous reforms?

Mr TRUSS—I thank the honourable member for Wannon, who, perhaps more than anyone in this House, has taken a keen interest in the wool industry over a very long period of time and has seen its highs and its lows. As a key member of the coalition’s agriculture committee and particularly in his previous chairmanship of the wool committee, he has played a key role in the reforms made to that industry and can take a share of the pride in the turnaround that this industry has enjoyed over recent times.

As the honourable member suggested in his question, wool prices have risen sharply over recent months and broke through the $10 a kilogram mark last week, reaching a 10-year high. That is really good news for Australian wool producers, who have been through a lot of very difficult times and can now look to the future with renewed optimism. Last Tuesday’s northern market indicator, which is an indicator of the strength of the market in Sydney and Newcastle sales, broke through the $10 a kilogram mark and finished the day at 1,008c a kilogram. The eastern market indicator, which has perhaps traditionally been the main benchmark, reached its highest level since June 1990 and also went close to the $10 a kilogram mark at 985c a kilo.

This represents a significant turnaround, and it is interesting to note that these are the highest prices since about 1990. It is interesting to note who was the agriculture minister at that time. It was none other than the Leader of the Opposition, who sat around at that stage and presided over the demise of one of Australia’s greatest industries—the wool industry. The Leader of the Opposition saw the wool industry fall around his knees and now he is asking the Australian people to trust him with the whole economy, the whole of the nation.

Mr Zahra interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for McMillan!

Mr TRUSS—The reality is that he was a failure as an agriculture minister. He saw an industry that everybody felt was almost indestructible—

Mr Zahra—that is nonsense.

The SPEAKER—The member for McMillan now defies the chair!

Mr TRUSS—brought to its knees. He had no solutions and no answers. It took the election of the coalition government to start the reform of the wool industry, to put in place the new structures that have radically changed—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr TRUSS—Those opposite presided over the decline of wool prices and the reality is that that has now been turned around. The opposition even opposed many of these changes. I know the honourable member for Corio wanted to support them, but he got rolled in his caucus, so we had the opposition even opposing the reforms that have led to this significant turnaround in the industry.

The reality is that the wool stockpile has now completely gone. The farmers will receive the last of their payments in relation to the returns from the stockpile—the residue of those amounts—in the next month. Indeed, the industry now has, for the first time in decades, a real market delivering genuine market signals to producers. I am pleased to report that those market signals are favourable. The Chinese have indicated an increased demand and purchasing requirements for the year ahead. All of that underpins a much brighter future for the Australian wool industry. Our great Australian wool industry can once again assert its greatness. It has worked cooperatively with this government to turn around the policy vacuum that occurred under Labor and to deliver a prosperous and bright future for the wool industry.

Immigration: ‘Children Overboard’ Affair

Mr CREAN (3.05 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister, and it refers to the additional answer that he just gave. Prime Minister, given that your original allegation in relation to the kids overboard affair was based on unsubstantiated rumours, why didn’t unsubstantiated rumours to the contrary, which you now admit your adviser told
you about, raise doubts in your mind, requiring further detailed investigation?

_Government members interjecting—_

**The SPEAKER**—I will rule the Leader of the Opposition out of order if his question is out of order; otherwise, he is entitled to be heard in silence.

**Mr CREAN**—I will start again, Mr Speaker. Given that your original allegation was based on unsubstantiated rumours, why didn’t unsubstantiated rumours—which you have just admitted were passed to you—to the contrary raise doubts in your mind, requiring further detailed investigation? Why did you rush out to peddle the first rumours and not act on the second set?

**Mr HOWARD**—The fact basis of that question is wrong in two respects: the first is that the original allegations made by me, made by the minister and also by the former defence minister, were based upon advice we received from the task force and not only was it not unsubstantiated, the Leader of the Opposition provides me with an opportunity—

**Mr Crean interjecting—**

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Prime Minister is entirely in order in his response. I only interrupted in order to get the silence to which he is entitled.

**Mr Crean**—On a point of order, Mr Speaker: if the fact was wrong, it was unsubstantiated.

**The SPEAKER**—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Prime Minister was entirely in order in his response. I only interrupted in order to get the silence to which he is entitled.

**Mr HOWARD**—The fact base of the Leader of the Opposition’s question is wrong in two respects: the original claims made by the government were not based on unsubstantiated rumour, they were based on advice that had been received—

**Mr Crean interjecting—**

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Leader of the Opposition knows the obligations he has had. I do not wish to take action against him, but if I were to do so, it would not be unprecedented—reluctant, but not unprecedented.

**Mr HOWARD**—The original advice conveyed on 7 October was confirmed in writing by a task group report given to me, and given to the former defence minister and the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, and it contained an unambiguous statement that children had been thrown overboard.

_Opposition members—Rumour!_

**Mr HOWARD**—That’s a rumour—a task force report is an unsubstantiated rumour! That is the first error in the Leader of the Opposition’s question. The second error is that he deliberately—I can have no other conclusion—misrepresented the supplementary answer I had given in the House barely three minutes earlier when I indicated that Mr Jordana had not passed that information on to me, yet the Leader of the Opposition twice represented to this parliament that he had. He is the person who is guilty of deception—

**Mr Swan**—On a point of order: is it in order for the Prime Minister to reflect on a Leader of the Opposition by accusing him of deliberately misrepresenting him in a previous answer? I would think not.

**The SPEAKER**—I listened very closely to what the Prime Minister was saying and would have intervened had I believed that he had abused the standing orders. I will check the Hansard record and come back to the member for Lilley if I am in error, but I did not believe the Prime Minister to be in error. Has the Prime Minister concluded his answer?

**Mr HOWARD**—No, I’ve only just started. It is important that this House understands—and again it appears that the Leader of the Opposition does not understand or chooses not to understand—the chain of events that have occurred in this matter. The original claims made by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, by myself and by the former defence minister were based on advice given in good faith and acted upon in good faith. As the Minister for Immigration and Multi-
cultural and Indigenous Affairs has pointed out to the House today, it is indisputable that the actions of people on board that vessel put at risk not only their own lives but the lives of the children on that vessel. The reality is, as pointed out very, very effectively in Alan Ramsey’s article at the weekend when he quoted at length from General Powell’s report, the naval personnel on 7 and 8 October were acting in very, very difficult and very, very challenging circumstances.

I repeat to the House again, and particularly to the Leader of the Opposition, at no stage was I told by my department or by any member of my staff—I repeat, at no stage was I told by my department or by any member of my staff—that the original advice tendered was wrong. I never had a discussion with Mr Jordana about that up until the time when the recording of those events was commissioned by me after the election.

Ms Hoare interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—the reality is that the Labor Party is running this ‘We were robbed’ argument in an attempt to try and explain away its own miserable performance. The Australian people voted on 10 November for my government for a number of reasons. In the area of border protection, they voted because they believed us and they didn’t believe the Australian Labor Party. They voted in favour of the coalition because they wanted a government that was strong on border protection. They voted for the coalition because they wanted people who could efficiently manage the Australian economy. They voted for the coalition because they wanted a group of people to stand up for the interests of this country abroad. I make absolutely no apology for any aspect of the election campaign that I have conducted. It was an election campaign that was designed to represent to the Australian people our views and our intentions as to how this country—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Grayndler is warned!

Mr HOWARD—should be governed over the next three years. At every stage during the children overboard issue I have acted on bona fide advice. I have acted in good faith. Whenever material ought to have been released, I have released it, including the video, and I have absolutely no reason to be concerned about the conduct of the Senate inquiry, politically biased though I know it will be, and as everybody in this House will know. Let the questions be asked; I am totally relaxed about the answers.

The SPEAKER—Before I recognise the member for Gilmore, I require the member for Charlton to withdraw the allegations she was making during the Prime Minister’s speech.

Ms Hoare—I withdraw.

Veterans: Entitlements

Mrs GASH (3.14 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs. Can the minister inform the House of measures taken by the government to improve care, support and compensation for the Australian veteran community?

Mrs VALE—I thank the member for Gilmore for her question and for her interest in this portfolio. The member is a strong advocate for the veterans in her community. I am pleased to advise the House that this is the 60th anniversary of the defence of Australia. The Howard government will continue its strong support for Australia’s veterans and war widows. Since coming to government in 1996, the coalition has increased the Veterans’ Affairs budget by 37 per cent, that is, from $6.2 billion to $8.7 billion, and it has extended the eligibility for the gold card to more than 40,000 veterans.

I would also like to acknowledge my predecessor, the member for Maranoa, who was a most excellent minister and advocate for veterans all over Australia. The veteran community is very much aware of the Prime Minister’s strong commitment and interest in veterans’ issues. Already this year the Howard government has addressed the anomaly that saw war widows who remarried prior 1984 lose their pensions. Most will now have their pensions reinstated, and I would encourage any widow who has not yet lodged a claim for reinstatement to contact my department to ensure that she is receiving her rightful entitlement.
From 1 January, the British Commonwealth and allied veterans over the age of 70, with qualifying service, have been eligible for full access to the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The Howard government is also committed to enabling war widows on income support payments to have their support income indexed to maintain their standard of living and to extend eligibility for the gold card to all veterans with qualifying service from post-World War II conflicts.

I have also recently announced the arrangements for a landmark review of veterans’ entitlements. This is one of the most significant reviews to be undertaken in recent years in this particular portfolio area. It will bring further clarity to perceived anomalies in the Veterans’ Entitlement Act, and especially disability payments. This government has also provided a particular focus on extending care to rural and remote veterans who face special difficulties because of their isolation. Last financial year 50 per cent of funding allocated through the veteran and community service grants was provided to veteran and community groups to develop assistance to veterans in remote and rural communities. Many of these projects were specifically aimed at addressing health and socialisation issues—the difficulties faced by veterans in these remote areas.

It is also my aim to give a new direction and vigour to the government’s commemoration program this year, the 60th anniversary of the defence of Australia. Their Service Our Heritage has been a great success into the lead-up to the Centenary of Federation. But now that the Centenary of Federation has passed it is time to take stock and to look at new ways that we can look forward to the appreciation of our veterans in the future for the benefit of new generations in Australia.

Mrs Irwin—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The minister is not answering her question. This is a ministerial statement.

The SPEAKER—It is fair to say that in the latter part of the minister’s answer there was, I felt, some policy enunciated. But most of the answer was consistent with what the standing orders provide. I did not intervene because it was the first occasion she had had to answer a question.

Mrs Vale—This is the 60th anniversary of the defence of Australia and there are some very important commemorations that we must make to pay tribute to our veterans and our serving personnel. This government has a very strong record on delivering on its commitments to the support of veterans in our community and it is my high priority while I am the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs to continue delivering to these veterans and war widows who deserve our utmost respect.

Mrs Irwin—Mr Speaker, I wonder whether the minister could table the document that she was reading from.

The SPEAKER—Was the minister quoting from a confidential document?

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—When the House has come to order! The minister is clearly having some difficulty with her voice. I need an indication which I can hear as to whether the minister was quoting from a confidential document.

Mrs Vale—It is a confidential document.

The SPEAKER—I thank the minister.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: ADDITIONAL ANSWERS
Rural Australia: Medicare Funded Health Services

Mr Anderson (Gwydir—Minister for Transport and Regional Services) (3.20 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek the indulgence of the chair to add to an answer.

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister may proceed.

Mr Anderson—The latter part of the member for New England’s question about the provision of doctors in rural areas asked whether the government would—I take it from his question compulsorily—apply provider numbers in rural and regional areas. I will make a couple of points. The government will willingly, and does willingly and freely, provide provider numbers to GPs,
including appropriately trained foreign doctors, in areas of need. We explored, largely at the request of a farm lobby group, the idea of using provider numbers to actually ration doctor supplies but moved against the idea very quickly on the basis that where it had been tried internationally it resulted in a very rapid exodus of the best of the doctors from the rural areas, an outcome that was disastrous in terms of attracting new ones. I regret that the member for New England is not here for the latter part of the answer.

The SPEAKER—The member for New England has the same access to the Hansard as anyone else. If there are no other issues that need to be raised—not even by the member for Melbourne—I will call the Clerk with petitions.

PETITIONS

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

Immigration: Asylum Seekers
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled:
Whereas the 1998 Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne carried without dissent the following Motion:
That this Synod regrets the Government’s adoption of procedures for certain people seeking political asylum in Australia which exclude them from all public income support while withholding permission to work, thereby creating a group of beggars dependent on the Churches and charities for food and the necessities of life;
and calls upon the Federal government to review such procedures immediately and remove all practices which are manifestly inhumane and in some cases in contravention of our national obligations as a signatory of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
We, therefore, the individual, undersigned Attendees and Members of St Dunstan’s Anglican Church, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, petition the House of Representatives in support of the aforesaid Motion.
And we, as in duty bound will ever pray.

by Mr Georgiou (from 16 citizens).

Health: Prostate Cancer
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain concerned citizens of Australia draw to the attention of the House that the Federal Government commit to eradicating prostate cancer, the leading form of cancer in men.
Your petitioners therefore request the House to, increase funding for research and education of prostate cancer, and make prostate cancer a national priority.

by Mr Bartlett (from 16 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Roll-back
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the complexity and unfairness of the Goods and Services Tax.
In particular the House’s attention is drawn to the additional burden placed on small business, especially with the completion of the Business Activity Statement, and to the inequitable application
of the tax to charities, caravan park residents and health products.

Further, attention is drawn to the detrimental effect that the tax has had on Australian families, pensioners and self-funded retirees.

Your petitioners therefore call on the House to rollback the Goods and Services Tax to make it simpler and fairer.

by Mr Bevis (from 19 citizens).

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the continued retention of the Parthenon Marbles by the British Museum.

With the Parthenon being one of the most significant buildings in Western Civilisation and one of the world’s great heritage and cultural symbols, the House’s attention is drawn to the rightful home of the Marbles being in Athens.

Your petitioners therefore call on the House to request the United Kingdom House of Commons to return the Marbles to their original home in Greece.

by Mr Bevis (from 63 citizens).

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to our concern that:

(1) the Howard-Anderson Government plans to fully privatise the Australian people’s 50.1 per cent share of Telstra as stated in the Government’s own 2001 Budget papers;

(2) a fully privatised Telstra will focus on profits not people; and

(3) services will suffer under a fully privatised Telstra, particularly in outer metropolitan, rural and regional Australia.

Your petitioners therefore ask the House to oppose the Howard-Anderson Government’s plans to fully privatise Telstra.

by Mr Martin Ferguson (from 17 citizens).

Aeropelican: Long-term Viability
To the Honourable the speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the crisis faced by the staff of Aeropelican due to the collapse of Ansett. We are concerned that we will lose this vital service and that our local economy will suffer.

We believe the Government should act immediately to ensure the long-term maintenance of Aeropelican. Local families depend on this service to stay in touch with loved ones, and they act as a lifeline for businesses and tourism in the area.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House act immediately to ensure the long-term viability of Aeropelican.

by Ms Hall (from 260 citizens).

Health System
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in parliament:

We the undersigned request that the Government take action to improve our health system including access to dental care, preserve bulkbilling and strengthen the Medicare system.

Our health system needs to be strengthened to ensure that all Australians receive the health care they need—when they need it.

The cessation of bulkbilling by many general practitioners, the closing of Medicare offices and the ceasing of the Commonwealth Dental Scheme as a direct result of Government policy—has caused great hardship to many local residents on low incomes particularly the elderly and those with young children.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House do everything in their power to strengthen our health system, increase bulkbilling and reopen much needed Medicare offices as a matter of urgency.

by Ms Hall (from 185 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Funerals
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House that a majority of Australians voted against the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax (GST). We believe a GST on funerals and all associated services is an unfair tax on death.

Your petitioners strongly request the removal of a GST on funerals and associated services.

by Ms Hall (from 126 citizens).
Migration Amendment Bill 2001
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Federal Parliament:
The petition of the undersigned draws the attention of the House to our concerns about the Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2001.
We are concerned that the second schedule of this Bill, which provides for a new Australian visa regime with a hierarchy of rights, will create a permanent group of ‘second class citizens’ in this country. Under this Bill those refugees who reach Australia via transit countries will only be eligible to be granted successive temporary protection visas for life—denying them the rights and supports enjoyed by other refugees. We believe that this is at odds with our obligations under international conventions on human and refugee rights. We believe that all asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status should enjoy equal rights—whether they arrived in Australia via transit countries or through United Nations High Commission for Refugees processing.
Your petitioners therefore request the House to repeal the Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2001 Schedule Two.

by Mr Kerr (from 1,502 citizens).

Immigration: Asylum Seekers
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Federal Parliament:
The petition of the undersigned draws the attention of the House to our concerns about Australia’s treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.
We are concerned about human rights violations in Australian detention centres, as identified by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), the US Department of State and the International Secretariat of Amnesty International. The HREOC report found that human rights are being violated due to the conditions of detention; restricted access to services; the practice and effects of long-term detention and restricted access to judicial review.
Your petitioners therefore request the House:
Comply with international human rights agreements and cease the practice of detaining refugee children;
Offer an independent review of the decision to detail an asylum seeker, in accordance with international law;
Implement an alternative detention model that offers open detention and community release for those asylum claimants whose identity and circumstances have been established;
Ensure that the assessment of asylum seeker’s identity and circumstances is completed within 90 days of their detention.

by Mr Kerr (from 1,569 citizens).

Immigration: Border Protection Legislation
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the strong stand the National and Liberal Government has taken to protect Australia’s sovereignty and our borders from people smugglers and illegal immigrants.
It is imperative that the Government’s Border Protection Bill, which would have prevented the present untenable circumstances, be now supported to ensure the protection of our sovereignty and borders.
Your petitioners therefore pray that the House call on the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Democrats to reconsider their position and allow the passage of the Bill through both Houses of Parliament.

by Mr Neville (from 265 citizens).

Airline Services Rural and Regional
Australia: Airline Services
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the crisis faced by rural and regional Australia due to the collapse of Ansett. We are concerned that we will lose vital services and that our local economy will suffer.
We believe the Government should act immediately to ensure the long-term maintenance of routes in rural and regional Australia. Local families depend on these services to stay in touch with loved ones, and they act as a lifeline for businesses and tourism in the area.
Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House act immediately to ensure the long-term viability of airline routes that service rural and regional Australia.

by Ms O’Byrne (from 179 citizens).
Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Independence and Funding
To the Honourable the Speaker and the Members of the House of Representatives assembled in the Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to:
(1) our strong support for our independent national public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation;
(2) the sustained political and financial pressures that the Howard Government has placed on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), including:
   (a) the 1996 and 1997 Budget cuts which reduced funding to the ABC by $66 million per year; and
   (b) its failure to fund the ABC’s transition to digital broadcasting;
(3) our concern about recent decisions made by the ABC Board and senior management, including the Managing Director Jonathan Shier, which we believe may undermine the independence and high standards of the ABC including:
   (a) the cut to funding for News and Current Affairs;
   (b) the reduction of the ABC’s in-house production capacity;
   (c) the closure of the ABC TV Science Unit;
   (d) the circumstances in which the decision was made not to renew the contract of Media Watch presenter Mr Paul Barry; and
   (e) consideration of the Bales Report, which recommended the extension of the ABC’s commercial activities in ways that may be inconsistent with the ABC Act and the Charter.
Your petitioners therefore ask the House to:
(1) protect the independence of the ABC;
(2) ensure that the ABC receives adequate funding;
(3) call upon the Government to rule out its support for the privatisation of any part of the ABC, particularly JJJ, ABC On-line and the ABC Shops; and
(4) call upon the ABC Board and senior management to:
   (a) fully consult with the people of Australia about the future of our ABC;
   (b) address the crisis in confidence felt by both staff and the general community; and
   (c) not approve any commercial activities inconsistent with the ABC Act and Charter.
by Ms Plibersek (from 12 citizens).

United Nations: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:
• Our deep concern at the Australian Government’s decision not to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which provides a significant opportunity for women who have suffered from discrimination to seek justice through the United Nations, and
• Our sincere disagreement that improvement and reform of the United Nations Human Rights Treaty System is best achieved by Australia restricting its participation in the system.
Your petitioners therefore ask the House to:
• Review its decision not to ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW; and
• Seek improvement to the United Nations Human Rights Treaty System without restricting Australia’s participation in it.
by Ms Plibersek (from 39 citizens).

Human Rights: Falun Dafa
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House the persecution of Falun Dafa in China.
Your petitioners pray that the House urge China’s leadership to immediately:
(1) Lift the ban on Falun Dafa and restore its legal status.
(2) Withdraw the warrant of arrest for Mr Li Hongzhi, founder of Falun Dafa.
(3) Cease the torture of all detained Falun Dafa practitioners and release them forthwith.
(4) Guarantee the full civil rights of released practitioners and their relatives.
Rectify all false propaganda used to defame Falun Dafa.

We further request that the Australian government issue a clear statement supporting the right of Falun Dafa practitioners to freely exercise their beliefs, and condemning the aforementioned abuses of human rights.

by Mr Sawford (from 14 citizens).

Afghanistan: Withdrawal of Australian Military and Political Support

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

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of Australia respectfully showeth that your petitioners are gravely concerned at:

The ongoing Australian involvement in war crimes in Afghanistan which are dishonouring the people of Australia and for which the Australian government may be held accountable in a future war crime tribunal.

And your petitioners humbly pray. That the House of Representatives calls on the government to take whatever action is necessary to withdraw Australian military and political support from the action as a matter of urgency.

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

by Mr Sidebottom (from 28 citizens).

Iraq: Withdrawal of Australian Military and Political Support

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

The humble petition of the undersigned citizen of Australia respectfully showeth that your petitioners are gravely concerned at:

The ongoing ineffective naval blockade of Iraq which according to Ramsay Clark the former United States Attorney General has directly led to the death of more than 15,000,000 people. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation estimate since August 1990 567,000 children in Iraq have died as a consequence of the sanctions. The British Medical Journal Lancer calculated that there are currently 4,500 children under the age of five dying each month from hunger and disease. This futile blockade has proved to have had no effect on the policies or activities of Saddam Hussein, and it is an unenviable and dishonourable task to assign to our servicemen and women.

And your petitioners humbly pray that the House of Representatives calls on the government to take whatever action is necessary to withdraw Australian military and political support from the blockade as a matter of urgency.

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

by Mr Sidebottom (from 26 citizens).

Telstra: Privatisation

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to our concern that:

• the Federal Government, as the major shareholder of Telstra, needs to maintain the Australian expertise within Telstra in order to uphold the quality of the Telstra network and customer service;

• the full privatisation of Telstra will inevitably entail the loss of thousands of Australian jobs;

• we seek your support in keeping a highly-skilled, committed and experienced staff with permanent jobs within Telstra to achieve a reliable service to all Australians.

We therefore ask the House to oppose the Federal Government’s plans to fully privatise Telstra and ask the Federal Government, as a major shareholder, to direct Telstra to retain a highly-skilled permanent workforce.

by Mr Vaile (from 16 citizens).

Petitions received.

COMMITTEES

Selection Committee

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom—Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources) (3.25 p.m.)—by leave—I move:

That Mr Lloyd, Mr McArthur, Mrs Gash, Mr Hawker, Mr Forrest Mr Neville, Mrs Crosio, Mr Quick, Mr Danby and Mr Wilkie, be members of the Selection Committee.

Question agreed to.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed:

That grievances be noted.

Afghanistan: Death of Sergeant Andrew Russell

Mr EDWARDS (Cowan) (3.26 p.m.)—I want to place on the record my sadness over the death of Sergeant Andrew Russell, the
SAS soldier killed on active service in Afghanistan. My condolences go to his family and to his loved ones. The burden of overseas service falls heavily on the loved ones and family members back here in Australia and they have my deepest sympathy.

The tragic circumstances here are that this soldier recently became the father of a daughter he will now never see and she will grow, never having had the opportunity to meet her father. The SAS is an elite unit in more ways than one, and I know that they will close ranks and give Sergeant Russell’s wife and daughter every support. But nothing will ever replace their loss.

According to media reports regarding this mine incident, this soldier had to wait an hour before a surgical team could parachute to his aid. A US combat search and rescue chopper then flew him to an American field hospital, where he died. I am at a loss to understand this procedure. Why wasn’t this helicopter immediately tasked to move in and evacuate this soldier to the hospital without delay? Indeed, was a helicopter available for this purpose? Why did a surgical team have to parachute in to tend him? There may be good reasons that explain the procedure that has been adopted. I am not in a position to make any judgments about what has occurred, but I know enough about casevac procedures to be more than a bit concerned about what I have read and heard.

I would be grateful if the Prime Minister or the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, representing the Minister for Defence, could come in and advise the House on these matters and perhaps reassure the people of Australia that our blokes on the ground in Afghanistan have the backup and support that they need. This is particularly true when our troops are operating in areas where there are antipersonnel and antitank mines. Antipersonnel mines are often designed not to kill outright, but to wound and maim. It is critical therefore that wounded soldiers are transferred to hospital in the shortest possible time. Indeed, their very lives depend upon it.

Tragically, this incident and the one a couple of weeks ago when another SAS member triggered an antipersonnel mine, bring home to all of us in Australia the scourge of antipersonnel and antitank mines. It is bad enough that soldiers on active duty have to deal with these dreadful weapons, let alone that civilians do. In many countries around the world, kids at play or tending sheep or just going about ordinary day-to-day chores so often set these mines off.

I know that Australia has been a leader in the push to have mines outlawed. I know that we have signed the relevant treaties, and I know that we have ratified those treaties in this place. But I feel that we have more to do. We have to do everything that we can to encourage those countries that are yet to sign and ratify those treaties to do so.

Talking about the SAS, I am privileged to be an associate member of the Special Air Service Association. I say ‘privileged’ because I have never served with the Special Air Service Regiment. The Special Air Service Association is a dedicated group whose members know too well the dangers of serving in the SAS in both peace and war. That danger has bred a sense of mateship for each other and for family members. I doubt if there exists in Australia an organisation which has a stronger bond that ties its members more closely. The dangers these men have faced have also bred a sense of steely determination to address some anomalies in the Veterans’ Entitlements Act.

The Special Air Service Association formed a counterterrorist and special recovery support group some two years ago. I want to quote from a pamphlet which they distributed on 12 September 2001. It is actually an invitation to the media. In it they set out a number of headings—’Who are we? What’s this about? What’s Happened? What can you do?’—and they explain:

The Counter Terrorist and Special Recovery ... Support Group is a sub-committee of the Australian Special Air Service Association. The sub-committee was formed about two years ago to lobby the Federal Government, through the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs ... to fix some anomalies in veterans’ compensation arrangements that impact unfairly on former members of the Special Air Service Regiment ...

In a fairly ‘recent submission’, they go on to say, they sought three things:
1. Amend the provision in the Social Security Act which counts veterans’ disability compensation as income for pensions paid by Centerlink. They point out that it is not counted as income for pensions paid through the Department of Veterans’ Affairs. They say:
Fixing this problem was a Government Election promise in 1996.

2. That service in the
Special Air Service Regiment
be formally recognised as “Hazardous” so that members injured while training could elect to make a claim under the Veterans’ Entitlements Act

3. That a Health Study of former members be undertaken to ascertain the long term health effects of service in the—
Special Air Service Regiment. They say:
During two decades up to 1998, 25 members of the unit were killed and 770 injured (35 very seriously), out of a total of 2,346 who served in the—
Special Air Service Regiment. They continue:
A death and disability rate over 30%.
I am aware of at least two other very serious injuries as a result of parachuting mishaps since that time. Under the heading ‘What’s Happened?’ they say in this pamphlet:
Minister Scott answered our submission with a flat refusal to address any of the issues. The Government will not honour it’s election promise: it won’t admit the obvious the duty with the SASR is “Hazardous”; and Minister Scott is too busy to be concerned with the long term health of those who have served in the unit with one of the highest casualty rates in the history of the Australian Defence—in peace or war.

Under the last heading, ‘What can you do?’ they say:
Let all Australians know the way the Minister has dismissed the reasonable and legitimate requests of some of our most dedicated and professional servicemen. The Government is only too ready to call on their skills and expertise when there is a tough and dirty job to be done. But it is very slow to help very same servicemen when they are doing it tough.

They deserve to be treated better, much better. I know that the minister has initiated a very wide-ranging, catch-all review of the Veterans’ Entitlements Act, and I congratulate her for doing that. I also want to congratulate those people in the veterans community who had to fight the previous minister and the government over the last two or three years to get their concerns recognised. The minister has come up with terms of reference, and the veterans community is going to be looking very closely at this inquiry which has been instigated. I want to compliment the members of the Counter Terrorist and Special Recovery Support Group and their associated veterans groups, like the TPI Association, BCOF and those other members of the veterans community—the rank and file—who have said, ‘We’re not happy. There are anomalies and we are not happy with the way that those anomalies are being addressed.’ I look forward to this inquiry unfolding, I know that the veterans community look forward to it unfolding, and I hope that at the end of the day the minister will act quickly to address the very real concerns that undoubtedly will be uncovered by this inquiry.

Alternative Energy: Geothermal
Mr CHARLES (La Trobe) (3.35 p.m.)—Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, this is my first opportunity to congratulate you on your election to that office, and I do so with great pleasure. My grievance today is that our efforts to reduce greenhouse gas production, reduce our dependence on burning fossil fuels, and efforts to help us move to the coming hydrogen economy are pitifully meagre. I rise today to advise members and the Australian public of progress into research and development of hot dry rock geothermal energy in Australia.

Those members who have been in this House for some years are well aware of my passionate interest in renewable energy generally, particularly the exploitation of renewable energy in quantities for base load power to augment or replace the burning of fossil fuels. Our good friends Dr Doone Wyborn and Dr Prame Chopra are ANU geologists who are worldwide leading experts in hot dry rock geothermal energy and have joined with others to form a company, Geodynamics Ltd, which has been established to do further research and develop a demonstration geo-
thermal power plant to prove both the technology and its economics. Their vision is to develop Australia’s unique potential for hot dry rock geothermal energy and to become a substantial and profitable base load electricity producer. The company was founded in November 2000 as a public company and is the only such company in Australia with a current focus on hot dry rock geothermal energy.

I take this opportunity to provide a very brief description of the hot dry rock phenomena and the expected process for exploitation. In Australia, across vast areas of our country, particularly in the Cooper Basin and the Hunter region, we have areas of high geothermal gradient—that is to say, a range of high heat producing granites which have special naturally occurring radiogenic minerals which produce their own heat. The heat is trapped inside these granites by an overlaying blanket of insulating rock. Such a blanket has to be about three kilometres thick for high temperatures greater than 200 degrees Centigrade to be generated. We have a number of locations in Australia where, in the order of four to six kilometres down, granite exhibits temperatures of 200 degrees Centigrade or greater. In parts of the Cooper Basin we have known conditions, or expected conditions, in excess of 250 degrees Centigrade at five kilometres.

Granites have an internal fabric of cooling joints and fractures of cooling down from their original molten state to the solids that they are today. In order to create a thermal reservoir, a well is drilled down to the desired depth—say, five kilometres—and water is injected under high pressure, causing the separated rock surfaces to slip past one another in response to natural stress conditions at that depth. When the hydraulic pressure is released the surfaces close together again, but not with the perfect meeting they had before. Small gaps of one millimetre or less remain between the closed up fractures, and those gaps or voids on many fractures make up an engineered reservoir.

In order to tap the heat of the reservoir, production wells are drilled out at around 500 metres from the injection well. Water is pumped down the injection well at relatively low pressure, forcing it through the reservoir and allowing the water to then rise from the production wells to a heat exchanger, which is then recycled down to the reservoir again. The heat exchangers recover the latent energy and produce steam and electricity.

Hot dry rock geothermal energy relies on existing technology and engineering processes and, except for tidal energy, is the only known source of renewable energy with a capacity to carry large base loads. The concept is simple. The energy is environmentally clean and does not produce greenhouse gas emissions. It has been classified as renewable by national and international authorities. Our resource could potentially supply all of Australia’s power requirements many times over. The majority of the world’s hot underlying granite is found in locations which previously exhibited volcanic activity. Research and testing in those locations have shown that granite tends to fracture vertically or slightly off vertical, which in turn produces reservoirs which are not as efficient in heat transfer as horizontal reservoirs.

Australia is particularly well placed to exploit the potential of hot dry rock geothermal energy, because of our known geological conditions in our hot granite. Our granite is generally fractured horizontally. It remains now for us to drill a new test well, create the engineered reservoir and drill a production well and test, as well as prove, the economics of the process. The Australian government has advised Geodynamics Ltd that the Industry Research and Development Board has approved their application for funding under the R&D Start Program to undertake a project in the Cooper Basin for research up to and including reservoir monitoring, to the value of $5 million, subject to the company demonstrating that it has a minimum amount of $10 million from an initial public offering, together with other lesser conditions.

The company plans a three-stage approach, culminating in the development of a demonstration hot dry rock geothermal power plant. Stage 1, the establishment stage, will focus on exploration of the company’s tenements, feasibility studies on economic viability, preparation of documentation to raise funds via an initial public offer-
ing and preparation of documentation to obtain government financial support. This stage is expected to be completed in May this year, with the successful raising of the funds required for stage 2. Stage 2 is the testing stage. It involves drilling the first deep well and the development of subterranean engineered reservoirs in hot granites with a temperature greater than 200 degrees Celsius. Stage 2 should be completed within a period of 12 to 18 months—say, in December 2002.

Stage 3 is a pilot plant development stage and includes drilling of production holes, conducting circulation tests and development of a geothermal plant of 10 to 15 megawatts. This stage requires approximately two years to complete—say, in May 2005—together with additional funding.

Internationally, more than $US500 million has been spent on research and development in the US, Europe and Japan. Progress has been relatively slow, partly because advances can only be achieved by drilling deep research wells of three to five kilometres, followed by scientific and engineering tests at great expense. Steady progress has been made and technology is now in transition from research to commercialisation. Projects are being pursued in a number of countries, including Japan, the United States, the UK, France, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden. The most advanced projects have been developed in France and Japan, and new projects have been initiated in Germany and Switzerland. It should be noted that the granite temperatures in all of these locations are substantially below those expected to be encountered and utilised in the Cooper Basin in Australia.

Research into the potential of hot dry rock technology has been supported by the government since 1993, with the first Energy Research and Development Corporation grant of $10,000, followed by another grant in 1994, some $890,000 in 1996, another grant in 1999 to investigate the Hunter Valley geothermal anomaly, and the most recent $5 million R&D Start grant. The company has had a good start and has already succeeded in raising more than $1 million in seed capital. It will be moving rapidly to the initial public offering in the first half of this year. The geodynamics corporate board of directors comprises Mr Martin Albrecht, chairman, a former managing director of Thiess; Dr Bertus deGraaf, managing director, a former managing director and CEO of Ross Mining; Dr Doone Wyborn, executive director, an internationally known geoscientist resident at ANU, who specialises in granite rocks; Dr Prame Chopra, non-executive director, reader in geophysics at ANU; Mr Robert Flew, non-executive director, formerly a senior vice-president of BHP for more than 10 years; and Mr Neil Galwey, non-executive director, former chairman of the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation.

We have a huge potential to develop a renewable energy resource from the hot granite under our feet, with no adverse environmental effects and with the object of augmenting or replacing fossil fuels in a push to reduce our burning of carbon and the production of greenhouse gases, and on the way to a hydrogen economy. For those who are interested in more information, the web site is www.geodynamics.com.au. I thank the House for members' interest.
government from other previous Australian governments.

The particular orientation of this government on refugees is, I believe, something that will cause great friction within the government and the Liberal Party over the next three years. It is very interesting that despite the extremely hard work by the member for Sturt on behalf of the Prime Minister—some would say he was getting his hands dirty on the electoral committee doing all kinds of unpleasant political tasks, many of which people will say were unjustified—did not earn him a place in the ministry. Very interestingly, neither did the member for Cook, Mr Baird, nor the member for Curtin, Ms Bishop.

It was also interesting to note the lining up of various forces in the ministry. The demolition of a person who I would have thought was a supporter of the member for Higgins, the former Assistant Treasurer, Senator Rod Kemp, and the replacement with a strong ally of the Prime Minister, is a very interesting development—as is the failure of the former Minister for Financial Services, the member for North Sydney, to go into the cabinet.

Very interestingly, in the Financial Review last week there was an insight into an attempt by the former Minister for Financial Services, the member for North Sydney, to take a group that he calls ‘the group’—described by journalist Tony Walker as very active in New South Wales, some of whose comments I will quote at the moment—to the national stage. Mr Walker argued that this was being done to enhance the political prospects of the government’s leader-in-waiting, the person who describes himself as the ‘leader of the moderates’—the LOM. Mr Tony Walker said that this has turned the spotlight on to the Liberals factional make-up, which is broadly supportive of a painless transition, but is represented by some of the people who share a house with ‘the LOM’—that includes the Victorian Liberal communications minister, Richard Alston, and my friend from Japan, Mason San, Queensland Senator Brett Mason, who were also the LOM’s cotenants.

Least enthusiastic about a Costello ascendancy, according to Mr Walker, are the faction of Nick Minchin in South Australia and the Howard-Abbott faction in New South Wales, both of the Right. Costello draws support from Western Australia to bolster his backing from Victoria, Queensland and amongst New South Wales moderates, as is the small business minister and the self-professed leader of the group, the member for North Sydney, Mr Hockey. Perhaps they will be called the ‘groupers’. Indeed, according to the article Mr Hockey confirmed recently that, as the convener of the New South Wales group, he was taking his group nationally to fight off the political promotion, as he saw it, by the Prime Minister of the Abbott faction, known as the ‘Visigoths’—a fairly harsh line description of a group of hardline people.

It is no accident—Mr Walker says—that at a moment when the Liberal Party is undergoing a leadership transition, this group should seek to reassert itself nationally.

As a prominent NSW moderate observed: “Traditionally, factionalism in the NSW Liberal party has been State-focused. What we are endeavouring to do has more of a national focus.”

According to Mr Walker:
The Treasurer has never evinced much enthusiasm for Abbott, who would clearly be Howard’s choice: indeed one way of viewing the third Howard ministry, in which Howard froze out Costello-supporting moderates, is through the prism of the PM seeking to bolster Mr Abbott.

Furthermore, according to Mr Walker:
In some Liberal quarters, an “ABT” mode prevails—Anyone But Tony.

A surprising comment—indeed an extraordinary comment—was made on the weekend by the member for Warringah, Mr Abbott, pledging fealty to the Treasurer in his inevitable takeover, when he said that the member for Warringah was no threat to the LOM. In fact, I thought this was extraordinary because it is the old Shakespearian dictum: the man doth protest too much. No-one had questioned him but he sought fit to make a public statement—it certainly appeared in the Sunday Age—saying that he was no threat to the
Treasurer. If I were the Treasurer, that would worry me more than anything else.

As to other divisions in the Liberal Party that have taken place since the election, Senator Herron has resigned as President of the Queensland Liberal Party after calling for no more vendettas, and there are terrible divisions in Ryan. There were some very interesting comings and goings, particularly from the Senate, during the first speeches of the new members from Queensland. It was extraordinary that the Prime Minister did not even visit the electorate of Ryan, although he was 100 metres from it with the new member for Ryan. I am not going to participate in the pogrom against Michael Johnson, the new member for Ryan. I find it distressing that some bigoted comments were used to denigrate him. It was very interesting that he said, with the Prime Minister being present, that he would actively or willingly participate in the population summit that the Premier of Victoria said that he would have. The coming struggle between the Treasurer and the Prime Minister—a potential result of this disgraceful hyping of fear in the Australian people—will lead to the ascension, apparently, of the Treasurer. There were some very interesting comings and goings, particularly from the Senate, during a speech on that issue. I am sure that the Prime Minister paid more attention to them than I did.

It is also very interesting that there has been a very unfortunate leaking of details of the residence of the member for Fairfax—where he does and does not live. It is very odd to me that the new Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the member for Moreton, seems to have on his staff the person who received an unfair dismissal from the staff of the member for Fairfax. Crikey.com’s view of this was that the new Fairfax homeowner, Lynton Crosby, the Federal Director of the Liberal Party, is said to be very happy with proceedings to date.

And of course we had the defamation case between the current member for Moncrieff and the previous member for Moncrieff, a case which was withdrawn. Mrs Kathy Sullivan is a Liberal stalwart who, it has been known for a long time, would always do the right thing by her political party. She was probably leaned on very heavily to withdraw the defamation proceedings.

I could go on about the divisions in Western Australia between the Crichton-Browne group, the purging of Winston Crane and the leaking to the West Australian of details about his travel arrangements. There was the recent purging of another moderate in Tasmania, Mr Greg Barns. That the Liberal Party could have any support for a republic or for reconciliation or have a slightly more compassionate view of asylum seekers is obviously impossible. We know that there are very deep divisions in Victoria between the Napthine forces and those of Dr Robert Dean, reflected in the behaviour of a number of people from Victoria here in the federal Liberal Party. I do not think that there will be a great benefit to Australia from a change in the leadership of the Liberal Party, but I certainly hope it will occur because it may affect the LOM’s compassion on refugee policy. It could only be an improvement. (Time expired)

**Australian Labor Party: Trade Unions**

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (3.55 p.m.)—I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, on your appointment as deputy speaker in this 40th Parliament. I look forward to working with you in that position over the next three years.

The debate of late last year and early this year regarding the ALP’s links to the union movement centred around the question of whether the union movement had a policy influence over the Labor Party, but I think it largely missed the point because the issue of the union movement’s power over the Labor Party does not go to policy. Largely, the union movement that influences the Labor Party is not interested in policy; it just assumes that the Labor Party will do what it tells them to do at the appropriate time on workplace relations and other issues like that. The question is about the power that the union movement wields over preselections, over conferences, over conventions and state executives. That is where the real power is found in the Labor Party and every member of the Labor Party knows it.
The member for Melbourne Ports, who is in the chamber, knows it very well because he is a part of the ALP machine that has ruthlessly used its power in Victoria to remove members of parliament in the past and will do so in the future. Last year the member for Melbourne Ports and I served on the federal electoral matters committee, and there are a number of aspects of this issue which I would like to talk to the House about today. We found that the main motivation for electoral fraud in the Queensland Labor Party, as practised by the Australian Workers Union and headed by Bill Ludwig, was the control over preselections within the Labor Party. It was that motivation that led to the jailing of Karen Ehrmann and the resignations of the Deputy Premier and two state MPs, including the leading light of the Labor Party, Mike Kaiser. It also led to the charging of David Barbagallo over electoral irregularities. It was not to try to win seats at the state level to represent the public, because most of the seats they were fighting over were safe Labor seats. The motivation was over preselection and over power. The electoral matters committee found that one way to act to take away that motivation was to sever the links of the Labor Party with the union movement by removing the 60-40 rule, which gives the trade unions disproportionate influence in Labor Party fora like preselection colleges, state conferences, state executives and the national executive. We decided that, if we introduced the concept of ‘one vote, one value’ to political parties, the Liberal and National parties would naturally not be affected because we already have ‘one vote, one value’ but fortunately we would be able to bring about ‘one vote, one value’ in the Labor Party, which would be very much welcomed by the vast majority of Labor rank and file members.

The control that the union movement has over the ALP and the performance of the union movement in internal preselections, which have ruthlessly destroyed the careers of many a good person who wanted to serve their community, were highlighted again only today by Glenn Milne in the Australian. He wrote a column about the Labor Party and the ‘deserted heartlands cry of rage’. He was talking about the Penrith Labor Party meeting with Neville Wran to discuss what went wrong with the ALP.

Mr Danby interjecting—

Mr PYNE—Well may the member for Melbourne Ports laugh, because he knows that nothing is going to affect his power in the ALP. He is laughing because he knows that this is all crying in the wilderness as far as he is concerned. He will continue to use his power and influence and the Victorian Labor machine to crush the hopes and aspirations of those who might seek to serve their community. Mr Milne wrote today:

... during the election the local Labor branch in Lindsay went on strike against the candidate, David Bradbury, a machine politician of the sort who is increasingly bringing the ALP undone in NSW.

‘Branches disaffiliated from the FEC (Federal Electorate Council),’ the minutes record. ‘Went on strike at the polls. ... Insulted the candidate.

So the New South Wales Labor Party candidate for Lindsay—against the member for Lindsay, Jackie Kelly—was insulted by his own branch members, who went on strike and disaffiliated from the council because they refused to accept control of the ALP in Western Sydney by the union movement.

Members of the ALP themselves are horrified by this turn of events and have been speaking out since the election campaign. They want to introduce democratic traditions into the ALP for the first time in its history. One of those members is Carmen Lawrence, the member for Fremantle, who wrote the following article for the Australian last year on Wednesday, 14 November:

One vote, one value—the prime condition for a democracy is not observed in the party’s rules.

So there you have a former frontbencher—in fact, she is still a frontbencher—placing on record the fact that ‘one vote, one value’ does not exist in the ALP. No democracy exists in the ALP; the union movement calls the shots. It is not just the 60-40 rule that has been causing consternation in the ALP. Even if you made it 50-50 or 70-30, or whatever, Rodney Cavalier made it very clear in the Australian that problems would remain while there is a link between the union movement and the ALP. Joel Fitzgibbon, the shadow minister for small business, had quite a lot to
say about this last year. On Wednesday, 5 December, in the Canberra Times, he was reported as saying:

... the rule forcing party members to join a union was a disincentive for small business and the wider community to join the party. If I have a small business person who supports Labor principles—

... it is unlikely; nevertheless—

who’s interested in joining a branch then to be a bona-fide member he or she would have to take out trade-union membership ... That’s ridiculous. Many work in areas where there is no clear cut union.

The article goes on to state:

... his wife was a beauty therapist with her own salon. She belonged to the party and supported its values, but the thought of “forking out hundreds of dollars each year to join a union which can be of no assistance to her whatsoever is anathema to her”.

While the rule was often ignored, as in his wife’s case, if non-union members tried to vote in preselections or other forums their membership was challenged.

If non-union members try to vote in an ALP forum or a preselection, their vote is automatically challenged. The Labor Party does not want the support of the general community in the ALP. It does not want local community oriented people. It only wants union hacks running the ALP from start to finish. The shadow minister did not get very much support either. The article further stated:

Another frontbencher, from the party’s Left—

we can only conjecture on who that might be, but they might be sitting at the end of the front row—

said Mr Fitzgibbon’s suggestion was “nonsensical”. “Joel’s on another planet. .... What are we going to do? Support scabs and non-unionists?”

So everybody who is not in a union is a scab. This person from the Left does not want anybody who is not in a union in the ALP because if they are non-unionists they are scabs. That is an extraordinary admission from the Left of the ALP. This proposal to introduce ‘one vote, one value’ has widespread support in the ALP. Robert McClelland, the shadow Attorney-General, Carmen Lawrence, a shadow minister, Joel Fitzgibbon, whom I have quoted, are all on record supporting the idea.

The ALP are too frightened to act on this issue. They are too frightened to take on the union movement in their own ranks. If they do not act on it—and I hope they don’t, because while they don’t the ALP will remain irrelevant and unelectable—the community will continue to turn against them more and more. It is why we are seeing, in areas like Western Sydney and Western Adelaide, Hindmarsh and other seats, large swings to the Liberal Party amongst people who used to be regarded as grassroots ALP supporters. As Glenn Milne reported in the Australian today, those people out at Penrith know what is wrong with the ALP and they want to fix it. But they will not be given the opportunity to fix it because the union will crush their spirit and would rather continue to elect people who are just union hacks who will do whatever they are told.

On 9 December, in the Sun-Herald, Mr O’Sullivan, the General Secretary of the Public Service Association, was at it again. I quote:

In a blistering letter to the New South Wales Labor Party secretary Eric Roozendaal, Mr O’Sullivan accused the employees—

these are the employees of members of parliament—

of flouting ALP rules; that they must join a union if they worked for a Labor MP.

He further stated:

It infuriates me to see those people take advantage of Labor Party positions—

Labor Party positions! If you work for a Labor Party MP, it is a Labor Party position. Far from serving the community and your local MP, it is actually a position doled out by the Labor Party. He did not say that—I digress from the quote. He said:

It infuriates me to see those people take advantage of Labor Party positions and yet defy the Labor Party rule which tells them to join the relevant trade union ...

Indeed, I am so p***** off that I intend to gradually “out” them.

So in the Labor Party, you can be outraged for not wanting to join the PSA.

Dr Martin—No wonder I left it.
Mr PYNE—Exactly—and a very good decision that you made too. What we are offering the Labor Party is an opportunity to do something about this, to get them out of the grip of the unions. Rodney Cavalier should have the last word. On Wednesday, 19 December, the Australian stated:

The rump of trade unions affiliated to the ALP is an ever-diminishing proportion of the trade union movement which is itself an ever-diminishing proportion of the Australian workforce. Members of unions affiliated to the ALP now constitute fewer than 10 per cent of the Australian electorate: that is, nine out of 10 Australians are excluded from the governance of Australian Labor. (Time expired)

Media: Cross Media Ownership Rules

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (4.05 p.m.)—I bring to the attention of the House the discredited and deceptive promotion by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Alston, of the proposed changes to cross-media ownership laws. In a broadcast on Thursday, 29 November 2001, on the ABC radio program AM, it was reported that the intention of the broadcasting services amendment media ownership bill is to ease the so-called restrictive media ownership laws by making changes that the country’s big media proprietors have been seeking. In the report on AM, the minister responded to reporter Mark Willacy on the future of cross-media ownership by saying:

Ownership of media per se is irrelevant. I mean, what we’re trying to protect here is the ability of people to select the news they want, not to just have a single view rammed down their throats. And in the old days when you had a couple of networks and a couple of newspapers and a few radio stations the world might have been a bit different. But these days there’s an absolute plethora of sources of information and I think we’ve got to do our best to ensure that that continues to expand through new media opportunities.

The propositions put by the minister are preposterous, deceptive, misleading and without foundation in either fact or reason. They are the words of the media magnates—spoken through the puppet hand of the minister on behalf of Mr Packer and Mr Murdoch.

Media ownership is not irrelevant. Media ownership lies at the heart of the core issue in the debate on cross-media ownership. The critical issue of media ownership is its influence on the hearts and minds of the Australian public. What we watch, what we read and what we hear determine what we talk about, what we understand about world events and what opinions we form on politics or on anything else. Whilst there is an inferential relationship between media influence and media ownership, to my knowledge no forensic examination has ever been undertaken by dissertation or academic research of the connection between the two. Indeed, the recent puerile contribution to the debate on the issue from the Australian Broadcasting Authority Chairman, Professor David Flint, seeks to diminish the connection between media ownership and media influence with fantastic and implausible propositions such as the unfounded claim that it is not media ownership that dominates media content in mass media but the independence of the journalist. Professor Flint seems to think that the journalist’s employer has no influence on what the journalist writes or, even more preposterous, thinks that the managerial prerogative of hire and fire power cannot be wielded to prevent a journalist’s independence. This reasoning is ridiculous and has been justifiably discredited by the Australian Journalists Association: he who pays the piper calls the tune.

It is also impossible to accept without validity the proposition put by the minister in the quote I have just read that there is in fact a plethora of media diversity, for such throwaway lines by the minister imply many things. Firstly, for example, that media diversity is today so vast that the influence of the old media is diminished and, secondly, that this perceived highly diversified new media now must be protected by the proposed changes to cross-media ownership laws. If the second proposition is true, then it is very strange that the media giants, Mr Packer and Mr Murdoch, are reported to be supporting—or, more accurately, sponsoring—these proposed amendments. Is it possible that these media tycoons are supporting amendments that thwart their own vested interests? No, of course not. The truth is they want the laws
changed so their grip on the commercial media, old or new, is tightened even further. They are interested in more concentration and greater influence, which is what the government looks set to provide them at the cost of our democracy.

Let us look at the facts about Australian consumption of media products. Senator Alston says there is a plethora of media sources. What are those sources to which he refers? Internet, television set-top boxes and pay television come to mind in the new media age. So does the odd alternative newspaper. Senator Alston paints a picture reminiscent of Alvin Toffler’s book *The Third Wave* which foreshadows the eruption of technology, resulting in a highly diversified futuristic world of a micromedia market where every personal computer is a veritable publishing house.

I draw to the attention of the House the *Communications Update* report on media ownership, issue 162, dated February 2000. *Communications Update* is a publication of the Communications Law Centre of the University of New South Wales. The report provides data and statistics on media ownership. The reality of media ownership is that two media magnates in Australia dominate market share and media influence in the commercial setting. I will first refer to the mass media newspapers. Mr Murdoch’s News Ltd has one-quarter of Australia’s total regional newspaper market; two-thirds of the capital city and national newspaper market; three-quarters of the Sunday newspaper market; almost half the suburban newspaper market; a quarter stake in Foxtel’s Pay Television and News Interactive Online; and interests in AAP Information Services. By comparison, the Packer family’s Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd company controls the Nine television network and the magazine publisher Australian Consolidated Press. Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd owns and controls three metropolitan licences and one regional television licence, reaching half the potential total Australian audience. It has a quarter interest in Foxtel and a one-third interest in Sky News. In addition, PBL owns a staggering 65 magazines, the top 30 magazines holding approximately 40 per cent of the total magazine market. PBL also operates a very popular online operation known as ninemsn.

Minister Alston asserts that diversity of media ownership is essential in a functional democracy. However, the minister transparently fails to demonstrate how the proposed amendments will translate into greater diversity of media interests. Household Internet access is approximately 30 per cent. The number of television set-top boxes installed nationally is only approximately 5,000. With approximately 97 per cent of households owning a television, numbering some eight million television sets, alternative media penetration of the media market is therefore just a joke compared with mass media market penetration by Mr Packer and Mr Murdoch. The minister’s comments imply that the lower the number of media owners the higher the concentration of influence on public morality and values by those owners and the narrower the coverage of news.

It is noted that no correlation between percentage of media ownership and percentage of influence can be made. It is a fact which eludes the minister, who seeks to rely on selling his proposed bill on the basis that it will preserve and enhance diversity. This reason has no basis in fact. In short, the facts on media ownership in Australia show that the two media magnates, Mr Murdoch and Mr Packer, dominate the commercial media.

Concentration of media ownership creates a supply side monopolistic practice in directing public morality and how to think. The minister’s selling of the proposed amendments to cross media laws only serves the interests of Mr Packer and Mr Murdoch by effectively further narrowing the participation of other media players. I call on the government to abandon this bill and I refer the Prime Minister once again to question 11, which appears on the first *Notice Paper* of this parliament. If the government goes ahead with this legislation and were it to get through the Senate the public interest would be slaughtered. The media have a vital role in providing news and information to the public which forms their opinions and influences the way they vote. People do not vote for Mr Packer or Mr Murdoch. They vote for
a party, a leader or, in a small number of cases, for a local member. It is outrageous that the government is promoting the media tycoons’ interests in this country ahead of the public’s. (Time expired)

Family Law Act

Mr CADMAN (Mitchell) (4.15 p.m.)—I want to grieve today about some aspects of the Family Law Act. I have come across a particularly distressing case and whilst I know that a particular problem can often create bad law if one moves to resolve it I do believe that this case epitomises a problem of the Family Law Act and by way of amendment a better result can be achieved.

It was a case that was first brought to my attention during the year 2000 but the story commenced back in 1997, with a young couple—a girl aged 15 and a young man slightly older. They were seeing a lot of each other. Sadly, the young lady became pregnant. The couple decided against an abortion, for which I give them great credit, and so a baby girl was born on 8 October 1998. The couple stayed with the parents of the young man for a period after the birth of the child, probably for about nine months.

During that period, the young man’s mother and her third husband—not the father of the young man but the third husband of his mother—became quite possessive of the baby and wanted to look after every aspect of the baby’s wellbeing, including taking it to preschool and the general care and attention that a mother would give. After approximately nine months, the young couple decided they would move out of the home. Even though the young lady was approaching the age of only 17—she was still very young—she and her partner decided they could make a go of it on their own.

He had found three jobs and he was working hard. The bloke could have walked away from this, and many young men, tragically, do. But he stuck to this young woman and they decided they were going to make a go of life together. But his mother was too dominating for them and so they moved to a house of their own, paying rent and with him working three jobs.

The man’s parents were possessive, and on 6 December 1999 court orders were issued to give up the child to the grandparents for one half Sunday every three weeks. That is how possessive the grandmother was. She wanted to see this baby—an 18-month-old baby—for a Sunday afternoon every three weeks between 12 noon and 5 p.m. Hardly had the ink dried on the court’s decision that should occur when on 13 December 1999 there was a fresh claim by the grandmother. She wanted to see the child for two weeks holiday each year—that is 15 days each year—and to have the child the full weekend every second week. Not only that, she wanted the child to spend every second Christmas with her.

The court actually listened to this argument. It seems to me a really strange thing. Here we had a young couple trying hard to make a go of life with a baby, obviously worried about the grandparents’ claim on the child, resisting the process and appearing in court and saying, ‘Look, we would like to visit whenever it suits us but we don’t want to be compelled to visit the young man’s mother by order of the court.’ Nevertheless, the court decided that there would be a modification in the previous order of half a Sunday every three weeks and that instead it would be a full Sunday every three weeks. So the court was influenced by this extraordinary claim made by the grandmother and her husband.

On 12 January 2000 I had a letter from the girl’s father. That letter sets out some of the concerns that the father had at that time. He—this is the young girl’s father, also a grandparent—concludes in his final paragraph that he has watched these kids and they are doing well. He hates to see this interference. He points out that the parents of this child have a limited capacity to pay all these legal fees in the Family Court. I will repeat his exact words:

The grandfather is a professional man and has stated that he is going to send them bankrupt. He knows that when the parents run out of money they will have no choice other than to give in to his demands, so today at 5pm his lawyer has adjourned the hearing and changed their demands, which will add further expense to the parents.
Here is a young couple in their late teens trying to fight this in the Family Court from their own resources, and working three jobs to do it. I took it up with the Attorney-General at that point. In May 2000 the young couple moved to Queensland, by the way, to get away from this. A bit after they moved to Queensland, I got a reply from the Attorney-General which repeats properly the law as it stands. I note that in his penultimate paragraph he says:

Should—I give their names—be dissatisfied with the Court’s decision about their child’s contact with her grandparents, they may ... consider challenging it through the normal appeal procedure.

How do a 19- and 18-year-old with an 18-month baby and working three jobs raise enough dough to go to the Federal Court? That is an impossible request. They are not eligible for legal aid, either. The Attorney-General stated:

Part X of the Act deals with appeals to the Family Court, however, time limits do apply.

He goes on to point out:

... children have a right of contact, on a regular basis, with both their parents and with other significant people to their care, welfare and development.

It just does not seem to acknowledge that a parent’s responsibility is over and above that of other contacts that the child might have. The child’s rights or the child’s capacity to have contact with others is one thing, but the parents’ resolve for the best for their children is something else.

Because the young people were in Queensland and this new claim was being heard in Parramatta, they were not going to travel with their 18-month-old daughter from Queensland every time there happened to be a court case, even if it was just on for hearing and then stood over. Understandably, they did not front. The next thing we know, the federal police went around and arrested both of them separately for failing to appear in court. I have in front of me the claims against them for $500 each relating not to resisting arrest but whatever the legal term is for failing to appear in court.

Again, I have a letter from the Attorney-General which is basically in the same terms as his previous letter and which says, ‘Everybody has got rights to these kids. They have to stake their rights and the court has a go at deciding who has got rights. We look at the children and who they would have contact with.’ At this stage we have a young couple who are going to give up their child. The current claim is for two weeks twice a year. The grandparents cannot have contact because they are living in Queensland, so the current claim is two periods of two weeks during the year rather than each third Sunday. I do not know where this is going to finish, but I think it is a tragedy to see a couple, who are obviously committed to each other and the wellbeing of their child, being put upon by somebody who, just for the sake of possessiveness, wants to interfere with that relationship.

Insurance: Public Liability Premiums

Mr ANDREN (Calare) (4.26 p.m.)—Last week I was pleased to be informed by the relevant minister that Burraga, a tiny community in my electorate south of Oberon, had been successful in its application for funding for the construction of a rural transaction centre. The very next day, a call came from a representative of the Burraga Sport and Recreation Club—that is, the group subsidising the community shop in which the RTC is to be placed—informing me that their organisation is threatened by the now all too familiar bogeyman for community groups, public liability insurance. Worse still, their insurer is not going to renew cover for any aspect of their operation, as their business is
sport and recreation, and the crowd gathering nature of this business—and the alleged risk—is now apparently uninsurable for all but the rich.

Burraga community totals about 150. A few years back they built their own water reticulation system using water poly-piped from an old mine dam. They shifted a mobile home onto a paddock, built a few golf holes and created a recreation club. When the local shop burnt down they rebuilt it. When the school is threatened with closure, they look for an extra family. They are a classic case of self-help rural determination. Until now they have been able to get around problems, but this one has them stumped. They are not alone among community groups and not-for-profit volunteer organisations in Calare, or indeed across Australia.

The price of premiums, quite bluntly, is crippling community groups—increases of up to 300 per cent, or, in the case of the New South Wales Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association, an increase from around $7,000 to almost $70,000 in one year! Local pensioners have street stalls on council footpaths, and councils around the electorate have been advised by their brokers that they can no longer cover community groups or day events under council public liability. This means, for instance, that Newbridge and its 100 residents are no longer able to hold their annual swap meet. This event brings people from as far as Melbourne and donates profits to the Newbridge Public School and Careflight, and had been covered by Blayney Shire Council insurance—not any more.

The Carcoar Village Association has folded because insurance companies are refusing to renew public liability insurance for incorporated bodies unless they have assets. The Highway Safety Action group has been forced to fold for similar reasons. This year, the Carcoar Australia Day fair, which attracts about 3,000 people to the historic village, was covered by the council, but not next year. Another Australia Day celebration, and one I had the pleasure of attending, was at Hill End. While the Evans Shire Council was able to cover the event under its public liability insurance, it had to submit the program to the insurer. Horse events, for one, were out. Cowra Shire Council is waiting anxiously for the activities their insurer deems as acceptable for their Festival of International Understanding, which has run for 37 years. They expect the billycart race will be out, and quite probably the rubber duck race down the Lachlan, too. Canowindra’s Marti’s Balloon Fiesta paid $14,000 public liability insurance last year for their spectacular two-day event. This year it will cost around $30,000, if insurance is offered at all. So now the insurance companies determine what activities a community may or may not stage. Black-banned activities now include old-fashioned physical activity and recreation. Just imagine the impact on the many bush festivals and carnivals around this country.

The residents of the village of Rockley are no longer allowed to swim in the small weir in the middle of their village. For years the local kids have been sliding down the hill on the home-made waterslide and swinging from a tree into the river. Toddlers and the elderly have been able to paddle in the wading pool at the edge of the water. Now Evans Shire Council has been instructed to dismantle the wading pool and ban swimming at this once popular spot. I and millions of country kids learnt to swim in such a swimming hole. Speaking of Evans Shire, that council is responsible for a $8 million share of a $16 million compensation award due to a negligence claim after an accident on one of its roads. Its outstanding liability amounts to some $6 million due to the gap left in its cover by the collapse of HIH.

Not only community and volunteer groups are affected. What do people like one of my pensioner constituents do when their income from lawn mowing—$2,800—is eroded by a $665 public liability premium? How do countless small businesses, the driving engines of rural employment, cope with their increases? Well, one butcher in Bathurst has reduced his staff—that’s how. Does the rural guesthouse close its doors after 27 years because it cannot cover a walk in the bush, a ride on a horse or a paddle in the creek?

Yesterday I attended the unveiling of a Banjo Paterson memorial in Orange on the
138th anniversary of his birth. The gathering was covered by council insurance and we heard bush poet Frank Daniel’s wonderful recital of Banjo’s poems about adventure, spirit, community—and, yes, unqualified risk. These days, the colt from old Regret would not only have got right away, but the noted riders would not have been able to ‘gather’, and there would definitely be no ‘fray’. Banjo would have been unable to afford his libel insurance and, I suppose these days, Mulga Bill could have sued the bicycle manufacturer. There is no doubt it is now a far more complex world, but how much more complex have we and our institutions made it by our propensity to trip over and sue?

Mr Hockey—Hear, hear!

Mr ANDREN—The huge fallout from September 11 has added to the domestic disaster of the HIH collapse. The crisis of risk, reinsurance and indemnity has filtered down to the most humble of community activities. While the supply of affordable insurance has dramatically contracted, the demand—the requirement for insurance—has not. I fear the national meeting of state and federal government ministers next month will continue to argue the toss about who bears responsibility. Certainly the states are responsible for the handling of claims and the regulation and setting of premiums or capping of claims for certain types of compulsory insurance like workers compensation and third-party motor vehicle insurance.

I am reluctant to argue for anything that reduces a person’s recourse to common law for fair compensation where gross negligence is proven. A simple blanket capping of payments could result in unfair compensation and a shifting of costs to the public health system—which it can ill afford—but it is galling that a compensation for loss of eyesight, for example, through another’s negligence could be capped while, as recently demonstrated, compensation for someone receiving the cane at school 25 years ago can reach some $3 million, whether it is overturned on appeal or not. These are the illogical anomalies that must be addressed.

State legislation—allowing the legal profession to tout for business with the ‘no win, no pay’ model—must also bear a large slice of the blame for the massive rise in litigation claims and payouts. That alone is a challenge to the legal fraternity on the government benches. Further, legislation like the South Australian or proposed Western Australian volunteer protection acts seem to shift liability to the organisation or group. In the end the groups will still most likely disappear.

Now that the Minister for Small Business and Tourism—and I am glad to see him here—has apparently tempered his earlier enthusiasm for federal responsibility, or had it tempered for him, and while the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer continues to stick with the line that only the states can solve the problem, I remind the government of the expectation out there that there is some national responsibility here. I do not know how we are going to get there, but there should be a model we can find. This is about the survival of the fabric of community and the great Australian tradition of volunteerism, especially in the bush. The government is happy to spend about $482 million on ‘protecting the community’ from the so-called threat of asylum seekers; how about protecting rural and suburban groups from the threat of being premiumed out of existence?

Last September the Prime Minister offered indemnity cover for the aviation industry. Why can’t such a subsidy be extended, in the short term at least, to not-for-profits and volunteer groups? We have a totally unfunded and totally unjustifiable system of federal and state parliamentary super schemes. Why not abandon these and get our funding priorities right by covering public and community risk through a national insurance scheme, perhaps like the New Zealand model? It could be found. Perhaps the Joint Coal Board model established for the New South Wales coal industry by both Commonwealth and state governments, providing workers compensation and liability insurance, might be the model. With broadened constitutional powers, if necessary, this is possible. It is a national problem and it can only be resolved at a national level. If that
requires greater constitutional powers, let us ask the people, for it is their communities that are suffering.

Broadcasting

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY (Dawson) (4.36 p.m.)—Mr Deputy Speaker Jenkins, I have not risen in this parliament to speak before you until now and I therefore take the opportunity to congratulate you on your election.

I would like today to raise the issue of regional broadcasting. Firstly, though, I raise the issue of international broadcasting. It was with great pleasure that last week I went to the ABC launch of ABC Asia Pacific. This was a very exciting event in terms of our relations with our neighbours throughout South-East Asia and also for Australian broadcasting. ABC Asia Pacific is very much the brainchild of the Chairman of the ABC, Donald McDonald, and it was his vision that pushed this forward. He was assisted in this greatly by the foreign minister, Alexander Downer, who championed the cause of this new service and supported the funding, which came largely from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

This is a new satellite service which will provide a uniquely Australian perspective of the region in which we live. There will be news, current affairs, entertainment—Blue Heelers—documentaries and knowledge based programming. As well as that, though, there will be interviews with significant figures throughout South-East Asia.

The footprint of ABC Asia Pacific is enormous. It stretches from Bangladesh in the west to Korea in the north and the Cook Islands in the east. The opportunity to have discussions about the establishment of a new ABC regional news bulletin covering North Queensland from Cairns to Mackay was also part of the evening and I certainly did not miss the opportunity to speak to senior ABC executives about the worth of a television local news bulletin for North Queensland. This is particularly pertinent for those areas where Channel 10 has withdrawn its service, including Townsville.

We each believe, quite rightly, that we come from a unique part of Australia and those of us who live in North Queensland are no exception. But there certainly is a flavour to the north and a small population, and an even lesser number of federal members who represent that part of the north. There is very much a need for a regional television news bulletin to be located in the north. In my home town of Mackay, it would complement the high standard of local news that we get from Channel 7. I would certainly like to see a local television news service, as would most of my constituents stretching from Mackay right up south of Townsville. In fact, with minicams in the future, I would not be surprised if every town has its local television news service, but that is probably a long way in the future.

I would like now to turn to the question of regional radio. There has been a great expansion of radio broadcast services in my electorate of Dawson, particularly in Mackay. In fact, if we had the same per capita criteria applied to Sydney as we have to Mackay, there would be 115 FM radio stations in Sydney. You may think that it is strange that a member from rural and regional Australia is about to complain about having too much of something, but too much of something can sometimes be a bad thing. I notice that the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, the member for North Sydney, is present. I dare say that Sydney would be a lot livelier with 115 FM stations. However, there is a downside to that. The Mackay commercial stations are, in the main, networked and run out of the capital cities and the Gold Coast. Only one local news bulletin is produced by a local commercial station, with the other commercial stations taking syndicated news services from the south. The reality is that this occurs because, as a small provincial city, there is a limited amount of advertising dollars and whereas they were previously spread over a smaller number of commercial radio stations, the advertising dollars now have to be spread over many more stations.

However, we are saved from the almost total commercial homogenisation by ABC Radio North based in Mackay. Were it not for ABC Radio, we would have very little local content on radio. We all know that there are local characters and a local culture,
if you like, in our own areas. The cultures in Townsville, Port Macquarie and Mackay are all entirely different. You have your local characters, local stories and local myths. You even sometimes have different languages. You certainly have different industries and different interests. On local ABC Radio North we have Captain Dan and his talkback show. If you have never been to the Whitsundays, you probably would not know Captain Dan, but we all do. He is most interesting. Syndicated out of Rockhampton we have Frank Wyatt and his program on gardening. Gardening is probably a poor way of describing what Frank Wyatt teaches us. We have learned of interesting ways to contain fruit flies with—dare I say it?—a recipe involving human urine. Now, there is something you don’t get on radio every day! Needless to say, Frank Wyatt and his recipes are absolutely legendary in the north.

We have characters, stories, myths and all sorts of local recipes and it is incredibly important that every community has that. However, I would like to return to why we have so many FM licences in Mackay. My understanding is that it was an experiment by the Australian Broadcasting Authority to test the effect of having an almost unlimited number of licences in the Mackay broadcast area. Regrettably, if this was an experiment, the result has sadly been a failure. We have an excessive number of stations scrambling for a limited advertising dollar.

The reality is that most of those stations have not assumed the local identity. They do not provide a local news service which reflects the interests of the local community. Sadly, in some cases, they are even resorting to subterfuge. Over Christmas, one of the announcers on a station which I will not name said how much they had enjoyed the local Christmas carols the previous night. Well, that was true; they were absolutely terrific. We have some good voices in Mackay, but they do not carry to Townsville; that news broadcaster was in Townsville all that week, all that night—and he is still there. People in Mackay are not silly. That sort of subterfuge trying to present a local flavour does not go over well. I do not entirely blame the radio stations; they have limited revenues because they are sharing the same advertising dollar over a greater number of stations. I am disappointed that they have sacked local people and are syndicating and networking their stations.

The truth is that you need an opportunity for young people to learn about media. We now rely on our community radio stations like Reef FM for training young people. Reef FM has a children’s talkback program. There is a great need to sensibly balance choice in radio stations and for the opportunity for those stations to have sufficient revenue to employ local people and put that real local flavour into the local community. I have to acknowledge 4MK/HOT-FM which are playing their part in providing a local news service, and also ABC Radio North which do an absolutely spectacular job in covering the region. However, we would like to see more of it. So I say to the ABC, ‘Please consider us and include Mackay in a North Queensland television service.’ Congratulations to the ABC on ABC Asia Pacific.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Order! The time for the grievance debate has expired. The debate is interrupted and I put the question:

That grievances be noted.
Question agreed to.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S SPEECH
Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Before I call the member for Indi, I remind the House that this is her first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to her.

Ms PANOPOULOS (Indi) (4.45 p.m.)—In congratulating you on your election, Mr Deputy Speaker, may I say what a great honour and special privilege it is for me to stand here today representing the people of Indi. I have been humbled by the support and affection shown to me by the people of Indi. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to her.
ple of Indi and their concerns will always be my principal priority. It is my task to repay their trust in the years ahead, and it will be by my deeds not my words that I will be judged.

I would like to speak today about the people of the North-East and about the principle which I hold dearest in political life and which I stridently believe should be the guiding light of any Australian government. The principle is the creation, protection and encouragement of individual opportunity. I am a Liberal because I believe in the innate right of the individual to work, strive and succeed without the burden of unnecessary government regulation or intimidation by special interests. I am a Liberal because I believe in the confidence and the ambition of Australians to take care of themselves and those who depend upon them. And I am a Liberal because the function of government is to help create and maintain an environment that allows people to grow and flourish, not drain people’s potential by consigning them to dependence on welfare.

I learnt early on how important it is to speak out against those who would take away people’s freedoms, who challenge the role of the family, and who would make people reliant on government and not on themselves. My greatest inspiration in my life has been my family. My parents left a harsh life on the land in Greece to come to this country and build a family and home of their own, a small business and a secure future. They worked in factories for over 20 years and I can still remember, as a special treat during school holidays, driving with my father to the Vegemite factory to collect my mother at the end of her evening shift. It was hard work and many personal sacrifices which eventually allowed them to open a business of their own while raising their three children. Working next to my parents in the family milk bar when I was young showed me first-hand how hard you need to strive to achieve your goals and often how hard you need to fight to keep what is yours. I am grateful that my parents came to this country and harnessed the opportunities it offered them.

Just as my parents were attracted to Australia by the prospect of a secure family life, so it has been for the people of the North-East over generations and why so many people from across Australia continue to resettle in Indi. The opportunities offered by the North-East are why they have stayed—young families starting out, those attracted to new businesses and new jobs, others on farms, and older Australians looking for a comfortable retirement. What can be said about the people of the North-East is their unfailing determination, their initiative, their belief in the power of community and their ideal of helping one another. It is the truest form, it is the essence, of the Australian character. It is the defining quality which reflects the very best values of the Australian people. I will stand up for Indi because I share these values. I will be there for the people of my electorate. I will represent those who feel alienated from politics, the political parties and politicians—people who want little from politics and government except to be acknowledged, understood and given a fair go.

Indi is a Federation seat and representation began with the distinguished Sir Isaac Isaacs, who later became the first Australian-born Governor-General. Indi was also represented by a Prime Minister in the colourful figure of Black Jack McEwen. Since Federation, Indi has returned only two Labor members for a combined total of nine years in more than a century. The second of these was Paul Jones, who was catapulted unexpectedly to Canberra in the election of 1928 unopposed when the Country Party member Robert Cook mistook the closing hour of nominations. The Border Morning Mail of 20 October 1928 noted:

Those who were present at the close of nominations were astonished and amazed to learn that the seat had been lost by a simple omission. I do not intend to follow Mr Cook’s lead. Nor will I ever regard any future election result as a foregone conclusion. Indi has now had continuous Liberal representation since 1977, and I am grateful to Ewen Cameron, who began our current period of representation. Ewen was much valued and loved not only as a local member but also by his parliamentary colleagues, many of whom are
still serving in this House. Ewen was the first member for Indi to voluntarily retire from the seat, and Lou Lieberman followed his example. I hope that I will be the third.

I am fortunate to have the most stunning electorate in Australia. It is bound by Euroa and the Victorian Alps in the south, and the Murray River in the north, stretching from Corryong to Yarrawonga. In Indi we are the custodians of great Australian legends. You can walk Ned Kelly’s last steps at Glenrowan, follow his trail across the North-East, pay homage to the Weary Dunlop memorial in the Benalla Rose Gardens, or visit Jack Riley’s resting place at Corryong. For those in the House who are unaware, Riley was the inspiration for Banjo Paterson’s Man From Snowy River. Nobody embodies the sentiment of service to others like Weary Dunlop, born in Wangaratta and raised in Benalla. It was not only in the hellish conditions of war that he seized the opportunity to care and look after others. He also made compassion and welfare for ex-prisoners of war his lifelong calling. Like Weary, the people of Indi have recognised the importance of using initiative and creating opportunities. Through their determination, they have made the region economically successful and diverse. Whether you are looking for Whiskas cat food, Australian-made ammunition, army camouflage, Brown Brothers Pinot Grigio, or Milawa cheese, you can be sure it comes from Indi.

We also contribute our share of timber, tobacco, thoroughbred horses and fruit. For those with a taste for the arts and the good life, you can join 35,000 other Australians on Melbourne Cup weekend and enjoy Australia’s foremost and internationally recognised jazz festival in Wangaratta, and follow up with a visit to one of our many award-winning wineries and gourmet eateries.

The people of the North-East are known for their personal enterprise. In the real world, it is not government which is driving the economy and job growth, or increasing the living standards of Australian families. Good government can create the conditions which allow this to occur, but it is the guts and determination of individuals in small and medium sized businesses who capitalise on the opportunities presented to them. A recent and stunning example of personal enterprise at its best is in the family business, Rice Graphic Images, based in Wodonga. Among many other commercial successes, they took on a job that no-one in Melbourne could do, and that was to paint the three-dimensional Channel 7 logo that now sits at the front of Colonial Stadium in Melbourne. They have also tendered for and won major contracts with Patrick Stevedores and Origin Energy.

For me, and many other Australians, there is no such thing as government enterprise or private enterprise. There is only individual enterprise. Living proof can be found in Bernie Smith, watchmaker extraordinaire from Tallangatta. Together with a mathematician friend, he took on a project which had been shelved by the CSIRO—and developed a turbulent flow measurement probe that is now used for research in universities around Australia, as well as at NASA.

From the beginning, the people of the North-East have had to be innovative. They have found opportunity in adversity, and have shown leadership in the creation of local solutions to nationwide challenges. The development of the first Australian breed of cattle, the Murray Grey, arose from the drought of 1902, which forced the Sutherland family of Tholongolong in the Upper Murray to introduce new stock, amongst which there was an almost white cow. Breeding with an Angus bull produced mulberry calves. The Sutherlands and later the Gadds further promoted what became known as the Murray Grey. This breed is, among other things, valued for its marbled meat quality, making it a highly successful export into Asian markets.

I wish to take this opportunity to present a number of goals I wish to help the people of Indi achieve. There are a number of key issues upon which my constituents are entitled to expect action from me and the government. Most importantly, they deserve national and economic security for themselves and their children. Equally, they deserve a basic level of services on par with those in capital cities. The need is particularly felt in the smaller towns and hamlets of Indi. These communities will only survive if govern-
ments make a conscious decision to ensure that they do. I do not speak of protecting and preserving a critical part of Australian life for sentimental reasons. Nor is it a call for social welfare and government funded survival. Rather, I am talking about consistency and equality of opportunity. The spirit and character which pervades these towns and hamlets is what has built Australia.

It is so easy for bureaucrats to uncaringly pull the plug on services and amenities which are critical to the region’s survival, simply in the name of efficiency. The people of Indi, whether they live in towns or in isolated communities, do not want special attention; they simply want the same basic facilities that are taken for granted in metropolitan Australia. Today, this means straightforward services like a phone that works—and I think we are all aware of the tragedy which occurred recently in my electorate. The requirements of the people of Indi also include a real teller across the counter, decent schools, safe roads and reliable country medical services. In this House, we also need to be focused on tomorrow’s challenges, such as broadband information services to schools and homes, regardless of location.

Of great importance, particularly to my South Australian colleagues, is the great environmental contribution that the North-East makes, not only by providing 38 per cent of the total water supply to the Murray Darling Basin but also by having the highest readings of nutrients and turbidity, making it vital to the health of the Murray River. What we need is a focus on the sources of water degradation rather than solely on its treatment. I call on members of this House to look beyond their local and state interests and beyond the short term, to support genuine national solutions which protect the opportunities of future generations. If we look to common interests, then this House can genuinely represent the Australian people—and I will personally give my commitment here today to that aim.

I am excited to be living through a period of significant change in the political landscape—a landscape that has given a voice to mainstream Australia. For too long, many politicians had been unduly influenced by so-called opinion leaders in our society, who consider they know best about Australia’s future, and for whom the election process is merely an appendix. That attitude, I am happy to say, seems to be declining everywhere. New and powerful tides of opinion have emerged all over the country. Parties old and new have sought to respond to them. The national electorate has found a new confidence and willingness to speak out. Long may their voice be heard.

The extent of this change is enormous, and would not have been possible without the leadership of the Prime Minister, who has made good the trust the Australian people have placed in him. I am proud to stand in this House as a member of the Howard government, which has as its core belief the value of standing up for individuals and individual opportunity rather than bowing to sectional interests. John Howard’s success, and that of the Liberal Party in recent years, is a vindication of belief in everyday, working Australian people, not cosy deals to appease groups who dwell on the fringes.

In contributing to the legislative process in this House, it is my responsibility and promise to be guided by the people of Indi and not seek acclaim from self-appointed arbiters of the public interest, who invariably reside within a chauffeur driven ride of the Sydney or Melbourne CBD. I will endeavour to ensure that the sovereignty of the Australian people is strengthened and not eroded. We should make our own decisions about our own country and judge carefully those who offer the nonsensical proposition that Australia is anything other than a fundamentally decent, open and generous nation.

Like many of the people I talk to in Indi, I am concerned about the extent to which we Australians allow our thoughts to be channelled to negativity and self-criticism regarding our nation. Although I have been active in politics all my adult life, I would not have taken the decision to run for parliament, and dedicate a significant part of my life to serving the constituents of Indi and Australia, had I not believed it was possible to succeed in the fight for the things in which I believe.
One of those fights, which for me began in my time at Melbourne University, is the fight for freedom of and freedom from association. Whether they be student unions or trade unions, they must earn the subscription of each and every member and not arrogantly disregard the need to prove their worth. The issue here is not the merits or otherwise of the organisation but whether a person’s freedom of choice is a right or an optional extra. I look forward to continuing the pursuit of individual freedom as a member of this House.

In a democracy it is not possible, of course, to win 100 per cent of the time. What is important is to never ever give up fighting for your beliefs, no matter what attacks may come your way. Up until 6 November 1999, it had been my fervent hope that the muted voice of the majority of Australians could impact government policy and the structure of our institutions. With the result of the last constitutional referendum, my hope was realised in the most striking way. My solemn promise to the people of Indi is that I will stand up for them and their way of life, just as I have stood up for these other issues over the years.

This being my maiden speech, there are a number of people whose inspiration and support I would like to acknowledge here today. I have noticed in my brief experience of public life that intellectual honesty and independent thought can be a rare commodity. Sir Harry Gibbs, Dr Colin Howard and Sir David Smith are men whose intellectual ability and integrity have not only inspired me but have proven that not all public figures succumb to petty vanities driven by deprivation of the spotlight. As a relatively young Australian, I am grateful for the hope that they have given me.

I thank my family for their unconditional love, support and wisdom. To my mother, I particularly thank you for living your life according to your Christian beliefs. Your strength of character has been an example to me and an inspiration to look beyond the hollowness of material possessions and to focus on what is right rather than what is easy or fashionable. I thank my father for his rugged individualism and for teaching me to disregard the urgings of the mob and to think and act according to my conscience.

I am pleased to have in the gallery my former boss, Senator Rod Kemp, and many friends from across Australia. For over 15 years you have given me wise advice, assistance beyond the call of friendship and, in difficult times, the ongoing encouragement and loyalty that is so uncommon in politics. I particularly want to thank four people who have been there from the very beginning: Susan Bruce, Gerry Wheeler, Les Timar and Alastair Furnival. To my local Liberal Party branch members and supporters, some of whom are also in the gallery today, I thank you for choosing me as your standard-bearer and for slogging away with limited resources for over a year on a very difficult campaign. I miss the camaraderie of that struggle, but the next campaign is less than three short years away.

Without people like you, bound together in the belief that the Liberal Party represents the values and hopes of mainstream Australians, our party would lack vibrancy and soul. I will not forget that the Liberal Party belongs not to the officials and to the elected representatives but to each and every member who makes a sacrifice for the cause. And finally I want to reiterate my gratitude to the people of Indi. I will not squander the opportunity you have afforded me. I promise to be your strong voice in Canberra.

Mr SWAN (Lilley) (5.04 p.m.)—I add my congratulations to the member for Indi on her maiden speech. I would like to begin by thanking the people of Lilley for the privilege of representing them for a further three years. Working hard with and in our local community is the most enjoyable part of my representative role.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr SWAN—It was pretty close for you too, Minister. In the very difficult circumstances of this federal election, it was gratifying to have received a two per cent primary swing as a sitting Labor member. I would like to thank all of those who sent me their best wishes during my recent illness. The support from all quarters, from people in
the street and from people in this House—from both sides, from the former Leader of the Opposition and the now Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister—was gratefully appreciated. Politics can be an antagonistic business from time to time, and that comradeship was certainly greatly appreciated by me.

I believe that we have an approach in Lilley that sets the standard for engagement between people and the parliament. Locally, our focus on community building has ensured broad community support. During the recent campaign many people in Lilley had a concern about border security, but they remained supporting Labor because they were engaged locally on bread and butter domestic issues—family living standards, aged care and health care. They knew that Labor had strong policies to protect our borders through border security, particularly our plans for a coastguard. To those who brand as racists people worried about national security post September 11 and worried about queue jumping I say they are not; they are Australians who are worried about the future and frequently under financial pressure from the policies of the Howard government. That is why, when the 214th boat came along, John Howard stopped it to distract attention from those issues to the fore in Lilley—jobs, health, education and living standards.

As a federal member, my challenge has been to discuss these issues in the local context. Issues, like a concern about the price of groceries are at the heart of family living standards. The Lilley price watch, run by a team of dedicated volunteers led by Bernie Kingston, responds directly to these concerns by forcing supermarkets to think twice before they raise their prices. For example, the price watch team’s latest survey shows that, over a six-month period, the price of bread rose from an average $2.56 for a 700-gram white loaf to $2.75, which is a 6.6 per cent increase. Over a three-month period, a 420-gram tin of baked beans rose from an average price of $1.09 to $1.14—a 4.6 per cent price rise. In three months, margarine rose from an average price of $1.99 to $2.23, which represents an average price rise of 10.7 per cent.

Regular price watch bulletins that detail these price increases help people to shop wisely, but they also spark dialogue between our constituents, our volunteers and their member of parliament. Frequently, ministers in this government, including the minister opposite, have come into this House and rubbished the results that I have produced in price watch. But I think that actually shows an indifference to the concerns of average people in our communities—inference to the pressures they face and the squeeze on their living standards. The truth is that the Howard government is more concerned with the share market than it is with the supermarket. Our annual ‘welcoming the babies’ ceremony is about recognising and supporting the contribution of parents who have brought a child into the community. It is a way of linking new parents to local services and of identifying gaps in service provision.

Also in Lilley we ran a strong grassroots campaign to save jobs at the local cannery, to get the government to stop discriminating against cooperatives and to stop cheap, unfair imports coming into the country and wiping out our pineapple farmers and the processors. We focused on local aged care issues, with the local community getting behind our push for more and better quality care. The Lilley community has responded to the efforts of our troops in East Timor and to the tragedy last year in New York, with cards and letters of goodwill. Each year, the Lilley Australia Day awards honour and celebrate the contributions made by many local volunteers, with some 64 people receiving awards this year. So, in Lilley, we have worked at ways to strengthen the common bonds between individuals and families who live in close proximity. To my way of thinking, this local community engagement provides a pointer for the regeneration of politics at the national level, because, in the end, all politics is local—it is about families, it is about streets, it is about schools and it is about towns. People are yearning for bottom-up politics. They do want politics to be family centred and they want it to be in their community.

By any measure, I think it is fair to say that the recent federal election was a bitter
one. The current discomfort of the government is the by-product of its manipulation of the Australian people for its own gain. Essentially, if you wanted to sum up the debate of the last week, it would be that the Howard government has put its own interests before the national interests and its own good ahead of the common good. During the next six months, we will ensure that the government is held accountable for its actions during this recent period, because I think it is fair to say that the government did engage in a monumental deception of the people on the boat people issue. The public are entitled to have some faith in their government and its institutions. I think the recent revelations indicate that that faith has been shattered.

I take issue with those few in the media and elsewhere who seek somehow to sheet home to the Labor Party some of the blame for what the government has done. Labor supported with sensible policies the call to address border security. We did not support the extreme solutions of the government as laid out in the initial version of their border protection legislation. Indeed, we voted it down. I note that some people are saying that it is Labor's fault that the government's deception in using doctored photos to support the lie that children were thrown overboard was not uncovered before 10 November, which is an extraordinary thing to say. I believe we were entitled to presume that the government would not misuse the organs of state, as the former Leader of the Opposition said so eloquently this morning, particularly our military, to win an election. To my mind, accusing Labor on this issue is somewhat akin to blaming the Democrats for the Watergate scandal.

What is important is taking stock of this terrible episode and noting that behind all this is what I call the 'arrogance of power'. The arrogance of power sits there as the substitute for this government's third-term agenda. What we have is a massive cover-up on a similar scale to that of the Watergate affair. Why has this occurred? Because what the government wanted to do during the campaign and prior to it was to portray asylum seekers as terrorists—terrorists who would do anything that they possibly could to enter this country. The government were seeking to exploit the mood post September 11. They knew that, if they could successfully exploit that mood, they would stop the ALP from winning the election on the issues of health, education and living standards.

To that end, the government was prepared to go to any lengths. I noticed that the Prime Minister said on a Sunday program that he was so open and transparent on this matter that he released the video in the last three days of the campaign. He released the video in the last three days of the campaign precisely to fan the issue and to lock the ALP out of the campaign, particularly on health, education and living standards. That is why the Prime Minister, for example, released the story to the Courier-Mail on the final Tuesday-Wednesday, saying that he had definite intelligence proof that there were terrorists on the boats, when there was no such intelligence proof. This was part of the orchestrated campaign. What it really says about the Howard government is something that we knew all along, something that we debated at length in the previous three years. It is something that was summed up by Shane Stone in his famous 'mean and tricky' memo: 'mean and tricky and out of touch with average people'. Because the government had previously been so mean and tricky and because it had so punished the living standards of so many average Australians, it had to go to these lengths to create the distraction—the arrogance of power.

The fact is that you do not have to throw the truth overboard if you want to stand up for Australia. That is why the debate we are having in this House is so important, because the government did throw the truth overboard to mount its election campaign and in a desperate attempt to hang on. All of that is about avoiding those issues that it did not want to face up to in the campaign. Issues like the deception that goes to the heart of the GST—never, ever a GST from the Prime Minister; the deception that goes to the heart of what it said about a savings bonus—remember all the pensioners were to be given a thousand dollars, and so on. All the family
payments were going to increase substantially, but it did not talk about its family debt trap.

These were all the issues that the government was desperate to cover up—the savage attack on the living standards of average Australian families. Household debts have increased by 86 per cent since 1996. Households are now paying around $100 more each month on interest payments on debts. One-third of all Australian workers now work more than 49 hours per week—the second-highest rate of long working hours in the developed world. The proportion of employees working on weekends has increased from 35 per cent to 40 per cent. There are 134,000 more children who are now living in poverty. More children are now being raised in jobless families. The number of children who live in the working poor families has increased by 40 per cent. Families who have taken out private health insurance were promised by the Prime Minister that the government would make it more affordable, now they face premium increases of up to 15 per cent—a $200 increase in yearly fees.

Children whose parents cannot afford up-front first-year university fees are jumping the queue by taking HECS places in their second year, and so on. Six hundred thousand families have incurred family payment debts and 200,000 will have to pay $750 on average back to the government because of the debt trap built into the family payment system. So the government’s treatment of average families is simply one which has put substantial pressure on their living standards. When the government confronted this during the election campaign, they hid from it and they refused to send out in October the letters that were going to those 200,000 families. Those letters are just hitting now. This is part of the pattern of deception that started with the GST and the false promises that were made—the pattern of deception that started with the lack of compensation in the family payment system. So what you are seeing is the underlying trait of the Howard government—mean and tricky.

These are things which come home to me on a daily basis when I move around my electorate. For example, the government has failed to acknowledge or act on difficulties for families with children who are deaf or who have hearing impairments and require hearing aids. I recently met Sally Miller, who is President of the Committee for Hearing Impaired Children, a group based in my electorate. This group is concerned, as I am, about the government’s failure to assist adult children with hearing impairments. The committee is rightly concerned that, once a young person reaches the age of 21, they must pay around $2,000 to $3,000 every time they need to replace their hearing aids. This is a prohibitive amount. I believe we should have a means tested system that ensures that young people who cannot afford to pay this kind of money are not disadvantaged.

A related issue is the government’s decision to allow private health insurers to exclude the replacement of cochlear implants from this month. This means that a family like the Roe family who live in my electorate and have been to see me will not be covered for the cost of replacing their daughter’s implant when this becomes necessary. Members around this House will have numerous examples like this.

Then of course there is the debacle of the government’s incompetent handling of public liability insurance. This is a disaster in the community. It did not just happen this year; it has been brewing over the last 12 months. The backdrop of it has been the government’s incompetent handling of the whole HIH issue, insurance and so on. But when you read the Governor-General’s speech, there is no mention of the word ‘insurance’. It is not mentioned once in the Governor-General’s speech, despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of not-for-profit and community organisations out there are going to the wall over this issue.

Recently, I attended a public meeting at the Anglican Church Hall in Banyo to discuss the impact of this with 30 local clubs, sporting groups, community organisations and volunteer groups. At that meeting, convened by Ron Virgin from the Banyo RSL, there was a local swimming coach. Admittedly, she was working as a coach for profit. She was also working for not-for-profit organisations. She was faced with an increase
in premiums of 540 per cent to teach young Australians to swim. So the future of hundreds of local not-for-profit organisations and clubs, those who work with them and many small businesses are under threat from increased public liability insurance and these organisations will close as a result.

A recent survey by the Queensland Council of Social Services found that 30 per cent of community organisations which responded had premium increases that were greater than 100 per cent. In 85 per cent of cases, the affected premiums were public liability policies. This is a disaster. The government’s response is to have two ministers publicly fighting about what they will not do, rather than the government biting the bullet and coming in and working with the states to get a national solution. Contrary to what was said in this House by one minister the other day, this problem cannot be solved at just the state level; it requires concerted national action.

We have the continuing obscene behaviour of the banks across the board, which the Howard government claps and applauds. All of the big banks have now got big flashing neon signs outside saying: low income earners, go away. We have the recent decision by the Commonwealth Bank to put up the account keeping fee—something that has been rejected time and time again by every inquiry into banking fees. They put up the basic amount of an account keeping fee to punish low income earners in the banking system. But that is okay, because this is a government for the top end of town; it is not out there for average people.

We have the debacle that is occurring in all of our areas with bulk-billing. It is not just the banking services that are being withdrawn, it is also the bulk-billing services, and it is happening at a rapid pace. We are witnessing the consequences of the underfunding of our public health system. This means that families, the elderly and people who can ill-afford the cost of paying more to see a GP are being forced to hunt down bulk-billing services, if they can get them. A family with three children—one or two of them are asthmatic, another has the flu; and they make a couple of visits to the doctor over the weekend—would be cactus. What is actually happening to those families is that they are not going to the doctor. You wonder what the consequences of that are down the track for expenditure in the health system, but particularly the human impact of that on our families.

This brings me to the question of alienation from politics across the political system. I think there is no doubt that by any standard this parliament has fallen into disrepute. The Australian people rate politicians lower than just about any profession—I will not mention the others, but they rate us fairly low. We have to do something about ourselves. If the public think there is a problem with us, let us not blame the public; let us actually get out there and do something ourselves. They are sick and tired of seeing what they regard as the pack of shrieking monkeys climbing the walls of their cages as an excuse for question time. They do not want to see it any more and we can do something about it. I have been encouraged by what the government have had to say about this matter when we have raised it with them. I am really hopeful that we can break the gridlock of partisanship in the area of parliamentary reform so that we can do something to lift the standard of the parliament—not the parties; the parliament—and do something about reconnecting with people. As we have said, this will rely on an independent Speaker, not just a change in standing orders, because the problem is that you have to have an independent umpire.

Anyone who is a sports fan in this country knows that you have to have an independent umpire. We might think the West Indian umpires too often give LBW decisions, but no one believes they will be one-sided if they are officiating between Australia and New Zealand—that is the basic point. The public understand that but we do not, and that is why it is absolutely critical to do something about the umpire as well as to do something about the rules of engagement. Sure, we could make it more like one-day cricket than a test match—that is fine, but that is not going to work unless we do something about the umpires. I look forward to continuing productive discussions with the government
in doing something about reinforcing the overall credibility and standing of this place in the eyes of the people.

We need a change of approach in this country. What has disturbed me so much about what has occurred in recent times is that so much of what happens in our communities is the politics of blame. So much is all about the individual and not about the collective. Recently there was a feature article in the Courier-Mail written by a professor of history at the University of Queensland, Dr Joseph Siracusa, in which he talked about the ‘death of humanities’. The death of humanities is symptomatic of what I would regard as a moral decline in our community. We are moving away from talk about goals and moral outcomes. We are so attached to processes, to how we get there, that we have lost sight of why we are going there. I believe that we need a much wider public debate about why we are here and what we are doing here. I believe that we as a community need to assert the growing importance of working together, not pulling apart. What I regard as being so reprehensible about recent political events in this country is that everything seems to be heading in the other direction.

That is a debate, I freely admit, that this side of politics has clearly lost, but it will not stop us from continuing to argue the case. If we want to be a cohesive society in the 21st century, we cannot continue to go down this road. We cannot continue to go down the road of running down our public health systems. We cannot continue to go down the road of running down our public education systems. We cannot continue to go down the road of sneering at people who are less fortunate than us. What is most disturbing about the political tactics of recent times is that every time the government get into trouble they are out there saying, ‘It’s all the fault of the dole bludgers, it is all the fault of the migrants, it is all the fault of the refugees. If you have resentment, don’t look above us. The people above us are doing very well; don’t look up there. Don’t look at the impact of the GST on the distribution of income in the community. Don’t look at any of that. Don’t look at the fact that the poor are getting poorer and the richer are getting richer and the middle are getting squeezed. Don’t look at any of that. Take your frustration out on someone less fortunate, more vulnerable, than you. Turn around and blame them.’ That is not the way to build a country in the 21st century, and that is why we need to reassert the value of community.

I thank my wife, Kim, and my family for their unfailing support. I also thank my dedicated office staff and the volunteers who come to my office. Thank you, too, to Beryl, who passed away recently. *(Time expired)*

**Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY** *(Dawson)* *(5.25 p.m.)*—Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, it is the first time that I have spoken in this parliament since you became Deputy Speaker, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election.

What an election result we had. The people of Dawson voted very strongly to support the government—strong leadership and responsible government. We told them what the National Party stood for, and I am pleased to be able to say that the seat of Dawson was won on first preferences. It is very humbling for me to be able to say that every second person that I meet in Dawson actually voted for me.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

**Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY**—It is true.

Mr Hockey—It’s great.

**Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY**—It is a great responsibility to think that people have put that degree of faith in you. It focuses you on ensuring that you deliver for them, that you keep faith with the concerns that they have.

I would like to return to the message in the last election, which was very much about strong leadership and responsible government—those two together. We were fortunate to have strong leadership both from the Prime Minister, John Howard, and from the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson. That positive, strong message really resonated, despite the fact that my opponent ran a very negative campaign—I would say a big lie, but I will touch on that later, because it is regrettably becoming part of the Labor Party’s approach to politics.
On election day it was very interesting to see the issues that people raised as they were going in and out of the polling booths. I stood all day on some of the biggest booths in Mackay. National security was definitely a major concern but, interestingly enough, for young people, people under the age of 30, a major concern was economic security. So many of them said, ‘What are you going to do? Are we going to have a secure future? Are there jobs and opportunities?’ In fact, so enthusiastic was one young man who came to vote—enthusiastic because he had recently used the first home owners grant to buy his first home—that he said, ‘This is such a great government, this is such a good program. Give me those how-to-vote cards; I’m going to stand here all day and hand them out.’ And he did, because he had had a chance. He and his wife had invested in themselves. They were both working, it was their first home, they were responsible, they were going to go out and build a future and they liked the feeling of that. I saw a lot of younger people that day, pushing prams and carrying toddlers, and that was a major issue for them: having a future, being secure, having the opportunity to grow a better future for their children.

That was not just for mainstream Australia. I was very surprised after the election to find two of the indigenous leaders in Dawson saying publicly at a launch that we had for an unrelated matter that their major concern and hope for the future was jobs for young people. Several of them said that for the first time indigenous people in Dawson voted National Party. They knew that there was a treaty offered by the opposition, they knew that there was an apology, they knew that there were all the symbols. But they said that they wanted a future for their children; they wanted low interest rates and jobs. That is a tremendous vote of confidence in our government and certainly in me as member. There is no way in which we can let down those people who have had such tremendous faith in this government.

I would like to make reference now to the Governor-General’s speech for the government’s third term. I thought it was an excellent address. There was no hubris; it was a determined and positive address. It dealt with national security, which is properly going to be pursued by the government. It spoke about our economic and political ties to North and South-East Asia, quite properly. It talked about ‘shared prosperity’, and I thought that that was a most important point—shared prosperity, not just for those in high-growth areas but for those right across the nation.

I would like to share with you some of the results in my own electorate because obviously each of us sees things through the prism of the results in our own electorate. I am pleased to say that tourism in Dawson increased by 50 per cent in January, a very pleasing result after the tragic events of September 11 last year. Much of that is drive-by traffic but we have certainly seen our local tourism in the Whitsundays, and even in Mackay, increase by a tremendous amount. Part of that is due to tourists not travelling overseas. It has been very encouraging. The Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources is at the table. He will be delighted to know that tourism in our area has grown despite the negative effects of last year.

I would like now to turn to sugar. Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, I am sure that in your area, as in mine, sugar is, sadly, not doing as well. The No. 11 spot price in New York shows over the next few months that sugar is going down again. That is just a prediction but it is certainly not a particularly encouraging prediction. The crop is looking better than last year in our area, but we have a fair way to go. However, debt levels are growing. I know of only one young farmer who has broken even in this last season, so it is extremely difficult for farmers and millers and all of those businesses in our area that depend on the sugar industry. Farmers are extremely appreciative of the sugar assistance package and 3,500 were able to access that package. The government showed tremendous regard for farmers when they realised that they were being buffeted by overseas prices, factors beyond their control, a matter which I would now like to turn to.

The New York No. 11 prices are about US$7.6c at the moment, sadly trending down.
Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, prices in Australia last year—and you would remember them as well as I do—were US$5.8c a pound; in the EU, 19c a pound, and in the US, US$21c a pound. It is pretty good if you can get it—and they certainly do. It equates to somebody in Australia earning an average wage of $50,000 but their counterparts in the United States, doing the same job, are earning US$200,000. That is how it compares. Of course, our farmers are not even getting an income at present. They are running at a loss. Again, to compare that, for somebody working in a major city in Australia earning $90,000 a year it would mean that somebody in the United States would be earning US$360,000 a year. You see immediately the differential between the revenue our farmers get and that of their competitors.

Why does this happen? It does not happen because our farmers are less efficient, or that they do not work as hard—they do. Our farmers are amongst the most efficient in the world. The reason it happens is that those countries have treasuries that are prepared to subsidise their farmers. I am not suggesting for one minute that Australia could, or should, do that. But we are up against a tremendous challenge. Over the next five years in the United States the US treasury will pour $US327 billion of subsidies into agriculture. They are increasing that by 20 per cent. Lyall Howard, from the NFF, has written some very strong and well researched articles in the Australian Financial Review on US subsidies. He points out that in the last few years Australia has gone backwards in its sugar quota. As you would know only too well, Mr Deputy Speaker, there is a quota to export sugar to the United States. Ten years ago, it was 850,000 tonnes—because it is at US prices it is quite a valuable quota, although it is very small—but it has been cut back to 85,000 tonnes. It is only 10 per cent now of what it used to be. The National Farmers Federation estimates that if we were to get back to what we had 10 years ago—back to the future, as it were—even with all of the subsidies and the corruption in the world market, it would mean an additional $50,000 on average to Australian farmers per farm.

But the outlook, unfortunately, is even grimmer than that. The trade promotion authority legislation in the United States proposes to exclude certain industries from any free trade agreement. Amongst those industries are the sugar, dairy and steel industries. Not only do we have to face heavily subsidised competitors in the United States and Europe; they are not even going to let us get to the table in the free trade agreement. I have to say that is a bitter blow to the farmers in my area who have waited for many years believing that in time the corrupt world markets, the trade barriers and the subsidies would gradually be whittled down and that, finally, they would have a chance at a truly free and fair market.

Our farmers would naturally be supportive of the benefits from a free trade agreement—of course they would. However, if there is a free trade agreement—that will be very difficult to negotiate and we recognise that—there has to be some commercial result for Australian farmers, including those in the sugar and dairy industries and those industries associated with the steel industry. They cannot be left in the too-hard basket again. There has to be a commercial result, even if that result were to include just going back to what we had 10 years ago. So there are some considerable challenges. For those who say that free trade is the future, yes, it probably is but only if it is truly fair. At present, with the United States talking about free trade on one hand, and doing quite the reverse on the other, it is anything but fair.

I would like now, though, to talk about our area consultative committees in Dawson. They are now under the Deputy Prime Minister’s portfolio—Transport and Regional Services—and they have come a tremendous distance since we came into government in 1996. I well remember finding in 1996 when we came to government that those on the area consultative committee—not so much the volunteers on that committee but those who had been appointed by the Labor Party—spent a good part of their discussions deciding what car would be appropriate for the CEO. They eventually decided on a Statesman. Unfortunately, they were not quite as diligent about deciding what would
be good for development in the electorate. However, we have moved on from there. Our chairman is Colin Meng, a local businessman, and Greg Sutherland, an indigenous man, is our CEO. They are doing a tremendous job. They are taking a new leadership role in uniting the community to achieve real outcomes. As we say now in the ACC: do not come and see us if you want to build a monument or you want a feasibility study or a workshop; we are not interested in that. We are interested in outcomes: real jobs, real private enterprise ventures if we can or community endeavours on the ground. Some of those that the ACC have worked on to date are the River of Dreams project in Mackay, federally funded in part and coming along very well to eventually, we trust, create over 100 jobs. There is a boardwalk and there are cafes right along the river in Mackay, linked with botanic gardens, walks and sporting facilities. The artificial reef project in Mackay is another very successful project that has been federally funded. It has got off the ground. There is an e-commerce training facility in Bowen which will ultimately create over 100 jobs.

But while I am very pleased with the area consultative committee and the progress being made there, I have to say that local achievements do not seem to resonate with the national press. Nobody could ignore the fact that at the moment the alleged 'children overboard' incident is gaining all the press coverage. This is very disappointing. It is, I think, based on the Labor Party's new approach, which hardly brings credit to them. The reality of this is that ministers made statements, as did the Prime Minister, during the election campaign based on bona fide advice given in good faith and acted on in good faith. However, the Labor Party and those in the media now want to make parliamentarians responsible not only for what they knew and what they did and what they said but also for what they did not know, did not do and did not say.

That is a ridiculous standard to set. It is not even a standard. I note that the Leader of the Opposition refers to this as ‘lied, spied and denied’. What the Labor Party are up to is dirt, hurt and divert. That is what they are up to: dirt, hurt and divert. ‘Dirt’: they want to winkle out some little fake responsibility; as I just said, be responsible for something you did not know and did not say. That is the dirt: winking out some false responsibility, as the opposition candidate did in my electorate in the federal election, ‘Hurt’: winking out this nonresponsibility and then throwing it back onto somebody’s reputation. You cannot fault their policies, you cannot fault their performance, so you try to hurt their reputation. If you create enough smoke, you will eventually hurt their reputation. It is the poorest of poor politics. And they want to ‘divert’ from the fact that the ALP lack policies in this area and that they have got dis-sension in their own ranks on how to deal with illegal immigrants and asylum seekers.

In fact, the Labor Party originally did not support the Border Protection Bill. The Labor Party are trying to divert attention from all that. The reality is that were the Labor Party in government—and thank goodness for the commonsense of the Australian people they are not—the Border Protection Bill would have been dumped, the Tampa would have been drawn up at Christmas Island and the rest would be history. The Labor Party are back to their old tricks. I do not see any leaves being turned over or any new approaches. In fact, as I said, I see dirt, hurt and divert. That is what the Labor Party are trying to do: dig out little fake responsibilities, hurt people’s reputations with these fake responsibilities and divert attention from the fact that they have no policies in this area—no policies at all.

Mr Melham interjecting—

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY—The member for Banks is always interesting to argue with. He is blowing kisses across the chamber. I do not know whether that is unparsimonal or not, but it is certainly surprising. But that does not change the fact that this is a very poor approach by the Labor Party and by some in the press who are pursuing the issue. As I said: dirt, hurt and divert. It will not get the Labor Party very far, because 80 per cent of the Australian people are very soundly behind the government’s approach on asylum seekers and illegal immigrants.
I would like to mention one of the other issues presently in the press—this so-called spying on Australians. I understand that this so-called spying was undertaken to find out what those on the *Tampa* were discussing. Bearing in mind they had come into Australian waters against Australian government advice, it would seem to most people in my electorate quite proper. But I want to talk about the Australians that were supposedly spied upon. Just who are these Australians? They are fairly unAustralian: the MUA. Let us have a look at the predecessors of the MUA, the Waterside Workers Federation, and how Australian they were. In March 1943, in opposition to a new gang rotary system that was being introduced by the Stevedoring Industry Commission, members of the Waterside Workers Federation went on a 16-day strike. On 30 March 1943, the Curtin government, frustrated by the delays caused to ships essential to war purposes, ordered that troops be made available to the Stevedoring Industry Commission to keep the ships moving. These Australians that were supposedly spied on were so unAustralian during the Second World War that the government had to order that troops be made available to keep the ships moving for our troops. That is how unAustralian the MUA’s earlier incarnation, the Waterside Workers Federation, was. People in my electorate think that spying on unAustralian people like that is a pretty good idea, regardless of the legal technicalities.

Mr Melham—Pity it’s against the law!

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY—Maybe it is, but so is being unAustralian. Having to get the government to call out troops for supplies for our men serving overseas is pretty un-Australian. That has to be kept in context.

It is great to have a third term for the government. Strong leadership and responsible government are assured again. In my electorate people are very pleased with the strong stance the government has taken.

Mr LATHAM (Werriwa) (5.44 p.m.)—This is quite an extraordinary time in the history of this parliament. All of those involved in the preparation of the Governor-General’s speech to parliament are now tainted by scandal. Never before so soon after an election has the reputation of the Governor-General and his Prime Minister unravelled so quickly. Australia now has a Governor-General who cannot survive. Years of neglect and the ignoring of very serious child abuse allegations within the Anglican Church are catching up with him. Every time a new scandal is exposed, every time a new victim comes forward, the office of the Governor-General is further tainted. I believe that Peter Hollingworth was a shocking appointment in the first place. Australia deserves better from the Queen’s representative as our head of state.

We also deserve a better government than the Howard government. I say that for those of us who love democracy the manipulation and deceit of the ‘children overboard’ scandal has been a shocking experience. This is the worst abuse of the democratic process by a Liberal leader in a quarter of a century. Just as the Fraser government was illegitimate after its election in 1975, so too the Howard government is illegitimate after its election in 2001. This government won the last election on a falsehood. It won the last election on an act of deceit. It effectively won the last election and occupies the Treasury benches in this parliament on the politics of the big lie. The truth will come out—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—I remind the member for Werriwa that that is unparliamentary. He cannot refer to either political parties or individuals as being liars in this chamber.

Mr LATHAM—If it pleases you, I will withdraw. The truth, though, will come out because the Prime Minister’s defence is so fantastic that it cannot be believed. The Prime Minister’s defence in effect is to say that he is only the Prime Minister. His department knew, we found out today that his office knew, the defence department knew and the defence minister knew from 10 October onwards that the children overboard story was a fabrication. The only one who
did not know was the Prime Minister, along with his minister for immigration. His defence in effect is to say that he is only the Prime Minister: he did not know.

Coincidentally, and it is a nice coincidence, this is also the defence of the Governor-General with his problems. In relation to those matters, the school principals knew, the parish priest knew and the lawyers for the Anglican Church knew. The only one who did not know was the Archbishop. His defence is to say that he was only the Archbishop. He did not know.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I remind the member for Werriwa of standing order 74, which he should observe.

Mr LATHAM—I also point out that the Prime Minister has been lecturing this parliament on family values for 28 years. Today, his reputation for family values lies in tatters. He has appointed as Governor-General someone who failed to act on child abuse allegations. He appointed as immigration minister someone who on 7 October accused other parents of throwing their children overboard without having any concrete evidence that this was in fact the case.

All members of this House, particularly the previous speaker, the member for Dawson, should read the reports into the 'children overboard' scandal. If they read those reports they will find this: Minister Ruddock acted on fifth hand information. Within a few hours of being told on fifth hand information of this alleged incident, he was out running it through a press conference as if it was fact. It was a rumour and nothing more than a rumour. It was a Chinese whisper that passed through five other people before it got to the minister. He was prepared, on fifth hand information—on a rumour; on a Chinese whisper—to level these serious allegations against the parents on that particular boat. He had no documentary proof; he had no defence intelligence report; he had no checking process in place. In fact, he had no due process to establish the facts. This was an outrageous act by this particular minister.

In fact, he acted so quickly—on a telephone call from his departmental head—and he acted so recklessly on this preliminary oral advice that it is now clear that he wanted the allegations to be true. He was not interested in the facts; he wanted these allegations to be true so he could make political capital out of them and so he could add to the controversy surrounding asylum seekers in the election campaign. In effect, the truth was thrown overboard in the minister’s desperate scramble to add to the asylum seeker controversy.

It has now been established that no children were thrown overboard, yet the government refuses to apologise to the parents who were so badly slandered on 7 October. I do not know the names of these parents; I do not even know their exact location today. But I do know that as parents who would love their children they are owed by this government an apology. They have been slandered on the Australian public record for the past four months and I put it to the Prime Minister and the minister for immigration, both of whom are parents, that if someone said to them without facts, without checking and without proof that they tried to bring harm to their children, how would they feel? How would they feel about it as parents? That is what they have done to these particular parents. They are treating them in the public debate as if they are objects; as if they are cardboard cut-outs bouncing on the hull of a boat. In fact, they are parents. They are real people; they are human beings with children, with feelings and with the right to have an apology from this government.

I ask the Prime Minister and Minister Ruddock to reconsider their failure to apologise. I ask them to put themselves in the shoes of these parents and see how they would feel. If I were to stand here today without proof, without evidence and without checking and say, ‘The Prime Minister tried to cause harm to his children,’ it would be regarded as an outrage. There would be motions of condemnation—rightly so—against me. It would be a public scandal of the first order because I had tried to slander a parent without proof. They have done exactly the same to these asylum seeker parents. They are not cardboard cut-outs; they are not objects in a political debate; they are not pawns in a political game. They are real parents.
who undoubtedly care for their children and are trying to act in the best interests of their families. The government should apologise to these parents and treat them as it would other parents in our community. There is no point in the Prime Minister lecturing us about family values unless he is prepared to apologise to these particular families.

What started out as a debate about the integrity of our borders is now very much a debate about the integrity of our government. For Minister Ruddock oral advice was good enough to spread rumours and to spread slander against these particular parents, yet for Minister Reith clear oral advice was not enough for him to confess publicly prior to the election that the children overboard story was a fabrication. This is a stunning double standard. It is good enough for Minister Ruddock to use oral advice to spread the rumour, to further the Chinese whisper and to slander these parents, but it is not good enough for Minister Reith to use clearer and more definite oral advice to correct the public error, to correct the mistake and to correct the fabrication that was put around this nation on 7 October. This simply confirms Churchill’s observation that a rumour in politics can race halfway around the world while the truth is still putting its pants on. How true it is with this government. This is a government with its pants well and truly down—a government that has been caught with its pants well and truly down. It is a mean and tricky government. The prediction of Shane Stone has been confirmed: a mean and tricky government, an illegitimate government which has no right to govern this nation.

The government claims to have protected the integrity of our national borders. In fact, in the process it has destroyed the integrity of many of our great national institutions. It has destroyed the integrity of truth in our national life; it has destroyed the integrity of the democratic process that we should hold dear; it has destroyed the important principle and integrity of an independent public service; it has destroyed the integrity of the defence forces; and it has gone a long way, unhappily—tragically—to destroying the integrity of Australian politics itself. In the process the government has destroyed its own legitimacy. It has always been the claim of conservatives in this place, going back more than a century, to defend our national institutions. On this side of the parliament we are always lectured to. We are always told, ‘Only the conservatives can do it; when it comes to defending national institutions, only the conservatives can do it properly.’ This has been one of their longstanding claims against the ALP. Now we find out that in fact this is not a conservative government that is willing to defend our national institutions. All it has been interested in defending is its political hide. It is not a conservative government that is prepared to defend our important national institutions, it is a cheap, nasty, reactionary government which will do anything to stay in power.

This whole controversy has been part of what we call the culture war. It has been a tactic by this government to divide Australia—a political tactic to split the nation in two and then try to pick up the biggest part politically. The government has been looking for issues that divide the electorate—that divide the inner city elites of this nation from the suburban working class. Not only has it found the issues, but the minister for employment, Mr Abbott, has even got a shorthand for it. He calls it the three Rs: reconciliation, the republic and refugees. The government has even got a shorthand for its cheap and tasty political tactic—the three Rs. The government, of course, in this culture war, in this debate about social values, tries to define itself not in a positive way, not by finding solutions for Australians, but by debating its weakest opponents—the likes of Phillip Adams, Ann Summers and Thomas Keneally. It looks to define itself in the negative. That is the way of the reactionary: to define politics in the negative, to debate one’s weakest opponents and to engage in a nasty, divisive form of politics.

This is a flawed strategy. It is flawed for many important reasons. Let me give them to the House. This strategy is based on deceit. We have just found from the recent election campaign that this is a government that cannot be trusted. It used refugees and asylum-seekers as a classic wedge issue. The ‘kids in
the watergate’ scandal has demonstrated the fraud involved. This is a government that cannot be trusted to tell the truth on any issue. It did not tell the truth about something as important as the ‘children overboard’ allegations; it will not tell the truth on any other aspect of wedge politics. When it comes to the next wedge—whether that is multiculturalism, native title or some other divisive issue—this is a government that cannot be believed. I say to the Australian people: beware wedge politics; it is not only divisive but based on the politics of deceit.

The second flaw in this strategy is that it is based on hypocrisy. The Liberal Party is trying to pretend that it opposes the elites, when in fact it is very much part of the elite class in this country. The chief accuser is the member for Warringah, Mr Abbott. He is always racing around saying that he is dead opposed to the elites. He never explains his own elite background, of course. He never tells us about his own history on these matters. I had an interesting email not long ago from one of his schoolmates from the 1970s who has been watching him for close to 25 years. This is what he emailed to me:

Abbott gets away with a lot, being rude about Ross Cameron and Larry Anthony, for starters, in attacking hereditary lords. How does this ex-GPS boy, ex-journalist, ex-apparatchik also get away with attacking elites? About the only honest job he has had is training with that most selfless of elites, the priesthood.

And even that did not work out, as my colleague the member for Banks knows full well. That is something that his mate has said about him. Imagine what we say about the member for Warringah, the minister for employment. That is what one of his schoolmates has to say about the hypocrisy of the man and his political position.

The member for Warringah has made an art form of pretending that the Labor Party is a party of elites. One of his charges is that we have a lot of members who have worked in politics for some considerable time. They have thought enough of public service and public duty to dedicate their lives to it. This, for the member for Warringah, is a charge that he levels against the Labor Party. But in truth it is also a charge he is levelling against himself, because he worked as a staffer for Dr John Hewson for a considerable period of time in the early 1990s. When the member for Warringah describes the Labor Party as an apparatchik class, in fact he is talking about his own side of politics. Let me read out this list of government members who have worked as political staffers: the members for Warringah, Goldstein, Mayo, Sturt, North Sydney, Canning, Flinders, Casey, Paterson, Kooyong, Hume, Parramatta, McPherson, Dunkley, Moncrieff, Moreton, Fairfax, and Blair. The member for Blair winks at me. He knows that he worked as a political staffer for Shane Stone and Joan Sheldon, if my facts are correct. He nods. If I can throw in a few senators to add to that long list of apparatchik members: Senators Minchin, Ferris and Payne. The list grows longer by the moment.

Mr Melham—And the member for Indi.

Mr LATHAM—My colleague the member for Banks has added the member for Indi, who worked for Senator Kemp. Of course, there is one other apparatchik on the government side—in fact, he heads the government—the Prime Minister. He had the worst job of any political staffer in Australian political history. In the 1972 election campaign he tried to save Billy McMahon. This is how the Prime Minister’s biographer, David Bar nett, remembers that memorable campaign:

One responsibility Howard accepted was rolling the manual autocue which was built into McMahon’s podium.

Imagine the sight—the poor Prime Minister rolling the autocue for the hapless Billy McMahon as he tried to avoid an impending loss in the 1972 election campaign. Not just an apparatchik, probably the worst political staffer’s job in the history of Australian politics—rolling the autocue for Billy McMahon, our worst ever Prime Minister.

The other claim by the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, the member for Warringah, is to accuse Labor of coming from political families. He thinks that having a family that takes an interest in public life and public service is some sort of crime. Again, he is exposing his own hypocrisy. This is a claim he could be making against his own side of politics. The famous
coalition political families are numerous. Let me give the family names: Downer, Anthony, Cameron, Ruddock, Kemp, Scott, Katter, Newman, McGauran and the new member for Flinders, Mr Hunt. Of course, it goes back to the origins of the Liberal Party—

Mr Cameron Thompson—Katter? He’s over there.

Mr Latham—Katter was a coalition member here after the 1996 election and his father was a member of this place before him. You are from Queensland, but you do not know your Queensland political history. I am giving the political families in the Howard government post 1996 and the member for Blair is taking an interest in this history. He will recall that the founder of the Liberal Party, Robert Menzies, came from a political family. This is what his wife, Pattie Menzies, had to say in conversation with Gerard Henderson:

They were a very political family. His father was a member of parliament in the state house. His uncle was a member in the state house. So it was in the blood.

Politics was in the blood of the Menzies family, who founded the Liberal Party, but somehow it is a crime if politics is in the blood of Labor families that are trying to do good things on this side of the parliament. The member for Warringah is damned for his hypocrisy and, I would have thought, to his discredit on the other side of House, he would be damned for de facto criticism of his own colleagues.

His third claim is about unionism. He is not only worried about political staffers and political families; he is worried about trade unions on this side of the House. The trade unionist who did best out of the last federal election was the member for Bradfield, the new Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Nelson. In his former life he was head of Australia’s most powerful and militant trade union—the Australian Medical Association. If trade unionism is such a bad thing, do not reward the former President of the AMA, Dr Nelson.

The elite party in this parliament is the Liberal Party. You only have to look at the history of the member for Warringah himself. Just last week he defended the use of the defence establishment in this country to spy on other Australians. What an elite action—to defend the actions of the defence department, to defend this government’s decision to spy on other Australians. He was also eulogising Princess Margaret just last week in the House based on the idea that the royal family is born to rule. This is elitism on steroids! He is in favour of the royal family because it is born to rule. He should have read the speech of his own Prime Minister in the same condolence debate. This is what the Prime Minister said about Princess Margaret:

She was a member of the royal family who had a very close identification with the world of entertainment and the film industry and many of the great stars of not only the United Kingdom but Hollywood as well.

The elite writ large. These are the elites that you condemn in another context. Eulogise them one moment in the parliament and condemn them the next. This is the hypocrisy of the Howard government. This sort of elitism from the member for Warringah brings back the memory of the speech he wrote for John Hewson in 1992, where he said:

In any street, of course, it is always easier to tell the rented houses. The lawn isn’t mowed, the plants aren’t watered and the fences aren’t fixed.

Talk about elitism out of control—he is paying out on public housing tenants. This is the strange half world in which the member for Warringah lives. He is the son of a medical specialist on Sydney’s North Shore; he is the product of a GPS and Oxford education; he is a former journalist and political staffer; he is the one who believes that the royal family is born to rule; he is the one who calls the unemployed ‘job snobs’; he is the one who refuses to live within cooee of a working-class area; he is the one who pays out on public housing tenants; yet, in this strange half world, it is the unionists, the ‘houseos’ and the working class of the Labor Party who are the elites. No wonder they call him ‘the mad monk’! This is a strange half world of hypocrisy and cant, which exposes the deceit of wedge politics and the so-called culture war.

The problem with the member for Warringah is that all the influences in his political
life have been negative. He is a protege of BA Santamaria, the only person in Australian political history who spent his adult life campaigning against both Marxism and market forces. The member for Warringah's first political party was the DLP, the party that only existed for negative anti-Labor purpose. When the DLP folded, he joined the Liberals—not for any positive or constructive reason but because they were anti-union and anti-Labor. No wonder the member for Warringah has become one of the new reactionaries of Australian politics. He can tell us what he opposes—the three Rs—but never what he favours. This cultural war, this wedge politics, is plain wrong, and the member for Warringah is a plain hypocrite. (Time expired)

Miss Jackie Kelly—I rise on a point of order. I would ask him to withdraw his last words calling member for Warringah a hypocrite.

Mr Latham—I had a compelling case that he is a hypocrite.

Mr Martin Ferguson—That is not unparliamentary.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—In the context in which it was put to the House, I might ask the honourable member for Werriwa to withdraw the final remark unreservedly.

Mr Latham—I had a compelling case but, if it pleases you, I withdraw.

Mr CAMERON THOMPSON (Blair) (6.05 p.m.)—I have a compelling case that I want to put to the House today, but it is not in the realm of political sniping, of which we have seen a lot lately. My electorate, the electorate of Blair, and in particular the southern part of the electorate of Blair around Ipswich, has been under a cloud since 1996—a cloud that has involved politics and that has, fortunately, been slowly lifting. Members can gather what I am referring to. In the context of the issue I want to speak about in this debate, it is something that people in Ipswich will be very glad to see the back of. What I am referring to is an overheated political focus on Ipswich. Over this period since 1996, there have been occasions where Ipswich, in particular, and Blair have at times been the brunt of much unfair criticism and a great deal of hypocritical stereotyping by people across Australia. Given the fact that our community is one of the most cosmopolitan and most accommodating in Australia, it is a terrible shame that over this period we have had to put up with a difficult political environment. It is with great relief that we notice that cloud lifting.

I would like to juxtapose that recent political history in my area and, along the way, say that many local politicians have been working to shrug off any of those unfair stereotypes that were there in the past and their consequences. For example, at times in our area we even suffered reductions in home values and things like that because of unfair stereotyping of Ipswich. Of course, we know that it is a good place to live and our community is the best in Australia.

I want to juxtapose that position against a milestone that occurred on Sunday. I raise the issue in the context of this debate because there has been so much community discussion about the standard of politics and the impact of politics on our community, yet at the same time that we have been talking about that, we have been honouring the work of volunteers. We have been out there honouring the good work of volunteers and we have been saying how important it is for people to be prepared to stand up for their communities and go out there and strike a blow.

The milestone I am referring to is the passing of a lady who has been hailed by some local figures today as, in effect, the Queen of Ipswich. This lady is 86-year-old Hilda des Arts who did more to develop a great sense of camaraderie in our community than anyone else. Certainly, since she became part of our community in 1977 or thereabouts, she has been a driving force in our community and her work. She set a shining example as a community volunteer and activist—I think the Queensland Times refers to her today as a ‘community activist’. Well, community activism takes on a whole new meaning when you experience the kind of activism that Hilda des Arts committed to the community of Ipswich. She was part of the community for that period, and she saw
our local support for one another blossom
and grow—and largely that has happened
because of her contribution.

Members of parliament from time to time
snipe, criticise and produce lengthy speeches
about each other’s foibles and difficulties. They
might like to listen to what the member
for Lilley said earlier about improving stan-
dards in parliament. They should be aware
that it is possible for someone in the com-
munity to make the kind of contribution
made by these volunteers. That contribution
is made in a way that enriches us all and
many members of parliament do that kind of
work. There is no need for us to descend into
heaping scorn on one another when, at the
end of the day, we are working for the good
of our communities.

Flags are at half-mast in Ipswich today
because of the passing of Hilda des Arts. As
a starter, I will recount a couple of things she
did. One of her most recent passions was
SeniorNet. She became known across Aus-
tralia as the cybergrannie because she
embraced the Internet with a fervour such that
few geeks could imagine the kind of uses
that she could foresee for the Internet, for
computers and the kind of impact they could
have in our community. It is interesting that
Hilda went out and did that when computers
were very much alien things to the older set.
However, as someone said earlier, the over-
55 age group is the fastest growing sector of
Net users today. That is a great salute to
Hilda des Arts who has been known across
Australia for expounding the idea of Senior-
Net and the idea that, if you are a mature-
aged Australian, the opportunities that the
Net can open up will enrich your life in ways
that can provide a whole lot of freedoms and
opportunities that you may not have seen
much earlier in your life when the community
would say that you have everything laid
out on a plate. The opportunities of this new
technology are expanding people’s horizons
all the time and it was Hilda des Arts in our
community who was in the vanguard of the
people promoting it.

As I said, Hilda died at the age of 86. As I
also said, she was a community activist and a
social worker. In her last few years, Hilda
was confined to a wheelchair, but ‘confined’
is certainly not the word in her case. She was
as active as a bee in a bottle the whole time
from when she arrived in Australia in 1977.
She worked in our community alongside
politicians, Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs and
every community group you could imagine
to activate community support and a greater
standard of community caring and cross-
cultural awareness. She has campaigned on
all those sorts of issues and, believe you me,
our area has been enriched by that.

For the benefit of people in Ipswich who
did not know a lot about Hilda’s background
prior to her arrival in Ipswich, I have been
speaking to her daughter Monica and I have
been able to pick up some of Hilda’s back-
ground. Hilda was born in 1915 and spent
the first five years of her life in London. She
then went back to Germany, where her fam-
ily hailed from, to school in Naumester.
Later on, she studied sociology at univer-
sities in various cities. Her parents moved into
East Germany before the war. They were
forced to flee from the Russians and found
themselves in Northern Germany at the end
of the war.

Hilda’s maiden name was Clausen and her
parents got money to start a business after
the war. They established a newspaper in the
town of Lech. It started out in a cowshed and
it grew to provide 300 employees with work.
The business is still there today; it is the
Clausen and Bosse book company and, as I
said, at one stage they had over 300 employ-
ees.

Hilda, being the kind of person she is, in
contributing to the management of the family
business built in some amazing social bene-
fits for her workers which were a pointer to
the things she was going to get into in her
later life. They included, for example, run-
nning a kindergarten for all their employees’
children and providing a home in their own
home for the apprentices that were working
in that firm. They provided a wide range of
social services to those workers, and it really
was unique. It definitely defined Hilda des
Arts as caring, and the fact that in a very ef-
ficient German printing works she would go
to that extent to support individual workers
is just a credit to her.
Later on, Hilda moved on from the company because it got so big that eventually they took on other shareholders, and she moved out of that field. She then moved into Hamburg where for two years she was involved in real estate. Sadly, at that point Marion, one of her two daughters—Monica and Marion—died of cancer. Marion was at the time aged 20. That deeply affected Hilda and shortly afterwards she went to Ireland where she was running a hotel. Marion died in 1967 and, according to people in Ipswich who are involved in Lifeline—one of her later passions in Ipswich—that particular event did impact on her. Although the business of running the hotel did not go very well in Ireland, she said that she found over there a kind of social support that she had not experienced before in Germany. Later on when she moved to Ipswich, it was that kind of social caring for her community that Hilda wanted to recreate, and she certainly set about it with gusto.

One of the things that I would like to say about Hilda’s move to Ipswich—it is local folklore and it is fact—is that when Hilda des Arts, who at that time had gone across Europe and wound up in Ireland, decided that she wanted to move out of Europe, she made a list. They say she put it into a computer—I do not know; this would have been 1977 and it would have been a very early computer. She sat down and she figured out all the things that she would want in a community to move to anywhere in the world, and she came up with Ipswich. And she did, because I think our community has got a reputation as a caring community, exactly the kind of community that Hilda would have been seeking, and exactly the kind of community that she wound up having such a huge impression upon.

When she arrived in Ipswich in 1977 she went straight into work at Lifeline. She spent something like 14 or 15 years there and she developed with them work in training volunteers and in assisting them with the administration of Lifeline. She became the actual director of Lifeline in Ipswich. For a time she was also the head telephone counsellor. She did all those kinds of jobs and she did them with great gusto and great enthusiasm.

In the process she also began campaigning for something that was to become in time the Ipswich Hospice. The hospice was a dream that she shared with Rev. Eric Moore, who at that time was in charge of the Uniting Church in that area. That was about 1984. In that year, Hilda was declared Ipswich Citizen of the Year because of the huge impact she had had by developing the idea that we needed a group of volunteers to go into nursing homes to support the local community with palliative care. She encouraged more people to get into it and she wound up with such a large roster of volunteers that the initial idea of providing palliative support to nursing homes blossomed and they were given a health department house in Roderick Street. They took that over and they were running training courses for palliative care workers. They evolved that into the Ipswich Hospice which today has I think six palliative care beds. It provides short-term respite, day respite and in-home care for people in and around the Ipswich area. It also provides long-term palliative care.

The whole idea has also blossomed from there. Hilda also took on providing bereavement support for families in need after the loss of a loved one. They have provided that and you can see what incredible support this has built into our community. As things stand today, largely because of the contribution of Hilda and the people she inspired, the West Moreton district health area, and particularly its palliative care program, is recognised Australia wide for being innovative in the support it provides and for the good service it renders our community.

Hilda is also someone who has a lot of other interests as well. I mentioned her involvement in SeniorNet. She has also been a very strong worker in the multicultural field with the ethnic communities in and around Ipswich—with people like the Aboriginal elders at Purga and other Aboriginal communities in our area and with the Samoan community. Hilda des Arts has worked with them and has been a mentor to them and has assisted them greatly in building a better
community, and we are much enriched by the contribution that she has made.

I would like to make a few points about the comments that have been passed about her in the last day or so. The Mayor of Ipswich, John Nugent, who is no spring chicken, said that he was inspired by Hilda des Arts. He said she was an inspiration to him and others of a mature age that you do not have to take a back seat and that you can choose to be a leader in your community no matter what age you are. Here is a lady at the age of 85 who, until only a month or two ago was in a wheelchair, bouncing around town in a taxi or wherever anyone would take her, at everybody's elbow promoting every conceivable project to provide support to people, to provide opportunities for people to communicate, to provide opportunities for our area to get ahead. She was also involved in things like the Ipswich Regional Development Corporation, of which she is a life member. She was involved in the Chamber of Commerce and she became a life member of that too. She was, as I said, Ipswich Citizen of the Year in 1984, but she went on to receive the Queensland Premier's Award in 1995. From Rotary she received a Paul Harris Fellowship in 1996, and she became the Australian Senior of the Year in 1997.

This is someone who really has contributed a lot, and her passing is a milestone in Ipswich's history. It now rests on us to go on with the kind of work that she has done. In her involvement in the Internet, she also was a big mover and shaker in the early establishment of Global Info-Links, which was a very early Internet service provider, operated by the Ipswich City Council. Our region was again innovative in this and, again, Hilda was in the vanguard of that idea. She went on to be instrumental in Global Arts Link, which has set a new standard in terms of what a regional art gallery can be. This is a venue at which the terracotta warriors are going to be presented in the very near future—and it is in Ipswich! We are tremendously proud of our city and its region. We are proud of the work that Hilda has done and we are proud of the way that we have been enriched by her contribution. Prior to this speech, I had quite a good discussion with her daughter Monica and she said, 'Don't rev her up too much. Hilda was a person, you know. She contributed over all this time, but everyone has their faults.' That is true but, to our area, I think she will go down in history as someone who created an attitude in our area and made it work for everybody. It is something that has tremendous bounce in politics and in the general community. If people could take a leaf out of her book—and I mean particularly people in politics, who have to work with each other for the good of the community—then I am sure we would all be doing very well. The community of Ipswich now has the question before us. We have passed that milestone. Hilda is still there with us somewhere. In Internet terms, it would be Hilda@heaven.net. That is where you would find Hilda today. We want to go on with her work. I am sure everyone in our community wants to see us go on. Issues like SeniorNet have to be pursued. Other issues—good strong community issues—need to be followed through. I thank Hilda des Arts for her contribution. (Time expired)

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman) (6.26 p.m.)—I welcome the opportunity this evening to respond to the government's purported plan for its third term. In doing so, Mr Deputy Speaker Jenkins, I would also like to congratulate you on your re-election as Deputy Speaker. I look forward to the day when you occupy the chair as a Speaker in the independent sense that the Leader of the Opposition has committed the opposition to in recent times.

Having said that, I want to say at the outset that, when I sat listening to the Governor-General's outline of the government's plan for this third term, I became convinced that the real problem was that the government does not have a third-term agenda. But when I think about the events of the last week, I suppose that, like many in the community, I should not have been surprised. I say that because what has become very clear over the last week is that, in the final days and weeks and months of the Howard government's second term, it was not a government consumed with a future policy direction but,
more importantly, with how it could maintain office at whatever cost.

The real conclusion is, as the Leader of the Opposition said last Thursday in moving a censure on the Prime Minister, that we now have a government that was absolutely consumed, beyond the nth degree, not with winning government for a third time on the basis of a third-term agenda or forward plan for Australia in the 21st century, but a government that was more consumed with lying, spying and denying its way into office for a third term.

That is why, in essence, we do not have a third-term agenda. What concerns me more than anything about the way in which they orchestrated their re-election was the extent to which the Liberal Party were so brazenly prepared to exploit incumbency to win office. I am not talking about matters that you sometimes expect from the other side of the House—going to the misuse of parliamentary entitlements and associated issues. I am talking about something more fundamental. I am talking about the challenge they have now made to the integrity of the Public Service, associated agencies, and the expectation in the Australian community that our Australian Public Service is above the political processes. We support the independent Public Service—one that operates on the basis of integrity and honesty. The manner in which this government have so brazenly used the Public Service to lie, spy and rort themselves back into government raises serious questions in the minds of the Australian community.

I also suggest to the House that, in doing so, the government have besmirched the offices they hold and, through their lies, further muddled the credibility of all politicians in the eyes of the Australian community. The Australian public, as we all know, has learned over the last few weeks about the new depths of political quests for power. Those depths were seen in the way the Liberal Party, led by the Prime Minister, John Howard, went out of their way to save their political hides and, in doing so, raised major questions about the integrity and honesty of our Public Service.

That aside, the truth of the matter is that, yes, they are sitting on the treasury bench, albeit perhaps under false pretences, because of the serious questions hanging over their heads as to the legitimacy of the Howard government’s third term. The most important issue is where we go from here, and that is really about a question of a lack of plan, a lack of a third-term agenda.

Sitting suspended from 6.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the address-in-reply be agreed to. The honourable member for Batman in continuation.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Thank you, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your reappointment as the Speaker.

The SPEAKER—Thank you.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Prior to dinner, I was dealing with the fact that I contend that the government does not have a third-term agenda. I also suggested to the House this evening that that was no more clear than in respect of my own portfolio. I noted that we again have the Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party, John Anderson, the member for Gwydir, as the minister for regional development. I must say I find this surprising, given the fact that prior to the election he was making it very clear that he was no longer interested in this portfolio. I also suggested to the House this evening that that was no more clear than in respect of my own portfolio. I noted that we again have the Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party, John Anderson, the member for Gwydir, as the minister for regional development. I must say I find this surprising, given the fact that prior to the election he was making it very clear that he was no longer interested in this portfolio.

I refer to the fact that, towards the end of the last term, the minister lamented to the Land magazine about his workload. He said ‘something had to give’. The Deputy Prime Minister, as we are all aware, was talking about the fact that he really did not want the workload nor did he have the interest that this portfolio requires and that he had struggled in the last term to actually handle the workload and the responsibilities, as he admitted in the interview with the Land magazine just prior to the election.

I simply say to the Deputy Prime Minister that I actually come from a family that takes pride in, honour from and a deep responsibility for the office bestowed by those we represent. With that background I was astounded to hear how the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Transport and Regional
Services, lamented the workload of office. What sort of leader is one who complains about leading and doing what one is expected to do as a minister of the Crown?

It is against that background that I also say to people on the other side of the House that clearly you have a huge amount of work to do, because in essence you have a minister who did not want this portfolio. He actually campaigned prior to the last election to be relieved of some aspects of the portfolio. It is very clear, as we have become accustomed to what goes on in cabinet and in the coalition processes on the other side of the House, that, unfortunately for the sake of what I regard as an exceptionally important portfolio—a portfolio that has many challenges ahead of it in the next 12 months—we, I suggest, have a minister who in essence is not interested in the challenges of the portfolio.

That aside, I say that last term, as was widely reported, we had with respect to this portfolio, Transport and Regional Services, a lack of action and a lack of motivation for some of those challenges. Obviously, the Deputy Prime Minister wanted to give something up, but he lost that battle in the ministerial reshuffle after the last election. I do not have much sympathy for the current minister because I actually believe that to campaign publicly to be relieved of some aspects of your portfolio does not send a sense of confidence to those who are dependent on ministerial performance in what is a very, very important portfolio not only to Australia as a nation but especially to some of the regions of Australia that are convinced that they are missing out on a range of fronts at this important point in time.

It is now the responsibility of the Deputy Prime Minister to actually take more seriously his responsibilities, as the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, to come to grips with some of the difficult challenges that confront the Australian nation, be it in the transport portfolio or alternatively in the regional aspects of the portfolio, to try to make sure that we get policy right in this term of parliament. That takes me to a range of issues that we are going to have to address. We are about trying to ensure, as a result of pressure from the opposition and also from players in the different aspects of the portfolio for which the Deputy Prime Minister has responsibility, that in this term the minister is required to lead and to deliver real reform and improvement in the quality of our communities.

The policy issues to be tackled, if we are serious about planning for our future needs, include regional and urban development, transport and infrastructure. They also include housing issues, regional services, territories and local government. I believe they are all critical areas for improved focus and policy solutions for our economic prosperity. They are all areas and issues that this government just does not get on top of, as we have clearly seen with the lack of performance over the previous two terms of government. We have to try to make sure that we use this parliament to make sure that we do not miss opportunities because of the minister’s narrow-focus approach and his intellectual laziness and partisan approach to governance in respect of some of these policy decisions.

On the issue of regional development, I contend that the government has botched portfolio responsibility and failed to understand the crisis that is emerging in our outer urban areas—a classic case in point. I actually believe it is time that we as a national government accepted that, when we talk about regional development, we are talking not only about regions outside our capital cities but also about some of the challenges in the outer urban areas of our capital cities. We actually want to consider issues of need in those outer areas. If they be access to public transport, education and health opportunities, then there ought to be an alliance between some of the people that, for example, you represent in your seat, Mr Speaker, and some of the people represented by other members of this parliament on both sides of the House in seats of the outer areas of our capital cities be they Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or whatever.

I also suggest to the House that there is in fact a revolution going on in the regions. But it is not one that is led by the government. More importantly, it is one that is driven by
communities demanding that their voices be heard and that their concerns be taken seriously by government. Regional communities want their national government to recognise, understand and help address these challenges. They do not ask for hand-outs. All that they ask is that the government takes an interest and that it enters into a partnership at a local level to try to work with local communities to overcome the difficulties and the problems that confront these communities.

In recent years, Australia has had a unique approach to regional development—one that I do not identify with. Alternatively, successful nations have understood that the market alone is not enough to secure a fair share of economic opportunities and jobs. The problem is that has not been the approach and understanding of the Howard government. The Howard government, as we all know, has rejected the need for active strategies to regenerate depressed regions and still has no agenda to link regions to domestic and global opportunities. Despite a variety of organisations attempting to promote a regional development debate, the government has refused time and time again to be a part of that debate.

For the past six years, regional development policy has been guided by the stand alone policy that our national government has no role to play in these important challenges. Even if the Howard government’s third-term agenda is actually considered in an objective way, one can clearly see that there was no real mention in the Governor-General’s speech of a commitment to lead the regional development debate. It was touched on in passing in the Governor-General’s speech at the opening of parliament, and that was all.

Alternatively, Labor sees regional development as being something more than an afterthought of national competition policy. Regional development must be seen as a core objective of government, something that is essential if the burden and benefits of change are to be shared fairly among our community. At the heart of our approach is the philosophy that, whether you live in the city or the country, you deserve a fair share in the economic and lifestyle opportunities of the nation. That means shining a light on the issue of regional inequalities. Labor recognises the need to look beyond the city-country divide to promote a better understanding of the trends that are shaping the development of our cities, regions and communities.

Australia needs a broader understanding of the geography of development, population, opportunity and disadvantage, one that will strengthen the links between various regions and one that respects regional diversity. For example, we need to have a debate about managing growth in outer urban communities. We need to have a debate about provincial cities being hubs of whole of region innovation and development. We need to have a debate about how governments can support communities through structural adjustment—actually getting your hands dirty at a local level. These are the challenges that have been neglected for the past six years. They are in fact the challenges missing from the Governor-General’s speech because they are the challenges that the Howard government wants to continue to walk away from because it does not have a third-term agenda.

It is clear that Australia urgently needs a regional development focus, one that recognises the ideas, the experiences and the ambitions of our people and communities. The objective of such an agenda must be to develop learning regions and learning communities by linking them to knowledge, support and solutions. One source of knowledge is our education and research sector in regional development. Labor believes that the education and research sector provides a largely untapped source of ideas and leadership. It is a sector that has been run down, unfortunately, by the Howard government. Another source of knowledge can come from sharing the many local success stories. It is about best practice; it is about leading. Unfortunately, as a result of lazy government, best practice initiatives in regional development remain largely unknown because of the boundaries of individual communities. I would remind the House again this evening that, when the Howard government came to office, it prided itself on its decision to abolish the Office of Regional Development,
including its presence in the regions. In the lead-up to the last election, a very feebly attempt was made to rebuild that network by using a series of handouts aimed at trying to win a series of marginal seats rather than putting in place a long-term commitment to sustainable regional development.

I say that regional development needs a commitment. It needs local brokers who can link people to the range of programs, services, resources and opportunities at the local level. These brokers need to be able to work across different government agencies and, importantly, they need to be able to work with state, territory and local governments. A strong regional presence can do more than help communities to understand government programs. If used properly, it can also help governments to understand communities.

This government has made only ad hoc attempts to repair the damage of six years of neglect that has left regional programs in a mess. This even applies to the minister’s belated announcement of support for disadvantaged regions and communities. As has been the history of this government’s regional programs, the sustainable regions initiative lacks transparency. The minister has also nominated a number of regions, without any transparent selection process. He has appointed boards for these regions, again without any transparent selection process. What regions want more than anything is recognition. We need to improve the way we plan, debate and make decisions at a regional level. A new regionalism must ensure that approaches at the national, state, regional and local level work together. In many areas, at the regional level, that combines adequate scale and resources with proximity to the community.

I argue that we have to take forward the debate on regional development to try to force the hand of the government, because of a lack of commitment to this approach in the speech of the Governor-General and because the government does not have a third-term agenda. Therefore, it is up to the minister to actually show a bit of leadership and to accept that there is no third-term agenda on the table. The minister must try to get involved and try to develop some decent ideas that will actually assist local communities, especially those in need. I understand that he did not want the job, but he has landed the job yet again. He should take it seriously and try to do something to assist our regional communities.

I also want to say that it is time that the minister got serious about his transport portfolio. Ansett is a prime example of the lack of government commitment to do something with the transport portfolio. I simply say that not only does it relate to trying to work out policy in areas such as the aviation industry; it also relates to a serious challenge confronting the government on the infrastructure front. Therefore, I refer in passing this evening to the Australian Rail Track Corporation’s audit report of last year, which targeted new work in railway infrastructure to the tune of an extra $350 million. I remind the House that, as a result of the joint sale of the National Rail Freight Corporation, the government recently received $220 million. I believe that part of that $220 million ought to be returned immediately as an investment in railway infrastructure to improve the efficiency of our tracks. I also believe that the government, over this term of parliament, should give a commitment to implement the full recommendations of the ARTC report, including the expenditure of $350 million to improve our railway infrastructure.

That takes me to an even more important debate. The time has come for the government to actually put together a land transport strategy. That is about trying to ensure, for example, that no longer do the players in the road transport, shipping, waterfront and railway industries see themselves as acting independently. More importantly, if we are to take Australia forward on the transport front we have to get serious, not only about the development of a land transport strategy, but also about how we bring the different aspects of the industry together in an integrated fashion, aimed at improving logistics. If one were to look at the recent sale of National Rail and Freight Corporation, one would find that a company historically a leader in the road transport industry has combined with a port focused company to purchase the National Rail and Freight Corporation. That
clearly represents a statement by the private sector that it understands where land transport in this country is going.

It is on that note that I say that there are many challenges in this parliament for the portfolio of regional development and transport. They range from a requirement to assist regions that have fallen behind, not only outside our metropolitan cities but also on the fringes of metropolitan cities. It also requires that we come to terms with a requirement to invest in our infrastructure, not only in roads but also in the railway industry and, dare I suggest, that the national government try to work out the difficulty we have with some of our ports around Australia. (Time expired)

Debate (on motion by Mr Tuckey) adjourned.

YIRRKALA BARK PETITIONS

The SPEAKER (8.16 p.m.)—I thank the Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government for adjourning the debate. It allows me to make several statements to the House, which will be of interest to members. In October 2000, I advised the House of a legal opinion that indicated that copyright may subsist in the Yirrkala bark petitions. Following that advice, I sought further legal advice from the Attorney-General on the implications for other papers and documents involved in the day to day work of the House. That legal advice was received on 10 October 2001 during the dissolution period. Because the matter had originally been raised by the honourable member for Lingiari, I sent him a copy of the advice on 26 November 2001.

In summary, the advice indicates that the Department of the House of Representatives can allow access to and can publish documents tabled in the House, or otherwise authorised to be published to members of the public, without fear of infringement of copyright or any other civil action. Publishing of documents submitted to the parliament will not be a breach of copyright because such publication will probably be carried out under an implied licence from the copyright owners and, in any event, such publication is protected by privilege.

The advice is that re-publication of a document by persons not connected with the House for any use for commercial purposes or private gain would not seem sufficiently connected with the proceedings in parliament to be protected by parliamentary privilege, nor would it be regarded as being within the terms of any implied licence. Therefore, advice to people seeking to reproduce images of the Yirrkala bark petitions will remain unchanged—that is, they will be advised to contact the Yirrkala community before reproducing the images. I table a copy of the legal opinion for the information of members.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (8.19 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek your indulgence.

The SPEAKER—Indulgence is extended.

Mr SNOWDON—I thank you for making a tabling statement and for the advice. I have passed it on to the Yirrkala community. I am sure they will be pleased with the outcome and your advice to potential users of images of Yirrkala bark petitions. I assume that other petitions and documents which might be held by the parliament cannot be reproduced for commercial purposes outside of the privileges extended to the parliament. I think that is a very important principle which we need to ensure that people understand.

REGISTRAR OF MEMBERS’ INTERESTS

Appointment

The SPEAKER—In accordance with resolution 3 of the House of Representatives, relating to the registration of members’ interests, I have appointed Mr BC Wright, Deputy Clerk of the House of Representatives, as registrar of members’ interests in the 40th Parliament.

COMMITTEES

Selection Committee

Membership

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor—Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government) (8.20 p.m.)—I move:

That Mr Causley be a member of the Selection Committee.

Question agreed to.
Membership

The SPEAKER—I have received a message from the Senate acquainting the House of the appointment of senators to certain joint committees. Copies of the message are on the chamber table and details will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

GOVERNOR GENERAL’S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (8.21 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, at this opportunity, I congratulate you on your re-election as the Speaker. The last time I spoke, it was only to ask a question and it did not seem appropriate at the time to congratulate you. I look forward to your continuing presence in the chair.

The SPEAKER—Thank you, Member for Sturt, and for your discretion.

Mr PYNE—Tonight I want to talk about the issue of the Murray-Darling Basin and to address parts of the Governor-General’s speech, particularly with regard to the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, which was touched on by His Excellency when he spoke to us last week in the Senate chamber. The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality is one of the more visionary and far-reaching programs that the Commonwealth and the states will be taking part in over the next five years. The Commonwealth and the states are putting aside $1.4 billion to tackle issues to do with salinity and water quality, particularly in the Murray-Darling Basin. It is a program that I strongly support, and it follows on from our excellent Natural Heritage Trust, which was one of the great achievements of our first term in office and which arose out of the sale of the first third of Telstra. As you would know, we put certain billions aside for relieving our debt burden, which was an important step, particularly with the Asian financial crisis that followed about a year later. We also established the Natural Heritage Trust with a billion dollars so that we could get out of the roundabout of Labor spending on the environment, which seemed to be dependent on which special interest group at any particular time was tweaking the Labor Party—its environmental program would be funded or its particular area of native vegetation would be saved. But the Natural Heritage Trust means that there is a committed amount of money that is put aside for the environment every year. It is one of our great achievements. The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality will be another great achievement of this government, because it will tackle the Murray-Darling Basin salinity and water quality issues, which you and I, Mr Speaker, have chatted about as recently as the last day or two.

The Governor-General’s speech presents an opportunity to comment on the Murray-Darling Basin and on steps that the Commonwealth might be able to take in the event that the states remain recalcitrant about working in a cooperative way either with each other or with the Commonwealth. I am pleased to say that the Prime Minister has identified the environment as one of the major points on the agenda of his third term in office as Prime Minister. Victoria and South Australia have signed the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, but the other states are yet to do so. It is very important that, in the coming ministerial council meeting on Murray-Darling Basin issues, they use that opportunity to sign the National Action Plan and to start the process. The Murray-Darling Basin is of such economic and ecological importance to the nation—and to South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland in particular—that it is time that the Commonwealth seriously explored the avenues available to it in the event that the states continue to not work together and instead pursue their parochial interests.

There are a few statistics of interest to do with the Murray-Darling Basin. The Murray-Darling Basin is, as we all know, Australia’s most important agricultural region, but not everyone would know that it accounts for 41 per cent of the nation’s gross value of agricultural production, which is a tremendous amount. It also provides the raw materials for almost all of the manufacturing activity that occurs in the Murray-Darling Basin and for much of the manufacturing that occurs outside the Murray-Darling Basin. Commercial agriculture is represented by 51,672
farms in the Murray-Darling Basin, which is 42 per cent of Australia’s 122,053 farms, covering an area of 84,625,000 hectares, or 18 per cent of the Australian total. It is also the home of three-quarters of the mainland’s hydro-electric power stations. It obviously includes the Snowy Mountains hydro-electric power station, but there are many smaller hydro-electric power stations in New South Wales and Victoria that exist in the Murray-Darling Basin. There are 3,280 manufacturing establishments in the Murray-Darling Basin, employing 62,400 people, particularly in the area of food, beverages and tobacco. The basin accounts for 17 per cent of Australia’s total in the industries of food, beverages and tobacco. It also accounts for 16 per cent of Australia’s total textiles industry.

As you can see, the Murray-Darling Basin is a very, very important area for Australia’s economy, particularly in agricultural production. As a consequence, we cannot afford as a nation to allow it to degenerate into parochial fights between states. Only the Commonwealth can take the national view on the Murray-Darling Basin. It is noteworthy that the member for Indi made that same comment today in her maiden speech. Much of her electorate is affected by the Murray-Darling Basin as it is right on the river. My 65 square kilometre electorate of Sturt in the eastern suburbs of Adelaide does not have quite the same problem, but as an Adelaidian I know that the issues to do with the Murray-Darling Basin have been the talk in my state for many decades. It is becoming much more serious, as is the mouth of the Murray—a constant source of political discussion in the great plain state of South Australia.

There are four options that the Commonwealth could consider with regard to the Murray-Darling Basin. It could run a referendum to delete section 100 of the Constitution, which leaves the power in the hands of the states over the tributaries and rivers of the Commonwealth. It could include a new power, under section 51 of the Constitution, that gave the Commonwealth power over the control and regulation of the Murray-Darling Basin and the use of the water thereof. It could consider running a test case in the High Court about what the term ‘reasonable use’ means, because section 100 of the Constitution says:

The Commonwealth shall not, by any law or regulation of trade or commerce, abridge the right of a State or of the residents therein to the reasonable use of the waters of rivers for conservation or irrigation.

That raises the question of what ‘reasonable use’ means. It is a matter that has never been put to the test in the High Court. It would be interesting, if the Commonwealth chose to go down that path, to see what the High Court would define ‘reasonable use’ as. I am sure that in many decades past it would not have been an issue, but now, given the serious environmental disaster that waits on our doorstep with regard to the Murray-Darling Basin—as was highlighted by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, David Kemp, and the Prime Minister as recently as last Thursday in question time—what ‘reasonable use’ means is a serious question. Does it mean that Adelaide’s drinking water will be unusable two out of every five days in 2020? Is that an unreasonable use of the Murray-Darling Basin and its waters by the people who have been using it under the auspices of the states? If the Commonwealth were to take it over, would that be a way of making sure that the Murray was being used reasonably rather than unreasonably?

The final option would be to ask the National Competition Council to consider whether they should withhold funds from those states that are recalcitrant in the area of the use of water. It was stressed by the National Competition Council last year that they would consider withholding funds from the Victorian and Queensland state governments over water issues.

Queensland was criticised by the National Competition Council for allowing cotton growers in southern Queensland to extract too much water from the Condamine-Balonne river system, starving the Narran Lakes wetlands of water. The National Competition Council has that kind of power. We need to ask whether it is the financial carrot that will cause the states to stop bickering over the Murray-Darling Basin and seriously come to the table and try and bring about
change. There is ample evidence to show that there are good reasons for the people to give the Commonwealth greater power in this area. The Australian Dryland Salinity Assessment 2000, the National Land and Water Resource Audit’s Australian Water Resources Assessment 2000 and the Murray-Darling Commission’s salinity audit, all from an environmental perspective, made it very clear that, while the states have had management of the basin since 1901 and have been arguing about it, it has been affected in a deleterious way. There are serious environmental issues facing the Murray-Darling Basin that we cannot ignore any longer. The Murray-Darling Basin commissioned a report as recently as October 2001, which was reported in the Weekend Australian of 16-17 February. The article stated that the report:

... released by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission last October, found 95 per cent of the river assessed suffered environmental degradation and water quality ranged from poor to very poor. Fish populations were in poor condition along the length of the Murray, and down more than 80 per cent on original population numbers in 17 per cent of the river.

It recommended the return of two-thirds of the Murray’s natural annual flow to the river—a big ask given that less than 30 per cent of the river’s median annual flow reaches the Murray mouth in South Australia...

That study followed an August report headed by eminent river scientist Peter Cullen that concluded the Murray needed a massive 1000 gigalitres in environmental flows.

The Queensland government is particularly egregious in its treatment of the Murray-Darling Basin. It is the Queensland government that has the most to answer for in terms of management of the precious waters of the Murray-Darling Basin. It is the Queensland government that still to this day refuses to sign the water cap agreement, but Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia signed it in 1997, based on 1993-94 extractions from the Murray and the Darling. The first time I spoke on this issue was in April 2001. I said then that Queensland had promised to sign the cap agreement in July in the lead-up to yet another meeting of the ministers that are concerned with the Murray-Darling Basin.

As I stand here tonight, it is fair to say that Queensland have still not signed the agreement. It follows their pattern of setting a deadline to sign the Murray-Darling Basin cap agreement and then just letting the deadline pass them by. Queensland are desperately taking water from the Murray-Darling Basin at massive rates of increase on a yearly basis. I think they believe that they are going to miss out when they finally sign the agreement and their extractions are limited. The truth is that this is a national issue. It affects South Australia, it affects Victoria to a lesser extent, it affects New South Wales—in the long term, the viability of the farms in New South Wales will be put at risk unless proper management is taken of the Murray-Darling Basin—and it affects Queensland as well.

Last Thursday, the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, in answer to a question from the member for Herbert, made the point that new research commissioned by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources, supported by the Commonwealth-backed Grains Research and Development Corporation, had found that no less than 21 per cent of Queensland’s cropping lands are now regarded as high hazard salinity areas—that is over half a million hectares of agricultural land in Queensland—and that, to prevent salinity destroying this land, there will need to be effective management of over 1.6 million hectares in Queensland.

The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality would deliver $81 million from both the Commonwealth and the Queensland state government to combat salinity issues and improve water quality management in Queensland. Yet Queensland still has not signed the national action plan agreement or the capping agreement between all the states and the Commonwealth. One has to wonder what the Commonwealth needs to do to make Queensland come on board, to recognise the urgent need, and to start making a difference for the Murray-Darling Basin. That is why people have started to talk about test cases on ‘reasonable use’ in the High Court and the withholding of money by the National Competition Council for bad water management. The piece de
resistance, the final straw, would be taking the matter to a referendum to delete section 100 from the Constitution and introduce a new head of power under section 51 that would give the Commonwealth sole power, or concurrent power. People are getting to that stage because they are fed up with waiting for Queensland in particular and the other states to come on board and support proper management of the Murray-Darling Basin.

The Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council next meets in April, which is in a couple of months. It provides an opportunity to discuss environmental flows and to review the cap. It gives the states that have not signed the national action plan the chance to do so. I wish the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, David Kemp, the best of luck in working with the states to try and achieve a cooperative approach. If the states fail again to move this issue forward at the April ministerial council then it provides impetus to those people who support taking the power away from the states and would give the Commonwealth reason to consider proceeding with a referendum. Even the Australian Conservation Foundation—which is not usually regarded as a supporter of the coalition; it is not—regard that step as the most radical. Yet it has been proposed by numerous people around Australia as the last straw to try and bring about change for the Murray-Darling Basin, change for the people of South Australia and change for Victorians who are as affected as South Australians.

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (8.37 p.m.)—Thank you, Mr Speaker. Let me commence by congratulating you on your re-election to high office. I also note that you and I are a lot closer than we once were, and I am very mindful of that.

The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Bendigo. I am sure that is a matter of affinity as well as geography.

Mr GIBBONS—Exactly. I am very honoured to be able to take my seat again as the federal member for Bendigo. I wish to thank the people of the electorate of Bendigo for the faith they have shown in me and in the Australian Labor Party in re-electing me. I and my staff certainly worked very hard in our first term to represent the voters of our electorate, and it is a pleasure to see that they have recognised our contribution and asked us to get on with the job. I want to thank most sincerely also the many hardworking members of the ALP team who made our re-election possible. Many of them are the people who made Labor’s election in Bendigo possible in 1998, and they have done so again. I also express my best wishes to the Liberal candidate for Bendigo in the 2001 election. The then councillor Maurie Sharkey is a man of considerable integrity and a man of good standing in the district and in community. He has given many years of fine service to the region. I congratulate him on a fair and decent election campaign in which he acquitted himself very well. I also thank my former leader, Kim Beazley, for his contribution over many years to the labour movement, to the Labor Party, to the opposition and to the nation. He is a man of excellent character and personality, and he has been an asset to all of us on this side of the House. I congratulate Simon Crean on his election as Leader of the Opposition. He has already proved that he is a worthy successor to Mr Beazley.

I would have liked to have been able to say to the Prime Minister and the government that I congratulate them. I cannot. I would have liked to have been able to say that this is a Prime Minister and a government of vision, decency and moral authority, but that is not possible. Last year, the then President of the Liberal Party, Shane Stone, reported that many Liberal MPs considered that their government was tricky, mean-spirited and out of touch. Prior to and during the election the Prime Minister and the government wanted to get back in touch by being even more tricky and mean-spirited. They sought to mutilate the truth over the asylum seekers in order to manipulate the voters. The Prime Minister is not so much a clayton’s Prime Minister as he is a Hanson’s Prime Minister—the Prime Minister you have when you do not have Pauline Hanson in the parliament. The Prime Minister and the government are now themselves refugees—refugees from the truth—and they are
sinking in a sea of lies. Each day brings
some new revelation of their dishonesty over
the asylum seekers and the refugees issue.

The national parliament has not been a
very pleasant place for honourable members
to be in over the last few days. It has been an
appalling few days for the government. I
have to be honest: it has been a very good
few days for the Labor opposition. It has
been an excellent few days for our new
leader, Simon Crean. But, most importantly,
it has been a sensational few days for the
member for Higgins. One of the highlights
for us on this side of the House over the last
few days has been to watch with great inter-
est the obvious discomfort experienced by
the member for Higgins as he sits there,
summoning all of the self-discipline he can
muster, in a herculean effort to stop smirking
at the Prime Minister’s obvious discomfort.

We have all seen the member for Higgins
doing his Paul Keating impersonations in the
House. He thrusts his hands in his pockets,
he rocks up and down on the balls of his feet
and from side to side. He goes through all
the mannerisms. But one of the things that I
find of great amusement—we have not seen
too much of it of late—is the ability of the
member for Higgins to hold up the Labor
aristocracy and the dynasties as some point
of ridicule. But we have not seen too much
of this over the last few months. I suspect
one of the reasons is that there is actually a
Costello political dynasty. It is not widely
known. Certainly the member for Higgins
has never ever mentioned it. But there is a
Costello political dynasty.

What I would like to do is to quote from a
transcript of a television program that went
to air in Victoria on 25 August last year. It is
an interview between the presenter of that
particular program and the Reverend Tim
Costello. Before I go any further, might I say
that I happen to regard Tim Costello as a
great Australian, a man of impeccable integ-
rity, a man of impeccable principle—as, I
believe, are most of the Costello family. It is
just a pity that the member for Higgins bears
no resemblance to this description. I will
quote from the transcript, which was a
voiceover. It says:

A HOUSE IN DRUMMOND STREET WAS
THE ANCESTRAL HOME OF FEDERAL
TREASURER PETER COSTELLO AND HIS
BROTHER THE REV. TIM COSTELLO.

PRESENTER:
Further along Drummond Street there’s another
house with an equally colourful and intriguing
past. 135 Drummond Street was the ancestral
home of Federal Treasurer Peter Costello and his
minister brother, Tim.

Now, your great, great grandfather, Patrick Cos-
tello, quite infamous in the area.

TIM COSTELLO - MINISTER:
Certainly was; a legend and a rogue. He built this
house in 1854 and it’s one of the oldest three still
standing. He ran for colonial parliament, got
elected; only sat a week because they discovered
he’d rigged the election.

PRESENTER:
How did he do that?
TIM COSTELLO:
He had only people who were going to vote for
him to come into his pub to vote (laughs); he was
a publican.

PRESENTER:
Right.
COSTELLO:
And he went and helped a friend down in Morn-
ington and got all his drinking mates, a few hun-
dred, to impersonate those who were either dead
or absent from the rolls.

PRESENTER:
Tim, that’s terrible.

COSTELLO:
So for some reason my brother wasn’t thrilled to
discover this story when we wrote it up a few
years ago. I bet he wasn’t!

So he was sent to prison—
this was Pat Costello—
the first parliamentarian anywhere in Australia
sent to prison.

He was sent to prison for electoral fraud! We
do not hear that political dynasty or political
aristocracy story from the member for Hig-
gins. But I suspect that the member for Hig-
gins is actually a chip off the old block. I
refer to a preselection brawl a few short
years ago involving the then member for
Monash Province in an attempt to gain pre-selection for the lower house seat of Brighton, which was also contested by Mr Mitch Fifield, who was a staffer in the electoral office of the member for Higgins. The threats and innuendo, the branch stacking, the interference with Liberal Party membership rolls, all the activities we have seen in a typical Liberal Party stoush, were present. And the member for Higgins was in it right up to his elbows, along with his mate, Michael Kroger. So I suspect he is a chip off the old block. But, then again, let us look at history. I am quoting from a biographical register of the Victorian parliament by Kathleen Thompson and Geoffrey Searle. There is another document which I will get to very shortly: A People’s Council: History of the Victorian Parliament 1856 to 1890. But this is the most interesting one, because it has got an entry about the famous Pat Costello. It says:

Arrived in Port Phillip in August 1840. Various occupations. Early innkeeper, city councillor. After expulsion from parliament for offences committed at a Mornington by-election, was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment but soon released after petitions from his wife, members of parliament, the mayor and aldermen of the city and citizens of Melbourne.

I said that the member for Higgins was a chip off the old block. I suspect I was probably being a bit generous with the truth. You see, Pat Costello was a really good operator. Not only was he able to get the numbers to get himself elected to one of the first colonial parliaments, albeit illegally—and he got jailed for it—he was actually able to organise the numbers to get himself out of jail, albeit by a petition signed by his wife and members of the family, as well as the aldermen and councillors of the City of Melbourne in those days. So there you have it. I suspect we will not be hearing too much more on the Labor aristocracy or the Labor dynasties from the member for Higgins, and why would we?

I am sure the minister at the table would be aware of this because he was in Bendigo during the election campaign. Minister Tuckey, I would like to thank you most sincerely for the magnificent contribution you made to my victory. I could not have done it without you. It is surprising how the Bendigo federal issues came home to roost in the 2001 election campaign. It is surprising that the issues that I first raised in my first speech to this parliament after the 1998 election are still today the dominant issues before the Bendigo region. They are the issues that flow directly from this government’s uncaring attitude to the ordinary people of regional and country Australia and from its mania for privatisation.

At the beginning of the election campaign in Bendigo the local newspaper, the Bendigo Advertiser, published an opinion poll that it had commissioned. The poll suggested the Liberals at that stage were set to win Bendigo comfortably, and the minister at the table would be well aware of that. That view reflected the politically manipulated political environment that the government had whipped up with one purpose: to create a feeding frenzy over asylum seekers and refugees.

But in Bendigo, Labor campaigned on the issues that were vital to people’s everyday lives and the future of their region. Those issues were jobs, privatisation, transport and regional development, living costs and the GST, health, education, community services and aged care. One can only say that with these issues Labor chose the ground to fight on in Bendigo and Labor won.

The government has been dishonest all the way with the Bendigo people over the future of the ADI plant at Bendigo and the jobs that it provides Bendigo workers. Now Bendigo is again paying the price as it continues to bear the brunt of the Liberal Party and National Party’s mania for privatisation. Bendigo was told by ADI management last week that 95 more jobs are to go from the Bendigo facility. This is on top of the 149 that were lost earlier because of the privatisation of ADI. That is a massive loss: some 244 jobs. The Prime Minister, when he was opposition leader, during the 1996 election in Bendigo proclaimed that the coalition parties would not privatise ADI. They held the Bendigo seat on that promise. Bruce Reid was elected in 1996, as indeed the Howard government was first elected. They broke the promise.
In the 1998 election the Prime Minister promised job losses from privatisation would be kept to a minimum and more jobs disappeared after the election. Since then, we have had the continued stalling by the government over the Bushmaster defence personnel carrier, which the government had originally promised would be built in Bendigo. The commencement time has blown out by three years, from 2000 to 2003, and there is still no guarantee that it will be built and that it will be built in Bendigo. If it is going to be built in Bendigo, we want to know when and how long it will take. The government deceived the firm that took over ADI in Bendigo. It has withheld the work that the company had contracted to do at Bendigo. The then defence minister, Peter Reith, was in Bendigo during the election campaign. He promised all was well with the Bushmaster project. Nobody believed him; he was a disaster. He actually torpedoed, with help from the minister at the table, his own party in Bendigo.

Bendigo people are all too well aware of the price that privatisation has inflicted on them. They were promised by the then Premier Jeff Kennett that privatisation of the state owned Bendigo railway workshops would commence a new era for the workshops. They were assured that the privatised rail workshops would create a second ADI. The workshops employment levels were 262 in 1992 and now every job has disappeared. The workshops, under private management, were denied the contracts they were promised and now they are closed down, employing nobody. Far from seeing an expanded and invigorated rail workshops—the so-called second ADI in Bendigo—we in Bendigo now see ADI itself in danger of becoming a second railway workshops. Isn’t it significant that the same Liberal state premier, Mr Kennett, who pushed privatisation on to the railway workshops also publicly and openly in Bendigo pushed for the privatisation of the Australian Defence Industries and promised us the world?

It is essential that the government get on with letting ADI build the Bushmaster in Bendigo. I urge the new defence minister to show some real faith in Australian workers and in the future of Australian defence manufacturing. If the Bushmaster project does not proceed in Bendigo I fear, and Bendigo fears, that the future of this entire plant will disappear.

I turn now to the weekend revelations about the former defence minister, Mr Reith, and the job he has carved out for himself as a defence consultant. The *Sunday Age* reported at the weekend that Mr Reith had taken on this position and had been working on behalf of the Tenix defence manufacturer to gain contracts from the government for that company. As an Australian, I find it an outrage that Mr Reith has taken on such sensitive employment so soon after retiring as defence minister. I find it an outrage that he also has apparently had the blessing of the Prime Minister to take on this job and that he has already been claiming some success. As the member for Bendigo, I am especially outraged. Why?

Firstly, this government has pulled the plug on ADI in my electorate and Mr Reith was the most recent minister before the last election to be in the pack with the government savaging ADI in Bendigo. They could not have cared less about Australian Defence Industries manufacturing in Bendigo. Now, in what we have all been led to believe was his retirement, Mr Reith is going all-out for his own sake to see that another company gets big defence contracts. He showed no such energy in government in seeing that the contract ADI had already won two years ago—the Bushmaster construction project—would finally and definitely materialise. Quite the opposite. He and the government slowed it and obscured it.

Secondly, it appears that Mr Reith has been actively campaigning as a lobbyist for Tenix. This company is a major rival of ADI. One must question how genuinely he worked to enable ADI to fulfil its Bushmaster contract when within just a short time of his retirement he is found to be so preoccupied with his own private commercial interest advancing a different company. Was his ambition to be a consultant already well in advance while he was still acting as a minister? That is the question.

Thirdly, both Mr Reith as defence minister and the government showed little loyalty to
ADI and to Bendigo. However, it appears that loyalty to Australians, Australian manufacturing and Australian jobs is not highly prized by the Australian government. What is highly prized and rewarded is loyalty to the Prime Minister. I note that the *Age* states that there are rumours in industry that senior government figures approve Mr Reith’s Tenex consultancy as a reward for his loyalty to Mr Howard. The loyalty he displayed to the Prime Minister appears to be loyalty in trying to get the Prime Minister off the dishonesty hook over the ‘children overboard’ issue. I would suggest that he also rewarded Mr Reith’s loyalty in toeing the Prime Minister’s line generally, including toeing his line over the consequences of privatising ADI and leaving the private owners of ADI out on a limb over the Bushmaster contract.

I will pursue this throughout this parliament until such time as that contract, as agreed to, is honoured, we stop the rot, we stop the jobs being lost at ADI Bendigo, and we get on with producing this Bushmaster vehicle. It has been approved by the Army, it is a very necessary bit of kit for the Army, and Bendigo needs the work.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (8.53 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, may I also take this opportunity to congratulate you on your re-election to the esteemed position of Speaker.

The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Curtin.

Ms JULIE BISHOP—In his address to the parliament of last Tuesday, the Governor-General noted insightfully the quiet spirit of progress and satisfaction in 21st century Australia. As he remarked:

There are few nations on earth which can enter the early years of this new century with the same sense of optimism, opportunity and quiet confidence that the Australian people are entitled to feel.

It is a symptom of the sometimes stifling and distorted atmosphere of this place and of Australian politics more generally that we perhaps too often tack towards a dark, brooding and convulsed vision of our nation and its fortunes. Events such as the terrorism attacks on the United States can clarify, ever momentarily, our perspective. They reveal to us, despite our prejudices, the bounty, the safety and the ease that we enjoy as Australians. But then some of us return our course back into the shadows, lamenting our misfortunes and proclaiming that the end is nigh. Such wilful misrepresentation is the accepted lot of an opposition. Wielded responsibly and with good humour, criticism of this kind is a tonic for our public life. But it is both a curious and concerning aspect that such negativity has a hold on what I call the commentariat in this country. That so little appears wrong must be proof positive that a great deal must be wrong, or so the negative forces would contend. This government, as the representatives of the Australian people, do not subscribe to this tortured pessimism. Rather, we believe that the 21st century will be, and ought to be, Australia’s century.

Australia’s future is bright. Our stability, our wealth and our place within international affairs now afford us the opportunity to write our name amongst the community of great nations. If the 19th century brought forth a nation for a continent and the 20th raised a people for a nation then the 21st century should carry Australian values to the world, and the flagship for the carriage of those values is trade. Nestled among the loaded containers, resting on the grain bins and riding the digital signals are the values that have made this nation proud, safe and prosperous—the rule of law, the right to the fruit of one’s own labour, respect for democracy and faith in reason. The Australian marketplace is attractive to foreign investment because of our stable legal and political systems, our transport and communications infrastructure, our standard of living, and our sophisticated financial system. Australia’s trade is not just an economic device, it is a beacon to those nations less fortunate than us and a clarion call to unfree peoples.

The economic benefits of trade to Australia, as noted by the Governor-General in his speech, are substantial; likewise its non-economic benefits at home and overseas. It is therefore with great appreciation that I note the strong commitment of the Howard government to trade liberalisation and the expansion of our trading links with the world, as exemplified by the efforts and interest of
the Prime Minister, the Minister for Trade and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The election policy of the government, entitled ‘Australians Exporting to the World’, detailed this ongoing agenda, which will include: refocusing the national trade effort through the establishment of the Office of Trade Negotiations within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; the direction of Austrade towards the specific role of achieving ‘export-ready’ small businesses; the recommitment to the export market development grants scheme, a commitment valued at $750 million; the introduction of TradeStart, the new Austrade program geared towards first-time exporters in regional and rural areas; action on the need, expressed most recently by the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services, for better communication of the benefits of trade to the community, by way of the Exporting for the Future program; and, finally, greater public-private sector cooperation in export support services.

I have little doubt that these initiatives will do much to further the significant gains in foreign trade made by this government since 1996. In those six years the Howard government has delivered tax cuts worth $3.5 billion to exporters, reformed the Australian waterfront—of course, when the naysayers said it was impossible—reduced dramatically inflation and interest rates, opened up some 240 new markets for Australian agricultural and food products, negotiated the lifting of the ban on rice imports into Japan, guaranteed beef producer access to the American market, and negotiated the reduction of numerous tariff and non-tariff barriers to Australian goods and services. As a result, Australian exports have increased dramatically. To take just one example, the sale of Australian ferries overseas has totalled $1.7 billion since 1996-97, with 180 vessels purchased in markets as diverse as Spain, Denmark, New Zealand and the overseas territories of the French republic. I pay tribute in particular to the tenacity of Austal Ships located in Western Australia in pursuing export opportunities in the international fast ferry business.

Trade policy is not simply a matter of assisting exporters to access markets or particular services. The bilateral, regional and multilateral negotiations undertaken by the Australian government are of crucial importance to the opening up not only of export but also of import opportunities with foreign individuals, corporations and government. The Howard government will strive to achieve positive liberalisation outcomes from the millennium round of the World Trade Organisation. We will work to improve our bilateral relations with the nations of East Asia and South-East Asia. It was most pleasing to note that, on the opening day of this parliament, the Chinese government announced that it was increasing its import quota for Australian wool. I should also note my personal interest in our growing trade relations with the emerging economies of South America and the significant work being undertaken in my state by the Western Australian-Latin American Business Association. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum remains a priority for the government.

But perhaps the most exciting aspect of our intended trade negotiations will be the mooted US-Australia free trade agreement. North America will continue to be the world’s leading economic region over the coming decades. NAFTA, the integration of the economies of the United States, Canada and Mexico, has created an economic powerhouse that is expected to continue to outperform the European Union. The development of such a free trade agreement with the United States and possible associated agreements with the other members of NAFTA will be difficult, there is no question about that, but, as Churchill once noted, ‘A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.’ I am by nature an optimist. I believe that the possibility of agreement with the United States, an agreement that would be worth up to $4 billion a year to the people of each nation, demands a concerted effort with bipartisan political support. The political, cultural and familial ties that bind us across the Pacific Ocean would provide a valuable underpinning to enhance United States-Australian economic relations.
The United States is Australia’s second-largest trading partner, the largest market for Australian services at some $5.8 billion annually and the destination of most Australian investment. Already our merchandise exports to the United States are in the region of $10.9 billion annually. On the Monday following the Leeuwin concert weekend at Margaret River, it would be remiss of me not to point out that the United States is the second-largest market for Australian wine. A free trade agreement promises even more. Not only would it expand trade and investment between Australia and the United States; it would set the reference point for the Australian economy in terms of growth over the coming decades to the international standard setter—the US economy.

As the Minister for Trade noted last year on this issue at the Australian APEC Study Centre conference, a free trade agreement would not abolish the restrictions on non-American shipping set out in the Jones act, nor would it abolish congressional largesse to the redundant American sugar industry. It would, however, open up significant opportunities for Australia in the sale of dairy products, processed foods, automotive parts, metals and fibres, and finance and communications to name a few.

A trade agreement of this kind would not constitute a diversion of trade but a generation of new trade that would in turn drive our regional and multilateral liberalisation efforts. It is therefore heartening that as recently as last Monday US Trade Representative Bob Zoellick, appearing before the US Senate’s Finance Committee, indicated that the negotiation of an agreement with Australia was a priority for the Bush administration. It was pleasing to learn from the representative’s evidence that a number of members of Congress have already made their support for an Australian-American agreement loud and clear. The lesson of the Closer Economic Relations agreement with New Zealand, an agreement that will celebrate its 20th anniversary next year, is that the benefits of such open interaction between similar nations are considerable.

As a parliament, we should also never tire of making the case for open economic relations across the globe. We should never cease acknowledging that the very nature of trade is a mutually beneficial contact. Parties to trade engage with each other because there is a benefit—both to buyer and seller. This fundamental truth puts a lie to those misrepresentations of foreign trade as damaging to our national interest. The facts are clear and ought to be shouted from the rooftops: the reduction in Australian tariff barriers between 1987 and 1997 has put $1,000 annually into the hands of each Australian family; one in five Australian jobs depends on exports; manufacturing tariffs hurt farmers and regional communities; 75 per cent of our agricultural produce is exported; and the trade liberalisation associated with APEC has lifted over 165 million people out of poverty in our region. We cannot afford, neither as proud Australians nor as responsible members of the international community, to allow neoprotectionism to gain a foothold in public policy.

Trade liberalisation is of paramount importance to the people of the state of Western Australia. Our state was built on trade with the outside world. Western Australia’s exports in the year to November last totalled over $30 billion and we are proud of our role in producing much of Australia’s agricultural and mineral exports, as well as our leading involvement in energy production, services and tourism.

Protectionism offers nothing to us except higher prices, fewer jobs and a transfer of wealth out of our community. I think it timely that the Australian government affirms its continuing support for globalisation in terms of economic integration. It should take every available opportunity to speak of the benefits of globalisation insofar as it provides benefits to those in the developing world.

One of the main claims of the antiglobalisation camp is that it widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots—that globalisation benefits the rich, does little for the poor and indeed makes their lot harder. The fact is—and best evidence available shows—the opposite is true. The current wave of globalisation—say, post-1980—has actually promoted economic equality and has reduced
poverty. Global economic integration does have complex effects on income, the environment, and culture and society generally, but its impact on poverty is a most contentious issue. The argument goes something like this: if international trade and investment benefits the rich countries, then to restrict trade to protect jobs, the environment or a culture is worth the cost. I say to restrict trade imposes further hardship on poor people in the developing world for the following reasons: there is a strong correlation between increased participation in international trade and investment on one hand and faster growth on the other. Openness to foreign trade and investment together with complementary reforms has led to increased growth in those countries that have, over the past 20 years, set their sights on globalisation. Globalisation has not resulted in higher inequalities within economies. Such inequality has more to do with domestic issues—education, taxation and social policy. You cannot link inequality within economies—take China as an example—causally to globalisation measures such as trade and investment flows, tariff rates and the presence of capital controls.

Of course, globalisation of itself cannot—and does not—cure all ills. It can be a powerful force for poverty reduction, but to tap into the full potential of economic integration and to sustain its benefits, there are other challenges. We must stop the growing protectionist movement in some developed countries that seeks to limit integration with developing countries. Developing countries must be encouraged to acquire the institutions and policies that allow them to prosper under globalisation.

It is useful to look back to the period between 1960 and 1980. Thanks to a series of multilateral trade liberalisations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, there was a dramatic increase in trade among industrialised countries. Developing countries remained largely isolated from this trade because of their own protectionist policies. But the success of Taiwan and South Korea acted as a catalyst to encourage other developing economies to open themselves up to foreign trade and investment. Now we have the examples of China in the 1980s, India during the 1990s, Uganda, Vietnam and Mexico, all of whom have increased their participation in trade and investment and prospered as a result.

As the economists Peter Lindert and Jeffrey Williamson have noted, even though no one single study can establish that openness to trade has unambiguously helped the representative Third World economy, the preponderance of evidence supports this conclusion. As they state, there are no antiglobal victories to report for the postwar Third World. So contrary to the claims of the antiglobalisation movement, greater openness to international trade and investment has helped to narrow the gap between rich and poor countries rather than widen it. It is an opportune time for Australia to continue its focus and commitment on trade, and a free trade agreement with the United States would give Australia another boost to our global economic profile. I urge all members to focus our efforts on our long-term interest in building global competitiveness.

In closing, may I take this opportunity to congratulate our new colleagues, the class of 2001, who have made their first speeches in this House over the past few days. The enthusiasm, intellect, energy and life experiences that each of them bring to their new role as an elected representative should be an inspiration to us all. To listen to them was to feel re-energised about our role in this place. I wish them every success in their calling to public office. I trust that most, if not all, of the hopes and dreams that they have articulated will be fulfilled.

Mr McMullan (Fraser) (9.10 p.m.)—In this, my first speech in parliament in this term, I want to start by thanking the electors of Fraser for their continuing confidence and support. It is something I never take for granted and always appreciate greatly. There is no greater compliment that your fellow citizens can pay you than to choose you to be their representative. All of us in here need to acknowledge that from time, never take it for granted, always continue to be available and appreciate the views, contributions and thoughts of those who send us here.

I want to talk about an issue that relates to the electorate of Fraser before I move on to a
couple of issues for which I had particular responsibility during the last term and then conclude with some comments in the area of economic policy which is my current area of responsibility. My concern is that the electorate of Fraser has more voters than any other electorate in Australia. The second largest number are in the electorate of Canberra and the two electorates in the ACT have a number equivalent to virtually three seats in every other state or territory. There were 219,000 voters enrolled in the ACT at the last federal election for two seats. That is an average of about 109,000. In the Northern Territory, there is an average of 55,000. There are fewer people on the roll in the Northern Territory representing those two seats than there are in my electorate.

I do not object to the people of the Northern Territory having two seats. That is properly determined in accordance with the legislation and they have that proper right and entitlement. They have the same problem as the ACT in terms of the volatility of representation that flows from the current legislative arrangement that determines territorial representation. However, the difference is quite dramatic even beyond the Northern Territory. Tasmania is constitutionally protected in its representation in this place. In fact, all the states have a guaranteed constitutional minimum. That will never happen for the territories. I do not advocate it, but we have to see how we can deal with this issue of fair territorial representation outside the question of a constitutional guarantee. It is not appropriate that my constituents should have the least effect in terms of determining the outcome of the government of this country of any electors in Australia, and at the next election it will be even more so; we will not gain an extra seat here in the ACT. The disparity will widen, not narrow, between now and the next election and that is an untenable and unsuitable situation. It is an issue about which I will continue to speak and about which I will continue to make representations within the party for reform, but, more importantly, it is an issue about which I would welcome more public debate, first of all here in the ACT, and thereafter nationally. It is an issue of proper democratic reform that needs to be addressed.

I want to speak briefly also about the two issues for which I had responsibility inside the Labor Party in the lead-up to the last election. I refer to the issues of Aboriginal affairs and the arts. When I took on the portfolio of Aboriginal affairs, I did so with a passion and enthusiasm which I have never felt for any other job that I have taken on in all my public life both in parliament and outside. I felt, and feel, that it was the greatest, and remains the greatest, social justice issue of our generation, and the privilege of holding the portfolio was an education to me. It built friendships which I hope will last long beyond my holding that position and reinforced my passion and my commitment and my determination. It is an issue about which Australian public policy needs to change. I would have loved the opportunity to be minister for Aboriginal affairs. Not many people say that; it is not one of the world’s great career moves to become the minister for Aboriginal affairs. It was a passion which I
looked forward to with enthusiasm but which the voters of Australia determined was not to be. I accept that with all the good grace I can muster and I will move on. But I will never lose my commitment to those issues and I will continue to advance that issue through the other roles which I might hold for the rest of my public life.

It was a great pity that we did not have the opportunity to incorporate in the opening of parliament recognition of prior indigenous ownership of this land nationally, and of this land here, in particular, by the Ngunnawal people. I notice, for example, that in her first speech the member for Calwell acknowledged the prior ownership of the Ngunnawal people of this land on which the Parliament House is built. Properly, we all should do that. But realistically the way to do it is to recognise it in the official opening of the parliament. The rumour that I hear is that the minister for Aboriginal affairs took up the concerns raised previously by members and recommended to the Prime Minister that that recognition should be adopted for this opening of the parliament but it was rejected. Needless to say, I am not privy to the internal discussions of the government as to whether that is true or not, but I think that, if it is, it is a great pity. But whether it was recommended or not, it is what we should do. We must modernise the opening of this parliament. All the procedural nonsense with which we go on each time needs to be cleaned up, and one part of modernising it should be to include indigenous recognition.

With regard to the arts, I welcome the third opportunity to be involved in policy development in an official capacity both as minister and shadow minister previously. I regard it as a very important area of public policy, because it is where public policy can have a significant difference in affecting people’s lives both in the pleasure they get in the way in which the arts can question where we have come from as a country and where we should be going, and telling our stories to ourselves in our own voices. It is also very important economically because it is that creation of knowledge, that generation of intellectual property, that is the currency of the 21st century, and countries that do it well will be countries that prosper as economies and societies. So those were issues about which I was privileged to have the opportunity to speak and about which my passion continues.

I want to spend the rest of the time I have available tonight to turn my attention to some issues concerning economic policy and in particular to the importance of low interest rates. Modern social democratic parties have to look at developing new ways of achieving traditional social democratic destinations. One of those paths to the traditional Labor destination of economic policy generating wealth and fair distribution of wealth lies in low interest rates. Achieving low interest rates is not the only goal of economic policy but it is a critically important element that I want to focus on tonight. I do not make any apologies for saying that Labor’s economic policy agenda has an orthodox foundation. It rests on sound macro-economic policy—that is, low inflation and disciplined fiscal policy—and on efforts to make the economy work better by improving its efficiency and competitiveness; in a word, by lifting productivity.

Keeping interest rates low is a key element in achieving both our economic and our broader social objectives. Low interest rates are one of the main drivers of economic growth. Low interest rates encourage business to invest, create jobs and provide the right incentives and opportunities for people to accumulate assets. My colleague the member for Werriwa, the shadow assistant Treasurer, has been arguing—and I think he is right—that Labor should strive to encourage Australians to build their wealth by accumulating assets. This can be done by assisting them in buying their own homes, saving for retirement, or enhancing their human capital through additional education and training. These are outcomes that Labor has always stood for and will continue to strive for. But it is important in the modern context that we recognise that low interest rates are an important ingredient in encouraging asset accumulation strategies.

But the most important benefit of low interest rates is to lower the cost of servicing debt. This does not only benefit business,
although it is vitally important to promote investment. Other borrowers who benefit from low interest rates include young families struggling with highly geared mortgages and families struggling with credit card and other debts. The statistics are very hard to find, but logic suggests that this benefit from low interest rates, this benefit of the reduced impact of the repayment burden, is greater for low income families than for those with higher incomes—a point which reinforces the redistributive importance of low interest rates. I note with concern that the Reserve Bank in its most recent quarterly statement on monetary policy said:

Some deceleration in the growth of household indebtedness would be desirable in coming years. This raises the question of whether any Reserve Bank move to increase interest rates—which some market commentators are already speculating about—is likely to cause difficulties for borrowers.

The rapid rise in household debt in recent years will leave families and other borrowers more vulnerable whenever interest rates rise. Rising rates may also have, in this new context, unexpected macro-economic consequences: with borrowers so heavily leveraged, the impact of rate rises is likely to be greater than in the past.

Low interest rates, as I have said, are not desirable in themselves, but are a means to achieving another end: the prosperity of all Australians. My point, in those previous remarks, has been to emphasise that Labor recognises the importance of low interest rates in striving for that goal. This is an important point of difference between the government and the opposition. We believe that economic growth should be inclusive and that all Australians should have the opportunity to participate in the nation’s economic life and so fulfil their aspirations. But the data shows that in recent years an increasing number of people have been left behind in this race. A report last week by NATSEM, the economic consultancy and modelling agency here in Canberra, commissioned by AMP, shows a growing disparity in income between the richest and the poorest. It pointed to that growing disparity between the richest and poorest regions of Australia.

The NATSEM report, commissioned by AMP, confirms what many Australians have already come to believe: that the benefits of economic growth have been captured disproportionately by a privileged few, concentrated in a few areas. Using data on taxable income grouped by postcode, NATSEM ranked taxpayers by their average taxable income and then divided them into 10 equal groups. Every one of those deciles showed some growth in average taxable income, but the increases in the richer postcodes were much greater than in poorer areas.

From 1994-95 to 1998-99 New South Wales was the state with the biggest increase in average taxable incomes, which rose more than 20 per cent to $37,100. Tasmania had the smallest increase, with average taxable incomes rising 15 per cent to $31,000. The report found metropolitan areas had higher average taxable incomes than non-metropolitan areas and recorded faster growth in incomes. The income gap between city and country increased from 17.9 per cent in 1994-95 to 21.7 per cent in 1998-99. Nine out of the top 10 richest postcodes in Australia, measured by average taxable income, are in Sydney, headed by Darling Point. The only other postcode in the top 10, Toorak, is in Melbourne.

These figures reinforce the view that the government should broaden its view beyond its fixation with Melbourne and Sydney, and recognise that regional areas have much to offer. We need to develop the necessary infrastructure and create the right conditions for investment and jobs to flow into these areas. It is clear that the government’s regional policy, if you can call it a policy, has been ineffective and poorly targeted. The government’s simplistic approach to the problem was demonstrated by the Treasurer’s infamous comments in 1999 that the way to solve regional unemployment was by cutting minimum wages.

The Reserve Bank itself has come under criticism for taking what some see as a Sydney-centric view in setting monetary policy, and concerns have been raised about the level of economic debate on the bank’s
board. So I welcome the bank’s recent decision to reopen branch offices to gather local information and better inform the board’s deliberations. I may have something more to say about this in future.

Managing interest rate policy is not an end in itself but a means to an end. It is an important element in a series of policies aimed at improving the living standards of Australians. But too often governments forget the social context of those objectives. As a modern social democratic party, the ALP must make economic policy take into account the environmental and social dimensions of policy. This need not be a drag on the economy. Promoting environmental sustainability and social cohesion will help our economic performance. The challenge for governments is to resist pressure to run away from the policy changes that will promote productivity improvements. To do this we must ensure that change happens in ways that spread the benefits as widely as possible.

One important technical aspect of that broader goal is the way the formal objective of Reserve Bank policy is defined. Should a central bank’s goal be simply to achieve price stability—that is, low and stable inflation; or should it also have other objectives, in particular, maximising employment and national prosperity? Some economists argue that the second, full-employment objective is a distraction from what should be the central bank’s primary purpose of ensuring price stability, and in fact they argue it can undermine that goal.

I disagree with this view. I read with interest a speech last year by Laurence H Meyer, one of the governors of the US Federal Reserve Board. Meyer argued that price stability ought not be the only objective of monetary policy. He said:

... the key point is that price stability is not an end in itself, it is important because it contributes to a higher level of output and perhaps faster growth in output ...

I am pleased that, in that contribution, Meyer held up the dual mandate of Australia’s Reserve Bank, which is charged with promoting both stable prices and full employment, as a model that the US should adopt. All the technical expertise in the world cannot disguise the fact that ultimately there remains an element of judgment in the exercise of monetary policy. It is an art as well as a science. The dual mandate is a reminder to central bankers not to forget that their ultimate objective is promoting national prosperity. Put simply, the message I am trying to put in this contribution this evening is that low interest rates are a crucial ingredient in achieving that prosperity and I am committing the Labor Party to a recognition of that importance and a recognition of the sometimes difficult decisions that underpin such a commitment.

I want to conclude as I began, by thanking the electors of Fraser for giving me the opportunity to come here once again. In this House or in the Senate, I have had the opportunity now of representing that area for 14 years and I am grateful for that opportunity. I will seek to do that on some more occasions and I hope that they will continue to offer me that support. I am grateful for it and I welcome the opportunity to participate in that debate. There are some very important economic policy issues to be debated in this three-year term. I welcome the opportunity to start that debate, in an article I published this morning and in this speech, and I look forward to joining the debate as it emerges. It would be a pleasure if the Treasurer came in from time to time to engage in that debate in this House.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (9.30 p.m.)—It is with great pleasure that I rise this evening to speak on the address-in-reply to the speech by His Excellency the Governor-General on the occasion of the opening of the 40th Parliament. It is a great pleasure to be back in this House, and I thank the electors of Riverina for providing me with the opportunity to once again represent the views of the many wonderful people of the Riverina. I have been listening in the past week to the maiden—speeches of some of our new members. As I have sat in this House, it has been a great pleasure and a great experience to hear the passion and the commitment that they have for their electorates and to note the verve and the vigour with which they promised to represent their electorates.
That led me to believe that I should have a look at my first speech to see if I had remained true to the thoughts and ideals that I had when I first came into the House three years ago and I was making my maiden speech. I wondered if I was still the same person, if I still felt the same angst and if I felt the same desire to be standing here representing the views of the people of the Riverina. I listened to the first speeches, like that of the member for Macarthur, and I was so impressed. I felt his was very moving. I believe he is somebody who in three years time will be standing here again as a newly re-elected member, looking back on his speech and thinking that he had not changed at all in the three years.

So I pulled my maiden speech off the web site and started to read through it. I was particularly surprised but very pleased to see that I had not strayed very far at all from the roots of my beginning here in the House. One of the first things that I spoke on was the most pressing concern of health issues within the Riverina—the waiting lists for the provision of elective surgery and the closure of beds—and I indicated that I felt there was a real need for the federal government to be more accountable in the way in which monies that are paid to the states for the provision of health were tied to outcomes. I said that to ensure the states were spending their money appropriately and were accountable we should put in place some accountability. I still feel exactly the same way.

If I was despondent or disturbed about the issue of health at that time on 2 December 1998, I can look back with great pride and see how much has been achieved in the health budget by the former minister for health, the Hon. Michael Wooldridge, and also by the current Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon. John Anderson. Together they travelled into regional Australia—and particularly in my case to regional New South Wales—had a look and determined the issues that were confronting us. In his speech, the Governor-General indicated:

The government will continue its commitment to improving choice and access to high quality health care for all Australians regardless of their personal circumstances.

That is exactly what these two ministers did. They set about putting into the federal budget an enormous amount of money to be delivered particularly towards rural and regional health outcomes. Some of them have been absolutely sensational: they have been successful and they have delivered more incentive. We have had the rural GP retention program and the John Flynn scholarships. We have had nursing scholarships—$5.2 million over four years for retraining programs for rural nurses. We have had a myriad of health initiatives being put forth by this government to address particularly the crisis in the area of health that was facing rural and regional Australia.

But again I find that there is a lack of accountability by the states. It seems that the more money that we put into providing rural health services in New South Wales the less money that seems to be spent on it by the state government. In fact, we look at that state government having a surplus in their budget when we still have long waiting lists. We have hospitals that have bed closures due to lack of staff and other issues. Ideally that money should be paid in order to bring those health services into some sort of a semblance of order, particularly in New South Wales.

I look at the issues of Wagga Wagga city. We have categories of RRAMAs. We are looking after the metropolitan areas. RRAMAs 1 and 2 and maybe 4, 5, 6 and 7 get some attention, but with RRAMAs 3—for those areas that are looking at regional centres such as the size of Wagga Wagga and some of the larger inland cities in New South Wales—their doctor-patient ratios at the moment are in excess of 3,200 patients per doctor. That is simply unacceptable at this point in time.

At the same time, having risen to make my maiden speech, I spoke about competition policy and how I feared it would bring about job losses. There was downsizing and outsourcing while all the time we were losing services in rural and regional Australia. I felt that the only real losers in competition policy were rural Australians and that per-
haps the winners were the big end of town. My feelings on this issue are the same.

I still have the same thoughts on the rice industry. It is a sensational industry, one that I am very proud of and one that has contributed so much to the electorate of Riverina. Ricegrowers Cooperative Ltd is one of Australia’s most successful vertically integrated agribusinesses. It produces and markets great products under the outstanding SunRice brand, and other brands. We have annual export sales of over $500 million, and Ricegrowers Cooperative is Australia’s largest exporter of branded food products with its SunRice brand. Those branded products are all in the Riverina. They are value adding jobs, they are all within the Riverina and the job provision is outstanding and enormous. And still there is a consideration that a single desk policy for rice is a preferred model. It is certainly not my preferred model for the rice industry; it is certainly not the preferred model for the rice growers of New South Wales, nor is it the preferred model for Ricegrowers Cooperative Ltd.

Basically, we have a sensational industry that embraces globalisation. It provides the electorate of Riverina with substantial growth. It retains a strong hold on the amount of rice that is exported during the year, maintaining its position as the world’s fourth largest rice organisation and Australia’s largest exporter of processed and packaged food. It continues to export in excess of 85 per cent of the production of short, medium- and long-grain rice to 72 regular international customers. Ricegrowers Cooperative can proudly say that its product reaches into every continent on earth. It certainly has an enormous impact on the probable outcome of employment within the Riverina. That is something that concerns me enormously when we look to see how competition policy is impacting.

So when I re-read my maiden speech, I think, ‘I’m still here, fighting for the rice industry.’ I imagine that there is no less vigour in my thought and my deed. I will be standing here proudly alongside my rice growers, still maintaining the very great value that the single desk policy provides to the nation and to the Riverina. I would be asking the Premier of New South Wales, Mr Bob Carr, to come forward to the table to determine how best we are going to overcome this issue.

The next thing I raised in my maiden speech was in relation to RAAF base at Forest Hill. At the time, it was under threat of closure. Can I say—success! We fixed it; it is a success story. One of the proudest moments of my time in this House was to have recognised that the RAAF base at Forest Hill was looking at imminent closure and the Prime Minister, with true integrity and a true understanding of the need for this facility in Wagga Wagga, Forest Hill and the Riverina, declaring that RAAF Base Forest Hill would remain open. That was backed up by the opposition. They undertook that, should they ever come into government, they would indeed keep RAAF Base Forest Hill open as well. So we are secured by all avenues to have RAAF Base Forest Hill there not only in its past capacity but also, through the grace of the former minister, Peter Reith, for the training process, so that we now have an even bigger and better RAAF Base Forest Hill. We went from imminent closure to a very positive, productive and wonderful defence base.

So you look through your maiden speech and you say, ‘Yes, we did it! Yes, we achieved! Something that is great does happen in this House.’ In my maiden speech I also went through the tax reform issue. We confronted the monster; we slayed the dragons; we conquered the kingdoms and we are out there now, reaping the benefits of a very new tax system that, over a period of years, will get better. Another issue that I mentioned in my maiden speech was tourism, and I indicated: Already the cheap fares to Asia are competing strongly with our domestic market and are impacting heavily on regional tourism visitation. We are experiencing an outflow that simply will not be captured unless all of the states apply resources to undertake a vigorous regional marketing campaign.

Now I find at the present time that, with the demise of airlines internationally, again I am standing in the same position, seeking for
regional tourism and the states to come together with policies in order to capture an outflow, to capture a market that is the bread and butter of some of the electorates across Australia. It is certainly the most impacted industry in relation to employment figures for the nation. It is an industry that I am most comfortable with. I applaud the industry, and I implore governments to look at ways in which we can increase the benefits to the tourism industry to enable them to revive themselves and become very strong. I see there are great initiatives from the new Minister for Small Business and Tourism. The Hon. Joe Hockey is out there, championing away, raising the awareness of tourism and the general benefit and value that it is to Australia.

In my maiden speech I also spoke on telecommunications and the problems associated with that. This is another success story. Here I stand as a member three years in with a another success story. Mobile telecommunications throughout my electorate are better than we have ever had before and we are certainly looking to get better Internet connections. We are looking much more established in the area of telecommunications. What about roads? I talked about the need for infrastructure and the need to build strong roads. What have we got? The $1.4 billion Roads to Recovery program. We put it in place, through the financial assistance grants, directly to local governments. That was a saving grace for local government, and now we have New South Wales minister Carl Scully running around seeking for that Roads to Recovery money to be spent on state roads. That is not on. This money goes directly to local governments, the strength of society. We need to do more on Roads to Recovery.

I looked at all of the issues that were in the Governor-General’s speech. He spoke about the environment and about tackling our salinity. I come from Wagga Wagga, and I am hoping that the National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality will deliver enormous rewards to counter urban salinity and some of the larger issues that are surrounding us at the moment.

The citrus industry is, again, one of those issues about which I am still passionate. I have the best industry in Australia; I have the best orange growers in Australia in the Riverina. The Productivity Commission is taking place at the moment, brought about by this government. We need to ensure that my growers are able to get benefits out of this Productivity Commission, and that is something that I will never give up on. I will never give up on the people that I represent—the great citrus growers of the Riverina, and, indeed, the great citrus growers of Australia.

Coming again to the issue of health and the Governor-General’s speech, I am fortunate that the Governor-General will be opening a radiotherapy centre—a cancer centre of excellence—in Wagga Wagga on 2 March. The money—over $4 million—has been raised out of the whole of the Riverina and beyond in about 18 months in order to build a cancer care centre. This has been something that has been dear to my heart. I dedicated my maiden speech to my father. Just as he and my brother had succumbed as victims of cancer, so too is my mother now a terminal victim of this destroyer of families. On 16 February, this Saturday just past, a very dear and wonderful family friend of mine, Margaret Kelly, passed away with cancer in the prime of her life, leaving her six young children. I look forward to the establishment of the radiotherapy unit, because no longer will country people have to take second-rate treatment; no longer will country people be forced into exile in the city areas, areas that they do not know well, in order to undertake lifesaving treatment. They will be able to have this treatment in a regional centre in Wagga Wagga. They will come from all over the Riverina and beyond in order to access the radiotherapy cancer care centre. This was brought about by a group of dedicated people.

I look forward to the Governor-General opening the cancer care centre on 2 March. Unfortunately it is a little bit late for the loved ones with whom I am currently experiencing this destroyer of families—this thing called cancer. But, again, it shows the pride and the passion of the Riverina; it shows
how much we dedicate and commit to our own wellbeing. I thank the former health minister, Michael Wooldridge, for his understanding and for agreeing to provide health program grant funding to the radiotherapy centre and Medicare rebates. Without the centre we would not have been able to provide the residents of the Riverina and beyond, as I said, with the opportunity to be treated with dignity in a place at which they were comfortable.

On 2 March, the Governor-General will also hand over keys to a house that was built by the local community for Camp Quality. We have a very strong and enthusiastic community that have a great desire to see the curse of cancer overcome; if it cannot be overcome, they want the people who are suffering from this horrendous disease to be made as comfortable as possible. The house will come with fully donated labour and goods. It will then be auctioned off and bought by some general residents of Wagga Wagga.

I move on to issues of mental health. We recognise that suicide in rural and regional Australia is of paramount concern to most people. As I stand here this evening—I have sat and pondered over the speeches of many of the new members—it is my view that mental health must be one of the more significant issues of the House and one of the more significant issues of government. There must be a bipartisan attitude toward removing the stigma of mental health and understanding of the issues that surround mental health, whether it be postnatal depression or any other form of mental health. This is something that the community recognises as a need. It is a cost to the community. I would like to be involved in establishing a far better understanding of this matter—removing the stigma for the people who suffer from mental health issues and providing some basic treatment and understanding. I think the best place to start is in the House. *(Time expired)*

**Mr PRICE** (Chifley) *(9.50 p.m.)*—Mr Deputy Speaker Jenkins, it is traditional, of course, to offer my congratulations to you. That seems somewhat misplaced, given that you failed in two ballots, but I must say that I am delighted to see you now returned to your current position. Please accept my sincere congratulations in that regard. I would be most grateful if you would also pass on my best wishes to the Speaker and Deputy Speaker.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** *(Mr Jenkins)*—Your generosity of spirit will mean that I will pass on your best wishes to the other two gentlemen, but I am not sure about the comments about me.

**Mr PRICE**—We have all been through an election and, in some ways, we could say, ‘So what?’ But I must say that, in 38 years of being a member of the Australian Labor Party, I have never seen an election like it. We first had the episode with the *Tampa* and then that devastating event at the World Trade Centre. In the midst of that we had an election campaign, in which, I must say, it was almost impossible for an opposition to get its messages out. I congratulate Kim Beazley, because in defeat there are no second prizes, but our defeat in fact could have been so much greater than it was. Yet in these most difficult circumstances, Kim Beazley has left us still in a position, if we are good enough and have the trust and confidence of the Australian people, to win the next election.

I want to thank the good electors of Chifley. They are most indulgent, very supportive and offer me great encouragement, and I thank them deeply for the privilege that they have given me. I would also like to thank Raoul Mendoza, my campaign director, and all those who worked on my campaign so tirelessly and, from a Labor Party point of view, for no monetary reward.

Having mentioned the *Tampa*, I want to return to the issue of asylum seekers. Notwithstanding our defeat, the Labor Party remain trenchantly committed to protecting our borders and having effective border protection. We all know that part of the problem was that in the last two years about 2,000 asylum seekers came to Australia. More than anything, it reflected a breakdown in relations between Australia and Indonesia. Having said that, though, I do not resile from any remarks that I have made about detention centres. I was very privileged to have been on the human rights committee of this
parliament which went around to detention centres and, unlike other committees, actually spoke to the people in detention centres. In some ways it is a matter of regret that we gave an undertaking to those individuals to preserve their anonymity and keep confidential the remarks they made to us. Those remarks are all in *Hansard* transcripts because we took a Hansard reporter around. There is an absolute commonality in what they were saying about each of the detention centres. None was different, really, from any of the others.

Whilst the minister for immigration chose to relentlessly pursue particularly the coalition members over the report, I have said previously that we were briefed by the department of immigration and those that run the centres, ACM, prior to those visits. After those visits, over a number of parliamentary sitting days, for 8½ hours we grilled the department and ACM. Again, I regret that, although I had moved on the committee that they be public hearings, this was rejected. I really regret that the information that we sought, given the criticism of the minister, was not on the public record. We certainly have the *Hansard* transcripts of all that questioning.

I am very happy with the report. Mr Deputy Speaker, I think that you would be very happy with the report inasmuch as it reflected the best traditions of the parliament. I cannot stand before you and say that I got everything that I wanted in the report in terms of the recommendations—that certainly is far from the case. But it is also true to say that the coalition members moved their position too and it was a unanimous report. I still think that the recommendations have a great deal of validity.

However, I want to raise two areas where I was unsuccessful, not to quibble with my fellow committee members—as I said, I think the report reflected the best traditions of the parliament—but merely to put them on the public record. They are two areas of the prison systems. In the state prison systems—in all of the states, as far as I am aware—there is what is called an official visitor program. Because so many of these centres are so isolated, the biggest problem is the fact that they are not open to public scrutiny in the way that other institutions are. Clearly an official visitor program whereby people could visit those centres, hear complaints and take them up with management would be a very useful extra level of grievance and accountability mechanisms.

The second measure relates to the practice in Western Australia and New South Wales of having an inspector-general of prisons. I suggested that the position of inspector-general of detention centres be created. We are used to having inspectors-general; in fact, the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security is looking at the moment at the incidents involving DSD. The inspector-general of detention centres would be a statutory office holder with the ability to undertake inquiries at the direction of the minister. He or she could do their own motion of inquiries and of course they could handle complaints. They would not replace the role of an ombudsman, I hasten to add; the ombudsman could still have their role. It would be a measure of protection and confidence building in the system.

It is possible to stream and process asylum seekers at a far greater rate than we are currently doing. However, I commend the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs because the 14 weeks that they target now is a much better figure than that which they were previously working to, but still too many do not meet that target.

The other point I make is that the government recently announced that it would offer $3,000 as assistance in the repatriation of people who are unsuccessful in establishing their bona fides—a minority of people in detention centres—and that is not a bad idea. Currently, all that can be offered is, from memory, $250. If they are costing you $104 a day, offering $250 to speed the return of an asylum seeker to their country of origin is not a great deal of money. I hate to praise economic rationalists, but I think that it is worth while offering much more than that if that is the inducement people need to return quickly.

Getting off the subject of detention centres, I want to mention two other things. One
of the things we did was to call the Director-General of ASIO to appear before us. He advised that he was able to develop a security profile such that he would be able to determine in a boatload of refugees those who needed closer investigation and detailed investigation and those who were not a security risk. I guess one interpretation of that is that, for those that are not identified as a security risk, detention then essentially becomes an issue of choice by the government rather than necessity. However, I believe that things like health checks and what have you are much better done in detention centres.

The other thing is that we did offer a scheme whereby if someone was not a security risk and was in there for the maximum time, the 14 weeks, and was able to be sponsored out into the community, they should be released. That was shamelessly misrepresented, I regret to say, by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. The point that I would make is that, whilst we were silent on families—for the very good reason that there was a pilot scheme under way—the committee did say that families were a priority for the committee. The very system we were offering for those that had stayed the 14 weeks could easily have been adapted for families who were not a security risk and were not there for 14 weeks.

I do not relish from the fact that it is possible—and I think desirable—to have a very tough approach to border protection and at the same time have an approach that treats asylum seekers who are in Australia with a bit of decency and regard for their human rights and dignities as individuals. I have always said that, if we could only get the TV cameras into these detention centres focused on some of these detainees and allow them to talk, there is no doubt that those great Australian qualities of fairness and a ‘fair go’ and barracking for the underdog would come to the fore—and what is occurring in detention centres would be rightly condemned by a majority of all Australians.

I guess one of the ironies for me was that in the week after the election I was called to one of the local public schools and there was a meeting in the library with a goodly number of the parents. They wanted to quiz me about what I was doing to give them some share of the money that Kings School and some of the other more better off schools were receiving. The irony for me, of course, was that we had recently had an election that in some ways had settled that issue. But I think it gives an indication of how difficult it was for the opposition to get its message about ‘It’s the election’ through to the people, given the events of 11 September.

Another matter I wish to cover concerns an allegation that, prior to the election, I was in favour of conscription. Firstly, let me say that I have never been an advocate of conscription, then or now. But I do note that even in the Governor-General’s speech he talks about the white paper. In the white paper it says that our Australian defence forces should be able to deploy a brigade overseas and sustain it over a long term and that they should be able, concurrently, to deploy a battalion at another location. The truth of the matter is that we cannot. I think that is a matter of concern.

When I was talking about what would be the likely deployment of Australian troops to Afghanistan, I made the point that the Americans—and it would be up to the Americans—would most likely ask us for SAS troops or commandos. In the event, it was SAS troops. But if they were to ask us for ground troops, the first choice the Prime Minister would have would be whether to mobilise the reserves—and that is fraught with danger because they are not on sufficient warning time. The Army has a $4.2 billion deficiency in equipment, and it would take an awful amount of effort to not only mobilise the reserves but have them ready to deploy to a location like Afghanistan.

The other alternative might be conscription. Perhaps I got myself into a bit of hot water over that, but I stand by my remarks. I think the most important aspect of my remarks is the fact that the white paper said that we should be able to deploy a brigade and sustain it, and a battalion and sustain it, and we cannot do it. We have had the lessons of East Timor and the huge strain that that has put on us. No-one could have anticipated, I think, September 11. We have re-
sponded to that with our most elite troops, the SAS. I do not think we should get out of our comfort zone by thinking that what is in the white paper—this necessity to deploy a brigade and a battalion and sustain it—is going to go away. We really need to make sure that we can do it.

It is matter of regret that the previous government—indeed, the previous minister—was not able to outline what is the role of our reserves. We know they are being used as slots in the Regular Army. That is on an individual basis, filling an individual billet. But we have not yet seen reserve units being deployed as formed units, although I understand there are some moves in that direction. Every time a general comes to brief us in this place, I love to quiz him about the role of the reserves. Of course, they are not in a position to say. Certainly, the minister has made no announcement. One is reluctant to repeat rumours, but one of the things doing the rounds at the moment is that, out of every brigade of reserves, we will be able to use one company—that is, 100. Out of 3,000 reserves we will generate a company of 100 and that 100 will then be deployed. I have no way of knowing whether that is true—Fran Bailey interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—Order! The honourable member for McEwen.

Mr PRICE—I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence; I do not think, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the parliamentary secretary is trying to defy your ruling. I think she is trying to assist me. But I have some difficulties, because I think we really do need to take some tough reform decisions in relation to our Army. I have been to a presentation where it was suggested that we can produce heightened readiness reserves but within current training day allocations and with no additional investment. The Army Reserve currently takes up $950 million, so what we really are saying is that for $950 million for the Army Reserve we are going to get five companies of 100 reservists. I think that that is a very difficult argument to sustain. I passionately believe that we should have a role for the reserves and that it should be a realistic role. We should give them the investment in equipment and the training they need. But if we do that we will not be able to do what we are doing at the moment; that is, have five phantom brigades of reservists.

And it is not only the reserves that need to be reformed. I will not get into that. But I do appeal to the parliamentary secretary at the table: I think the government should make an announcement and put us all out of our misery about the direction ahead for the reserves. There has not been an official statement. There has certainly been no ministerial statement. These people are volunteers; they volunteer to be part-time soldiers. I admire their commitment, I admire their dedication—I am sure we all do. I think these people deserve to know what is going on, rather than it all being by backroom innuendo or by rumour. (Time expired)

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (10.10 p.m.)—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, and congratulations on your election to the high office that you hold for this parliament. Tonight I rise for the address-in-reply to the Governor-General’s speech. Just to set the scene for those listening, the Governor-General’s speech was an excellent overview of why the Howard government has been given a renewed mandate to manage the national affairs of our country. Much has already been achieved by the Howard government but there is still a lot to be done, and in his speech the Governor-General gave us a broad-brush account of what that agenda looks like.

The forward looking agenda is a comprehensive one: reforms, specific policy commitments and implementation of forward looking strategies like the $32 billion defence white paper and the Australians Working Together package to get people to focus on people’s abilities and to help them be more engaged in the community and in the work force. We have also got Building on Australia’s Ability, the innovation measure that was previously announced, and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality—one of central importance to both you and me, Mr Deputy Speaker—recognising that the health of our natural systems goes straight to the heart of the health of our
economy and the vitality of our community. So those long-term forward agendas are there.

The Governor-General also referred to the commitment of the Prime Minister and this government to tackle other longer term challenges such as environmental sustainability, and treading a little more lightly on our environment in the economic activity that we undertake; our ageing population; the affordability and resourcefulness that are needed to keep implementing government programs to meet the growing expectations of our community; and improving our security and our law enforcement capacity. The agenda that the Governor-General outlined also recognised the need to nurture the foundations and the values that make this nation a great nation and where we could build on a century of achievement and accomplishment, strengthen our institutions, maintain a thoughtful form of regional engagement and continue our strong, reliable alliance with friendly nations like the United States, put families back in as the cornerstone of our community and make sure that the care and support systems for those that are in need are there. That is the outline that the Governor-General provided. The Governor-General also pointed to the government’s continuing commitment to pursue reforms that will help improve our productivity as a nation. Producing higher living standards for our citizens, making our marketplaces fairer and more accessible for all participants, increasing the number of jobs that are available and ensuring access to valuable training opportunities were all covered by the Governor-General, as well as the need to provide to the depth and purpose of that comprehensive work program that you have already seen from the Howard government in its first two terms.

Tonight I want to emphasise the word ‘work’. This is about a work program, and we know that, because worthwhile achievements rarely come easily. Our political stability, our peaceful lifestyle, our personal security, our envied economic prosperity and our boundless opportunities and the freedoms we enjoy are all hard-won virtues of our nation. Much of what the Governor-General said, including the program that he outlined for this Howard government, is about underpinning those virtues and making sure they are there for everybody, because they do not just happen. We have to work for them. We have to protect them. They are hard-won virtues of our country that we need to build upon.

I emphasise the work that is ahead and the work that has already been undertaken. We have secured many good things for our citizens, and that is what gets us all out of bed in the morning. I do not know about you, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I am sure that if we wanted a career of fun we could do something else other than be in public life. But we are in public life—all of us on all sides of the parliament—because we feel we can do something worth while for our country. On 10 November the vast majority of Australians decided that the value of the work that the Howard government had already undertaken was worth continuing. I hope that is also an endorsement of the many individual Liberal and National Party members that were re-elected. It was about the work that the Howard government has done.

With regard to the historic third term that the Howard government won, we are under no illusion that that was a product of some sea change of political opinion. That was not what it was. It was not some sort of seismic shift of, in my case, the locals’ love of the Liberal Party. It was actually about our work. We had been working hard and we had been workmanlike in tackling the challenges that the nation faced. We had gotten on with the job. The vote on 10 November was an endorsement of our work and a green light to keep working. That is what it was about. That is something that is very handy for all of us in this place to remember.

From my point of view, I am able to continue with that work because of the support from the local community. I would briefly like to mention the outstanding campaign team that helped enable that in my case: Greg Sugars, who was campaign director—what an outstandingly gifted individual he is—and has a big future ahead of him; Natalie Divola; David Morris; John Howard—the namesake of our Prime Minister,
who is also as virtuous as our Prime Minister—Bill Beaglehole; Harry Dean; and all of the members of the local branches of the Liberal Party. Also, there were many members from the Labor Party who liked our work, liked our positivity and liked the fact that we were looking forward and did not want to just get into a carping, opportunistic slanging match. Also, I would like to thank all of those regular people from the community who also put up their hands and said, ‘Yes, we want to be a part of this work.’ Thank you to all of those people. We have much to do.

In 1998, I outlined a community action plan called ‘Our Dunkley Destiny’. It was a program of activities that I would pursue in partnership with the local community if I was able to earn the support of the local community. Thankfully, we did earn the support of the local community and were able to implement that community action plan. The campaign slogan we used was ‘positive, passionate, persistent’, three qualities that you very much need in a marginal seat in Australian politics and three qualities that helped us make sure that that community action plan was implemented and that we secured some practical results for our community.

But like with the nation, in Dunkley there is still a lot more that needs to be done. I thought the reasonable thing to do in asking people for their support was to give the electorate an understanding of where I would be applying my energies—what the work would be that I would pursue on their behalf. So, we had an ‘Our Dunkley Destiny’ mark 2 that built on the work we had previously secured and the partnerships that helped us get things done in a local community. That is the interesting thing about Dunkley. The folks in Dunkley want the members of parliament to be a community resource. Once the election is over, people do not care much about what side of politics you supported. It is everybody getting in to do something for our local community. I think that is a quality that is a strength in the Dunkley community that I certainly respect and admire and am happy to be a part of.

My commitment to the electors of Dunkley is that we will keep going with that work and we will keep implementing ‘Our Dunkley Destiny’ mark 2, the next stage of our community action plan, so together we can make Dunkley an even better, more sustainable place to live, work and visit.

Now, what is on the agenda then? Someone in this place, I cannot imagine who, may not have heard of the Scoresby Freeway. The parliamentary secretary at the table, Ms Bairley, is cheering vigorously in support of the Scoresby Freeway. What an important infrastructure project that is. Through our work, we have secured $445 million; federal dollars to be matched by the states to see that crucial infrastructure project completed. The feds are there; we are there. Prime Minister Howard is there; he has signed the $45 million cheque and it is going to the state government. We are just wondering why the Bracks Victorian Labor government is AWOL—absent without leadership—on this project. We are anxious that the state should get its act together and its house in order so that we can move on with that important project.

Keeping home ownership affordable is also a central part of what we need to do to make sure that the Dunkley community is vital and that people are able to enjoy the standard of living that they have come to expect.

You, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, might remember that I have waved around a weapon in this place: a syringe. Right around our communities, a syringe is becoming the weapon of choice for people in armed hold-ups and in armed assaults. The Howard government during the election campaign, in response to years of advocacy on my behalf, have agreed to work to protect innocent people from the health risk of recklessly discarded needles by supporting the use of retractable syringes. That is my commitment. But what the Howard government have done is put $27.5 million on the table to help develop that technology. This will help ensure that there are retractable syringes available and suitable for use in needle supply programs and to make sure that when a needle is recklessly discarded it is not then a danger to innocent people enjoying the beaches of Dunkley or the parks of our community or
travelling on some of the public transport, or that a shopkeeper in Frankston or a policeman in Mornington is not facing somebody waving a used syringe around as a weapon. That is an outstanding measure that was announced during the election campaign that is part of our ongoing program.

We also need to have a look at re-establishing the reputation, character and atmosphere of Frankston as a key coastal regional centre that has tourism at the heart of its economy. Some bureaucrats actually think Frankston is like a twin city to Dandenong. Anybody who knows the area can understand how misguided that view is. Over time, as the metropolis of Melbourne has changed, people have allowed themselves to assume that Frankston has been swallowed up in the urban sprawl. It remains the key regional coastal centre on that south-eastern side of Melbourne. We need as a community to recommit ourselves to re-establishing that reputation, that character and that atmosphere of our city. It is a great city but we cannot allow it to become purely a retail capital. We need a diversification in the economy. We need to recognise that we have a skill mix in our community that needs a broader range of activities than purely retail. That is the challenge that is ahead of us.

In terms of aged care, I have heard people in this place talk about the wonders and virtues of their electorates and how they are the best place in Australia. I can understand their thinking only if they have never been to the Mornington Peninsula. What a great place. It is fantastic place. It is a retirement magnet. It is a place where people, when their time is their own, choose to be. It is also a place where many young families are setting out to for a better quality of life. All of that amounts to the fact that it is a place where there are huge demands on aged care services because when the government, through the aged care planning advisory committee, is deciding where to allocate low care and high care aged care beds it works on a formula that relies upon the residential population.

That is fine if you are not a magnet—if you do not have an excellent RSL war veterans’ nursing home which draws in veterans from around greater Melbourne, or if you are not part of the Mornington Peninsula, where people from around Victoria belong and want to come, not only to retire but to get the appropriate standards and quality of residential aged care. They come to our community because it is the place they want to be. But that magnet effect is not reflected in the planning formula, and I am committed to seeing the magnet that the Peninsula is reflected in the allocation of aged care beds and support services.

We also need to recognise the fact that our ageing population means that we might need to have a bit of a rethink about the sorts of aged care services that are provided. Talk to any provider of aged care services and they will talk about how their clients and residents are in their care for longer periods of time. What we are finding, though, is that a lot of them might be better supported through things like the community aged care packages that look after their physical wellbeing and their personal care in some of the domestic tasks that they are confronted with, but that is not the only thing that makes people’s wellbeing what it should be. Many are lonely. They want someone to talk to. They want to engage with other adults. They want to talk about the issues of the day. They want to be alive. They want to be human and have those connections that many more mobile people take for granted. Maybe we should look at community aged care packages having that human nourishment element factored into them. We may well see the demands for residential aged care reduced, because we are not only dealing with people’s physical, physiological, personal care and home accommodation needs, we are dealing with their souls and their need to be in contact with other people.

We have some great environmental assets that offer enormous visitor appeal, and that should be part of repositioning Dunkley as the renewal destination for 3½ million Melburnians. I do not know about you, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, but most of the people I run into are, frankly, exhausted. Life is screaming along and they are running to stand still. When their time is their own and they want to recharge their batteries, maybe
we should be saying, ‘Jump on the Scoresby transport corridor, hook on down to Dunkley, enjoy all these environmental cultural appeals, get the wind in your hair that comes with being a part of that community, and recharge your batteries on the doorstep of our great city.’ Maybe that should be part of the vision. I think that needs to be part of our forward agenda. That popularity that the region represents is also an enormous challenge. The Mornington Peninsula traditionally characterises an area of village communities and primary industry. The problem we are facing is that a lot of our rural land is becoming darned expensive as we get QCs from Melbourne buying up a vineyard, or some very wealthy business person who in their spare time wants to run a few herefords.

Fran Bailey—it is like what happens in the Yarra Valley.

Mr BILLSON—it is like what happens in the Yarra Valley, putting enormous pressure on property values. What we need to do on the Mornington Peninsula is go French. Why don’t we get a little bit provincial? Why don’t we say, ‘Come down and renew your batteries on the Mornington Peninsula and use the accommodation in Frankston. Why not eat our beef? Why not enjoy our vegetables? Why not take our fruit? Why not suck on the chardonnay that is the teardrop of an angel—that is, Mornington Peninsula wines? Why not enjoy the whole experience?’ This is what happens in France. Through that, you can have higher value added returns on what are primary industry functions on our peninsula that frankly cannot compete with other areas because of the value of the land. In doing so, we not only nurture and maintain those qualities that make this spectacular region so attractive to many others, we also do ourselves a great favour in keeping the landscape looking the way it is and taking some of the pressure off the urban subdivision that always seems to want to creep its way across the Mornington Peninsula. That vision of sustainability on the Mornington Peninsula needs to be part of our longer term plan. That is what I will be putting some of my energies into. Having talked about urban movement into the hinterland of the peninsula, I should declare a pecuniary interest, being shortly a Mornington East resident. That housing explosion out there is creating demands on services and infrastructure that we need to try to catch up with to better connect these rapidly growing urban areas in our area.

In the few minutes that are left available to me, we have talked about Scoresby and the renewal destination. We are also working on those over-45-year-olds who find themselves out of work. We are working with local training and Job Network providers and health providers to put into place some mature age career collaboration whereby we can bring in people of white collar background who find themselves displaced from the labour force; who are terrified when they look at a computer; who may be unclear on how the economy is changing and, therefore, how the work force is changing; who may take a too narrow view of their own skills to be aware of some of the opportunities that are available; and who may be so frustrated with the circumstances they face that they do not take proper care of themselves. This is something we will be piloting this year, and I hope that it is sensational. All my colleagues will stand up in the party room and say, ‘Prime Minister, we need a Dunkley mature age career collaboration in every electorate.’ We will experiment with that because it is an issue facing our local community that we need to work on.

I have secured the commitment of the Howard government to put in place a program to guard against youngsters aged 13 to 26 who may experiment with drugs. We need to grab those people and help them and work with them so that that experimentation or that occasional use does not develop into a drug-dependent lifestyle. Let’s grab them before they lose their way. We are also going to look at the drug abuse services that are available and see if we are coordinating those well and that there is reasonable access to residential rehabilitation and detoxification facilities within our region. I am tired of sending young people from my area to Canberra and Mount Gambier to get into a detox centre. It is unsatisfactory and it has got to change, and I am committed to seeing it change over the life of this parliament.
Finally, there is something else going on in our communities, and that is that families are doing it tough in some cases. Families are under stress. In many areas of the community I represent they are too often single parent families with teenaged kids. Because they are single parent families they are out working, which means that the kids are coming home and there is no-one there. Our after-school-hours programs cut out at 12 and 15, depending on where you are. Therefore we need to work with those families to strengthen the families themselves and develop some life skills, resilience promotion and self-management skills to make sure that those citizens grow up to be valuable, connected and fully engaged citizens in our community.

We are all in here to make a big difference. My time is rapidly expiring. I would just like to leave with you my commitment to the electors of Dunkley: it is truly an honour to be elected for a third time. It is not something that I take lightly. We have got a lot to do together. We have, through Our Dunkley Destiny II, a program to make sure that at the end of the 40th Parliament our particular part of this great nation is much better than it currently is, as terrific as it is at this time.

I rise tonight to congratulate a number of young people in Isaacs. The first group of young people are students from a number of schools in Isaacs who received community or citizenship awards in their schools at the end of last year. We are very good at recognising and acknowledging the people in our schools who do well academically or on the sports field, but we do not always recognise, acknowledge or thank the students who work hard behind the scenes. These students and people like them are the backbone of our society. They typically go about what they are doing voluntarily—quietly, happily and without looking for reward. It is important to publicly acknowledge these people and to thank them. I am pleased that I was able to be a part of this process last year by presenting a number of awards at various schools.

The following are students who received these awards in 2001. Venaka Thuduwage, a year 8 student last year who attends Lyndhurst Secondary College, is regarded as a leader within the school. He is a good student, involves himself heavily in extracurricular activities and is regarded by his teachers as a good role model for other students. Andrew Janszak, who was in year 11 last year, goes to Parkdale Secondary College. He is another contributor behind the scenes. Andrew is organised and interested in what he does. He has a good, positive attitude, is very keen to do well and sets high standards for himself and for others. Dan Voet was in year 12 last year and went to Patterson River Secondary College. Dan worked very hard backstage for the rock eisteddfod and happily and voluntarily undertook lots of work in his own time. Dan could always be relied upon to do exactly what he committed himself to do. Matthew Szucks was in year 11 last year at Cranbourne Secondary College and he thoroughly deserves his community service award. Mathew gets heavily involved in whatever goes on around the school, including gardening and working bees. He is very good at and interested in computers and he stands out as a very reliable and committed young man. Jessica Gregor was in year 12 in 2000 at Mordialloc College and was nominated for the 2001 award. Jessica was dux of school in
2000. She participated in the school debating team in earlier years, provided tutoring to year 7 students in mathematics, was editor of the year 12 end-of-year magazine and achieved first place in the senior division of Mordialloc College’s dance competition. Last year, 2001, Jessica completed her first year of a combined engineering/science degree at the University of Melbourne. I look forward to being able to participate in citizenship awards at the various schools around Isaacs again at the close of this current school year.

The second group of young people I want to acknowledge tonight are those who received awards as part of the Australia Day ceremonies conducted by local councils in Isaacs. Paul Graham, a young man from Mordialloc, won Kingston Council’s Young Citizen of the Year for 2002. Paul was nominated for this award by both the Mordialloc Flyers Basketball Club and the Mordialloc Community Centre. Paul plays for the Mordialloc Flyers Basketball Club and coaches four of their junior teams. He is an inspirational model for the younger members of the club and teaches these young people by example and with a sense of fun. Paul won the Mordialloc Community Centre President’s Award in both 2000 and 2001 for the most outstanding contribution made to the activities of the centre. He participated in a number of activities involving younger children at the centre, particularly a couple of all-day events requiring lots of energy and endurance.

As part of Casey Council’s Australia Day celebrations, the participants of the Casey Council’s 2002 Australia Day Study Tour were announced. Ten students from within the city of Casey have been given the opportunity of undertaking a five-day study tour of all three levels of government, including a visit to Canberra. This group includes Amy Little from St Peters College in Cranbourne and Heather Iverson from Lyndhurst Secondary College. It is really good to see all these young people committed to their communities. They are a great example to all of us, not just to the young people of our area.

Eden-Monaro Electorate: Closure of Bombala Softwood Mill

Mr NAI RN (Eden-Monaro)  (10.34 p.m.)—It is with a great deal of regret and disappointment that I rise this evening in the House to express my concern for the 15 to 20 direct jobs—and possibly tens of other indirect jobs—that have been put in doubt by the closure of the Austral Softwoods timber mill in Bombala. However, this is not simply a story of a business failing due to factors that were beyond the control of the company’s management. Such stories, as you may recall, were all too common during 13 years of Labor government. No, this story involves promises from Labor Party representatives and a community strung along month after month, year after year, in an effort to win votes.

The softwood mill in Bombala has always had a vital role in this small yet vibrant community. Originally operated by CSR, in 1999 the mill was purchased by Softwood Developments Corporation—SDC, later to become Austral. The purchase was accompanied with a great amount of ceremony, with promises to the community of greater things to come. In early March 1999, a couple of weeks before a state election, the Labor candidate for Monaro, John Durst, welcomed the New South Wales Minister for Forestry, Kim Yeardon, into the electorate to announce up to 300 new jobs in the region with a $50 million new softwood mill to be constructed at Bucky Springs Road just outside Bombala. The promises were extensive: more people into the town, 75 to 80 new houses that would need to be built and the possibility of working with an electricity supplier that would use forestry biomass for power generation. In the words of the local Bombala Times:

You could almost hear celebrating in the streets of Bombala.

Over the coming months, the state minister was never too far away from a photo opportunity—but not now. In early 2000, SDC finally made a time commitment: they would have bulldozers at the site by the end of that year. Not content with leaving things so indefinite, the then Labor candidate for Eden-Monaro joined the crew in an effort for votes
by announcing that the proposed commencement date would be November of that year. He was at the time reported as stating that it was, ‘Labor delivering for Bombala and the South-East.’

The community became anxious around March 2000 when Glenn Hodges, representing SDC, wrote a letter to the local paper assuring the community that the project was still going ahead, with a planned operation date of January 2002. However, in July 2000 the nuts and bolts started to fall out of the ALP’s vote-winning machine when a public meeting revealed that locals had noticed that nothing had happened. According to SDC, the project was still going ahead, but maybe now on the existing site and not at Bucky Springs as they had first stated.

Yet amidst all the uncertainty, the New South Wales Premier was still reported in the Bombala Times as ‘continuing to provide every assistance to the Softwood Development Corporation’ to ensure that the project went ahead. He went as far as to sign a second memorandum of understanding, this time with Austral Softwoods, another arm of the same corporate group, promising a now downgraded $30 million development. The downgrading of course was not at the expense of the pomp and ceremony accompanying the last announcement. Even up to August last year, Austral Softwoods was still stringing out the community by signing a contract for the design, construction and commissioning of the new mill.

By the end of January this year, while the paint was still wearing off the Labor candidate’s signs trumpeting his commitments to Eden-Monaro, Austral entered into voluntary administration. The jobs to this day remain uncertain and the displaced workers in Bombala want answers to their questions. Both the New South Wales Premier and the former Labor candidate for Eden-Monaro always seemed to be quite close to the company, yet now they seem to be far enough away from them that they cannot ensure the workers’ continued employment.

Many questions need to be asked and I know that my colleague the member for Monaro in the state parliament will be asking them. Looking at the company structures, Austral Softwoods is owned by ASP Consolidated which is owned by another company and on and on it goes. The principal of all of these, Harry Wolthuizen, was probably taking a nice little amount out of this company and leaving the company on the ground to go broke and, along with it, a number of small businesses in Bombala will not be paid. That is just a tragedy. Throw in a political donation from Austral Softwoods to the New South Wales Labor Party in 1999-2000 and you have a very sorry tale to tell. There are many questions to be asked of the involvement of the New South Wales government dating back to their agreement with CSR when no royalties were paid and $6 million is outstanding to New South Wales state forests by this company, Austral Softwoods. Many small businesses in Bombala have not been paid. Somebody has got away with a lot of money as a result. That is not good enough and the New South Wales Labor government has a lot of questions to answer. (Time expired)

Burma: Karen People

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand) (10.39 p.m.)—I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to office.

The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Gellibrand.

Ms ROXON—I want to speak tonight on a matter that has been raised with me as a local issue, but which is really an international issue. It gives rise to some cause for reflection, given the current debate on the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in our country and in our region. The issue concerns the ongoing struggle for democracy in Burma and the story of the Karen minority people who are, in some small numbers, starting to make the electorate of Gellibrand their new home after fleeing persecution and living in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border.

Mr Ganemy Kunoo is the Vice President of the Australian Karen Organisation and he lives in my electorate. He is quietly spoken, intelligent and a leader amongst his people. Ganemy organised for me to meet two Karen leaders who were visiting Australia last year. I met the two leaders, Saw Htoo Htoo Lay
and Saw Thackabaw, only three days after the election last year. They met me to urge Australia to play a greater role in sponsoring and promoting peace and democracy in Burma, and to ask for assistance in the growing humanitarian crisis. They talked to me about the internal political circumstances, especially the ongoing persecution of all other ethnic nationalities within Burma, of which the Karen people are the major group, and the refusal to recognise democratically elected representatives. They presented a list of 11 items of their wishes for me to urge upon the Australian government. If there is not time for me to read it out tonight, I would ask leave to table it and have it incorporated in my speech. In particular, they asked us to support tripartite talks to enable a peaceful transition to democracy. They seek help and protection for refugees, of which there are over 100,000 on the Thai-Burma border, and the internally displaced persons of which there are now over 300,000, and hope for assistance in providing a safe haven for many refugees.

Well might the Karen people look to us as a nation for some leadership and compassion on this issue. We had, after all, a very proud record in the past. However, in the current circumstances, I have to confess that I found it personally a little jarring—almost a bit embarrassing—to be called upon to assist in our region when, despite the strength of our democracy, the rights we were seeking to protect elsewhere may not be ones that we have fully acknowledged in our own country. This is not the time and place for me to put on the record in detail my view of mandatory detention and our treatment of asylum seekers. However, I am pleased to record that Labor is rethinking its position and all of us, me included, have the opportunity to put forward our views and to contribute to finding a decent, compassionate solution that is also good for the country as a whole. Rest assured that I have taken that opportunity to raise my views about the inappropriateness of holding children in detention, the lack of educational facilities provided, the need to separate criminal deportees from asylum seekers, the failings of private management and much more. These issues are close to my heart because the Maribyrnong detention centre is in my electorate of Gellibrand. The issue of children asylum seekers being mixed with criminal deportees, often people who arrived here lawfully but committed other offences, is one of the most troubling aspects of this whole debate and an issue that does not receive much attention.

I have referred to this briefly lest people wonder why I raise these issues in an adjournment debate when they are international matters, without reflecting briefly on our plight. I do so because we used to be able to hold our heads high in this region and I think that we can do that again. However, we need to have a decent policy here and we need to be able to participate actively in the region around us. That includes us being able to take seriously the list of issues in respect of which it has been requested that we assist. I would like to forward that list to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Rather than take up the time of the House tonight to read that short list, I seek leave to table it.

Leave granted.

Gold Coast: Police Shortage

Mrs May (McPherson) (10.44 p.m.)—Firstly, Mr Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your re-election as Speaker of this great House and I wish you every success. Tonight, I would like to raise what I believe is a very serious problem on the Gold Coast. In fact, we do not have enough police. The shortage of police is constantly brought up in my electorate at community meetings such as Neighbourhood Watch, and the shortage is attracting its fair share of media coverage and public debate. How does the Queensland police minister, Mr McGrady, respond to these concerns? He was reported as saying towards the end of last year, near Christmas, that we have too many police on the Gold Coast. I believe that is an extraordinary statement when the opposite is true, and has been demonstrated on many occasions.

The level of police numbers and resources is a state government matter but it is something that affects every single one of us, and community concerns are growing daily at the increasing prevalence of crime on the Gold Coast. In my electorate of McPherson we are
working together as a community to secure more police and resources, such as extending the operating hours of local police stations, many of which close at 5 p.m.

I recently circulated a petition calling on the state government to increase our police numbers, and I wish to thank all those people who signed the petition. I also sent out a survey last year asking people to rank a list of issues that were of concern to them in our community. The results held no surprises and, as I expected, the number one concern was fighting crime and illegal drugs. Interestingly, the number two concern was fighting welfare cheats. I wish to thank the 1,900 people who took the time to let me know of their views by filling out that survey.

The shortage of police is a very real problem. The shortage is compounded by our dynamic population growth of Gold Coast, presently sitting at 3.8 per cent, which far outstrips capital city growth. It is not only population growth but also the increasing number of visitors and tourists that are putting pressure on the police force. The M1 highway from Brisbane to the Gold Coast has improved accessibility to the region, making the trip easier and faster for tourists and daytrippers. Police numbers do not reflect this growth. We are in continual catch-up mode without ever being able to catch up.

The shortfall in police capacity also means that police tend to be reactive rather than proactive. Strategies to pre-empt crime, such as drive-bys in service stations, are being cut back. However, overall lack of forward planning and resources can be seen in our crime rates, with South-East Queensland coming a close second behind metropolitan north for the highest number of offences against property such as unlawful entry, property damage, and motor vehicle theft. So the likelihood of someone breaking and entering your home is an ever-increasing probability.

As I stated earlier—and this really bothers me—the Queensland police minister, Mr McGrady, was quoted last year as saying that the Gold Coast was overstaffed. What a joke! Such statements from the Queensland police minister are alarming and arrogant and bring no joy or comfort to the victims and potential victims of crime or to the frail aged who just want to feel safe in their own homes.

There are seven state Labor members on the Gold Coast and their silence on the issue is deafening. Why are they not lobbying the Beattie government for the constituents? Is it because the Beattie government have too big a majority, or do they just not care about their constituents? They are showing more and more arrogance to the people who supported them in the last election. Our police stations are undermanned, our police officers are overworked, and crime is increasing. I call on the Queensland police minister to recognise the reality of the situation and provide Gold Coast City with the substantive positions that are needed to safeguard the Gold Coast community.

Insurance: Public Liability Premiums

Ms KING (Ballarat) (10.49 p.m.)—I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to this chamber. I wish to raise the important issue of public liability insurance and I wish to bring to the attention of the House the impact of premium rises on my constituents and their dissatisfaction with the government’s lack of action. I wish to cite a couple of case examples to illustrate the absurd circumstances faced by my community.

This year is the thirteenth year of the Talbot Yabbie Festival. Last year the festival was notified by the Victorian Tourism Operators Association that its insurance underwriter had refused to extend public liability coverage to the event. Subsequent discussions resulted in another insurance company coming to the small community of Talbot to undertake a risk assessment prior to an offer to insure the event.

Talbot has a population of 344. It comprises a mixture of retired people and a smaller but growing number of new families. The Talbot Yabbie Festival is a community event enjoyed by the whole Talbot community. It involves, among other activities, a community dance, and entertainment by local young musicians. The meeting with the city based insurance assessor was a little like a Monty Python skit. The insurance company wanted to know if the community was planning to have a mosh pit—yes, a mosh pit—at...
the community dance. They wanted to know if the community was planning to hire bouncers to surround the stage when the youth band was playing. The lack of understanding of the insurance company as to the nature of the community events was astounding. Talbot was eventually offered public liability insurance of $4,000, which they were unable to afford. They have subsequently received insurance coverage through a broker in Mildura but the specific terms of the insurance coverage are prohibitive. The insurance coverage they have been offered requires that each display at the festival is assessed as medium- or high-risk, and they have to take out their own public liability insurance. This includes a concrete garden gnome vendor having to take out public liability cover of up to $10,000 million at a cost of $600 per annum. Now, I don’t know about you, Mr Speaker, but I have not heard about many cases of dangerous garden gnomes roaming the country attacking people at community festivals.

Small business has been similarly affected. One Ballarat small business owner, Mr Phil Duggan, approached my office when he was unable to obtain insurance for his business, Cashworks, operating in both Ballarat and Geelong. His existing insurer had declined to renew his insurance, and nine other insurance companies have declined to offer a quote. Other small businesses have had their futures threatened by sharp rises in insurance premiums.

The federal government has known about these problems for well over 12 months. Lynne Kosky, the Victorian Minister for Finance, called on the federal government in September 2001 to develop a coordinated national response to business and community concern. Yet so far all we have seen is the two ministers sniping at each other in the media about what they will not do and then turning on the states in an attempt to deflect their responsibilities for the issue. It is a joke that the Minister for Small Business and Tourism is calling for a national compensation scheme while the Assistant Treasurer is ridiculing such a proposal as ‘really flawed’ and ‘untenable’. Unfortunately, the joke is on Australia’s small business and community sectors.

My community is not much interested in hearing the Commonwealth duckshove on this issue. The government must do more than simply call a forum on the issue and expect the states to supply an answer. It must put some of its own proposals on the table. The people of Ballarat demand action from the government on this issue.

**National Ocean Outfall Policy**

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (10.53 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, may I start by congratulating you on your reappointment.

The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Flinders.

Mr HUNT—I rise to speak on an issue which is of importance to my electorate, and that is the question of the phasing out of ocean outfalls, both locally and nationally, and the development of a national ocean outfall policy. I want to address this issue in three phases. The first is to look at the problem within my electorate—the question of the Gunnamatta outfall, which has a profound effect on water quality; the second is to have a look at the national problem; and the third is to examine some of the solutions that are available, both locally and nationally.

Looking at the local problem, which is what generated my own particular interest, the situation is this: Gunnamatta Beach is a beautiful surf beach—one of Victoria’s finest, if not the finest surf beach. It is on the south coast of the peninsula, facing Bass Strait. It is also the site of just about Victoria’s major ocean outfall, second only to the Werribee outfall. The Carrum Downs treatment plant processes approximately 42 per cent of Melbourne’s waste water. That waste water is treated to secondary stage. The water is then piped underneath the Mornington Peninsula, taking on board additional sewage at Mornington, from Hastings and at Rosebud. It then leaves the system at Boags Rocks, Gunnamatta Beach. The result is a series of algal blooms, of turbidity in the water, of blow-back onto the beach and, as the surfers have testified, a threat to both the environment and to public health.
So there is a serious concern. It was a system which was put in place over 30 years ago. At its time it was state of the art, but two things have happened: firstly, the technology has moved on; secondly, and very importantly, the quantity of water being processed has increased significantly. How do we deal with that? The Clean Ocean Foundation is a group of volunteers which works on the Mornington Peninsula. It is a fantastic group of people, led by Peter Smith and Graham Quail and staffed by Sally Mitchell. They have developed an awareness of this problem. They have given it a concrete perception, and they have figures and an understanding of what occurs when you release this much secondary-stage treated water into a fragile ocean environment.

How does this fit within the broader national context? What is occurring at Gunnamatta Beach is part of a broader question across Australia. Australia is a dry continent. Mr Speaker, you come from South Australia and South Australia is perhaps one of the driest regions in the developed world, but it is also a region which perhaps makes, within the Australian context, the most effective use of its waste water. My understanding is that the South Australian water authorities are planning to recycle up to 50 per cent of waste water within three years from now. If that were done across Australia, that would have a profound effect. At present, we are looking at a discharge of 1,325 gigalitres a year nationally, rising by 2,020 to 1,803 gigalitres a year. This is a waste of water, which is now recognised worldwide as a critical resource, and it is also has a damaging environmental impact.

So what then are the solutions? I think the solutions are twofold: firstly, there needs to be the development of a national ocean outfall strategy. Ocean outfalls fall within the province of state governments. None of these governments, with the exception of the South Australian government, have taken it as a priority to (a) reduce the waste, and (b) reduce the environmental impact. So here I believe there is a role for the federal government, through the department of the environment, in helping to coordinate a single strategy. That is a strategy to which I would like to commit myself. Within the area of the Gunnamatta Beach, I believe there is a critical recycling process, which should involve tertiary recycling and the reuse of water, fats, metals and solid waste or sludge. With those things, we can start to make an impact on the waste of water and the damage to the environment. Mr Speaker, I commend to the House the notion of developing a national ocean outfall strategy aimed at phasing out the waste of water through ocean outfalls.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 10.58 p.m., the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 10.58 p.m.

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Mossfield to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) Western Sydney is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia with a high proportion of young people;
(b) currently there is a negative perception of young people in Western Sydney, which is a mistaken view since Western Sydney is no different to any other region with regard to youth problems and youth achievements;
(c) there needs to be public recognition of the achievements of young people which is linked to high self esteem and minimises anti-social behaviour;
(d) lack of access to educational facilities, especially information technology, has resulted in an imbalance of academic achievements; and
(e) there is insufficient provision of community and recreational facilities for young people in Western Sydney;

(2) urges the Government to:

(a) research methods of providing adequate access to computer facilities to the disadvantaged in Western Sydney in order to close the digital divide; and
(b) provide urgently needed youth community facilities in the Western Sydney area to address the social needs of young people; and

(3) acknowledges the work of the Blacktown Youth Orientation in drafting this motion and bringing these issues to light.
Mr Forrest to move:
That this House:
(1) acknowledges the seriously depleted nature of rainfall patterns across south east Australia in the last decade;
(2) recognises that adequate water availability is a limiting criterion for Australia’s economic and population growth; and
(3) encourages the implementation of water conservation projects, including capital upgrades for inefficient and wasteful water supply projects, increased public education on measures to conserve water and increased meteorological research into changing rainfall patterns and possible intervention measures.

Mr Sawford to move:
That this House:
(1) acknowledges the collapse of the educational framework in Australian schools;
(2) recommends as a matter of urgency a return to a more structurally balanced curriculum; and
(3) notes that the current framework disadvantages boys in particular and children from disadvantaged migrant and indigenous backgrounds.

Mr Bartlett to move:
That this House:
(1) acknowledges the outstanding work of our emergency service and community organisations;
(2) thanks the unpaid and paid firefighters and support personnel for their work in saving life and property during the recent bushfires; and
(3) urges the relevant State and local government authorities to consider approaches to better reducing risks associated with fires.

Mr Haase to move:
That this House:
(1) recognises and acknowledges the contribution made to the Australian economy by people working in remote areas of Australia; and
(2) discourages the practice of fly-in, fly-out employment by restricting the payment of taxation zone rebate to permanent residents in remote areas of Australia.

Mr McClelland to present a bill for an act to amend the Corporations Act 2001 and the Workplace Relations Act 1996, and for related purposes.

Mr McMullan to present a bill for an act to provide small businesses with a simpler method of calculating Goods and Services Tax payments.

Mr Latham to present a bill for an act to amend the Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992, and for related purposes.

Mr Kerr to move:
That this House calls on the Government to:
(1) establish a formal inquiry into poverty in Australia to review and update the information base established by the Henderson Inquiry; and;
(2) advise regarding those measures most capable of reducing poverty and reducing the gap between rich and poor within the Australian community.

Mr Kerr to move:
That this House expresses its concern at the growth of untargeted financial subsidies paid to the well off in the community and calls on the Treasurer to provide transparent information regarding the cost of tax concessions and direct payments to those who have high incomes in multiples of average weekly earnings.

Ms Grierson to move:
That this House calls on the Government to support improved quality of life for people with Alzheimer’s disease and their carers by:
(1) amending the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee’s eligibility requirements and conditions to include greater recognition of qualitative measures rather than quantitative measures; and
(2) allowing greater consideration of the advice of medical practitioners and carers involved in the daily management of patients to determine the continued eligibility for the use of the drug Aricept on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme list.