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Wednesday, 19 March 2003

The SPEAKER (Mr Neil Andrew) took the chair at 9.00 a.m., and read prayers.

BUSINESS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.01 a.m.)—I move:

That for the sitting on Wednesday, 19 March 2003 so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the routine of business being as follows, unless otherwise ordered:

(1) Order of the day, government business, being resumption of debate on the Prime Minister’s motion relating to Iraq and the commitment to the coalition in the Gulf;

(2) Presentation and adoption of the report of the Selection Committee; and

(3) Notices and orders of the day, government business.

The question before the House deals with the commitment of troops. This is the most serious issue that any nation can face and it should take priority over all other business in the House. In 1991 the House dealt with no other business until a motion in similar terms was decided. So what I am proposing the House do today entirely follows the precedent set in 1991 by Prime Minister Hawke, and I put it to the House that they should support it.

Mr SWAN (Lilley) (9.02 a.m.)—I move:

That the following words be added to the motion:

“(4) Questions without notice from 2 - 3.30 p.m.”

Yesterday this arrogant Prime Minister turned his back on the people. Today this arrogant Prime Minister is turning his back on the parliament. This government is sending our troops into battle but it is not prepared to defend its decision and the consequences in question time. Once again this Prime Minister has put his foot on the throat of the parliament. Question time is this parliament’s most powerful weapon, and this Prime Minister is not prepared to face scrutiny on the decision that he announced yesterday. Just consider this very simple fact: in the 13 sitting days this year, the Prime Minister has cancelled or been absent from question time for seven. He has been AWOL for over half the time. The Prime Minister has been missing in action. When it comes to question time, this arrogant Prime Minister is a part-time Prime Minister.

When the parliament reconvened a few weeks ago, on 4 February, the Prime Minister cancelled question time, and he did that following the decision to predeploy our troops in January this year. This has been the record of the Prime Minister. When he cancelled that question time there had not been a question time in this parliament for 53 days. So this Prime Minister is a serial offender when it comes to avoiding the scrutiny of this House. When he cancelled that question time on 4 February, I guess in one sense we should have been grateful. He used the excuse that he was going away; he was going overseas to see President Bush. At least when he went to see President Bush we got some of the answers we were not going to get in question time, because President Bush said in Washington what the Prime Minister was not prepared to tell the people of Australia—that is, that we were a member of the coalition of the willing. You might not agree with President Bush and you might not agree with Tony Blair, but the one thing they have at least been prepared to do is be honest with their people—unlike our Prime Minister, who has not been honest and not been accountable.

Yesterday at his doorstop interview the Prime Minister was asked a very important question relating to possible terrorist reaction now that the government has made its decision. He said, ‘I’ve not had any advice recently suggesting the need for an upgrading of the terrorist threat’—no recent advice. I am sure there are millions of Australians today who would like to know from the Prime Minister what his latest advice is about the terrorist threat to the safety of this community. We heard something about this from the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations last night. He said in the parliament, ‘There is an increased risk of terrorist attack.’ We would like to use question time to ask very serious questions about the increased threat to this country which Minister Abbott was prepared to admit to in the parliament last night but the Prime Minister is
not prepared to come into this House and admit to today.

Mrs Irwin—What are they hiding?

Mr SWAN—What are they hiding? What have they got to hide? The government says that it is following a precedent of 1991. There is one big difference. That was a special recalling of the parliament; this is a normal sitting of the parliament—a normal sitting of the parliament where the Prime Minister has not fronted up for seven out of the last 13 question times, including today. This part-time, arrogant Prime Minister has been AWOL for over half the time. It is now 2½ months into this year. He has only fronted up to question time for six days. This is the Prime Minister who claims that he is accountable but, as always, is the great dealer in deception. If you have a look at his record when it comes to accountability, you will see that it is simply dreadful. He is a serial offender. Look at all of his rhetoric.

Who said this on 9 February 1994:
The Prime Minister regards question time as a courtesy extended by the executive to the parliament. How more arrogant could he possibly be? In other words, he is somebody who, in imperial fashion, deigns occasionally to bless us with his presence.

Who said that? It was John Howard, our part-time Prime Minister, who has been AWOL for over half the time this year and has not fronted up to the parliament to answer the most important questions of national security.

Mr Edwards—Flying the white flag!

Mr SWAN—Yes, flying the white flag. On 9 February, who said this:

In other words, parliamentary respect and tradition is turned on and off like a tap according to the Prime Minister’s own political convenience.

What a very apt description of our current Prime Minister and what a very apt description of his behaviour. Or go to his headland speech of 6 June 1994. This is what he had to say:
The Coalition will seek to invest the Speaker of the next parliament with greater independence similar to his or her counterpart at Westminster.

And so on. It is a whole argument for fundamental parliamentary reform. When this parliament opened last year we on this side of the House committed ourselves to fundamental parliamentary reform. The Leader of Government Business in the House committed himself, and where did it go? It all hit the deck because this arrogant, part-time Prime Minister is not prepared to countenance any form of parliamentary reform.

And that brings us back to the grave decisions before this House. This is the first time in this nation’s history that we have been an aggressor in war. This is a decision that does not have bipartisan support. That is why we are entitled to a question time today. That is why it is not like 1991; there is no bipartisan agreement about this decision. We fundamentally disagree with the morality of this decision, and that is why we deserve a question time today. Last year we on this side of the House put up a comprehensive package of reforms. But what we are seeing today is the arrogance of the Howard government and their unwillingness to be frank and accountable to the Australian people. We saw it in here yesterday when the Prime Minister turned his back: he did not just turn his back on the parliament, he turned his back on the Australian people, who are overwhelmingly opposed to his decision. That photograph in the Daily Telegraph today said it all. And today he is turning his back on the people because he is refusing us the right to ask absolutely essential questions.

And what are those questions? It is important for all Australians to hear their politicians today. Thousands of families have loved ones in the gulf today. They deserve to know what the government has committed them to. Australians want to know whether the government has considered the consequences of the war, particularly in terms of the risk of terrorism at home. Australians want to know how much combat is going to cost the nation and what that would mean, for example, for our health and education spending and the domestic security of people at home. Australians want to know whether chemical and biological weapons are likely to be used on the battlefield and if our troops are equipped to meet this threat. Australians with relatives and friends in the Middle East want to know what advice they have re-
ceived from the government and what plans have been made to safely evacuate those in the region. Australians want to know what limitations John Howard has set on this deployment: is it open-ended? What impact will the deployment have on our defence capacity at home? All of these are absolutely vital questions that Australians deserve answers to, and that is why they deserve a question time.

But of course they are not going to get it. They are not going to get it because this Prime Minister continually refuses to be accountable to this parliament. This is a symptom of the fact that this Prime Minister is now so completely out of touch with what is happening in Australia—what is happening out there in the streets, what is happening out there in the suburbs—that he has no intention of being accountable to this parliament because he has taken his decision. He has now been so locked into the war room that he has not got a clue about what is happening in the lounge rooms and the family rooms of Australian homes. Australians today are watching this parliament; they are watching it because they want to see that their parliamentarians are looking after their national interest. They do not want to see the sort of Gestapo tactic that we are getting in this House today from this government that is not prepared to be accountable.

It is not as if having question time today is going to disrupt the debate on Iraq. It can take a maximum of 90 minutes. We are prepared to stay here as long as possible so that every member of parliament has their opportunity to speak. We have agreed with the government to limit the speaking time of members of parliament so that all members of parliament can speak in this House before events erupt in the gulf. We have been very reasonable about that. We are prepared to sit on this evening if the government needs more time to accommodate all of the speakers in this House. But why you would compromise the most fundamental cornerstone of parliamentary democracy, the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of accountability, by cancelling question time I do not know. You would only do it if you had something to hide. You would only do it if you had made a private commitment months and months ago to the United States and did not want to be exposed through questioning in question time as having taken that decision. You would only do it if you were not going to be fully frank with the Australian people about the terrorist threat to this country that arises from the decisions that have been taken by this government. Australians deserve better.

A few weeks ago when the Prime Minister cancelled the first question time of the year I said, and I will say it again, there is a dark side to this Prime Minister. He will go to any lengths to deceive the Australian people. We saw it with the children overboard and we are seeing it again with the decision that he has taken for Australia to join the coalition of the willing. That is, with this Prime Minister there is more Gollum than Smeagol in his make-up. He will go to any lengths to achieve his objective, and if trashing parliamentary accountability, if trashing parliamentary standards, if trashing parliamentary reform achieves that end then he will do it. The ends justify the means.

This government is always putting its political interest before the national interest, and you can see that across a whole range of its activities. It is not just trashing parliamentary accountability in this House on a weekly and daily basis. Look at what occurred last year when we had very important legislation to deal with national security matters, or the ASIO bill. These were important bills that went to the heart of the security and the civil liberties of millions of Australians. They were brought into this parliament and rushed through with a minimum of accountability, question time was cancelled and so on.

In summary, it is a very simple proposition. Why has this Prime Minister decided to go AWOL at question time? When it comes
to question time, why has he become a part-time prime minister? What has he got to hide? If his decisions are right for the country and if he is convinced of the righteousness of his cause, why will he not come into this parliament and subject himself to 90 minutes of questions? I will tell you why: this Prime Minister is turning his back on the parliament and he is turning his back on the people. He is not prepared to be accountable and the consequence of that is that his foot has been placed on the throat of this parliament. And the consequence of that is that the Australian people are not going to get the answers they deserve to some of the most important questions confronting the security of this country.

The most important question, the one that we will want an answer on today, is very simple: what is the increased threat to this country’s security arising from the Prime Minister’s decision to go to war? What is the threat? The Prime Minister ought to come into this House and answer that question today in a question time which reflects the dignity and accountability of this House. The Prime Minister will not do that because he has turned his back on the people and the parliament.

The SPEAKER—Before I call for a seconder, let me clarify that what the member for Lilley has moved is an amendment. I am not critical but that was not clear at the beginning of his speech.

Mr Swan—I moved that at the beginning.

The SPEAKER—Yes, I am sorry, but the fact that it was an amendment was not clear and I did not interrupt, for obvious reasons. It is now clarified. Is the amendment seconded?

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (Perth) (9.16 a.m.)—Mr Speaker, I second the amendment. The Prime Minister is prepared to commit the troops and put the troops under fire but he will not come into this House and take the parliamentary fire. Yesterday, the Prime Minister turned his back on the Australian people; today he turns his back on the Australian parliament. He is not prepared to face scrutiny in this House on the most solemn decision that a minister, a government or a parliament can make—namely, the committing of troops to military action, the committing of troops to military conduct.

Yesterday, at least the Prime Minister ended the charade. At least he finally had the common decency to tell the Australian people what he had committed himself to privately for some time. At least yesterday he finally had the decency to stand up and say publicly that he was committing troops. We know from question times earlier in this place that he had committed himself to President Bush as early as July last year. Today, when the Australian public are faced with the decision by the government to commit troops—a decision which is strongly opposed by members on this side, strongly opposed by members in this place and in the Senate, and strongly opposed by a vast majority of the Australian public—the Prime Minister will not come into the House and face scrutiny. He turned his back on the Australian people yesterday; today he turns his back on the parliament.

The Leader of the House says that there is an analogy here with the Gulf War in 1991: that there was no question time at a comparable stage in 1991. There are two very important distinctions. Firstly, in 1991 the government of the day, the Hawke government, recalled the parliament for the express purpose of debating the government’s decision to commit. Secondly, that decision to commit had bipartisan support: it was supported by the major political parties. That is not the case on this occasion. The two important distinctions can be seen this way. Firstly, this is an ordinary sitting of the parliament and the parliament is entitled to subject the executive to scrutiny and, secondly, this decision to commit troops is fundamentally and strongly opposed by members on this side of the House—and it is opposed for very good reason.

The Australian public is entitled to see the Prime Minister examined on the very important adverse implications for Australia’s long-term national defence and security interests and why he commits troops, flying in the face of the United Nations. How can it possibly be in our long-term national security and defence interests? How can it possi-
bly be in our long-term interests to undermine the United Nations? As a middle-sized power, it is absolutely vital to our future national defence and security interests that we have a strong and vibrant United Nations. And the Australian public are entitled to hear the Prime Minister respond to the question: why have you proceeded down a path which will undermine the United Nations? The Australian public are also entitled to know whether the government has received advice—asserted by the Leader of the House yesterday—that the decision made by the government is actually increasing the security threat, the security risks and the terrorist risk to Australia, because one of the other pillars of our long-term national defence and security interests is our regional arrangements and our relationships with our neighbours. It is absolutely clear from the way that the government has conducted itself in this matter that our regional arrangements and relationships have been entirely neglected in the course of their decision making process. As a consequence, commonsense tells the Australian people that we run the grave risk of being under even greater terrorist threat. We run a grave risk of being at greater risk in our own region.

The Prime Minister is entitled to be scrutinised by the parliament—and the public are entitled to see that scrutiny—about why he has not chosen to act in a way that ensures that our alliance with the United States, a fundamental pillar of our long-term national security and defence interests, is a robust alliance and not a craven alliance. The great criticism which can be made of the Prime Minister, so far as our relationship with the United States is concerned, is that he did not tell the United States publicly or privately that their decision making process was wrong and that the far more sensible approach was to go through the United Nations and exhaust those processes.

So the public are entitled to see the Prime Minister scrutinised on the damage he has done to the standing of the United Nations, the damage he has done to the standing of our relationships in the region and the damage he has done to the robust alliance that we have with the United States. And, most importantly—given the words that have come out of the mouth of the Leader of the House—the public are entitled to see the Prime Minister scrutinised on whether the decision that he has made, and publicly announced yesterday, to commit troops to Iraq has increased the security threats to Australians in our own region.

Mr Abbott interjecting—

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—The Leader of the House urges me to come to a conclusion and, for the sake of the convenience of the House, I am happy to do that, on the basis of the following summary. The Prime Minister is happy to make a decision to commit troops. He is happy to see troops committed. He will see the troops under fire, but he will not come to this House and take the parliamentary fire. He is happy to turn his back on the Australian people in the making of this decision. He is happy to turn his back on the parliament in the face of the Leader of the House in his speech yesterday saying, ‘There is the increased risk of terrorist attack here in Australia.’ This is a fundamental issue of national security importance, a matter of fundamental interest to Australia, and he turns his back and refuses to face scrutiny. It is no wonder that the expression ‘honest John’ was originally an ironic expression.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.23 a.m.)—In closing this debate, I just want to say very briefly that the government obviously rejects the various accusations that have been made in the last 15 minutes or so across the chamber. This is a government which has held itself fully accountable to the parliament and to the Australian people. This is a Prime Minister who has committed himself under almost all circumstances to 20 questions a day. He stands in sharp contrast to his predecessors.

What the government is proposing for today’s business is entirely in accordance with the precedent set in 1991 by former Prime Minister Hawke. But the substantive question before the House, the question of the commitment of forces to military action in the gulf, will be dealt with by the end of
business today or tomorrow morning. Tomorrow we will go back to normal business, including question time, and so the matter ought to now be dealt with.

Question put:
That the amendment (Mr Swan’s) be agreed to.

The House divided. [9.29 a.m.]
(The Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

Ayes.……….. 63
Noes.……….. 73
Majority……… 10

AYES
Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Andren, P.J. Beazley, K.C.
Bevis, A.R. Breereton, L.J.
Burke, A.E. Byrne, A.M.
Corcoran, A.K. Cox, D.A.
Crean, S.F. Danby, M. *
Edwards, G.J. Ellis, A.L.
Emerson, C.A. Evans, M.J.
Ferguson, L.D.T. Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A. George, J.
Gibbons, S.W. Gillard, J.E.
Grierson, S.J. Griffin, A.P.
Hall, J.G. Hatton, M.J.
Hoare, K.J. Irwin, J.
Jackson, S.M. Jenkins, H.A.
Kerr, D.J.C. King, C.F.
Latham, M.W. Macklin, J.L.
McClelland, R.B. McFarlane, I.E.
McKeay, L.B. Melham, D.
Mossfield, F.W. Murphy, J.P.
O’Bryne, M.A. O’Connor, G.M.
O’Connor, B.P. Price, L.R.S.
Plibersek, T. Ripoll, B.F.
Quick, H.V. Rudd, K.M.
Roxon, N.L. Sciaccia, C.A.
Sawford, R.W. Sciberras, P.S.
Sercombe, R.C.G. Snowdon, W.E.
Smith, S.F. Tanner, L.
Swan, W.M. Vamvakianou, M.
Thomson, K.J. Windsor, A.H.C.
Willie, K. Zahra, C.J.

NOES
Abbott, A.J. Anderson, J.D.
Anthony, L.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baird, B.G. Barresi, P.A.
Bartlett, K.J. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, J.I.

Brough, M.T. Cadman, A.G.
Causley, I.R. Charles, R.E.
Ciobo, S.M. Cobb, J.K.
Costello, P.H. Downer, A.J.G.
Draper, P. Dutton, P.C.
Elsom, K.S. Entsch, W.G.
Farmer, P.F. Forrest, J.A. *
Gallus, C.A. Gash, J.
Georgiou, P. Haase, B.W.
Hardgrave, G.D. Hartson, L.
Hawker, D.P.M. Hockey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A. Johnson, M.A.
Jull, D.F. Kelly, D.M.
Kelly, J.M. Kemp, D.A.
King, P.E. Ley, S.P.
Lindsay, P.J. Macfarlane, I.E.
May, M.A. McArthur, S. *
McGauran, P.J. Moylan, J. E.
Nairn, G. R. Nelson, B.J.
Neville, P.C. Panopoulos, S.
Pearce, C.J. Prosser, G.D.
Pyne, C. Ruddock, P.M.
Schultz, A. Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D. Slipper, P.N.
Smith, A.D.H. Somilyay, A.M.
Southcott, A.J. Stone, S.N.
Thompson, C.P. Ticehurst, K.V.
Tollner, D.W. Truss, W.E.
Tuckey, C.W. Vaile, M.A.J.
Vale, D.S. Wake, B.H.
Washer, M.J. Williams, D.R.
Worth, P.M.

* denotes teller

Question negatived.

Original question put:
That the motion (Mr Abbott’s) be agreed to.

The House divided. [9.37 a.m.]
(The Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

Ayes.……….. 76
Noes.……….. 62
Majority……… 14

AYES
Abbott, A.J. Anderson, J.D.
Anthony, L.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baird, B.G. Barresi, P.A.
Bartlett, K.J. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, J.I.
Brough, M.T. Cadman, A.G.
Cameron, R.A. Causley, I.R.
Charles, R.E. Ciobo, S.M.
Cobb, J.K. | Costello, P.H. | Rudd, K.M. | Sawford, R.W. |
Downer, A.J.G. | Draper, P. | Sciaccia, C.A. | Sercombe, R.C.G. |
Dutton, P.C. | Elson, K.S. | Sidebottom, P.S. | Smith, S.F. |
Entsch, W.G. | Farmer, P.F. | Snowdon, W.E. | Swan, W.M. |
Forrest, J.A. | Gahus, C.A. | Tanner, L. | Thomson, K.J. |
Gamburgo, T. | Gash, J. | Vannakainou, M. | Wilkie, K. |
Georgiou, J.P. | Haase, B.W. | * denotes teller |
Hardgrave, G.D. | Hartsuyker, L. | |
Hawker, D.P.M. | Hockey, J.B. | |
Hunt, G.A. | Johnson, M.A. | |
Jull, D.F. | Kemp, D.A. | |
Kelly, J.M. | Lely, S.P. | |
King, P.E. | Macfarlane, I.E. | |
Lindsay, P.J. | McArthur, S. | |
May, M.A. | Moylan, J. E. | |
McGuigan, P.J. | Nelson, B.J. | |
Nairn, G. R. | Panopoulos, S. | |
Neville, P.C. | Prosser, G.D. | |
Pearce, C.J. | Randall, D.J. | |
Pyne, C. | Schultz, A. | |
Ruddock, P.M. | Secker, P.D. | |
Scott, B.C. | Smith, A.D.H. | |
Slipper, P.N. | Southcott, A.J. | |
Somlyay, A.M. | Thompson, C.P. | |
Stone, S.N. | Tollner, D.W. | |
Ticehurst, K.V. | Tuckey, C.W. | |
Truss, W.E. | Vale, D.S. | |
Vaile, M.A.J. | Washler, M.J. | |
Wakelin, B.H. | Worth, P.M. | |
Williams, D.R. | | |

**NOES**

Adams, D.G.H. | Albanese, A.N. |
Andren, P.J. | Beazley, K.C. |
Bevis, A.R. | Brereton, L.J. |
Burke, A.E. | Byrne, A.M. |
Corcoran, A.K. | Cox, D.A. |
Crean, S.F. | Danby, M. * |
Edwards, G.J. | Ellis, A.L. |
Emerson, C.A. | Evans, M.J. |
Ferguson, L.D.T. | Ferguson, M.J. |
Fitzgibbon, J.A. | George, J. |
Gibbons, S.W. | Gillard, J.E. |
Grierson, S.J. | Griffin, A.P. |
Hall, J.G. | Hatton, M.J. |
Hoare, K.J. | Irwin, J. |
Jackson, S.M. | Jenkins, H.A. |
Kerr, D.J.C. | King, C.F. |
Latham, M.W. | Macklin, J.L. |
McClelland, R.B. | McFarlane, J.S. * |
McLeay, L.B. | Melham, D. |
Mossfield, J.W. | Murphy, J. P. |
O’Byrne, M.A. | O’Connor, G.M. |
O’Connor, B.P. | Organ, M. |
Pilbaro, T. | Price, L.R.S. |
Ripoll, B.F. | Roxon, N.L. |

**IRAQ**

Debate resumed from 18 March, on motion by Mr Howard:

That this House:

(1) condemns Iraq’s refusal, over more than 12 years, to abide by 17 resolutions of the United Nation Security Council regarding the threat it poses to international peace and security;

(2) recognises:

(a) that Iraq’s continued possession and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, in defiance of its mandatory obligations under numerous resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, represents a real and unacceptable threat to international peace and security;

(b) that Iraq’s behaviour weakens the global prohibitions on the spread of weapons of mass-destruction, with the potential to damage Australia’s security; and

(c) that, as more rogue states acquire them, the risk of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists multiplies, thereby presenting a real and direct threat to the security of Australia and the entire international community;

(3) abhors:

(a) Iraq’s continued support for international terrorism; and

(b) the institutionalised widespread and grave abuse of the human rights of the Iraqi people over many years;

(4) notes that United Nations Security Council resolutions adopted under Chapter VII of the United Nations charter, in particular resolutions 678, 687 and 1441, provide clear authority for the use of force against Iraq for the purposes of disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction and restoring international peace and security to the region;

(5) endorses the Government’s decision to commit Australian Defence Force elements in the region to the international coalition of...
military forces prepared to enforce Iraq’s compliance with its international obligations under successive resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, with a view to restoring international peace and security in the Middle East region;

(6) expresses its unequivocal support for the Australian service men and women, and other personnel serving with the international coalition, our full confidence in them and the hope that all will return safely to their homes;

(7) extends to the innocent people of Iraq its support and sympathy during the military action to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction and the reconstruction period that will follow; and

(8) notes that the Government is committed to helping the Iraqi people, including through humanitarian assistance, to build a new Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours.

upon which Mr Crean moved by way of amendment:

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

“This House:

(1) insists that Iraq must disarm under the authority of the United Nations;

(2) believes that, in the absence of an agreed UN Security Council resolution authorising military action against Iraq, there is no basis for military action to disarm Iraq, including action involving the Australian Defence Force;

(3) insists that there should be no commitment of Australian troops to a war in Iraq outside the authority of the United Nations;

(4) concludes that Australian involvement in a war in Iraq without UN authorisation is not in Australia’s national interests or in the interests of maintaining international peace and security; and

(5) expresses its confidence in our servicemen and women and our full support for them and their families”.

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (9.43 a.m.)—I rise to speak to the House with a heavy heart on this sad, sad day. It is the day democracy died in Australia. I feel a sense of frustration and loss of hope with the train of events that has led us to this debate. There are many things lost in war. Truth is said to be the first casualty in war. We lost that months ago. But we have much more to lose and I fear that when history judges these events it will not be kind to those players who failed to consider the consequences of their actions.

Just a few weeks ago, I took part in a massive rally and march held in Sydney to oppose war. I stood and marched with what must have been more than 300,000 Australians to express our opposition to war. When I think of the people in that crowd, I know what was in their hearts was a plea for peace. When I think of those in the crowd who were of my age group or older and ask what we have achieved in our lives, I can feel a sense of frustration and powerlessness.

If, in a new century and a new millennium, we have not learned the horrible lessons of the last century, what have we achieved?

When I heard the words of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the announcement that the coalition of the willing would act outside the sanction of the UN and that its legitimacy will be questioned, his disappointment seemed hollow. But the disappointment of millions around the world is heartfelt. While we who make up a majority of opinion are left powerless to stop this slaughter, we are told in sanctimonious terms that morality is on the side of those who act in what they claim to be our interests. Although it is clear from opinion polls that this war is not supported by the great majority of Australian people, our Prime Minister has been one of its keenest supporters. While he has told us that war is horrible and a last resort, his every action has made this act of aggressive war more and more certain as each day has passed.

So we feel that we have failed in the course of our lives to bring lasting peace to the world; that what we have taught our children and what will be our legacy to the world is not peace but the waging of aggressive war; and that the institution of the United Nations has failed to find a peaceful resolution to the question of control of biochemical and nuclear weapons. When we engage in wars of aggression, we encourage smaller nations to arm themselves with these terrible weapons rather than to give them up. Nothing that has taken place in the last year suggests that we will have a process of controlling biochemical and nuclear weapons.
As a generation that grew up and lived most of our lives with the threat of nuclear war, we now feel more threatened than at any time during the Cold War. Sadness, disappointment and a feeling of powerlessness is the mood of the great majority of Australian people today. But this government has ignored our beliefs. It has trampled on our values and shattered our hopes. Is this the sort of democracy that we will impose on a new Iraq? When I think of those younger ones at the rally, I wonder what hope they can hold for the future. What faith can they have in our nation’s leaders when they are deceived and misled and when they are shown that they have no influence on their nation’s future? What beliefs will they form? What values will they pass on to their children?

The events which have led to this war have already caused so many losses. We must wonder about the future of the United Nations as a body charged with the responsibility of preventing war. For those of us who have in the past placed our faith in the United Nations, we must ask if the UN will become little more than an international relief agency—a red cross under a blue flag. For those of us who see ourselves as Australian citizens with allegiance to the government of Australia, at times like these we associate more with those citizens of the world who see their loyalty to humankind rather than to the so-called coalition of the willing. When people say that war in Iraq is not in their name, that is what we are saying. We want no part of this war. We want to say loud and clear to the people of the world that, no matter what the government of Australia says or does, it does not speak for us, the majority of Australians.

So with great sadness, those of us who have sought a peaceful path must contemplate a world dominated by one superpower: the United States of America. We must ask ourselves what we stand for as a nation. Must we, like our Prime Minister, refer to George W. Bush as the President? Clearly, we have no influence on our Australian government and even less on the policies of the United States. In the empire of the United States of America, are we to be merely citizens of a vassal state? That is where the demise of the United Nations leaves us—not as a proud and independent nation but as a deputy sheriff to the United States; a mercenary force at the bidding of the President.

It must be asked why Australia is to commit its forces as part of a coalition of the willing. At no stage has the government shown that Australia’s involvement is crucial to our national interests. When only the United States and the United Kingdom have joined the coalition of the willing, what obligation does Australia have to take part in this aggressive war? The ANZUS treaty cannot be the basis for our commitment. That point has been made clear by a number of speakers in this debate. So why are we involved? There is no answer. Again, the feeling of powerlessness is overwhelming. The losses in this war will be felt not only by the people of Iraq; Australia will not be the same place again.

My generation was greatly influenced by the Vietnam War. From the time of the wars fought by our parents in defence of Australia, war was seen as honourable and those who fought in those wars returned to a grateful nation. Our involvement in Vietnam led to a nation which now sees war in a different light. I have the utmost faith in the members of our Defence Force to carry out their duties honourably. I wish them courage not only in the face of their opponents but also in respecting the rights of all human beings. If they do that, they will deserve the lasting respect of the Australian people.

But the horror of war wounds more than just the bodies of our defence personnel. The nightmares of military action leave mental scars as well. Some of the staunchest supporters of a peaceful resolution have been people who have witnessed first-hand the horrors of war. Not surprisingly, the strongest advocates of this war have not had first-hand experience in warfare—those who have attracted the label ‘chicken-hawks’. And it appears from this debate that this parliament has its share of them.

So on this sad, sad day, while government members promise the flowering of democracy and freedom in Iraq, we mourn its passing in Australia. But we cannot be defeatist. Like those who fought in the war against
fascism and vowed never to allow the world to be plunged into the horrors of war again, we must rebuild international bodies that are capable of controlling chemical, biological and nuclear weapons—an agency capable of inspecting all nations which manufacture, hold stocks of or trade in these weapons of mass destruction. That will not come from this war with Iraq; that will only come when the people of the world resolve to put those controls in place. I wear my ‘No War’ badge proudly in this chamber today. My question to the Prime Minister on behalf of the people I represent is: Prime Minister, why didn’t you give peace a chance?

Mr Anthony Smith (Casey) (9.53 a.m.)—This motion comes about as a result of a very difficult decision this government has had to make; it is a decision the Prime Minister and the cabinet have taken as a last resort. On the two or three occasions previously I have had to speak in this House and express my views on the subject of Iraq, I have outlined my desire for the United Nations to back its resolutions and its words with action to ensure that its resolutions were not just talked about and passed but actually enforced. We all hoped that disarmament could have been achieved through the United Nations. We wish the United Nations could have done its job, but it has not. Unfortunately, it has to be said that one of the reasons it has not is that some member nations have not been prepared to stick with the spirit and the substance of their earlier resolutions.

We all wish Saddam Hussein had abided by the resolutions of the United Nations, but he never has and, after 12 years of lies and defiance, I think we all know in our hearts he never will. We did not court conflict; we sought resolution—but we will never shirk our responsibilities. That is why I believe the decision taken yesterday by the Prime Minister and the cabinet is the right decision. I strongly support it and the motion before us today.

Whilst the issue is difficult and while it is one of the hardest decisions that any Prime Minister and government can make, I firmly believe it is the right decision because of what we know about Saddam Hussein’s actions in the past, what we know about his intentions today and what we know he would do in the future if he were ever given the chance. After more than a decade we know a lot about him. We know he is a murderous dictator who has done everything in his power to develop, acquire and use weapons against his own people and against innocent civilians in other nations. We know he supports terrorism and terrorists, and we know he does everything he can to spread terrorism in the Middle East—he pays every Palestinian suicide bomber’s family $US25,000. We know he seeks a nuclear capacity because he has sought one in the past, and the only reason he does not have one today is that on two occasions he has been thwarted in that aim. We know he seeks more weapons of every variety not just so he can acquire them and hide them from weapons inspectors but so that he can actually use them as he has done in the past.

It is for these reasons that the world community took the action it did in 1991. The world community took the decision then that he must be fully and totally disarmed. The world community took the decision that, unless that happened, he would pose a risk to the world. That is why resolution after resolution has been passed. The fact they have been passed and not enforced shows that we have reached the end of the road of waiting for compliance. Waiting longer will deliver the same result. Twelve years of failure by the UN is not a great argument for further weakness by the world community.

There has been much said about the legality of taking action against Iraq. I want to address this briefly. Clearly, the legal obligation is and has been for the last 12 years on Iraq to comply with those UN resolutions. The fact that it has not does mean that those existing UN resolutions over a very long period of time do give the legal authority for the decision that the government announced yesterday and do give the authority for the sort of action that is being contemplated. Those opposite know that—back in 1998, when action was being contemplated following previous breaches by Iraq, it was made clear on both sides of this House that those
existing resolutions gave legal guarantees, if you will, for action against Saddam Hussein.

In my view, although the issues are difficult, they are also reasonably clear cut. If Saddam Hussein is not disarmed, the world will be a more dangerous place. If he is not disarmed, the world will be at greater risk from the existing weapons that he managed to acquire and keep through 12 years of defying the UN. If he is not disarmed, he will acquire more weapons and escalate the danger, other rogue nations will be encouraged to do the same thing and, on top of that, terrorists would have a multiplicity of opportunities to acquire these weapons through Iraq or other neighbouring countries. As one Labour leader with courage, Tony Blair, has said, we must confront this new reality where terrorists will use anything within their means to cause destruction and the murder of our fellow citizens.

That is the greatest risk we now face—the coming together of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. Despite considerable opposition from within his own ranks, Tony Blair has refused to buckle to populist forces. Unlike other Labour leaders he has held firm because he knows that the stakes today are very high indeed. The coming together of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction is the new truly horrific prospect we must face and confront, and we must confront it today—because today we still have a chance to do something about it—not once we have lost control of the situation in the days, weeks and years ahead.

Knowing all this, as we do, in my view we would have to suspend logic and common sense to think that not disarming Saddam Hussein—or not taking action against him—would not lead to a more dangerous world. It might be tempting, it might be easier, it might even at a superficial level seem safer to do nothing, but when we think about it and we consider the past and what we confront now with terrorism it is clear it would be wrong, it would be irresponsible and it would be dangerous. Weakness today in the face of 12 years of failure will in my view guarantee a greater threat tomorrow and a greater risk of tragedy.

If we as a parliament turn a blind eye to all of this, I believe we would knowingly be taking a decision to allow Australians to live in a more dangerous world in the future. That is a point we should all bear in mind. To not take action, to not take a decision, is also a very dangerous course. This is something that has been missing from much of the current debate and media commentary. Those who advocate no action, those who say we should take no steps or those who hope that, if we just wait a little bit longer, things will somehow after 12 years automatically right themselves are through their inaction also taking a decision. They are taking a decision to allow Saddam Hussein to continue to keep his weapons of mass destruction. They are also taking a decision that it is okay for him to defy the United Nations at will for more than a decade without consequences. They are also taking a decision that Saddam Hussein should be able to continue to seek to acquire further weapons. They are taking a decision through lack of action to allow a dangerous world situation to continue and in my view to risk an even more dangerous situation in the future.

As I have said previously in debates on this subject, as members of parliament we have to have more than an opinion; we have to be responsible for it. We have to think about the future. We have to think about what is right and what is responsible not just what is easy and popular in the short term. We have to imagine a future in which we are confronted by a tragedy where chemical, biological or even nuclear weapons have been used by Iraq or used by terrorists able to acquire them from Iraq and we had failed to take action at this time and failed to do something about it. In that situation, the Australian people would wonder why it was that this parliament, knowing all we do about Iraq and Saddam Hussein, took no action—and they would be right to do so. We would stand condemned for not acting and we would deserve it. We would think we had failed and we would have.

I want to conclude my remarks by expressing my full support for our troops who have been deployed in the region. They have a difficult task. Their families deserve our
admiration and united support. Irrespective of our differing views, they should not be the subject of any opposition. The disgraceful way that our Vietnam veterans were treated—that sorry chapter—should serve as a reminder that our Defence Force deserves full respect. That is a chapter that must never be repeated in our country.

Mr TANNER (Melbourne) (10.04 a.m.)—Australia is about to commence involvement in an immoral attack on another nation that will kill many thousands of people, most of them civilians, and including, sadly, some Australian service personnel. This will do severe damage to the international system, the United Nations and the multilateral system of global order—imperfect as it is—that we have had for the last 50 years or so. It will make the world a less stable and less secure place, it will do significant harm to Australia’s interests—particularly our interests in our region—and it will expose Australia to an increased threat of terrorist attack.

The justification for war that the government has advanced in the last couple of days is a tissue of fallacies, fabrications and falsehoods. The Howard government is marching off to participate in unprovoked aggression at the behest of a US administration that is drunk with its own power, with George Bush playing the role of the lion of war and John Howard playing the role of the jackal snapping at his heels and hoping to pick up a few titbits as a result of the efforts of the dominant power, whether it be in the free trade agreement that the administration is offering or whether it be in an enhanced role in the US’s security considerations.

The decision about participation in this war is not just about the United Nations nor indeed about Australia’s national interest. Ultimately, it involves a calculation about the magnitude of the threat that is posed by Saddam Hussein and Iraq versus the appropriateness of the international response to that threat. That is ultimately the calculation that has to be made. There are no black and white answers to these questions. We have to assess as a nation and as part of the international community precisely how strong and threatening Saddam Hussein is and what the appropriate way of dealing with that threat is.

Saddam is clearly a threat to regional security and regional peace, but so are others. The magnitude of that threat, I believe, is relatively limited—significant but limited. There are alternative ways of dealing with such a threat. Containment and sanctions—these are the ways that have been used and, although they are imperfect and although they do have a range of negative consequences, we have to measure those approaches against the alternative and against the consequences that flow from a military assault that is not sanctioned by the United Nations.

In my view, the approach that is being taken is simply not justified by the nature and the magnitude of the threat. By responding to the threat from Iraq with a pre-emptive strike and virtual re-colonisation of Iraq without the support of the United Nations and the wider international community, the United States is opening up a frightening array of future possibilities in global conflict and in the conduct of global politics and diplomacy in general.

In the conflict over Kashmir, you have a situation of nuclear weapons on both sides, active sponsorship of terrorism and a fairly nasty dictatorship in Pakistan, with a serious risk of a fundamentalist regime emerging in that country. Based on the Bush doctrine that is now being applied in Iraq, India would be entirely within its rights, at some point in the future when Kashmir again reaches a flashpoint, to launch a pre-emptive strike against Pakistan. They could base their case on the principles now being established in the attack on Iraq. How will a future United States administration or the United Nations be able to sanction India in those circumstances? How will they be able to say, ‘No, you shouldn’t take this action; you should take alternative measures’? They will not be able to do it, because the Indians will have an appropriate precedent to rely on where the United States itself has taken such a course of action. There are numerous other potential conflicts around the globe that fit into a similar kind of paradigm, such as China and Taiwan, North Korea and various others.
This war is the latest chapter in a century of American, British and French intervention and manipulation of the Middle East. It raises huge questions about the future of the region; the Kurdish people; the Shiites in Iraq’s south; the feudal regime in Saudia Arabia; the Palestinians, with the appalling circumstances in which they now find themselves; the Syrian military hegemony in Lebanon; and the corrupt authoritarian regime in Egypt, which tortures prisoners and which recently has been exposed as a breeding ground for al-Qaeda because of its heavy-handed approach to dealing with Islamic activists. What is the US going to do about all of these issues, about freedom and democracy for other people in the region who are being oppressed by regimes that the Americans have long supported? They will not be able to contain the demand for freedom. They will not be able to pursue their national interest unencumbered by demands from people throughout the region for change that they feel entitled to. The world will be watching with some interest to see how long the rhetoric of freedom and democracy lasts after Baghdad is levelled.

We as a nation face a choice between multilateral and unilateral action, between a multilateral and a bilateral world. The government has chosen unilateral action. The actions of the United States in their own way constitute as much a threat to the future of the United Nations and global security as the inaction of the major Western powers in the 1930s did to the then League of Nations. This time the international system is threatened by excessive action rather than by inaction, but ultimately the consequences may well be the same: the breakdown of the only system of global governance and protection of global security and global order that we have. The Americans are trying to blame the French, but it is clear that many other countries were also going to oppose the American position. The talk of the international community taking action against Iraq that the Prime Minister went on with yesterday is simply a charade. Many other prominent nations in the world are not participating. Australia is part of a lonely US cheer squad—some of whom, such as Spain, get to be involved in the decisions about these matters but are not sending troops, when we are not even involved in the decisions.

Opinion polls show that the Australian people understand the importance of the United Nations, imperfect as it is, and the importance of taking action of this extreme kind only when there is a global coalition—a diverse broad coalition—of nations that are committed to doing so. Not only is this war fundamentally wrong and fundamentally immoral but also it is contrary to Australia’s national interests. It will damage our relationships in our region, it will damage the global multilateral institutions upon which a middle-sized power such as Australia depends so much and it will damage our security against the threat of terrorism. This war will severely undermine our regional relationships in the medium term and our credibility with a number of countries in our neighbourhood. It will undermine the very institutions that we as a nation depend on and have so often sought to contribute to, and it will increase the threat of terrorism—the real issue that should be the primary focus of our security concerns in this parliament.

That is the final point that I wish to focus on. Rather than protecting Australia and other countries from the threat of terrorism through al-Qaeda—which this attack on Iraq allegedly does—it will actually increase that threat. Yes, it is possible that there are links between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda. If there are, I suspect they are at a fairly low level, but there is no evidence as yet of a serious connection and certainly no evidence to justify a military invasion. It is theoretically possible that Saddam Hussein may at some point seek to provide weapons of mass destruction to al-Qaeda but, again, it is highly unlikely, given that al-Qaeda has no love for the secularist Baath regime in Iraq. Indeed, it is much more likely that such weapons would be given to al-Qaeda in the event of an attack on Iraq when Saddam will be totally desperate and about to be obliterated.

If this is a criterion for military action, then around the world there are numerous
other risks of al-Qaeda getting their hands on weapons of mass destruction—for example, through the huge number of nuclear weapons and other weapons still littered around the former Soviet Union, where the US has contributed only a billion dollars a year to assist in ensuring that they are secure; through a fundamentalist regime coming to power in Pakistan; and through a variety of other possibilities. Little is being done about these threats, but the very thing that is being done—supposedly directed against the threat of al-Qaeda getting weapons of mass destruction—will actually increase that threat, not diminish it. No-one knows what the outcome of this assault will be. According to Des Ball, the US is even speculating about the possibility of nuclear weapons being used. This war may be short but it will not wipe out the stain of naked aggression; it will not wipe out the day of shame where Australia has stood against the international system and the United Nations. (Time expired)

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (10.14 a.m.)—Canberra was extraordinarily sombre yesterday—and well it might have been, with the decision that cabinet took. As a result, there is the motion this House is debating this morning. We are debating one of the world’s ultimate nightmares. We should not dismiss that concept in any way, but we should also focus on what the core problem is. I know that it is very complex and that there are all sorts of issues. Many eloquent speakers already have alluded to those issues. But there is a single core problem that underlines this whole debate. The core problem is simply this: the world has to face up to rogue states having weapons of mass destruction that could be passed on to borderless terrorists. This whole debate is really summed up by those few words. As I have said, there are many issues relating to that and many possible scenarios, but all of us have to search our inner being, ask how we think the world should face up to that and respond accordingly.

I have heard—as many members have—lots of words and have had a lot of contact with electorate offices and with members and senators. There have been many bitter words, many emotional words and many passionate words, but also some very good debate. I think that I would ask those who send their views to members of the House of Representatives and senators to understand that emotion and bitterness count for very little. What we as leaders of this nation set great store by is well-argued and logical approaches to this most difficult issue. Certainly, it is a very complex issue indeed, with many facets and many possible outcomes. Probably all of us are working for the same thing. Nobody wants a war. People want peace in our time. But there is a big divide there.

I understand that the motion we are debating is not popular in Australia. The government’s decision is not popular. That does not mean it is not right. A hallmark of the Howard government is that it has been prepared to face very difficult issues that have not been popular in the Australian community. I somewhat suspect that, with that track record, there is a significant body of opinion out there that does not say a lot but that has seen that the Prime Minister has faced up to the courage of his convictions, and he has been able to bring Australia with him. I think that people will know that the Prime Minister’s decision and his leadership of this nation are in the right interests of the nation. They are in the interests of mankind.

There has been significant contact from the electorate. As I talk to colleagues, I hear that there have been different forms of contact across the country. I received an email last night from Neil Skinner, a constituent in Townsville. I guess this email sums up many of the emails that I have received. It says:

Dear Peter,

As a concerned Christian, a resident of Kirwan, and a constituent of yours, I am writing to let you know my views on the government’s decision today to commit Australian troops to a war against Iraq.

I am totally opposed to war. Whilst I do not condone in any way the past atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein, I do not believe the situation is helped by committing further atrocities of our own making. I do not want to harm the people of Iraq. I do not want to be part of actions which may spark a chain reaction of evil acts which harm people in many countries.
I believe that the vast majority of Australians are opposed to sending our sons and daughters to this war. Please represent my views to the Prime Minister. Please speak out against this war. Please work to get today’s Cabinet decision reversed. Please bring home our troops.

The Bible says ‘If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat’ … Jesus said ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.’

Please pray for the people of Iraq and their President. Please pray for Australian troops. Please pray for the government, and all world leaders, that they may turn away from the use of violence as a means of dealing with problems.

Please work for the distribution of humanitarian aid to all suffering people groups. This will do more to bring peace in the world that any amount of military might.

I thank Neil Skinner for sending that to me. That is a view that many of the contacts to my office put forward. It is part of the dilemma the government faces that what Neil says is right. But there is also a sense of rightness in addressing this terrible problem in Iraq at this time.

This has been a difficult personal decision for me. I certainly am appalled at the way that France has handled the situation. Effectively, it has made the Security Council impotent. Although I oppose war, I have been compelled to favour intervention because, as I see it, now no other option remains. The core problem is what I have articulated: that we have to address the possibility of weapons of mass destruction finding their way into the hands of borderless terrorists. If we fail to eradicate international terrorism, we expose ourselves to terrifying consequences. I have also clearly said that there should be no military operations without a mandate from the United Nations. I believe that that mandate has been provided by UN resolutions 678, 687 and 1441. The actions that cabinet authorised to be taken yesterday are fully supported by resolutions of the United Nations and carry the mandate of the United Nations.

When the Prime Minister informed the government yesterday of cabinet’s decision, my thoughts immediately turned to the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, their families and all of those involved in any possible military operation. I am pleased to see that local people can show their support for the troops, with the defence department setting up a ‘messages to the troops’ email facility and a free fax facility. If constituents in my electorate do not have access to either email or fax, they are welcome to come to my office and we will arrange to get the messages to the troops.

I condemn Iraq’s refusal to abide by resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and its continued possession of weapons of mass destruction in defiance of its mandatory obligations under numerous United Nations resolutions. This represents a real and unacceptable threat to international peace and security. Sad as I was to witness yesterday’s course of action, I am committed to doing what I believe is the right thing for Australia and I ask for community support in the long-term interests of Australia.

In the few seconds left to me, I would finally like to observe that I was very sorry when I saw the Leader of the Opposition on the deck of the HMAS Kanimbla, using that opportunity for political purposes and saying to the troops there and then that they should not be going. That sent shock waves around the Australian Defence Force. Then I saw the hypocrisy yesterday of the opposition leader saying, ‘We will always support our troops.’ I was very sorry to see that. It was a sad day for Australia. (Time expired)

Mr EDWARDS (Cowan) (10.24 a.m.)—A few weeks ago I was invited, in my capacity as parliamentary secretary to the shadow minister for defence, to say some words on behalf of the opposition to the SAS troops in Western Australia who were being deployed to the war in Iraq. What I had to say then is what I want to say today, and I will now read that speech into the Hansard:

In being here today to represent Senator Chris Evans I say to you and your families that I believe that politicians of the day must work with greater determination and resolve to achieve alternative outcomes to international threat than the commitment of young Australian men and women to battlefields in foreign countries. I can tell you that we in our party will not relent in this challenge or this pursuit because we believe that deployment of troops must always be
the resolve of last resort. You will also be aware that this deployment has become a political issue. But what will not be a political issue is our support for you, your families and the SAS Association which so strongly supports you.

Your democratic duty as members of the Australian Defence Force is to carry out those roles set for you by government. I know that in the best and highest traditions of your regiment you will carry out your allotted tasks with courage, professionalism and dedication.

Be assured that, wherever you are sent and whatever role is allocated to you, your well-being will have the full and total support of the federal opposition.

You are well trained, well led and soldiers with initiative and experience who know that your greatest asset is your own discipline, common-sense, good judgement and, above all, the strength of mateship which will see you through the challenges ahead.

We as a nation will follow your deployment with concern and strong interest.

Be strengthened by the resolve and love of your families and friends and by the support of the people of this nation, who bid you godspeed and a safe and early return.

That message was delivered directly to the SAS blokes who were being deployed. I extend now that message to all members of the Australian Defence Force and I say again to all of them: godspeed and a safe and early return.

I watch our Prime Minister constantly play a cruel hoax on our troops and their families. He is always saying how much he supports them, but what he says and what he does are two different things. I will give you two examples of that. Firstly, the new compensation scheme which this government has been promising for years has yet to see the light of day. But in the discussions I have had with the ex-service organisations that have been involved in consultation with the government, they tell me that this new military compensation scheme is actually going to decrease the benefits available to troops who may be wounded—or, in the event of them being killed, the benefits available to their families.

What the Prime Minister says is one thing but what he does is another. It is interesting that, while he calls on the people of Australia to direct their opposition to him, he is not prepared to even accept the flak of this chamber by conducting a question time today—nor was he prepared to do so yesterday. He is prepared to commit the troops to fire but he will not come in here and face that fire himself. I have a question I want to ask the Prime Minister and it is this: Prime Minister, do you recall saying on Brisbane radio on Thursday, 27 February, when talking about military compensation:

... I’d be interested to hear the details of where it’s claimed that it’s been made hard—to get fair compensation—

... I’d like to investigate that ... But I do want to give an assurance that they will be very very fully cared for.

Prime Minister, what is your response to Australia’s most recent war widow, who was quoted a couple of weeks ago:

‘Everyone knows John Howard only comes to Perth when the SAS are going away or when it’s an election,’ she says. ‘He uses those guys extraordinarily to aid his political agenda, and he promises them all when they go away we’ll look after your families, and as soon as anything happens he doesn’t want to know about it.’

Prime Minister, why is your government delaying the introduction of a new military compensation scheme and how does your government intend to ensure that any member of the Australian Defence Force who is severely wounded or killed will be, or will have their family, ‘very, very fully cared for’? That is a question that I want the Prime Minister to answer. When the Prime Minister will not even come into the chamber and face those questions, how can we, the troops or their families expect an answer?

The other issue I raise relates to this government’s hiding of the Gulf War health report—a report which was commissioned a couple of years ago and has been completed but which, I am told, is now being hidden by the Prime Minister’s office. Why won’t the Prime Minister release that report? Gulf War illness is not just an issue for Australia but equally an issue for America. In that country the troops are being treated just as poorly. I quote from an article in the Financial Times written by James Politi. It says:
The top Bush administration official responsible for war veterans has appealed to Donald Rumsfeld, defense secretary, for more information on potential health risks in Iraq—an attempt to avoid a repeat of the “Gulf war syndrome” controversy of the 1990s.

Advocates for veterans’ groups are worried that in spite of lessons from the Gulf war the Pentagon is still not preparing soldiers for the medical side-effects of a possible war in Iraq. Some also sense growing friction between the Pentagon and the veterans’ affairs department (VA). In a letter sent last week to Mr Rumsfeld, Anthony Principi, VA secretary, demanded that the Pentagon disclose data on US troops’ exposure to chemical, biological or radiological weapons in the event of a war on Iraq.

Mr Principi’s letter, seen by the Financial Times, indicates the level of anxiety within the administration about the unpredictable consequences of another war in Iraq.

“Much of the controversy over the health problems of veterans who fought in the 1991 war with Iraq could have been avoided had more extensive surveillance data been collected,” Mr Principi wrote. “I want to ensure we apply this lesson if there is another war with Iraq.”

Between 25 and 30 per cent of the 697,000 US troops who served in the Gulf war are thought to be ill—“over and above the control population”, according to the latest estimate of the VA’s research advisory committee on Gulf war illnesses.

Politically, the Pentagon’s handling of Gulf war syndrome created deep divisions between the Pentagon, the VA, and numerous veterans’ groups. The controversy revived post-Vietnam war worries that the US was neglecting its obligations towards discharged service men and women.

Advocates fear it could all happen again. Steve Robinson, executive director of the National Gulf War Resource Centre, says the mistakes of 1991 remain uncorrected.

There is an obligation on this Prime Minister and this Minister for Veterans’ Affairs to release that report. Why are they hiding it? What is in that report that they do not want the troops who are on deployment to know, and what is it that they do not want the people of Australia to know? Just as there are lessons to be learned in America, so too are there lessons to be learned in Australia. For instance, following the 1991 deployment it became evident that the records of those troops who served there were not kept up to date. Some Gulf War veterans who served in that war still do not have an accurate record today of, for instance, what inoculations they had.

This Prime Minister has an incredible responsibility to release reports such as this and to be prepared to come into this chamber and accept the flak of this chamber and the questions we want to put to him. Just as he expects our troops to walk into fire, so too should he be prepared to be man enough and to show the courage to do the same thing back here. Until he does that, he lacks as a Prime Minister.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (10.34 a.m.)—War is a horrible thing. Devastation, death, waste, loss—each is the product of war. Each we would have hoped and prayed had been consigned to past eras—times when man’s inhumanity to man was too common, times when it was the melancholy duty of freedom-loving people to respond to the excesses of a regime such as Nazi Germany. With sorrow, though, I realise that it is clear these times have survived mankind’s transition into this new century. With sorrow, I see too many of past centuries’ mistakes being repeated.

Mankind’s burden continues to be our inability to escape the clutches of evil—evil that motivates terrorists; that human trait that occasionally, but still too frequently, manifests itself to guide the hands of wicked men and women who, delusional in their pursuit of disgraceful ambition, cut down the lives of innocents. It is a blinding ambition that renders all who gaze on the face of the evil featureless, such that the ambitious one strikes them all down. There is no distinction between civilian and combatant and no distinction between man, woman and child, just as there was no distinction or remorse for the thousands of innocents murdered on September 11 or maimed or murdered on October 12 in Bali. Likewise, there was no remorse for the hundreds of thousands of innocents tortured, raped, summarily executed or maimed in Iraq under Saddam Hussein and his minions.

What is the fundamental evil? It is not the act itself; the act is the manifestation. The fundamental evil is the intention. History has taught us that intention, or indeed motivation, is the distinction between wrong and
right. It is the measure. Freedom-loving people have many times acted in a calculated and brutal way. They have done so because it was right. The pure of heart, with a steadfast gaze on justice, know the awful weight of what they do but do it anyway because it is right and just. I believe this to be the case today. I know that nothing I say will sway the belief of those who have immersed themselves in the details of this debate and have formed an opinion. So, shaped by the beliefs I hold, the words I utter and the promulgations I put serve the purpose of providing guidance on why I can hold my gaze steady on justice while carrying the burden of this action.

In 1991 the Iraqi regime invaded Kuwait. In doing so it murdered thousands of Kuwaitis and held hostage a city and its people. The world united in its abhorrence of Iraq's aggression and the United Nations Security Council passed the first of what are now 17 resolutions dealing with Iraq. With one voice the world condemned Iraq and ordered Iraq to rid itself of weapons of mass destruction. We all recognised the clear and direct threat Iraq posed as a rogue state—a rogue state with ambitions to become a nuclear power; a rogue state with a military dictator willing to trample any individual, any country, any principle, in the quest to remain in power and achieve nuclear power status.

For a decade and some, the world has engaged Iraq. For a decade and some, Iraq has remained defiant. For a decade and some, Western democracies have sought peaceful disarmament. We have spectacularly failed. It does not require the clarity of Aristotle to recognise that good faith must exist on all sides to achieve what was sought. The peaceful disarmament of Iraq required good faith by Iraq. It simply does not exist. At our peril the West let this issue fester, exacerbated by the expulsion of weapons inspectors in 1998. Our attention diverted, Iraq was permitted to resume its ambitions. The United Nations again become impotent as a tool, unable to sustain the world's clear directive on Iraq, unable to harness the power of the consensus that existed.

Without the puff provided by the West, the United Nations forgot Iraq's responsibility to disarm. It forgot about the 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agents Iraq possessed. It forgot about the 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals. It forgot about the growth media used to produce up to 26,000 litres of anthrax spores. It forgot about the 30,000 special munitions possessed by Iraq and specifically designed to deliver chemical and biological agents. It forgot about the regime that actively sponsors terrorism and it forgot about the millions of lives destroyed by Iraq's hand. It was not until September 11 that we had cause to remember. With the collapse of the World Trade Centre, we saw the collapse of our historical notions of the threat and risk paradigm. The threat now is not exclusively nation states; the threat now is a combination of the nation state and the individual. It is the armies of old and the terrorist cells of new. In this environment the unbridled ambition of a rogue state like Iraq, coupled with its terrorist sympathies, presents a very clear threat.

I have listened to the arguments of the Left. I have heard their calls for more time, the plea that peaceful disarmament remains an option, the request that the United Nations provides its moral sanction. However, the more I listen, the more I cannot see past the flaws in their approach. Throughout a decade of defiance, the only real concessions Iraq has ever made have been when pressure is applied. The indictment of the 'give peace a chance' brigade was the actual expulsion of the weapons inspectors. And I know that, had it not been for the United States in the post September 11 world, the United Nations would still not have weapons inspectors in Iraq today.

Let us not be misguided on this issue. Iraq has demonstrated time and time again that the only voice it hears is the voice of action. The Leader of the Opposition, the Greens and the Democrats seem unable to appreciate this most basic fact. It has only been in the past several months, with the amassing of troops in the Middle East, that Iraq has begun to once again provide petulant assistance. Calls for more time lack intellectual rigour. They are predicated on our ability to sustain the unsustainable. At best, they are predicated on the West maintaining forces
indefinitely in the Middle East. At the worst—and this is telling of the Greens—they are predicated on 12 years of failed practice and failed belief: belief that in the absence of military might Iraq will act in good faith and continue to provide the scraps of cooperation we have seen in past months.

Another argument I have heard from the Left is that we are the aggressors. The left of centre apologists claim the West displays moral turpitude by seeking, after 12 years, the forced disarmament of Iraq. What absurdity. In the face of over a decade of defiance, in the light of revelations that Iraq continues to seek the development of weapons of mass destruction, despite a regime that sympathises with terrorists and in spite of world consensus demanding Iraq demonstrate it has disarmed, the Left’s only course of action remains process centric. If we examine our activities with the eyes of the opposition, we conclude that action with UN sanction is moral. Action without UN sanction is immoral. Action passed by 14 members of the United Nations Security Council but vetoed by one permanent member is apparently immoral also. How utterly arbitrary this moral framework is.

Further, I cannot countenance those on the Left who attempt to justify inaction out of the fear it will make our wonderful country a target for terrorist attacks. The most nefarious attribute of terrorism is its cancerous invasion of the liberties and values central to Western democracies. To be complicit in Iraq’s defiance, to be wilfully blind to Iraq’s threat on this basis is truly selfish. It begs the question: what price peace? Peace is most certainly always achievable. Through appeasement and surrender we can achieve peace, but there have been many generations that have fought and died for the values I, and I know many, hold dear. These are the values that enable me to hold steady my gaze and to shoulder the burden of our action—values we believe to be worth fighting for.

This war is morally and legally right. Importantly, it is intellectually honest. At its core is our desire to defend the liberty and freedom of Western democracies. At the periphery, we are focused on enforcing the world’s voice, enforcing the disarmament of Iraq following 12 unsuccessful years of diplomacy. The threat is clear; the risk of inaction paralyses me with fear in contrast to the risks of action.

Finally, I express my gratitude and heartfelt blessings to the families and loved ones of our service men and women. They are required to perform a dangerous task and I pray God will bless each and every one of them.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (10.44 a.m.)—Like the member for Herbert on the other side, I have faced many dilemmas about making the speech that I am going to make this morning. The world, particularly the United States, crossed a barrier of imagination when 3,000 people were murdered in the twin towers in New York. That barrier of imagination, where thousands of people could be murdered in a terrorist attack, has deeply influenced the United States and their foreign policy ever since. It is clear that the rest of the world, as epitomised in the United Nations and the failure to get Security Council support, has not crossed that barrier of imagination. That is an analytical fact that those of us in politics across the world outside the US have to bear in mind.

Before I go into the substance of my remarks, I join everyone here in expressing my great concern for the defence forces— and their families—who are to participate in this imminent conflict. I wish them godspeed back to Australia and safety while they are there.

Unfortunately, the debate over the last 18 months that has led to this vote and this debate today has been characterised by a partisanship that has deeply influenced the Labor Party in its opposition to the government’s policy. Last year the foreign minister made charges of appeasement against the opposition. Comparisons were made of the Leader of the Opposition with Saddam Hussein. Earlier, we had the government’s very cruel treatment of the boat refugees, many of whom were Iraqis. This has greatly undermined the credibility of the government in their current concern for the Iraqi people and the refugees from that potential conflict.
Also, as I was reminded in a recent visit to Jakarta, the Prime Minister made very unwise remarks about pre-emptive strikes on the region. This has exacerbated legitimate public concern about the reactions of the mainly moderate Muslim nation of Indonesia, where Australia’s profile has been raised in an unnecessary way. This is apart from the nonpartisan policies Australia must undertake against international terrorism. Soon those evil people who murdered nearly 100 of our countrymen will be brought to trial in Jakarta.

I support, and take very seriously—as the Labor Party always has—issues of disarmament. The previous Labor government, Senator Gareth Evans and Prime Ministers Hawke and Keating, have a great record of honour in the areas of chemical weapons disarmament, the missile technology control regime and nuclear disarmament. I have previously canvassed it in a speech focused on the issue of Iraq. I simply want to say that there are people who take the issue of the disarmament of Iraq and its chemical weapons very seriously. The opposition, the shadow foreign minister and the Leader of the Opposition take very seriously the outstanding issues of disarmament that have to be undertaken by Iraq in the areas outlined by UNSCOM in 1998. They have not been addressed by Saddam Hussein’s current piecemeal moves to dismantle rockets like the al-Samoud.

I also take very seriously the human rights situation in Iraq. Probably more than many other members, I have followed internal Iraqi politics for more than 20 years, and I agree with the Prime Minister of Kurdistan, who spoke recently to the Socialist International and was reported in the Guardian as saying:

... some of our former friends find the martyrdom of the Iraqi people to be an irritant. They avert their eyes from the grisly truth of our suffering, while claiming concern at the human cost of war. I am sure there are many people on this side who are not like that, who have a deep concern for the Iraqi people and the Kurdish people who are being brutalised by the dreadful regime in Baghdad every day. My would-be colleague—the Labor candidate for McEwen at the last election—Andrew McLeod, calculated that 137 people a day are murdered by the Saddam Hussein regime.

In evaluating whether we should go to war we have to weigh the terrible cost of civilian casualties in this conflict versus doing nothing. It is not a zero sum game. Those of us who are realistic and take these things seriously evaluate that difference. We also support and take seriously the United States alliance, because it is in the national interests of Australia. As the member for Griffith said, this is a tragedy for Australian foreign policy. We need not have been divided, because the history of this place is that we have always striven to maintain a bipartisan national security policy. Because of those statements about appeasement and because of the treatment of refugees—when it suited the government to treat them in a different way, particularly Iraqi refugees—and because of the statements about pre-emptive strikes, we do not have that bipartisan national security policy.

I will turn to what some people will regard as a side issue. It is one of the things that I most regret about this debate. Like most MPs, I am being bombarded by emails on this topic. Many of them are from very sincere and well-meaning people who are mostly against the war—there are a few in favour—and their arguments should be taken very seriously. However, like most members of this parliament, I utterly repudiate those bigoted emails that we do not dignify with a response to their deeply prejudiced claims that conspiracies et cetera are behind American and Australian policy. Like most MPs, I do not take them seriously. I want to tell the people who send them that, having spoken to all of my colleagues, I know that the bigoted emails simply get the delete button.

It is regrettable that a slightly deodorised version of that kind of bigotry was broadcast on the recent Four Corners program; it was about the so-called secret agendas of people with Jewish backgrounds in the American government. In my view, the correct response to these people being Jewish was given by the columnist Gerard Henderson, when he said:

So what? Above all, they are Americans.

...
Little wonder then the ‘agenda’ in this instance is ‘hidden’. It cannot be found because it does not exist. Rightly or wrongly, the US is contemplating military action in the Gulf because of the change in the American psyche after the September 11 attacks.

This is something we have to understand. Let me say something about Mr Tony Blair. People on the government side have been goading us about him and his role in this international conflict. Many people on this side greatly admire Mr Blair. They may disagree with him tactically on this issue. But, in particular on this issue, let me focus on his recent achievement at the Azores in getting the Americans to sign on to the United Nations being involved in a post-conflict situation where all Iraq’s oil revenues would be put into escrow for the development of Iraq and the benefit of the Iraqi people. I think that is something serious that the opposition would contemplate in a post-conflict situation, along with the democratisation of Iraq.

Let me refer also to something that has been achieved with the engagement of the US, thanks to Blair’s efforts, in a post-conflict Israeli-Palestinian situation. We have had some very good developments there too with the Palestinians electing their own Prime Minister, Abu Mazen, who will take a more realistic view than President Arafat, who has never been able to make a decision that would bring that conflict closer to an end. It is pleasing that Mr Sharon is pledged to reach some kind of realistic situation too. I hope that this conflict ends quickly with a minimum of civilian casualties. (Time expired)

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources) (10.54 a.m.)—In the seven years that I have been in this place this government has faced many tough decisions. I guess such decisions started in 1996 with the gun law reform. Other difficult decisions have included tax reform, dealing with border control and illegal migration and, of course, there has been East Timor. During that period, there has been a concerted effort by those opposite to criticise many of these difficult decisions and to attack the government at every opportunity. But at the end of the day these difficult decisions have proven to be the right decisions for the Australian people. East Timor is a classic example of where governments of a range of persuasions sat on their hands and bit their tongues for many years and allowed the atrocities to continue because it was not quite in their backyard. But we had the courage to go in there and liberate the East Timorese people, and for that I am very proud.

However, the decision we have had to make this week has certainly been the most difficult of all the issues we have had to face. As was the case in East Timor, I do not believe that we have the option to sit on the fence and hope that Saddam will just disappear. Iraq has had some 12 years to comply with multiple UN resolutions, 17 of them, and it has failed to do so. There is no question that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction. There is no question that it has the capacity and the will, as it has demonstrated on numerous occasions, to use these weapons, not only on its neighbours but also on its own people. The risk of chemical and biological weapons falling into the hands of terrorists, in my view, is simply too great.

If we as part of the international community fail to make Iraq comply with UN resolutions, then what chance do we have of being able to challenge countries like North Korea and others that are of a mind to go down a similar path? Anyone who thinks that these countries have not been sitting back and watching how the world community has dealt with Iraq over so many years is kidding themselves; of course they have been and still are. There is no doubt in my mind that how we deal with Iraq will certainly, in a very significant way, work towards how countries like North Korea will continue to challenge others and act in the future.

I also accept the legal basis on which we have joined the coalition task force, led by the United States and the United Kingdom. But I do not do so lightly. In the end I believe that the government’s decision is being taken in the best interests of international security and in the best interests of Australia.
There certainly are very strong views, some extreme views, out in the community—arguments on both sides. Like the previous speaker, the member for Melbourne Ports, I also make good use of my delete button when I get the conspiracy theorists and the bigots arguing both sides; I remove them from my emails. I certainly appreciate their concerns, and they weigh very heavily in making this decision; nevertheless, this is a decision that we have to make. Faced with the facts that have been presented to me, I feel very strongly that I need to support the way in which the government and the Prime Minister are going.

One of the things that really convinced me was the arrogance of the French with the veto that they hold. Work was done by the United Kingdom last week in presenting an alternative, which was to be the 18th resolution, and the French in their arrogance said, ‘Well, we don’t even want to look at it.’ Before it was even presented to Iraq or anywhere else they said that they did not want to look at it, that they would veto it immediately. That convinced me that there was no way in the world that anything could be done that would not be affected by a veto from the French.

So I believe that we had no choice but to go along the course of action that we have. When you look at the French, you wonder about their hypocrisy. I find it totally unbelievable that France, along with a number of countries, has certainly been a major supplier of arms to the Middle East and Iraq. France is the only country to cut a deal on oil with Iraq, in breach of UN sanctions. That says a hell of a lot. When the conspiracy theorists argue that it is about oil, for France it is. For the United States, I believe it is about September 11. But for France, it is about oil.

The hypocrisy from France continues. It recently deployed thousands of troops to the Ivory Coast. There was no UN backing there, and their history of doing such things goes back to Rwanda. Who can forget the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland Harbour and then the French putting the bombers up in a South Pacific resort until they liberated them as heroes? Then there is Mururoa—something very important to me—and the arrogance of the French continuing to nuke our area in the best interest of France. Quite frankly, when you start to compare America as the eagle, China as the tiger and Russia as the bear, in my view France is the vulture. It circles around and does nothing for itself. It waits for an opportunity to go and peck the benefits from other people’s hard work. Quite frankly, I believe that this is what will happen in this particular case.

A policy of ongoing containment is certainly not going to work. It has been destructive over the last 12 years. We talk about the impact on Iraqi citizens. The Washington Post recently reported that, based on UNICEF estimates, the ongoing policy of appeasement with Iraq backed by the United Nations—the sanctions—kills about 5,000 Iraqi children per month. That is about 60,000 a year, and that is not counting the numbers who have their tongues cut out et cetera by Saddam, his sons and their henchmen. This is an ongoing thing that we are talking about here, and at some stage it has to stop. Sadly, if Saddam goes on his own he has two sons to fill his shoes, and they are equal to, if not worse than, Saddam. So I do not believe appeasement is in any way going to resolve the human rights issues in relation to Iraq. At the end of the day, we have to make a solid stand. The inaction of the United Nations certainly failed the people of Rwanda, as it did those in Croatia, Serbia and Somalia. East Timor is another example where they failed.

In 1991 they had the opportunity. You may remember General Schwarzkopf saying, ‘Give me two more weeks. We’re on the border of Kuwait. Two more weeks and we’ll sort Saddam out once and for all.’ It was the United Nations that said no, and it was Bush Sr who said, ‘We’ll abide by the United Nations.’ So they stopped. Saddam promised the world; he gave nothing. It ended in 1991. It is now 2003, and we are still talking about it. Hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis have died during that period of time. You cannot forget the slaughter of the Shiites, who expected the Americans to come in and liberate them, but the United Nations said, ‘No, stop. Stop at Kuwait.’ So it is no longer
an option. Time has run out. The Iraqi people deserve an opportunity to live some sort of a life where at least they have some guarantee that they are not going to be executed by this tyrant.

In the bit of time that I have left I will say that, as the Prime Minister rightly said yesterday, this has been a difficult decision but it is a decision that has been made by government. As such, if there are people who disagree or are angry with the decision, they must focus their anger on the government, not on the troops who are serving over in these areas. They are there at the command of the government. They are doing a magnificent job. I know they will continue to do a magnificent job over there. Our thoughts and prayers must go with our serving members of the ADF and their families, and I certainly wish them a safe return to this country.

(Time expired)

Mr LEO McLEAY (Watson) (11.04 a.m.)—I am against this war. I am against it whether it is with or without the UN. I think that the weapons inspections were working and, if we have taken 12 years to get to this position, as the Prime Minister said, it would not have hurt us to take another two or three months to find out whether the weapons inspectors would have completed the job.

I arrived in this parliament when the Vietnam conflict was fresh in the minds of members. That was a very divisive issue for Australia and an issue that some people are still working through in their own minds. There were lessons learned by both the government and the opposition from that conflict. One of the lessons that the Labor Party learned was that you do not scapegoat the troops. The troops are there doing the job that the government sent them to do legally, and they have no option but to be there if they are sent there, whether they agree or disagree. As it was in that Vietnam conflict, where some agreed and some disagreed, so it is in this current conflict—some agree and some disagree. We will make sure that the government sticks to its promises that it has made to the troops who are over there fighting in the gulf at present. We heard my colleague the member for Cowan tell us earlier about how the government is about to try and change

the rules for Defence compensation. We will be making sure that the government sticks to the deal that it has made with the defence forces. Labor back the troops; we do not back the war.

The coalition government of the day in the seventies also learned something from the Vietnam conflict. That was that you do not engage in a war without significant domestic and international support. But, unlike the Labor Party, the government have forgotten what they learned from that conflict. For this war, there is no international support. Millions around the world have marched. There is no support in the UN. The trio of the willing have been put in a position where they cannot even get Spain, which was one of the sponsors of the resolution to go to war with Saddam Hussein, to commit troops. That shows you how little international support there is. Even the generals are against this war. General Rose, the UN commander in the Balkans, is against it. General Schwarzkopf, the US commander in Gulf War I, is against it. General Clark, who was the NATO commander in Kosovo, is against it. Brent Scowcroft, who was George Bush Sr’s national security adviser, is against it. You have international opinion and international personalities who have held high command positions against this war.

In the first Gulf War, 34 countries committed troops. In this war three countries have committed troops. There is no domestic support for this war. Newspoll yesterday showed that 71 per cent of Australians are against this war. There have been huge marches all around Australia, including men, women, children, grandparents with their grandchildren and parents with their children. I have never seen marches like this in my life. The Vietnam marches were not like this. The broad thrust of Australian society is saying no to this war. Dyed in the wool Liberals like John Valder—the former federal and New South Wales President of the Liberal Party—are saying no to this war. John Valder is taking out ads against this war. The only people who seem to be in favour of it are John Howard and the spineless people on the back bench behind him, who come in
here and parrot what the Prime Minister says.

Many of Australia’s former senior commanders are against this war. General Grattan, who was the Chief of the Defence Force in the first Gulf War, is opposed to this war. Air Vice Marshal Ray Funnell, who was Chief of Air Staff, has said that he thinks this war is ‘strategic stupidity’. Very senior bureaucrats are against this war, including Mr Woolcott, who was Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and has advised Australian prime ministers from Menzies to Howard. Mr Barrett, who was Secretary of the Department of Defence in this government, is taking out ads against this war. I have never seen that before in my life. The last secretary of the defence department but one is now taking out ads against the war that the government is committing Australia to.

There is no international support and no domestic support for this war. The only support for this war seems to be in the minds of the Prime Minister and his supporters. The only people who are really in favour of this war are the trio of the willing: two large countries and one medium-sized country trying to punch above its weight in a silly conflict. More importantly, we ought to ask ourselves: who are the trio of the willing? It is a very dangerous thing when you consider it. The trio of the willing are three English-speaking Western nations. Why are they waging war on Iraq? They say it is part of the war on terror. The war on terror, which was started after the bombing of the twin towers in New York, had very wide international support. The invasion of Afghanistan was in support of that proposal. People around the world were shocked about what happened in America on 11 September, and the whole world united to try to bring down terrorism. But what is this war going to do for the war on terror?

Yesterday I watched the President of the United States declare war. I watched it on CNN—that is how you see these things nowadays. You do not read it in the papers; you watch it as it happens on CNN. The President finished his speech with the words ‘God bless America’. If we are thinking about the war on terrorism, the President has just provided a recruitment poster for international terrorists: the Christian crusaders—the three English-speaking Western countries invading Iraq. By being part of this crusade, the Prime Minister has made Australia a very significant target. We have ratcheted up our position on the target list by about 100-fold. We have already paid a penalty for being part of the war on terror with what JI did in Bali. But now it is going to get worse and worse for Australians. The government knows that. Indeed, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations admitted in his speech last night that we have been made a far more significant target than we ever were.

It does not matter whether this war takes three months, three weeks or three days. The effect on Australians and on Australia in this region will go on for years and years, because that is the effect of our being made a huge target in this war on terror. That is what the Prime Minister has done. All those young Australians who used to freely travel around the region and bask in the happiness of being Australian now have a target painted on them by John Howard. All those Australian businesses that moved out into the region when the Labor government internationalised the economy now have a target painted on them by John Howard.

We should not be in this war. It is an immoral war. It is Cheney and Rumsfeld’s war. It is not even Bush’s war; it is Cheney and Rumsfeld’s war, and they are prosecuting it with an evangelical zeal. They have come up with this new doctrine of pre-emption, which is one of the scariest doctrines I have heard of in all the years I have been in politics. The doctrine of pre-emption says that, if you think someone is going to do something bad to you in the future, get them now. By having this war in Iraq and proclaiming this doctrine of pre-emption, the trio of the willing have given a green light to anyone else. You cannot say that only we can do it; anyone else can do it. In our region, we have given the green light to India to think about invading Pakistan; we have given the green light to China to think about invading Taiwan; we have given the green light to North Korea to think about invading South Korea. The scary
thing about that is: they are all nuclear nations. We could be seeing the beginning of what could be a nuclear war in our region—all because we are part of the trio of the willing.

This is a scary scenario and it is a scenario that Australia should not be part of. This is not Australia’s war. It is not in our international, national or strategic interest and, one day, we will pay a very high price for our involvement in this. We should recall our troops now. We should rethink our position and not become part of this trio of the willing.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (11.14 a.m.)—As I often say in my own community of Dickson, Australians take it for granted that they live in the best country in the world. I do not think there is any doubt about that, but the point needs to be made that it is not by chance that that is the case. In this country we have a great tolerance of a diversity of views on many topics, including the issue of Iraq that we are debating in this parliament today. The point also needs to be made that Saddam Hussein has never acted in the interests of the people of Iraq. The people of Iraq have never been afforded anywhere near the same level of democracy of countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom or other Western democracies. But Saddam Hussein now has 24 hours to act in the interests of the people of Iraq. He has not done it during the term of his regime, and the hand of peace now rests with him.

Today I offer my support for the decision of this government to be part of a coalition to rid Saddam Hussein of his weapons of mass destruction. There is ample legal and certainly moral grounds for action to be taken. United Nations Security Council resolution 678 of 1990 and resolution 687 of 1991 provide adequate legal grounds for this government to act against Saddam Hussein and his regime. Resolution 1441, passed last November, also provided a basis for action that cannot be and should not be denied by the thinking nations of the world. The decision that was taken by this government yesterday is, in my view, in the medium- and long-term national security interests of Australia—and, it could certainly be argued, the long-term national security interests of the world. The decision is not only in the interests of Australia and the world but also, as importantly in this debate, in the interests of the people of Iraq and, more broadly, the countries of the Middle East.

There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein is a dictator. He is a person who has been either directly or indirectly responsible for the death of two million people and he is a dictator who has been responsible for the torture of his own people. On the issue of democracy, if you are a resident within Iraq and you speak out against this dictator, the end result is that you have your tongue cut out or that you are tortured until your views coincide with those of the Saddam Hussein regime. Saddam Hussein’s possession of these weapons of mass destruction should sound alarm bells to, in particular, any Western nation. We enjoy our Western way of life and we enjoy the fact that we can spend time freely with our friends, family and generally in the community. We have the great honour in this country of being able to speak out in support of our views and we have a great tolerance and respect for those views.

One of the major points that needs to be made in this debate is that the terms of military engagement have changed forever. The terms of military engagement changed as a result of not only September 11 the year before last but also the atrocities that arose out of the terrorist attacks in Bali on 12 October last year. In decades gone by a declaration of war was followed by the rolling of tanks across borders, but today we do not see that. The new form of military action is in the form of terrorism. There is no pre-emptive warning of a strike, and we have seen the end result in the tragedies of September 11 and Bali, where thousands of people lost their lives.

In my view, the greatest threat that the civilised world now faces comes from the weapons of mass destruction possessed by people like Saddam Hussein slipping into the hands of known terrorists. We know that Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime have direct links with a number of terrorist organisations. In this debate people want only to concentrate on al-Qaeda as they are fresh in
our minds because of the atrocities that they have committed in recent times. But the fact remains that Saddam Hussein is linked not only to the suicide bombers within the Middle East but also to other terrorist organisations throughout the region. Al-Qaeda training camps exist in Iraq, and they are certainly sympathetic to the cause of any anti-Western body.

The government’s decision in relation to this matter stands in complete contrast to the views of the ALP. But, when you dig a little bit deeper, you understand that the ALP is with the government in that it agrees that Saddam Hussein needs to be disarmed of these gross weapons of mass destruction. But, like on many issues that the ALP faces, when it comes to the time for an ultimate decision and ultimate action, it is missing. The ALP is missing again on this issue. It agrees with us up to the point that some action does need to be taken to rid Saddam Hussein of his weapons of mass destruction, but yesterday, in one of the worst speeches I have heard in my short time in this House, the Leader of the Opposition spoke about providing Iraq with another two or three months, thinking that that would provide some sort of outcome, some sort of resolution.

If you cast your mind back to early November last year, you will see that resolution 1441 provided definitely a last opportunity for Saddam Hussein to rid himself of his weapons of mass destruction. He has had the time that has elapsed between November and now—some three or four months—to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. The weapons inspectors were not there to provide some sort of forensic analysis of every square inch of Iraq; they were there to support Saddam Hussein to destroy those weapons of mass destruction.

Saddam Hussein has played the Australian Labor Party and other opponents in this debate like a fiddle, and Simon Crean’s pathetic performance yesterday really highlights that fact. He is still of the belief that, if Saddam Hussein were provided with another two or three months to rid himself of weapons of mass destruction, we would achieve some sort of outcome. The fact of the matter is that would never have happened. The weapons inspectors would never have been readmitted into Iraq without the military build-up—and that has been admitted and agreed to by Kofi Annan and, indeed, Hans Blix. The position taken by the Australian Labor Party at the moment is a disgraceful one, it is one that smacks of political opportunism and it is one that, in my view, is formed to divide the Australian public. We have seen this on many issues.

Dr Emerson interjecting—

Mr DUTTON—Of course, the other side do not like to hear it but, if you look back over other significant decisions that this government has taken—none more serious than the subject of this debate—such as in economic reform, which has been one of the hallmarks of the success of this government, we have been opposed at every turn by the Australian Labor Party. If you look at interest rates, for argument’s sake, and the benefits that have been provided to young families and small business and if you look at the ultimate benefits that have been provided to the Australian community through tough decisions taken by this government, it stands in complete contrast to the weakness and gutlessness that we have seen from the Australian Labor Party in this place. It is a point that needs to be made because this is another stark example of the inability of the Leader of the Opposition and, indeed, the Labor Party within this country to take a decision that is in the national interest and the national security interest of Australia.

We need to be reminded of that fact. We do have a great respect in this country for the diversity of views, but we do not welcome the position that has been taken by the Labor Party in relation to this issue, because they have not faced up to the problem and they have not faced up to the decision that needed to be made—a decision that has been made by this government. I believe that, at the end of the day, we will be vindicated through the support of the Australian people, identifying a decision that has been made in the national security interest of the Australian people.

I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute and offer the prayers and good wishes of all the people of Dickson to Australian
Defence Force personnel for the course that they are about to embark on. I wish them safe passage and a return to Australia at the first available opportunity. (Time expired)

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (11.24 a.m.)—Like many members in this House and, in particular, on this side, I am sad, disappointed and angry to be standing here dealing with, and speaking on, the motion of the Prime Minister to commit our forces to an invasion of Iraq. I am sad because we are committing our young men and women to combat—to war—with all the dangers associated with it. Only God knows what awaits them. Like everyone in this House and all Australians I wish them well and I hope they all return safely. I send my sincerest thoughts and best wishes to their families and friends, and we stand with them in our belief that each will do their service and duty professionally and diligently.

We hope that this conflict will be speedy and with a minimum of suffering for all involved. Labor have consistently argued that, although we do not support this government’s decision to commit our defence personnel to war, we support our defence personnel and their families. They have been legally deployed by this government and deserve our support. We are all determined that there will not be a repeat of what happened during the Vietnam War—and nor should there be.

I join with thousands of Australians in sadness, disappointment and anger because this war is unnecessary and wrong. I am sad because this government has failed to uphold Australia’s national interest and has joined with a minority of countries driven by the USA to invade Iraq without the authorisation of the UN Security Council. President Bush, in his feigned sense of righteousness, claimed this as ‘the moment of truth for the world’. We also saw in the equally feigning Murdoch press ‘The moment of truth’. This is a monstrous misuse of the word ‘truth’. The truth that Bush is talking about is his version of the truth—the self-proclaimed judge of what is moral. The problem for Bush, Blair and Howard is that the great majority of the Security Council and the world do not accept their version of the truth. Like the Labor Party—and I believe the majority of Australians—the Security Council does not accept the so-called case for war. No amount of pressure from the US or Great Britain could convince the majority that war is warranted—that war based on a US timetable was right. Indeed, look at the immense pressure placed on Turkey to allow US troops and forces of the coalition of the willing to use Turkey as a staging base.

George Bush’s moment of truth is not the truth as others see it. It is not the truth as we see it. Clearly, after months of war rhetoric, false threats of producing conclusive evidence and pretence that our defence forces were not already committed to the US war timetable, the Prime Minister has failed to convince Australians of his case. For all his attempts to do so, he has not provided evidence of a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda’s involvement in the events of September 11 or Bali nor evidence that Iraq has or—in the absence of a US-led attack on Iraq—is likely to provide weapons of mass destruction to international terrorists, and there is no evidence that Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction capability presents a real and present danger either to its neighbours, the UK, the USA and, most importantly, Australia.

The Prime Minister has moved his rhetoric from talk of pre-emption, feigned support for the UN—we know he does not support the United Nations—to war in the name of removing Saddam Hussein, the brutal dictator of Baghdad. Alongside this is the babble about hypothetical connections between Iraq, terrorist groups and potential threats in our region and other rhetorical hypotheticals. Indeed, the speeches of the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party and the Treasurer yesterday were full of hypotheticals—it was a network of spurious potentialities and hypotheticals.

I have observed with disappointment the role of the Murdoch press in this matter, as it has unashamedly supported the Bush doctrine of pre-emption. This was no better demonstrated by the Australian newspaper’s headline article blaming France for single-handedly sinking the prospect of a final resolution sanctioning military action against Iraq. Greg Sheridan’s pro-war views have peppered the editorials of the Australian. All
Murdoch newspapers bar one, I believe, out of 175 have supported the Bush-Blair unilateral view. Little wonder Murdoch is numbered among the leading new conservatives so enamoured by the Paul Wolfowitz policy of pre-emption.

Contrary to the Murdoch-Howard propaganda, the reason the Security Council has not endorsed a further resolution to endorse military action is not due to French intransigence but that the UN processes have not exhausted themselves. Germany, Russia, other members of the European Union and NATO do not support a military option. Simply, the dilemma for the United Nations Security Council is that time was and still is required to exhaust its processes of weapons inspections. On the other hand, the dilemma for the coalition of the willing is that they are hostages to their own military timetable.

Sadly for Australia, John Howard’s indecent haste in this matter has been premised on deceit. Howard’s failure to tell the Australian people in July 2002 that he had committed our troops and Defence Force personnel to a pre-emptive strike has been the worst kept secret in Australia. The Prime Minister has failed to take the Australian people into his confidence. At least the US and the UK have debated the matter beyond a few minutes in parliament, unlike here.

Why have many thousands of Australians demonstrated against the prospect of pre-emptive military action? Simply because they do not see such action as necessary, just as the United Nations Security Council does not see Iraq as a clear and present danger. The Australian people remain unconvinced that Iraq genuinely poses a threat to Australia, in spite of the crude arguments of John Howard and the Murdoch press to prove otherwise.

People I speak to believe our participation in the war against Iraq will heighten the prospect of Australia being a terrorist target. This government, the Murdoch press and even sympathetic talkback radio jocks have failed to persuade Australians that a non-UN sanctioned war against Iraq is justified. Many people I talk to are puzzled not only by this government’s obsession with Iraq itself but with their undue haste to invade this country. And make no mistake: it is an invasion.

Bush’s phrase, ‘The moment of truth,’ and the Murdoch press’s heralding of it have indeed highlighted the first casualty of this drive for war and that, sadly, is truth itself. The second casualty is, as Robin Cook pointed out in his resignation speech as the Leader of the House of Commons in Great Britain, that international partnerships most important to Great Britain and Australia are weakened. The European Union is divided, the Security Council is in stalemate and, as my colleague the member for Brand pointed out in his speech, the extraordinary goodwill and positive support for the US after September 11 and the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan are disintegrating. The third and most important truth about this unilateral militarism is that people will suffer and die in what is clearly an unnecessary war.

Those on the other side have used the example of Kosovo to justify the fact that military action can be taken outside the UN. What they fail to recognise is that there was a compelling humanitarian case for military intervention, that it was supported by NATO, that the neighbouring countries surrounding Kosovo were supportive of it and that so too were Germany and France. It is not the same. There is no other support for the coalition of the willing outside those three.

To blame France for the so-called intransigence of the Security Council is to deny the fact that other countries—including Germany, Russia and China—NATO, the European Union and the majority of the Security Council see no case for war. Finally, the policy of containment has indeed succeeded. The very fact that these forces of the coalition of the willing can invade Iraq means that Iraq’s capability of defending itself has been greatly reduced over the last decade because of the policy of containment. I wish our soldiers, our sailors and our air personnel well. I wish them a speedy return and I hope they all return safely.

Mr CHARLES (La Trobe) (11.35 a.m.)—I rise today to support the Prime Minister’s motion on Iraq. This is the third time that I have spoken on this issue in this House—the first time being 17 September 2002 and then
more recently on 5 February this year. This has been one of the most well debated issues ever to come before this parliament during my time in the House of Representatives.

I have consistently supported the contention that, following the 11 September 2001 terrorist acts in the United States and the 12 October 2002 bombing in Bali, the world is a more dangerous and unstable place in which to live for the people of freedom-loving democratic nations. There is little question that that is true. We live in a different world today than we did before September 11, one which is highly unstable, one which is highly unpredictable.

It is not an issue where nations line up and say, ‘I am going to invade you tomorrow,’ or in fact start overt hostilities from one nation state against another. It is in fact a war without boundaries, without rules, without necessarily physical engagement until the result is felt on the ground due to terrorist acts. We need to make sure, it seems to me, that we do everything possible to prevent the terrorists from getting access to weapons which can kill masses of human beings.

Iraq has continued to abrogate its responsibility to destroy its weapons of mass destruction and to disarm in compliance with its commitment to do so in 1991, following the Gulf War in Kuwait. We would not be here today if Iraq had done what Saddam Hussein had promised to do all those 12 years ago. We would not be debating this issue in this parliament, the headlines would not be screaming about war, and we would be getting on with the business of governing Australia. But Saddam Hussein did not disarm. He has not proved to the world that he has eliminated his weapons of mass destruction as he agreed to do.

There is argument about whether or not this proposed action to be taken by the United States, Australia, Great Britain and many other supporting countries is illegal. I found the Prime Minister’s arguments regarding the statements contained in three United Nations resolutions dealing with this issue compelling. I was pleased that he was willing and able to table a formal advice in that respect. I was also impressed by the compelling case put yesterday in the Australian newspaper by a group of eminent lawyers. I was also informed by an article in this morning’s Australian authored by a colleague and fellow Victorian, the member for Flinders, who argues very strongly, and from a very solid background in foreign affairs, that the proposed action is more than legal. I think we are taking the right action.

We need to deal forcefully with the issue of weapons of mass destruction. I know that many argue that Iraq is not the only country in the world to have weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear arms. That is true. But the other states are not rogue states. North Korea is another problem, and I suspect that one of the reasons it is acting the way it is at the moment is simply that the United States is very much committed to this action in Iraq. I suspect that, when it sees that the free world has not caved in to this murderous regime and to acts of terror, it will quickly back off. I certainly hope so.

Another reason that this is the right action is that we have got to finally deal with terrorism. It is no good arguing, as some do, that if we take this action there will be increased acts of terrorism around the world. I think that is a fallacious argument. It bears no relationship whatsoever to reality. What do we do? Do we always bow to the bully? Do we cave in and say that containment works? I recall those arguments having been made—at least from what I have read in the history books—prior to World War II, and no-one dealt properly with Hitler until he was dealt with militarily. The attempt to pacify him was fraught with absolute failure. We have had 12 years of defiance by the Hussein regime of its responsibility, and 12 years is long enough. If we continue to allow this regime to hold its weapons of mass destruction, there is no doubt whatsoever that they will find their way into the hands of terrorists who are prepared to use them to murder tens or hundreds of thousands of innocent people anywhere in the world—and one of the problems is that we do not know where.

I also believe that this is the right action because the Iraqi people, of all people in the world, deserve better than what they have. The murderous regime of Saddam Hussein has been chronicled many times over. It
never fails to amaze me that those who are opposed to this war generally fail to mention Hussein’s crimes against his own people. He has used weapons of mass destruction to murder hundreds of thousands of his own people—not to mention others. We are taking the right action. It would be preferable if the military action we are taking in coalition with other nations had been demanded outright by a united United Nations, but unfortunately our friends in France made that absolutely impossible. There are those who say, ‘Where was the vote?’ There was not a vote. How many of the smaller nations would have lined up and signed up had France not threatened its veto? We will never know.

I have to say that, on the other side of the debate, I have many constituents who, up to this point at least, have not supported pre-emptive military action in Iraq. I mention in particular a group known as the Hills Peace Network who came to see me last week in my office—and they were very peaceful. They put up some good arguments, and we had an interesting discussion. They said, ‘You are elected as our representative, so represent us. Go to the parliament and defy your Prime Minister. Cross the floor or resign your seat.’ I said to them, as I say to others, that this is not a vote demanded by the Prime Minister; this is an issue that I have freely decided on my own conscience to vote for. But I did tell my constituents that I would tell the parliament that their views were different from mine—and that, to me, is part of our democratic process. A brief email that I received this morning from a constituent reads:

Dear Bob,

I know this must be a difficult time for any member of the Government. Be comforted by the fact that the PM is doing a terrific job and his stance will be completely vindicated.

The government needs to publicise the membership of the ‘coalition of the willing’ much more than it has. The fact that the vast majority of Europe is supportive needs to be driven home.

... ... ...

Regards
John Knorr
(Time expired)
ple of truth overboard and the Prime Minister’s duplicity.

Saddam Hussein must be disarmed, but the weapons inspections have been working. We should allow them extra time. But that was not the objective of this government or of the administration in the United States. The objective has always been regime change. They have wanted to change the regime. They knew that they could not get a resolution to change the regime through the United Nations, so they said that the objective was disarmament. If it were truly disarmament—an objective that we share—they would allow the weapons inspectors to continue their productive work.

The United Nations is the world’s only hope for peace. By their actions, the Prime Minister of Australia, the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom have eroded the authority of the United Nations, perhaps beyond repair. They are now in effect allowing other countries to say, ‘Well, if it’s all right for the United States, Australia and Great Britain to attack sovereign nations without the support and endorsement of the United Nations, then it’s all right for us to do so as well.’ What a dangerous path these three leaders are taking the world down. Now these three leaders have committed troops to liberate Iraqis by bombing them—by killing innocent Iraqi women, children and men—and the Australian government, along with the governments of those other two countries, is the aggressor. Of course Labor supports the Australian troops, but that does not mean we support the government’s decision. We oppose it vehemently. I wish our troops all the best and a safe return to this country. They are doing their duty under instruction from the Prime Minister of Australia. It is not their fault. I support them. We all support them.

I despise the treatment of this war by American citizen Rupert Murdoch, his editors and their journalists. They portray it as a video game. In the short time available, I will not be able to go through all the examples, but I draw the attention of the House to the Daily Telegraph of just last Saturday, with the headline ‘Boom, boom, boom’ and a White House official telling the Daily Telegraph:

‘Boom, we’re going in hard and fast ... This time next week, sit by your TV and watch the fireworks.

It is not a video game. It is not the bicentenary of Australia. It is not the Olympic Games. It is not New Year’s Eve. They think this is fun. They are callously desensitising the Australian people and our children to the horrors and grotesqueness of war. ‘Boom, boom, boom: Tommy’s new tactic’ shouts out the headline inside the feature, and it says:

The only thing missing when the bombs start dropping over Iraq will be the thumping crescendo of the 1812 Overture.

This makes me sick. It continues:

Pyotr Tchaikovsky could not have asked for a more spectacular light and sound show to accompany his legendary celebration of military might. That is military might that will blast to pieces innocent Iraqi children, women and men. It is not a video game. It is not fireworks. It is the killing of innocent people. You want to look for motives behind this. Of course, whenever any Labor MP dares suggest that the motive might possibly be the ‘O’ word, oil, the Prime Minister and the foreign minister say, ‘Oh, how dare you demean this noble war by suggesting that it might be about oil.’ We do not have to suggest it, because American citizen Rupert Murdoch put it very plainly when he told the Bulletin:

The greatest thing to come of this to the world economy, if you could put it that way, would be $US20 a barrel for oil. That’s bigger than any tax cut in any country.

There is the motivation from American citizen Murdoch. As the Guardian points out:

How lucky can Murdoch get! He hires 175 editors and, by remarkable coincidence, they all seem to love the nation which their boss has chosen as his own.

I condemn Rupert Murdoch and News Ltd for their campaign to desensitise Australians and people around the world to the horrors of this war. In so doing, I have probably engaged in a career-threatening exercise, given that the only newspaper in Queensland, my home state, is the Courier Mail. But so be it,
because I feel compelled to condemn News Ltd and Rupert Murdoch for the callous treatment of this very serious, grotesque and horrible war and for their attempt to desensitise Australians.

The truth has been thrown overboard time and time again. We know the truth: months ago, in a discussion with the President of the United States, the Prime Minister committed Australia to the coalition of the willing—willing to attack Iraq with or without the support of the United Nations. All Australians knew that, but he threw the truth overboard and denied it until he got the phone call the other day from the President on Air Force One—flying from a meeting at which Australia was not even represented—saying, ‘Come on, we’re going to attack Iraq.’ The Prime Minister then got on television and said, ‘That’s it, we’re going to attack Iraq.’

The truth is being thrown overboard time and time again, through the grubby free trade agreement that this government is negotiating as a pay-off for its acquiescence and subservience in the war against Iraq. Again the Prime Minister says, ‘How dare Labor even suggest that that might be a motivation.’ Just yesterday, he said, ‘I see the two things as being completely different.’ He should have a talk to his Minister for Trade. The Prime Minister has invoked the alliance as the reason for the attack on Iraq. His trade minister says:

... an FTA would help engender a broader appreciation—in both countries—of our alliance and our common role in helping underpin the stability and prosperity of East Asia and the Pacific. This is now doubly important given the nature of the threats to security—and especially to Western interests—in the region.

He, the foreign minister and a range of ministers have said that this free trade deal is directly linked to the alliance. The alliance is given as the reason for us as the aggressor attacking Iraq. This Prime Minister has done untold damage to Australia’s relations with East Asia through his reckless deputy sheriff language, through his offer to bomb them and through the negotiation of a trade deal which will discriminate against them. He is not acting in the national interest. The one decent thing that the Prime Minister could do in the face of throwing the truth overboard—this litany of lies—is to resign. The Prime Minister should give it away, get out and let someone else run this country. He is not doing it. He is not acting in Australia’s national interests and it is time we had someone who did. (Time expired)

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (11.55 a.m.)—I rise this morning in this House to support the motion put by the Prime Minister in this place only yesterday and to repeat a couple of points in the motion before continuing with my comments today. I think it is important to recall some of the important points in the motion, to remind members opposite of what this government is seeking to achieve. Firstly, the motion condemns:

... Iraq’s refusal, over more than 12 years, to abide by 17 resolutions of the United Nations Security Council regarding the threat it poses to international peace and security ...

Secondly, it recognises that:

... Iraq’s continued possession and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, in defiance of its mandatory obligations under numerous resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, represents a real and unacceptable threat to international peace and security ...

Thirdly, the motion refers to:

... Iraq’s continued support for international terrorism ...

... the institutionalised widespread and grave abuse of the human rights of the Iraqi people over many years ...

Of course, this motion also notes that:

... United Nations Security Council resolutions adopted under Chapter VII—

I will add, for the interest of those opposite, that chapter VII allows for the use of force under Security Council resolutions and was the same chapter under which we were involved in East Timor and in the Korean War many years ago—

of the United Nations charter, in particular resolutions 678, 687 and 1441, provide clear authority for the use of force against Iraq for the purposes of disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction and restoring international peace and security ...

Of the two final points that I think are important to reiterate in this debate, point 7 in the Prime Minister’s motion extends:
... to the innocent people of Iraq its support and sympathy during the military action to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction and the reconstruction period that will follow ...

Finally, in point 8, the motion asks us to note as a government that:

... the government is committed to helping the Iraqi people, including through humanitarian assistance, to build a new Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours.

These were just some of the points that I wanted to highlight from the motion which the Prime Minister moved in this place yesterday and which is the subject of my contribution here today.

No-one likes war; it really is the last resort. But it is important to reflect on why we are at this point in relation to the non-compliance of the Iraqi regime, with resolution after resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council. It started on 29 November 1990, not long after I came into this parliament for the very first time. Security Council resolution 678 authorised all means necessary to force Iraq out of Kuwait. They had illegally invaded Kuwait in a military operation, and that resolution allowed the use of force to push Iraq out of Kuwait and bring about peace in the region.

After the military operation, Operation Desert Storm, the Security Council declared a cease-fire and put forward another resolution, resolution 687. That required Iraq to comply with resolution 678, which required them to comply by destroying their weapons of mass destruction. It was conditional on their complying with that resolution and showing the goodwill to do so. Eleven years later, the Security Council last year—and I had the great privilege to be at the United Nations representing the parliament of Australia with our mission to the United Nations during this very interesting and once again very difficult time—declared in resolution 1441 that Iraq was in material breach of its obligations under the two previous resolutions, 687 and 678. It offered the regime in Iraq one final opportunity to comply with those resolutions—not to backtrack, cheat and retreat but to comply fully with those resolutions. It also said that failure to comply with the resolutions—particularly 1441, which draws on previous resolutions—would bring about serious consequences. With resolution 1441, Iraq’s regime was put clearly on notice.

For the last 12 years, and particularly the last six months, the United Nations has tried diplomacy. We in this country, with other like-minded countries, have tried diplomacy. We have been part of a military build-up in the Middle East as part of building pressure on the regime in Iraq to comply with more than 17 resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, and we still find the regime in Iraq thumbing its nose at the international community and failing to comply with resolution after resolution. The world cannot stand by and allow Saddam Hussein to continually thumb his nose at the will of the United Nations Security Council and those who want to bring about a resolution to the noncompliance of a regime in Iraq which is condemned by countries around the world not only for its actions in the Gulf War and its invasion of Kuwait but also for its support for international terrorism.

We have exhausted the diplomatic process. We can no longer stand by and watch the regime in Iraq defy the will of the international community through resolution after resolution of the United Nations. If we in this place as leaders of this country cannot learn from history, then history is bound to repeat itself. You only have to draw on the lessons of the time prior to the start of the Second World War when for years and years Hitler was snubbing the free world, cheating and retreating. History tells us that, if we cannot learn from that lesson, history is bound to repeat itself. An old saying that has been quoted by some in this place is that evil will persist when good men do nothing. We cannot do nothing. We have the legal authority of the United Nations on our side. As we have learned over the last couple of days, we, along with three members of the Security Council and up to 40 other countries, have the clear legal authority, and have a duty, to make sure that Iraq now complies with these resolutions. We are not alone; we are with three members of the Security Council and 40 other countries that have now joined the coalition of those who want to see
the regime in Iraq comply with resolution after resolution of the Security Council.

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Barresi)—The member for Brand was heard in silence, as was the member for Rankin.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT—The government fully supports our troops and their families. The Labor Party cannot have it both ways. The Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that he does not support the government. He has called for the recall of troops from the Middle East, and he cannot then say that he also supports the troops. He cannot have it both ways. I conclude by saying that I know our troops are there to do a job. They are well trained and they will always do as they are asked. The government’s support, and mine, is behind the troops, their family members and their near relatives and friends. We all pray that they return safely to Australia after doing the job that they have to do.

(Time expired)

Mr LATHAM (Werriwa) (12.05 p.m.)—In her outstanding book The March of Folly the American historian Barbara Tuchman looks at the reasons why nations and governments often act in a manner contrary to their self-interest. She writes that throughout human endeavour:

... government remains the paramount area of folly because it is there that men seek power over others—only to lose it over themselves.

For Tuchman, persistence in error is the problem. When leaders abandon reason and rationality—when they refuse to withdraw from bad policy, no matter what damage they are doing to themselves and their nations—this is the march of folly. Vietnam was an example of this process. Fearful of McCarthyism and right-wing opinion at home, successive American leaders from Eisenhower to Nixon refused to be the first president to concede ground to communism. This is why they pushed their country deeper and deeper into the folly of a counterproductive foreign policy.

I believe that something similar is happening in the United States today. Post September 11 the American people want revenge for the attack on their country, and the Bush administration is determined to give it to them. It is determined to wage war on Iraq and Saddam Hussein even if this means damaging America’s long-term interests, even if this means diverting resources from the real war against terror, even if this means trashing the UN system, even if this means dividing the Western world and gutting NATO, and even if this means generating a new wave of anti-American sentiment around the world. After the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon people were worried about what al-Qaeda might do next. Today they are worried about what President Bush might do next. The Bush administration has squandered much of the international goodwill towards its nation. This is the march of folly and, shamefully, the Australian government is following the United States down this path. This is the worst piece of Australian foreign policy since Vietnam.

The Prime Minister has made a crude judgment post September 11 that the world has just one superpower and in the war against terror Australia needs to get with the power, no matter the cost to our independence, no matter the cost to our international standing. The Prime Minister is not interested in arguments about the soundness of US policy or the need for global power sharing and cooperation. The Howard government is simply determined to follow the leader. For some of the media elites, to say these things is seen as anti-American. In my case, I greatly admire the achievements of the United States people. I am not anti-American; I am anti-Bush. I am anti the right-wing hawks of the Republican Party in the United States. I am anti-war.

When people ask, ‘What is the alternative to war?’ I say the answer is quite simple: the alternative to war is peaceful disarmament. On 7 March the chief UN weapons inspector, Hans Blix, reported that substantial progress had been made and that Iraq could be disarmed peacefully within a matter of months. He said:

We are not watching the breaking of toothpicks. Lethal weapons are being destroyed.

There is indeed a huge credibility gap in the argument for war. We now know that, as incredible as it may seem, large slabs of the
British government’s dossier on Iraq were plagiarised from university students. In this country a senior ONA officer, Andrew Wilkie, has blown the whistle on the true nature of Australian intelligence reports. In his assessment:

Iraq does not pose a security threat to the US, the UK, Australia or any other country at this point in time. Their military is very small, their weapons of mass destruction program is fragmented and contained and there is no hard evidence of any active co-operation between Iraq and al-Qaeda.

So why the mad rush to war? Why does Australia need to act outside the UN system when the independent report of the weapons inspectors has said that peaceful disarmament is possible? Why does Australia need to launch an invasion of another nation, an unprovoked attack on another nation—a nation that does not threaten us? Why have we sent our best troops and equipment to the other side of the world when they should be here, guarding our country against real threats, against the real terrorists? Why do we need to be part of a war that involves the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians? Why are our military forces invading a country where half the population is under the age of 15? That is 12 million boys and girls, their lives now at risk because of George Bush, Tony Blair and John Howard.

None of these things need to happen. Peaceful disarmament is possible. This war is simply unnecessary. The invasion of Iraq will in fact create more problems than it solves. It will cause enormous suffering and instability in the postwar reconstruction of Iraq. It will breed a new generation of terrorists and, as the Leader of the House, Mr Abbott, admitted yesterday, it will increase the likelihood of terrorist activity on Australian soil. The war against terror must target terrorists, not the women and children of nation states. It must solve problems, like catching bin Laden, wiping out al-Qaeda and addressing the Palestinian question. It must attack the core reasons for terrorism, rather than being diverted into conflict in Iraq.

The Republican Right in the United States has tried to legitimise its policies by talking of the so-called ‘clash of civilisations’—the struggle between Western values and Islamic culture. I regard this theory as nonsense. The real clash is within a civilisation—the civil war within Islam itself, the struggle between militant fundamentalists and moderate Muslims. We need to do everything we can to ensure that the moderates win. We need to find a lasting peace in the Middle East, not start a new war in the region. We need to address the burning problem of Third World poverty, overcoming the injustices that fundamentalists thrive on. This is why the invasion of Iraq is such bad policy. It is contrary to each and every one of these goals.

There is another reason for opposing this war: it is based on a dangerous doctrine—the new doctrine of pre-emption. For nearly 60 years the world has kept itself relatively safe from weapons of mass destruction via policies of deterrence and containment. Pre-emption can only make the world an unsafe place, and yesterday, in the Main Committee, I outlined the folly of this approach with respect to North Korea. I fundamentally believe that we cannot run the world according to threats and first-strike thinking. History tells us that deterrence and containment are the only answers. Pre-emption is a recipe for international suspicion and military escalation. It is bad policy; it is bad practice.

Along with most Australians, I do not want a world in which one country has all the power. I do not want a world based on an axis of evil rhetoric and the constant threat of pre-emption. There is a better way. It is called the United Nations. This means respecting the findings of Hans Blix. It means respecting international opinion. It means sharing power and cooperation across the globe. I ask this simple question: who was the last world leader to unite France, Germany, Russia and China? This is an unprecedented coalition of the unwilling. From the right-wing Gaullists in France, to the Social Democrats in Germany, to Putin’s Russia, to the Communist Party of China—international opinion is united all right; it is united against the United States and against the invasion of Iraq that is promoted by the Australian government. Around the globe, people do not want a world in which one country has all the power. They want power sharing and cooperation.
The key divide in Australian politics is now clear. The Liberals have become an American war party. Labor stands for global power sharing and cooperation. We stand for national security based on collective security. We stand for an independent foreign policy. The Liberals stand for war. They stand for unprovoked attacks on other countries, because the United States wants it that way. The Prime Minister is too weak to say no to George W. Bush. This is the march of folly; this is the march of Australian folly. I urge the government, even at this late hour, to change its mind. Listen to the words of Barbara Tuchman:

In the search for wiser government we should look for the test of character first. And the test should be moral courage.

Surely there is someone in this government who can pass the test of character first. And the test should be moral courage.

Six months ago in this place—last September in this House of Representatives—24 government members voted against stem cell research because of what they considered to be the sanctity of life, the sanctity of embryonic stem cells. I note that the member for Parramatta, the next speaker, was one of them. Today we are not talking about single cells. We are not talking about cells that are too small to be seen with the naked eye. We are talking about real human lives. We are talking about the lives of 12 million Iraqi children, little boys and girls and their families—resting peacefully today but living in fear of their death tomorrow. Where are these 24 government MPs today? They are no longer defending the sanctity of life. They have joined the American war party and they are determined on the destruction of life.

I oppose the government’s motion. I oppose the war in Iraq and I urge members opposite—they can find the moral courage, those who truly believe in the sanctity of life—to do the same. Support the ALP amendment; stop this invasion of Iraq. Stop the destruction of human life. Have the guts to stand up for the principles, the lectures you gave us on stem cell research about the sanctity of life—what about the sanctity of Iraqi lives? *(Time expired)*

Mr ROSS CAMERON (Parramatta—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Family and Community Services) (12.15 p.m.)—Like many coalition members, I arrived at my desk this morning to find another several hundred emails. Many of them were simply titled, ‘You murderer,’ ‘Blood is on your hands,’ or some other statement. I would like to live in a world of such moral simplicity. I will begin with a quote from an American President in a former age, who reflected on some of these moral questions. He said:

The hottest place in hell is reserved for those who, in time of moral crisis, choose neutrality.

It was Saint Thomas Aquinas who taught that war is sometimes a moral duty in order to overturn injustice and protect the innocent. I recall John Stuart Mill, a great liberal, who said:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. A man who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing he cares about more than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unless made so by the exertions of better men than himself.

I am mindful of the fact that our remarks in this place have an impact on our serving forces in the theatre of battle. I would like to quote from an email sent home by an Australian soldier just before email communications were halted. He says:

The Australian and the world public has the right to be presented accurate unbiased facts. I fear at the moment the Australian public is a victim of a political tug of war. That aside, while those back home sleep snug in the evening, under the very blanket of freedom we defend with our life, I trust they appreciate their freedom of speech, their quality of life and their geographical distance from conflict.

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I need not preach the reasons why Australia should be here. In fact, as an officer I need not understand why I or many of my colleagues are here. Yet I must respond with the highest degree of vigilance, with the objective of achieving my
stated mission and returning my men safely to their loved ones at home.

I fully endorse Australia’s involvement, as a key member of the coalition in response to terrorism. The common belief that we are simply jumping blindly into bed with George Bush must be replaced with the understanding that peace is not America’s gift to the world, it is God’s gift to humanity.

I have no affection for war. I accept that war, at any time, represents a failure by the human race. It is a blunt and brutal instrument in which the innocents always suffer and almost always perish. But we are, as Aquinas said, under an obligation to the innocents which sometimes places upon us the burden of war.

The previous speaker referred, as others have, to the fact that a significant proportion of the people of Iraq are children. I understand that 50 per cent of the Iraqi population are under the age of 15. Those speakers did not go on to say why so many of the people of Iraq are children. It is a combination of two factors: the first is that Iraqi mothers tend to have large families; the second is that Iraqi fathers tend to be dead. In two weeks of the conflict between Iran and Iraq 50,000 people perished. But that is now a distant memory. In weighing the moral imperatives the critical consideration is often whether or not a story appears on CNN. The basic proposition seems to be that if I cannot see it, if I am not aware of it, if it is not a front-page story, it is not a moral crisis.

The truth is that war has been taking place in Iraq since the Baathist regime came to power 30 years ago. It is a war which takes place in small ways every day, in every neighbourhood and in every family. There are one million people in Iraq on the payroll of the Iraqi secret service. Dissenters are nonexistent because they disappear if they articulate dissent. The stories about those things are hardly ever told. They hardly ever make the pages of our newspapers, but I note that one of those stories—from a constituent of mine—makes the pages of the Daily Telegraph today.

That story follows the death of an Australian aid worker, Stewart Cameron, in Kirkuk. He was the chief of Care Australia in Iraq. He was working in northern Iraq among the Kurds. Because the Kurds could find no place in the pan-Arab nationalist ideology of the socialist Baath Party, Saddam Hussein simply decided that the best policy would be to eliminate them. So over a period of time he sought—by terrorising them and by actively bombing their cities, in many cases with nerve agents—to remove the Kurds from the face of Iraq.

Stewart Cameron, an Australian aid worker, because he was helping the Kurds, was simply shot at his place of work in Kirkuk. I think he was the first Australian casualty in what I describe as this ongoing 30-year war by the administration of Iraq against the people of Iraq. Not satisfied with having killed the principal aid worker, the henchmen of Saddam Hussein then went about terrorising individual staff members. One couple there included a constituent of mine: Bayan Boskany and her husband had both started as volunteers with CARE Australia and then become staff members. Bayan worked as the superintendent of a kerosene distribution plant. Of course, the Kurds had no electricity and, in most cases, no running water; in 1993 the families got their entire source of heat and light from kerosene. My constituent Bayan Boskany was there, distributing the kerosene to the Kurdish families. She arrived home and, while she and her husband were in the kitchen, a bomb was thrown into the living room, where it exploded. It did not actually kill her; it simply produced the miscarriage of her first child.

Her story would not appear in the Telegraph, as it does today, were it not for the fact that a massed force of 250,000 American, British and Australian troops is gathered on the doorstep of Iraq to end this regime. Nonetheless, hers is a story which is representative of the lives of literally tens of hundreds of thousands of others. It is said that 1.5 million people have perished as a consequence of the belligerence of this regime since it came to power 30 years ago. We are talking about chemical weapons, and it is not widely known that Iraq was the first regime to use a nerve agent in war. It did so in 1982 in the Iran-Iraq conflict against the human waves of Iranians defending their positions.
A problem arose at that time in that so successful was the use of sarin that it became something of an addiction of the regime, which moved quickly from importing the pre-agents to manufacturing them at home. Under Saddam Hussein’s direct personal command, Iraq built the world’s most impressive domestic manufacturing capability for chemical weapons. It has never given up that addiction and it continues it to this day, just as Saddam Hussein’s aspirations continue to this day.

I want to support that Australian soldier sending his email home. I concur with his view that peace is not the gift of America to the world but the gift of God to humanity. I conclude with the simple thought that this is a just war. I support the government. I endorse the motion.

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (12.25 p.m.)—This afternoon I stand to oppose the Prime Minister’s motion on Iraq and to support the amendment of the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Simon Crean. In July last year the Prime Minister travelled to Washington supposedly to speak to President Bush to get a better deal for the farmers. He got nothing for the farmers but gave a blank cheque for Australia’s support to Mr Bush in relation to Iraq. Why is that important? It is important because it illustrates the Prime Minister’s subservience all along to America’s interests and not Australia’s interests, and we must never forget that.

This is the fourth occasion on which I have spoken in this House against Australia’s involvement in a war without the endorsement of the United Nations Security Council. Little if any attention has been paid to the ultimate issues at stake at the moment as to what this war means to those who are participating in it. Yes, there is the allegation that this is a war for globalisation, for the domination of world oil supplies and other incentives of a commercial nature. It is irrelevant what the United States, the United Nations or Australia or any other nation supporting war with Iraq may say. This war will be interpreted as a war against Islam, no matter what is said and no matter what moral justification may be reached.

The first rule of diplomacy is the one most often missed; that is, to act diplomatically one must speak the language of the other person. For communication to be effective, at a minimum it is necessary for words to be communicated so that the person receiving the message understands the language of the person giving it. It is not being said here that comprehension or even agreement must be reached, but at least the words must be understood. In the present circumstances, a series of small regimes in the Middle East, including the Taliban in Afghanistan and Iraq, have been actively supported over the last 15 years by successive United States governments in order to keep at bay expansionism of the former Soviet Union in the south. That was the reason for Afghanistan being invaded by the former Soviet Union and why, to this day, the Russian government holds strategic vested interests in Iraq’s oil and trade. It goes without saying that France and Germany too have financial interests. All this is well understood and needs no further discussion.

At the heart of this issue is what is described by the Prime Minister of Malaysia as a ‘clash of cultures’. However, both cultures in question are misrepresented. On one hand, the veil of legitimacy is ultimately based on notions of some link between the despotic regime of Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party and their affiliation with and support for terrorism. On the other, the receiving end, is the endless rhetoric of Islamic overtone—the tongue of the serpent, the infidel, satanic United States, Western albeit Christian arrogance, crusade and other strongly jihad-inspired overtones—that this is indeed nothing more than a holy war for the liberation of Palestine, the erasure of the state of Israel and the Islamisation of the whole world. Arabic media is replete with such rhetoric. Both views, in my view, are sadly misguided, yet the official rhetoric is loudly proclaiming one of these two views.

Wherein lies the truth in this matter? Why are the United States and a few allies—Australia regrettably one of them—being taken to the point of war? We need reminding that, in the Gulf War, Iraq fired some 39 missiles into Israel. If any of those missiles
had been nuclear, chemically or biologically armed, millions upon millions of people would have died in an act of genocide. It is true that rogue states—those without responsible government and driven by tyrannical leadership—must never be allowed to proliferate and pose a real military threat to the world. Israel has been invaded four times since World War II and has a legitimate right to exist in freedom and peace. The Palestinians also have the right to self-determination and independence.

Yesterday, the arrogance, hypocrisy and contempt the Howard government has for the Australian people reached an extraordinary level in this chamber. This morning, Australians at home, going to work or school are reading and listening to reports that I believed I would never see or hear again. Today’s Sydney Morning Herald has a headline ‘Australia chooses war’. Choosing war and invading Iraq without a specific UN resolution or broad international support is wrong. It is not in Australia’s interests, it is not in the interests of global security and it is clearly against the will of the majority of Australian people and, most importantly, the people that I represent in my electorate of Lowe. While there is no doubt about the importance of peacefully disarming Iraq and any other nation that shows contempt for basic human rights and human dignity, in this case the ends do not justify the means. In this decision, the Howard government is contributing to a potentially fatal blow to the future of the United Nations and global security, especially in our region. The consequences could be devastating.

On the issue of going to war, there is no dilemma for me and the people I represent. I have received an unprecedented number of messages from my constituents opposing Australia’s attack on Iraq. At the same time, my heart and my head tell me that the best interests of the residents of Lowe and Australia’s best interests can never be served by choosing war when all avenues of securing a peaceful solution have not been exhausted. I will never understand why this government has decided to reduce Australia to that of a servile agent of the United States of America. The case for war and for the Prime Minister’s motion has not been made and nothing has changed since I first spoke in opposition to any unsanctioned invasion of Iraq. Ignoring diplomacy, whatever its weaknesses or perceived failures, will permanently damage the international rule of law. This will encourage other countries to choose force in the place of diplomacy. They will be following this example.

How can this outcome be in Australia’s best interests? Choosing war is not courageous—it is choosing failure. It is placing the lives of Australian service men and women under threat, and their families under terrible strain, without first exhausting every diplomatic option and without providing any evidence of a link between Iraq and September 11 or between Iraq and the Bali bombings. I do not believe that Australians hold Iraq responsible for the Bali bombings. Attacking Iraq will make international cooperation for fighting terrorism more difficult to achieve, particularly with our most important neighbour, Indonesia. Worse, attacking Iraq will only increase the threat of terrorism in Australia. I believe the vast majority of residents in my electorate of Lowe and across Australia are opposed to an Australian involvement in the war on Iraq without the support of the United Nations Security Council. Hundreds of thousands have already peacefully demonstrated this.

I believe the reason for the terrible division in Australia over a fundamental issue like international security is the government’s failure to be open and honest with the Australian people. The government has not taken the Australian people into its confidence on this issue and it has not bothered to properly argue the case for the war. As I said earlier, that has been apparent since the Prime Minister visited Mr Bush in Washington last July. Instead, the government has accused opponents of the coming war on Iraq of America bashing, of not being critical of Saddam Hussein, of not supporting our troops and of not understanding the legality of the government’s position. All these accusations are offensive to say the least. What is important to Australia is our national interest and whether our participation in this war is
right or wrong for Australia. I believe it is wrong, and so do most Australians.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (12.34 p.m.)—
I rise today to speak on this motion with the proposition that what we are talking about is the liberation of Iraq, not the invasion of Iraq. Yesterday’s announcement of military action against Saddam Hussein and his brutal regime in Iraq began the first step of the liberation of the Iraqi people from years of suppression, repression, torture and prosecution. The military action announced by the United States President, Mr George Bush, in concert with the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and our Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, heralds the beginning of the liberation of Iraq and its people, not the invasion of Iraq, as the political opportunists on the other side of this House are wailing. This proposition, might I add, was put to me by not one but a number of my constituents, particularly one of my constituents in a town called Waroona.

The human rights atrocities and suppression of the Iraqis have almost been sidelined in this highly politicised debate. In fact, you will seldom hear the Australian Labor Party and its disingenuous and emotional supporters mention Saddam or human rights in this debate. I will now refer to a report on the John Laws program this morning which I found abhorrent. John Laws cited an article in a British publication by a group called Indict, who were acting as observers in Iraq in the last few weeks and months. One of the most horrific pieces of this report was in relation to the torture of political opponents. The report of an observer in Iraq recently said that the Iraqis had a plastic shredding machine and that, when their opponents were placed in the machine head first, death occurred rather swiftly, but that when they were placed in the shredding machine feet first it was a horrific thing to listen to because they were killed gradually. The observer was told that the remains of the people put through the shredder were then collected and fed to the fish. That is the sort of regime we are talking about.

The report went on to say that opponents had body parts lopped off to demonstrate which part of the person had offended—whether it was the hand, foot, tongue et cetera. It is horrific to think about. The report also reported rape of political opponents in front of spouses and families, and it suggested that this was being administered by Saddam Hussein’s youngest son. You do not hear much from the opposition about the human rights atrocities in Iraq, but this is the sort of regime we are dealing with. Not only those opposite but others seem to be defending this absolutely brutal dictator and making excuses for him. They seem to be more intent on demonising George Bush, the President of the United States, than Saddam Hussein. How many marchers did you see in the streets carrying anti-Saddam posters? They were not; they were carrying anti-George Bush posters and anti-John Howard posters but, strangely, no anti-Blair posters—which says something in itself.

We know that other critics of Saddam have been sidelined: the Marsh Arabs; the minority Sunnis have been persecuted by the Shiites; and the Kurds, who are absolute victims, have been murdered en masse through the use of biological and chemical weapons. And there is more, but the Australian Labor Party and their cohorts in this debate want to give Saddam and his regime more time. More time for what? They want to give him more time to butcher more of his own people.

Let us look at one of the arguments of those opposite—that a United Nations resolution is needed. There have been 17 resolutions on Iraq. These include, over the last few years, resolutions 678 and 687. Those resolutions are still on the books of the United Nations and they require Iraq to totally disarm. This was reinforced in no uncertain terms in November last year by resolution 1441. There was no better explanation of this than that given by Treasurer Peter Costello yesterday; it was an excellent legal brief and it showed how he got his stripes. If you put 1,000 lawyers in a room you will have 1,000 different legal opinions, so at the end of the day there are wide-ranging views on the interpretation of the UN resolutions. The resolutions on hand are about finishing the previous war on Iraq of some 12 years ago, when Saddam said that, rather than
troops marching into Baghdad, he would comply and rid himself of weapons of mass destruction and take on the agreement with the United Nations. This is really the war that Bob Hawke started 12 years ago, and yet it is going to take another government at another time to finish it on behalf of the Australian people.

There is only one group who are more opportunistic than Bob Hawke, and that is the French. The French have been absolutely disgraceful in this debate. One of the stories which explains some French idiosyncrasies is: how many Frenchmen does it take to protect Paris? Nobody knows, really, because they have never tried. They have always needed somebody else to do it for them, since Napoleon. The French in this matter are quite bizarre. We do know that when they feel like it the French oppress other people. They did so in Mururoa Atoll and with the attack of the Rainbow Warrior—where they not only rewarded the people by not prosecuting them; they actually gave them medals on behalf of the French nation. Why don’t the French take on Saddam in exile? It was reported yesterday that the French economy has fallen through the EU safety net of debt level, so Saddam’s millions might actually help prop them up.

We have people like Ramos Horta, from East Timor, who is very credible on human rights, saying that this sort of person needs to be dealt with straightaway. The fact is that people tend to quote polls all over the place, but polls all over the world are indicating many different things. For example, only two per cent of the Spanish population—the Spanish, we know, are very supportive of disarming Iraq—support their president in this unilateral action. John Laws’ poll yesterday showed that out of 11,000 people, which is not a bad sample, 87 per cent support the action taken yesterday against Iraq. So the polls are changing around. The Newspoll has also indicated an increase in support for the Australian action in this area. Newspaper editorials, like the one in the Australian newspaper today, are saying that enough is enough; it is time to get on and deal with this. So the sentiment in this area is changing and it certainly will change once this brutal leader in Iraq has been removed.

There is real leadership coming from the Labor Party—but not from the Labor Party in Australia. It is coming from Blair in Europe. Even though the Labour Party in Britain is divided like the Labor Party in Australia, Blair is still holding the line. It is good to see that the opposition leader, Mr Crean, is here. He has been missing in action on this matter. The fact is that if he showed some true leadership on this issue he would not be being awarded with a white feather, which he so properly deserves. This action in the Middle East will bring stability to the region and give a better opportunity to settle the Palestinian problem with Israel. This effort will see the end of tyranny in Iraq and the liberation of the Iraqi people by a coalition of determined and responsible nations. I therefore support the military conflict and I support the motion before this House.

**TERRORISM**

**Mr CREAN** (Hotham—Leader of the Opposition) (12.45 p.m.)—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Leader of the Opposition moving the following motion:

“That this House:

(1) notes the comments of the US Homeland Security Secretary, Tom Ridge, overnight that: ‘The Intelligence Community believes that terrorists will attempt multiple attacks against U.S. and Coalition targets worldwide in the event of a U.S.-led military campaign against Saddam Hussein’;

(2) insists that the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs explain to Australians the increased terrorist threats to all of us from the Prime Minister’s and the Government’s decision to commit Australia to war without the authority of the United Nations;

(3) insists that the Manager of Government Business explain his statement to the House last night that the Prime Minister’s decision to commit Australia to war in Iraq without the authorisation of the United Nations would increase the terrorist risks to Australia—something which the Prime Minister and the Government have refused to tell the Australian people the truth about;
(4) recalls that the Government was asked about this issue on three occasions this year with no answers and demands that the Prime Minister immediately come into the Parliament and explain to Australians the heightened terrorist threat for Australia of the Government’s decision to commit Australia to war in Iraq without the authorisation of the United Nations; and

(5) calls on the Prime Minister to immediately outline the urgent steps being taken by his Government to protect Australia and Australians from the increased terrorist threats to Australia from his decision to commit Australia to war without the authority of the United Nations.”

The Prime Minister has committed us to war but has turned his back on Australia and the heightened risk to our security. We have had the manager of government business, the Leader of the House, talk about the increased terrorist threats, but the Prime Minister is still refusing to say what steps his government has taken.

This is a Prime Minister who has consistently been asked on radio what advice he has, and all he keeps saying is, ‘At this stage, I’ve not had any advice recently suggesting the need for upgrading.’ I do not believe him on this occasion either. He must have received advice about the heightened security risks. The US President has put his country on a heightened terrorist alert and has said that it applies to the coalition of the willing; yet our Prime Minister remains silent. This is a Prime Minister so quick to take the call from the US President to go to war but so slow to warn Australians about the increased terrorist threat that we now face because of his reckless, dangerous and unnecessary act. This is a Prime Minister who has committed us to war but cannot secure the peace or the security of the nation because his mind is on the next phone call from the US President.

This is a Prime Minister who has not thought this issue through. All this Prime Minister has been doing all along has been waiting for the call from the President but he has been putting no steps in place to ensure the security of our nation or its citizens. He has already put our troops at risk on the front line—committing them to a war unnecessarily. Now he is ignoring the increased threat of terrorism to this country and is not taking steps to protect it. The US President has acknowledged that these steps need to be taken. In fact, the US government announced heightened security needs and quoted the Department of Homeland Security as saying that, under Operation Liberty Shield, they have begun implementing increased protective measures under a comprehensive national plan to protect the homeland.

The US government have said that, under Operation Liberty Shield, they will increase security at borders, strengthen the transportation sector protections, enhance security at critical infrastructure, increase public health preparedness and make sure all federal response assets can be deployed quickly. They have also deployed the National Guard or additional police forces to improve security at critical locations throughout their states. These heightened security measures will help deter terrorism and increase protection of America and Americans. That is what the US did when George W. Bush gave the 48 hours to midnight deadline. When George Bush committed America to war and thereby committed Australia to war, America went on a heightened security alert, as there was a heightened risk of terrorism in that country. And when the US government went on radio and television and talked about it, they said that the threat did not just apply to them; it applied to their coalition partners.

Who is one of those coalition partners? We are—by virtue of the Prime Minister’s reckless decision yesterday. Instead of arguing with George Bush to go back to the United Nations and find a peaceful solution to this disarmament of Iraq, he said, ‘Yes, we will go to war with you.’ But in agreeing to war, the government has done nothing to address the increased threat of terrorism in this country, to our citizens and to us as a nation. The US saw the need to move to add these additional protections and take these additional precautions, but what did John Howard do? He turned his back on Australia again—just as he turned his back on the Labor Party in this parliament because of our opposition to his stance; just as he turned his back on the UN alliance in ignoring article I, which requires going through the United Na-
tions to resolve international conflict; just as he turned his back on the Australian people by not telling them the truth about what commitment he has made; and just as he turned his back on the Australian troops on the decks of the Kanimbla, by pretending to them that they were not being deployed for war.

This is a Prime Minister who is so quick to commit to war but so slow to protect Australia’s citizens; a Prime Minister who should be condemned for his inaction; a Prime Minister who should be condemned for his lack of truth and candour with the Australian public. We need more from a Prime Minister than someone who just picks up phone calls. We could employ someone at a much cheaper cost if all they had to do was to take the phone call and become the cipher for the US President.

We deserve better. We deserve a Prime Minister that acts in Australia’s national interest; a Prime Minister that is prepared to develop a foreign policy based on what is in Australia’s national interest, not what the US President asks him to do; and a Prime Minister who, having made the wrong decision to commit us to war, ought to understand the full implications of it. One of those implications, of course, is the fact that we are under an increased threat of terrorism.

And here is the Leader of the House coming through the door—no doubt to try to gag me in this debate—who yesterday let the cat out of the bag. He said yesterday in the parliament that we would be under an increased threat of terrorism. He said to this House that Australia faced an increased terrorist threat as a result of the decision to go to war.

We have asked this government for months now on many occasions this question: what increased threat to Australia do we face from terrorist activities as a consequence of us being involved in a unilateral war—in a war without United Nations authority? We have asked this of the government and of the Acting Prime Minister, because the Prime Minister was not here. The government has refused to answer that on numerous occasions. But now we are actually committed to war, this is an answer they can no longer avoid.

The government closed down question time today to avoid accountability. They are a government in hiding. They are not a government at war; they are a government in hiding—they are a government of cowards when it comes to the Australian people. We deserve better and the Australian public deserves to know what circumstances this government’s actions have exposed our citizens to. If there is an increased threat of terrorism—as the US asserts and as the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations at the table asserts—we want to know what it is. We demand to know.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Corcoran)—Order! The member’s time has expired.

Mr CREAN—The Australian people deserve nothing less. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr RUDD (Griffith) (12.54 p.m.)—I second the motion. This debate on Iraq will generate many casualties, the first of which is truth.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (12.55 p.m.)—I move:

That the Member be not further heard.

A division having been called and the bells being rung—

Mr Snowdon—I rise on a point of order. Could you indicate, Madam Deputy Speaker, why the microphone for the Leader of the Opposition was turned off prior to you calling him to order?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—My understanding is that it was turned off once the time had expired.

Mr Snowdon—With great respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, it was turned off prior to you addressing him.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I will check that out and follow it up.

Question put.
The House divided. [12.59 p.m.]
(The Deputy Speaker—Ms Corcoran)

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**AYES**


**NOES**


* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Original question put:

That the motion (Mr Crean’s) be agreed to.

The House divided. [1.05 p.m.]

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**AYES**

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney) (1.10 p.m.)—The member for Canning spoke about what the polls are showing in terms of public support for a war on Iraq. Of course it matters what the public thinks—and we had 300,000 people march in Sydney a few weeks ago in opposition to this war—but it turns my stomach when people start talking about whether a swift war will mean a rise in support for the Prime Minister or a long war will mean a rise in support for the opposition. When we begin to measure domestic politics according to the cost of human lives, whether they are the lives of Australian soldiers, Iraqi civilians or whoever else we are talking about, it turns my stomach. It is the end of our common humanity when we start looking at the polls to decide whether we make war on another nation or not.

The member for Canning again brought up the old furphy that people who are opposed to the war are not opposed to the regime of Saddam Hussein. That is not the case. We have been very clear in saying that this man is a terrible dictator. But that is not why we are going to war against him. Six months ago, the reason we were going to make war on Saddam Hussein was because of his links with al-Qaeda. We have seen no links, so we disregard that as a reason and turn to the weapons of mass destruction. Hans Blix and the weapons inspectors say that, with more time, they believe they could successfully disarm Iraq. So that is no longer the reason. Suddenly we turn to Saddam Hussein’s human rights record—the same record he has had, incidentally, for the last 20 years; the same record he had when Britain, the United States, France, Germany, China and Russia were selling him weapons or precursors; the same record that he had when the United States helped him in the war with Iran. It is not about Saddam Hussein’s human rights record. He has had this appalling record for many years.

We need to find a way to peacefully disarm this man. I agree with that. There is no question about that from this side. What we say is that this is not the way to do it. The precedent that this sets in international rela-
tions is appalling. When we say that a country—whether it be the US or any other country—can pre-emptively attack because it believes it may be threatened, what message does that send to countries around the world? What message does it send to China about its relations with Pakistan? Why are their fears any less justified than the United States' fears of Iraq? In fact, in a situation like that of Pakistan and India, where you have two countries next door to each other, perhaps the threat is a more imminent threat and, perhaps, using this logic, they have much more justification for invasion. We set a terrible precedent when we say it is okay to invade because we fear our neighbours.

Who could have believed that the international coalition that was built to end terrorism could have been squandered so quickly? The international community was prepared to work together to combat terrorism, and George W. Bush has ended that preparedness to work together. He has ended the ability of the international community to work cooperatively for peace because he was not interested in cooperative work for peace.

I support disarmament. Many people in this chamber have campaigned long and hard for disarmament, and not just for the disarmament of Iraq. There are many countries that have weapons of mass destruction and I fear the possibility that they will use them in the future, but I do not see that invading Iraq will help at all with the disarmament of these countries. In fact such action may make these countries more likely not only to hang onto their weapons but also to feel that a weapons of mass destruction program is necessary for their own defence against their neighbours, particularly given this precedent of pre-emption that we are talking about. The US is going to use weapons in Iraq—like cluster bombs—that Australia has signed international conventions against and that we do not support the use of. So one of our two allies is going to use weapons that we believe should not be used in international conflict. How will our support help them use those weapons? How will having our ships refuelling their fighter planes help them drop cluster bombs on the Iraqi civilian population?

I think we have a serious moral issue before us when we start talking about disarmament as well. The weapons inspectors have asked for a few extra months. I cannot understand how this Prime Minister can be so keen to go to war so quickly and rush headlong into this terrible conflict. We are now calculating the cost. What a tragic situation we have before us. I think it is inevitable that we will lose Australian soldiers. My heart goes out to Australian soldiers and their families. I imagine the families at home now worrying about whether their sons, daughters, husbands or wives will come home from this conflict. Of course it is not just our troops, the American troops or the British ships that we care for; it is the Iraqi civilians. I have heard estimates as high as 260,000 possible deaths in Iraq from bombing, starvation and the typhoid that will break out when the water system and the sewerage system are destroyed and raw sewage flows into the water sources. We are talking about an enormously high death toll.

The government says that Saddam Hussein is responsible for a lot of civilian deaths and therefore must be stopped. He is responsible for a lot of civilian deaths; no-one is attempting to defend his record, but how can we allow ourselves to become responsible for more deaths of the Iraqi civilians we are claiming we wish to defend? The logic that Saddam Hussein is killing people so we are going to save them by killing more of them is beyond me. What else can we do? People say there is no alternative, but there is. The weapons inspectors have asked for more time. As a start, we could give the weapons inspectors more time.

These people who are so keen to put all their muscle into going to war could instead put some of that muscle and money into international solutions. The United States is talking about spending $88 billion on this conflict; Australia will spend about $1 billion on this conflict. How about instead we spend $1 billion building up the Iraqi civilian population? How about instead we spend some of that money making their lives a little easier?
We could spend that money in so many better ways. Dwight Eisenhower said:

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.

If we are talking about a genuine concern for the Iraqi civilian population, I can think of so many better ways of spending $1 billion. We could spend it internationally, and not just on the reconstruction of Iraq. For example, we could spend it on feeding the one million people in the Central African Republic who are about to die of starvation. In September last year, the United Nations tried to take up a collection to help these people on the brink of starvation in the Central African Republic. Do you know how much Australia committed to that? Not one single cent. Do you know how much has been committed by the international community? Not one single cent. How much has Australia committed to supporting the UNHCR in their efforts to prepare for the inevitable flow of refugees from any Iraqi conflict? Not one single cent.

We have committed $800 million to waging war on Iraq. We have committed $10 million to some postwar reconstruction—we have not paid any of that money yet—but when asked for money to help prepare for the inevitable flow of refugees from this conflict we have given not one single cent. We are prepared to say that we have a concern for the Iraqi population, but I have seen no evidence of that. I see no evidence of that in the way that we treat Iraqi refugees who come to Australia and I see no evidence of that in what we are prepared to do to support Iraqis in their homeland. I would like to see a real commitment to peace from this government. Instead of being prepared to make war on the population of Iraq, I would like to see the Prime Minister support international efforts to bring peace to Iraq.

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY (Dawson) (1.20 p.m.)—I rise to support the Prime Minister’s motion on Iraq. Firstly, I want to say that none of us in Australia wants a military conflict. However, it is useful to reflect on the steps that have brought us to this very unwelcome and unpleasant decision. In 1991, following the Gulf War, peace was established on the proviso that Saddam Hussein progressively remove his weapons of mass destruction. In the 12 years since the Gulf War ended, there have been 17 resolutions from the United Nations Security Council calling on Saddam Hussein to remove his weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt that he holds stocks of biological and chemical weapons. When the United Nations weapons inspectors left Iraq at the end of 1998, they were unable to account for a vast arsenal of chemical and biological weapons. There are also clear indications that he is now producing biological agents such as anthrax, botulinus toxin, aflatoxin and ricin and is preparing to produce nuclear warheads. It seems very likely, at least in the foreseeable future—perhaps next week; perhaps not for five years—that those stocks of weapons of mass destruction will intersect with terrorists. So the democratic world has attempted to obtain an 18th resolution from the United Nations Security Council.

Regrettably, however, that has been foiled by France in particular. Can I say how deeply disappointed I am, because young people from Australia, particularly from my home city of Mackay, went to the aid of France and are now buried on French soil. Let me name some of them. Sergeant Harry Fisher was killed in France in September 1918. He came from Mackay. Lieutenant James McBride was born in Mackay. He is now buried in Belgium. Corporal Thomas Matthews was from Septimus, near Mackay. He fought at Villers-Bretonneux and is remembered by his family in Mackay. The body of Private Francis Ross was never found. He is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial. There are many others.

The North Mackay high school recently went to France to lay a wreath on the graves of young men from our district who died during the First World War and Second World War. When Australia was called at that time she was not found wanting; she went to the aid of the French. Can I say now how very disappointing it is that, as Australia again seeks peace through enforcing a further resolution of the UN Security Council, the French have chosen to adopt a post-Napoleonic posturing to foil that resolution.
It must be very hurtful to those families who lost people who fought in the First World War and the Second World War. I notice that, in the papers today, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Crean, is compared to Jacques Chirac—in fact, he is called the Jacques Chirac of Australia. I will move on because, in the case of those who do not have the wish to enforce peace through the UN Security Council, I am sure history will be their judge.

There is a question about the legality of this recent move by the coalition of the willing to forcibly disarm Saddam Hussein of his weapons of mass destruction. The government has received advice from the Office of International Law, the Attorney-General’s Department, the senior legal adviser to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Attorney-General to the British government, as well as US legal advice, that such a conflict would, in fact, be legal. It is instrumental to look at the opinion published in various newspapers yesterday by a group of international lawyers. They have said that, in fact, the United Nations Security Council has already endorsed the use of force. Resolution 1441, which was unanimously supported, said that Iraq is in ‘material breach of its obligations’, that it has a ‘final opportunity to comply’, which has passed, and that, failing that, Iraq will face ‘serious consequences’. The resolution also recalled resolution 678, passed in 1990 by the United Nations Security Council, which authorised all necessary means to restore peace and security in the region. It further recalled resolution 687, passed in 1991, which establishes the conditions of the cease-fire after the Gulf War and which plainly have been broken.

The view is also expressed that our Asian neighbours will be concerned about military action in Iraq. I have just come back from the 6th Australia-Indonesia Ministerial Forum in Jakarta. Certainly, there is concern over the domestic reaction by some Islamic groups in Indonesia. Can I also say, though, that, more importantly, there is a mutual respect and understanding: Australia understands the challenges that Indonesia faces and Indonesia understands Australia’s very deep concern about regional and international security. I give credit to the Indonesian government for saying publicly and recognising that such a military action would not be one against Islam but, rather, one against weapons of mass destruction.

I would like to mention something from my electorate. Young people are very aware and well-informed about all of the issues in this debate. Typically, I think they are searching for information and thinking very deeply about the consequences of this. I would like to give the example of one school, St Patrick’s College, in my home town of Mackay. At St Patrick’s College last week a debate was organised by a year 12 student, Alex Samson. It was a very well-run debate and included speakers from Mackay People for Peace and me. But it was the quality of the questions that really highlighted how deeply young people are thinking about this issue. And they are thinking in a living fashion—in other words, as they obtain more information, their views are shifting. They are not caught in the 1960s statist views of some of those on the other side of this debate. For instance, Stacey Crowley, a year 12 student, asked what administration would be placed in Iraq prior to the election of a democratic government. Stacey is a young lady who really thinks very deeply about the issues to hand. Francis Hammond has also thought very deeply about what is happening and what the motives for such a war could be.

One of the motives for this decision, other than the obvious one of removing weapons of mass destruction from Saddam Hussein, is a humanitarian one. We have heard those on the other side asking, quite rightly, what casualties there will be. Obviously, we all pray that casualties will be minimal. But there is a war every day in Iraq. There is an internal war against the Iraqi people every day. There is no better example of this than in the article by Walter Mead in the Washington Post. He says that it was estimated that the Gulf War in 1991 killed between 1,000 and 5,000 civilians. He says that UNICEF estimates that 5,000 Iraqi babies die every month in Iraq. If Saddam Hussein holds power for another 10 years, he will condemn to death 240,000 children under the age of five and, in total, another 360,000 Iraqis.
Why? Because he has rorted the oil for food program that was supposed to help his people to buy food and medicines and, of course, he commits atrocities on his own people.

In closing, I would like to say that this debate must not degenerate into the type of disgraceful mean-spirited reaction that was shown to our troops when they came back from Vietnam. Today I have written a message to our brave troops on behalf of people in Dawson. I have said that they should know that they have the strong support of the community in our region and that:

An opportunity presents itself to secure a world largely free of weapons of mass destruction and of brutal murderous regimes.

That takes courage. That is what they have displayed by serving their country, just as their brave forefathers did. They are continuing the Anzac tradition. Our pride, prayers and heartfelt support go with them. On behalf of the people in my electorate, I sincerely thank them for their efforts and I wish them a safe and speedy return home.

Mr ORGAN (Cunningham) (1.29 p.m.)—

I rise today in support of the opposition’s amendment to the Prime Minister’s motion committing Australia to war against the people of Iraq. This is a sad time for Australia and for the world community. It is an especially tragic time for the people of Iraq. The decision by the Prime Minister and his government to go to war is plainly wrong. It is in defiance of the will of the Australian people. It is also in direct defiance of the will of the United Nations. It will open a political Pandora’s box in the Middle East, and the people of Iraq will be the unfortunate victims.

By this decision, the United States, Britain and Australia—the so-called coalition of the willing—are thumbing their noses at the UN and at international law. Make no mistake: this coalition is putting in place a new world order where the United States—to quote the Prime Minister: ‘the one superpower of the world’—will determine which country is invaded, which dictator is allowed to stay in power, what role the United Nations will be allowed to play and who will win and live and who will die. This has been a deliberate effort by the US to bully the UN and to usurp its role. Sheriff George W. Bush has arrived in town and he has taken control!

Just three weeks ago, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the summit of the non-aligned movement in Malaysia:

If the international community fails to agree on a common position and action is taken without the authority of the Security Council, then the legitimacy and the support for that action will be seriously impaired. States and peoples around the world attach fundamental importance to such legitimacy and to the international rule of law.

In taking this action, Australia, the US and the UK do not have the support of the United Nations. Three-quarters of a million Australians recently marched to oppose this war and the Prime Minister’s justification for it. In my electorate of Cunningham, we saw a rally of some 5,000 people march through the streets of Wollongong. It was the largest rally in living memory. I look forward to marching with them again until the Prime Minister and his government get the message and bring our 2,000 troops home.

The Greens are opposed to Australia’s involvement in a war against the people of Iraq. We have long held this view, and it is heartening to see the opposition adopting a stronger position on this matter. Both views reflect the will of the vast majority of the Australian population, young and old, because the decision by the government to commit this nation to war is immoral and illegal. The United Nations Security Council resolutions 678 and 687, on which the Prime Minister relies, do not authorise this war with Iraq. They refer specifically to the Kuwait action of some 13 years ago.

Relying on resolution 1441 is even more outrageous. Resolution 1441 does not support military action, and the US, UK and Australia know this. Following the vote on that resolution last November, John Negroponte, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, told the Security Council:

As we have said on numerous occasions to Council members, this Resolution contains no “hidden triggers” and no “automaticity” with respect to the use of force. If there is a further Iraqi breach, reported to the Council by UNMOVIC, the IAEA, or a member state, the matter will return to the Council for discussions as required in paragraph 12.
So there you have it: the US accepted that 1441 did not allow them to go to war, yet they and their partners have now turned their backs on this resolution, on this commitment and on the UN and international law. This is why the US tried so hard to get a second resolution—because they knew that, without a second resolution, their action would be illegal. Yet, on Monday, they decided to go to war—to invade Iraq. This decision is undoubtedly against the best interests of the people of Australia. On the government’s own advice, it will increase the risk of terrorist attacks on Australian soil. It is a decision for war, when we were looking to the Prime Minister and this government to do all in their power to maintain the peace—a peace that has been maintained in Iraq for 12 years.

Iraq’s violations of Security Council resolutions are mostly a matter of providing incomplete documentation about weapons that may or may not exist. At the same time, other countries continue to flout UN resolutions. Israel is in violation of over 30 resolutions and Morocco is illegally occupying Western Sahara, but there is no suggestion that the United States should go to war to help uphold international law in those and many other cases. Such is the hypocrisy that currently faces us.

The United States does not itself violate Security Council resolutions because it can always veto them, which it did when the Security Council tried to condemn its illegal invasion of Panama in 1989 and on seven occasions regarding its Contra war on Nicaragua. With the coalition of the willing on such shaky legal and moral ground, it has turned to highlighting Saddam Hussein’s atrocious human rights record and using this as a prime justification for war. We are being told that the end justifies the means—that is, the people of Iraq must accept the horror of war to stem the possibility of future atrocities by Saddam Hussein.

This week’s action by the coalition of the willing has forced the UN to leave Iraq and the weapons inspections to cease, yet in recent months we have seen inspections increase in effectiveness and scope. Iraq has begun to dismantle its al-Samoud missiles. Hans Blix and his team have not uncovered any weapons of mass destruction. They have stated that they have made significant progress in disarming Iraq, yet the White House has contemptuously dismissed all of these efforts. The constant refrain is that time is running out, with no explanation of why the time is so limited. The reason is simple—it is not because there is any imminent threat from Iraq; it is because the troops are now there and ready to go.

The obvious conclusion is that the war was decided upon long ago, irrespective of Iraq’s subsequent actions to disarm. Nothing Iraq could have done, short of full-scale capitulation and regime change, would have stopped the United States from going to war. That makes this war a clear case of naked aggression. On Tuesday, the French Ambassador to the United Nations pointed out that the UN is working hard towards a peaceful resolution to the Iraq problem. Australians want peace above all, not war.

The world and the UN Security Council believe that peace and diplomacy require more time; however, as members of the coalition of the willing, we have now taken that opportunity away. In doing so, the Prime Minister and his government have made us subservient to the will of the United States, sold out our sovereignty and embarrassed our nation on the international stage. This issue here today is not about our troops and their role; it is about the government’s open defiance of the will of the people.

The community knows that this war is wrong, that it is not justified and that it is being waged as a result of the American neo-colonial agenda and Iraq’s massive oil reserves. We are also aware that this government’s commitment to war is intrinsically linked to its addiction to economic rationalism. The Australian people are not stupid. They know that the first round of free trade negotiations occurring in Australia right now are being discussed in the context of Australia’s unwavering support for George W. Bush’s expansionist plans. They are also aware of the close links between the Bush administration and the oil industry.

The Greens oppose this war, full stop. We reflect a widely held view in the community. Our opposition stems from our adherence to
the core principles of peace, nonviolence and disarmament. I invite the Prime Minister to embrace these principles. I invite the Prime Minister to pull back from the brink of war, bring the troops home now and reignite the UN peace process. Then, and only then, will the Prime Minister receive the support of the Australian people. I commend the amendment to the House. In doing so, I call on the Prime Minister to allow members on the government side to exercise a conscience vote on this matter so that the will of the parliament can truly be tested and the will of the people of Australia be reflected here in this House.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (1.38 p.m.)—I begin my speech on this debate on Iraq with the words of Jose Ramos Horta, Nobel peace prize winner and foreign minister of East Timor. In a recent article in the Age, Dr Jose Ramos Horta said:

The anti-war demonstrations are truly noble. ...

But if the anti-war movement dissuades the US and its allies from going to war with Iraq, it will have contributed to the peace of the dead. ...

We cannot forget that despots protected by their own elaborate security apparatus are still able to make decisions. Those are the words of Jose Ramos Horta. They remind us that there are people of good faith on all sides of this debate. No-one is advanced by personal attacks. No-one is advanced by questioning the good motives, the good intentions and the good beliefs of all those who sincerely hold differing views on the question of how we deal with weapons of mass destruction and the gross and untenable human rights abuses in Iraq.

I have made a pledge to people such as Marion Rosetzky and Norman Guggenheimer in my electorate that I would faithfully represent their views in parliament, and I do that acknowledging that they do not agree with the government's position. But I also made a pledge to myself to faithfully represent my own views, and those views are within the context of a historical debate. In this situation in which we find ourselves now at the commencement of the 21st century, the question we have to ask is: how does the world deal with rogue states? How does the world, at a time when we have the examples of Kosovo, of action on Timor and of action in terms of Afghanistan, deal with rogue states?

I want to expressly and fully, but with a great deal of sorrow, support the notion that international enforcement must proceed now in the case of Iraq's flagrant, continued and ongoing violation of the Security Council. I want to make two arguments: firstly, that there is an overwhelmingly just and imminent cause; and, secondly, that there is a powerful legitimacy which attaches to any action now. In terms of the just cause, the first and most important point is that we have within Iraq a state which has gathered and acquired weapons of mass destruction in the form of chemical and biological weapons and which, without doubt, has also pursued a nuclear weapons program. The evidence for that was gathered over the course of eight years by the United Nations weapons inspectors. When they were evicted in 1998, there were over 25,000 litres of anthrax that had been recorded. There were 300 tonnes of VX nerve gas precursors, 1 1/2 tonnes of VX nerve agent, numerous chemical bombs and many other toxins such as sarin gas, mustard gas and other agents, all of which have been casually lost. They have all simply disappeared and cannot now be accounted for.

Let me read a quote from the Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC, Dr Hans Blix, in his update to the United Nations Security Council on 27 January 2003. Some have said that Dr Blix has not identified any weapons, has not identified a fault, but this is false. Dr Blix said:

Thus, there is a discrepancy of 6,500 bombs. The amount of chemical agent in these bombs would be in the order of about 1,000 tonnes. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, we must assume that these quantities are now unaccounted for.

In addition to that, the al-Samoud missiles have been uncovered. We know that the anthrax materials all existed prior to 1998 and all have disappeared. There is no doubt that the chemical and biological programs have
continued and that they are a fundamental element of the regime. But the reason why this situation becomes more powerful and immediate and of absolute express concern to the international community is that there are undoubted links to terrorist organisations. Some have focused on the question of al-Qaeda. That is still to be determined. But terror does not just equal al-Qaeda. Without doubt, there are express and proven links with the Abu Nidal organisation, with the Palestinian Liberation Front and with the Mujaheddin-e-Khalq, all of which are groups with the capacity and a history of carrying out atrocities against civilians. Add to that the fact that there is an expressed desire amongst these groups and al-Qaeda to acquire chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, and we see great fear. The great fear that strikes at the hearts of governments and leaders is that, within the next five to seven years, we will face an unparalleled threat to our cities, whether it be Manchester, Cincinnati, Seville, Hamburg, Lyons, or somewhere close to home. That is the great strategic threat which is unparalleled in recent modern history.

We have never witnessed anything like it. That is why, when some talk about attacks across borders, the traditional model of conflict is dead. It is this new model of asymmetric threats, disguised weaponry of chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction which can be easily exported across borders by silent individuals, which changes the very nature of the threats we face. Conflict as we know it has gone. It is a new type of threat that we have never faced before. So if we take the quiet option now, what we will face in five to seven years time is an unprecedented horror on our cities that we will forever rue. We will look back on this time and say, ‘Why were we passive?’

The second great cause here is human rights. In my previous speech to the House, I detailed the more than 500,000 deaths which came directly from the acts of the Hussein regime—deaths to the Marsh Arabs, the Kurds and ordinary civilians. I detailed the use of torture, the systematic rape of large sections of the female population, the act of eye gouging and the most horrendously vile actions against the individual person. This cannot be allowed to stand. The steps that we took in Kosovo, Timor and Afghanistan have all contributed to a dramatic change. They are part of an evolving international position. They feed into the notion that we have here the opportunity to produce a change in the quality of life for Iraqi citizens, which is unthinkable without changing the regime.

Having dealt with the first major issue of just cause, this leads me to the second major issue of legitimacy. There are three questions which must be dealt with here: duty, breach and authority. Duty is very clear: the combination of resolution 678 in 1990, resolution 687 in 1991 and resolution 1441 in 2002 all establish the notion that Iraq had an unequivocal duty to disarm its chemical and biological weapons, and that has been continuous throughout. Beyond that duty, though, we know that there has been a systematic, fundamental and ongoing breach. Why do we know this? We know because the materials of the previous weapons inspectors, and the current weapons inspection team led by Dr Hans Blix, have shown again and again the nature of those breaches. Whether or not it was the 27 January report or any other reports presented by Dr Blix, they all show the breaches. The authority is clear for the international community to enact those. I wish to finish where I started with a quote from Jose Ramos Horta, who witnessed the most egregious conditions in his own country:

… I also remember the desperation and anger I felt when the rest of the world chose to ignore the tragedy that was overwhelming my people. We begged a foreign power to free us from oppression, by force if necessary. It is with a sad and sorry heart that I have come to the conclusion that no other means are available to express the will of the Iraqi people, to provide them with an opportunity for a future, to provide them with a freedom and to provide the international community with the security that it demands and which is necessary to disarm Iraq today. (Time expired)

Mr KERR (Denison) (1.48 p.m.)—At the heart of this parliamentary debate, there is an emptiness. There is an emptiness because the
lines that we have heard delivered by our Prime Minister that have committed us to war have been delivered by a third-rate actor following a script written by another. The speeches that we now hear from members on the other side in this House repeat parrot like the same lines. We have not heard one speaker from the government side raise doubts about the consequences that this may lead our nation to. Contrast that to the debates in every other parliament which is considering these issues: the United States Congress, where senators and congressmen of all sides are deeply concerned about these issues. Some speak in support of war in brutal terms that exceed anything said in this House, but some in the President’s own Republican Party have expressed grave concerns. Consider the United Kingdom parliament, where there have been resignations from the governing Labour Party by men and women of great conscience and where, even within the conservative opposition, we have seen three resignations from the shadow ministry. Yet this Prime Minister does not come to question time to address this matter. It is not simply Saddam Hussein in the bunker; our Prime Minister of Australia is in the bunker. He has created a bunker where he is willing to commit us to war but not to defend his reasons.

Let us look at some of the propositions that have been put forward and the meagre-ness of them. We are told we must learn the lessons of proliferation; the lessons of history. The truth is that we have been pursuing the disarmament of Iraq and should still be pursuing it—not war. Weapons of mass destruction are serious issues. The former Keating government established a commission to lead the international struggle for disarmament and against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—an initiative discontinued by the Howard government. Who is going to be reading the lessons of the history President Bush and Prime Minister Howard are making now? You do not have to look very far. Look to North Korea and look to Iran. As they see the military threat building up against Iraq, what lessons do they draw from the lessons of history now being written? The lessons they are learning are that, in order to prevent yourself becoming the target of an invasion on a unilateral basis without a United Nations sanction, you must make certain you are so steelily armed with your own weapons of mass destruction that such an attack is unthinkable. We see, in our own region, North Korea re-energising its nuclear plants and commencing to produce plutonium grade materials, which can be used in the creation of nuclear weapons of mass destruction. They want to frighten any nation to not dare invade because of the threat of retaliation and the destruction of the invader or allied countries. North Korea is launching missiles to show that they are serious about this. In Iran—another of the three countries in the ‘axis of evil’—what lessons have they learnt? They are also recommis-sioning their nuclear plants.

Of course, who would be seeing this as a vindication of the lesson of history that he is seeking to preach? One Osama bin Laden, who is seeking to create an apocalyptic vision of a clash between the religion of Islam and that of the West. That is not a construction that I have ever conceptualised any of these issues around. It is not one that the Prime Minister conceptualises these issues around. Indeed, it is not one that the opposition conceptualises these issues around. Despite my extreme opposition to the course that the government has taken against the United Nations—and in the face of the fact that the United States and the so-called coalition that it built could not even find the majority of nine it required, could not get the support of its neighbours—Mexico and Canada—and could not get the support of countries that had no regional interests in an area where it is the superpower—not even I put the case that this is a war against Islam.

But it is not what I think; it is what might be passing through the mind of a 14-year-old child now hunkering down in the basements of Baghdad. It is what might be passing through the minds of one of those Islamic extremists that the US funded and used as its agents in Pakistan that might be readying to seize power at this very moment in a coup against the United States’ aligned president of that country. It is what might be passing through the minds of the people in Malaysia who go to madrassas and schools where they
learn of an Islamic culture which is now being permeated by some who wish to preach the message of hate and argue that the war is being prosecuted on behalf of three crusader nations against the world of Islam. Those are the minds that we have to concern ourselves with—not our own views, not the views of the West and the Murdoch media influenced constituents that we represent, but the views of those who will see the world through very different eyes.

Of course, Osama bin Laden could not have expected the kinds of consequences of the actions he so violently triggered. We responded to that together. There were leading headlines in French newspapers saying, ‘We are all Americans now.’ How quickly that goodwill was squandered. Osama bin Laden, as a result of these actions and by way of American response to this, now sees a world where the United Nations Security Council has been defied, where the key Western alliances are being wrecked apart and where he now has his propaganda weapon to promote this as a war against Islam—and, of course, that is what he will seek to do.

The other point I want to make is that we have to think of our regional and long-term geopolitical interests. In the short term, I do not know what will happen with this war. For the sake of the Australian serving personnel, I hope it will be short, surgical and quick. It may be; it may not be. But whatever happens, it remakes the nature of our world and our geopolitical arrangements. Part of the underlying rationale of the United States neoconservatism which has driven this agenda of the removal of Saddam Hussein from power was regime change. Remember, it is not disarmament alone that we are talking about; there was a UN process where the weapons inspectors were saying there had been substantial compliance and were seeking more time to complete their task. Time frames could have been established to see the complete removal of weapons of mass destruction. What ultimately was the decisive point? The difference between those countries that now proceed to war and those that do not, is that the United States also wanted regime change. What, in those circumstances, was their underlying agenda?

Essentially, it was the projection of US unilateral power. At root is a reconceptualisation of the world which, in terms of the United States debate, sees this as an asymmetrical conflict. In that framework, those who promote the neoconservative agenda see any effective rival to US supremacy—militarily, economically or socially—as having to be effectively rebuffed. That means taking on, with military strength, those that will not conform to what they now see as a single pole of global military, economic and social dominance. They see the world no longer as ‘multipolar’, which was how they characterised the Cold War. Now the United States alone must define the terms of global peace. Who do these ‘neoconservatives’ see ultimately as posing the real threat to the exercise of that power by the United States? Read through their literature. It is not Iraq, Iran or North Korea. The only country they see growing in economic power and in military power with the capacity to rival the United States is China.

I am not certain that we want to be tied so closely in our own region both to the enmity of those who might see our actions as conducting a war against Islam or as a part of a strategy designed in some way to hedge China in and to reduce, contain and effectively disempower it in terms of what the Chinese would see as their legitimate growing global significance. If we do not think of these things in terms of how others might see us and simply see this whole discussion in terms of how we see ourselves, then we deceive ourselves and we deceive the ideals that we purport to represent. We speak of abstract objectives that will lead to the deaths of many thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—for consequences that might ultimately be terribly destructive to our own security. It is not just our security today, as the Leader of the Opposition so correctly mentioned, that might be subjected now to immediate consequences of greater threats of terrorism but also the long-term global security of our region. (Time expired)

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Minister for Education, Science and Training) (1.58 p.m.)—From my perspective, the case for Australia’s support of military action in Iraq
rests on two inescapable but nonetheless quite unpalatable truths. The first is that we are living, whether we like it or not, in a world of fundamentalist intolerance. We are living in a world where there are people who are driven by religious fundamentalism in particular to commit heinous crimes against innocent people and where we, if we choose to stand by, risk them being supported by, and receiving patronage from, rogue states such as that of Iraq. The second is that some of the most heinous crimes against humanity—and I add to that the environment—that have been committed in the last 15 years have been committed by the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Two of the key questions which many of my constituents in Bradfield have asked me are why Iraq and why now. I am asked by many of my constituents, who are concerned and thoughtful in their criticism of the government’s actions, what it is that has made Saddam Hussein public enemy No. 1. I am asked why diplomatic and military pressure was not brought to bear so strongly on Saddam and the United Nations after the 1998 removal of UN weapons inspectors from Iraq. The fact is that it was and it was supported at that time by both sides in this federal parliament. But Iraq has squiggled and squirmed yet again, and five years later Saddam Hussein continues to flout not only UN resolution 1441 but the other 16 United Nations resolutions in support of disarmament.

In terms of why we would take action now, I think we need to understand that it is all because of 11 September 2001. September 11 in 2001 changed everything. The world has changed. It was changed irrevocably, as was the way that pre-existing threats were seen and would be addressed by the rest of the world. No more so has this been the case than in countries such as our own, Great Britain, the United States and other liberal democracies.

We should not forget that on that day two planes were hijacked and crashed into the World Trade Centre twin towers. Thousands of innocent men and women were killed, families were emotionally scarred, orphans were created and entire industries from airlines to insurance went into free fall. A third plane crashed into the Pentagon and a fourth, destined for the White House, crashed killing all on board, not reaching its target thanks to the heroism of everyday people. We should remember that 10 Australians lost their lives on that day in the United States. All countries that value political, religious and economic freedom were also changed that day.

Whether we like it or not, we are involved. By our way of life, notice was served on us that our fundamental values are the very target of fundamentalist extremists. Had those hijackers—had those who committed the Bali atrocity—been able to access biological, chemical or, God forbid, nuclear weapons, there can be little doubt of far more devastating consequences. Saddam Hussein denies having a relationship with Osama bin Laden. Who is to know? But if fanatics of any political or religious persuasion find sponsorship from any rogue regime hell-bent on destruction of Western values, hell on earth is what we will see. Abu Nidal, Mujaheedin-e-Khalq and the PLF are just three organisations sponsored by Saddam Hussein.

The parliamentary debate seems to provide for some a platform for venting guttural views of the worst anti-American kind. Oddly, none of those so ready to stick the proverbial boot into the US President have even mentioned Tony Blair, though the latter has prosecuted the case for sorting out Saddam Hussein with passion and intellectual integrity. Vigorous debate of issues such as this is a feature of our democracy. But it should not descend into rampant anti-Americanism. This nation’s trade, educational, cultural and strategic military interests should not be undermined by hot-headed emotionalism.

This is our fight. We have a stake in a world that is free of fundamentalist intolerance feeding wanton terrorism, potentially financed and supplied by equally fanatical but sovereign despotic regimes. Every United Nations process has been fully exhausted in this, as it should have been. Every fibre in thinking human beings reviles at the thought of war with all that history’s legacy leaves us. Yet we must surely have learned that there is also a heavy price paid for peace at any price.
But, sadly, among the placards that are carried at rallies and marches in our country there have not been any condemning the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein. Who speaks for the people of Iraq and 20 years of war, human rights abuses and torture of the worst kind? Hussein took his own people into two bloody wars, killing a million Iraqis and injuring a million more. He then unleashed chemical weapons on Iraq Kurdistan, killing 3,500 women, children and frail elderly who were unable to flee Halabja. What about the March 1988 events, to which the monument to Omar Khamar has been built—the father of eight lying dead clutching the body of his dead baby son? It is a pity that the voices of the 150,000 Kurds killed in the destruction of 5,000 villages could not be heard above the calls for no war. Similarly, those rebels who seized the opportunity offered by the Gulf War in 1991 were brutally crushed, killing another 180,000 innocents.

Environmental vandalism has also been this man’s stock in trade, from burning oil-fields to destruction right through to the destruction of the ancient southern marshes. I might add that was described by the United Nations as one of the world’s greatest acts of environmental vandalism. Then of course, as Dr Hans Blix has documented, there is his possession of chemical and biological stores and as we know anthrax and VX nerve gas. I add to that rape and torture as tools he has used against his own people.

Too many of us in this country take for granted the freedoms that have been given to us by earlier generations. In Iraq and many countries throughout the world, oppression is the ubiquitous source of human misery. There are no voices to question Saddam Hussein. Those who speak have their tongues removed or worse. In our country, we should celebrate many things but few more than the right to question decisions taken on our behalf in an environment of peace and without fear of retribution.

The threshold question for me in relation to Iraq and our involvement in this military action is whether fewer people will be killed and injured in the forceful removal of Saddam Hussein or by passing an 18th UN resolution in the hope that he might eventually roll over. I must say that I have concluded that more of the same is not hard to defend; it is damn near impossible to defend. When have we as Australians ever thought it appropriate to teach our children that the only time that you take a stand is when you believe that your own interests are going to be served by such courage? Do we not believe that, if evil threatens the safety of others, we should stand up to be counted?

Some argue that we should only participate in international actions where our own interests are being directly served. In this case, our interests are being directly served, and more importantly we are serving the interests of others who have neither voice nor influence. We should not lose sight of the fact recognised by Kofi Annan that the UN inspectors would not have even been in Iraq without the military pressure applied by Britain, the United States and Australia. By agitating for enforcement of UN resolution 1441 and Iraqi disarmament, the international coalition gives teeth to UN decisions. Some constituents have said to me, “Why didn’t we finish off Saddam Hussein last time?” The reason is that the coalition was working under UN direction.

If, out of all of this, Saddam Hussein is able to hold his own people, let alone the rest of the world, hostage to unacceptable behaviour, we risk him and other rogue leaders being more aggressive in their demands and reckless in their behaviour. We need to stand up for what we believe to be right. We should not forget that many Iraqis have turned up here and in other countries claiming asylum on the basis of a cruel and unjust regime whose leader persecutes and tortures his own people. Almost all of those Iraqis who have come to Australia have been given protection.

As Australia’s minister for education, I conclude by saying this. Wars are dreadful, but, if we did not believe that the rights of other human beings are important enough to be worth fighting for, could that not be worse? We should remember that the war against terrorism is as much a war against what Socrates described as the root of all evil—that is, ignorance. In fighting terrorism, we should remember that education in
our own country and the export of education to overcome ignorance in other parts of the world should remain a key priority. *(Time expired)*

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (2.09 p.m.)—As I speak these words, Australia has been committed to war by the Prime Minister. Australia is going to war at the behest of the Australian government but without the agreement of the Australian people. The basis of the nation’s agreement to use force against Iraq was through the United Nations mechanisms when all else had failed. The United Nations is saying that all possible means of diplomacy have not been exhausted, so the Security Council has as yet no mandate to ask for force to be used. Yet we are listening to the Bush mantra of defending the democracy of the Iraqi people. He is telling the people what is good for them. Bush continues to try to persuade us that there is still a significant number of weapons of mass destruction hiding somewhere in Iraq—but so far little evidence has been found of such a cache. Even the weapons inspectors are hard pushed to find any argument that Iraq is not complying with the requests that they have made, and they have asked for more time.

But we are going to war anyway, because America wants to solve a problem it cannot sort out by peaceful means. Bush’s father failed in his mission to subdue Saddam Hussein, and it irks the family that he is still in power some 12 years after the last skirmish. He sees that the only alternative for the US now is to follow through on the threat and to turn it into a war. It is too simplistic to blame Saddam Hussein for all the acts of terrorism, particularly as there has been no evidence of his involvement with al-Qaeda. This is not Australia’s war. This country has never been into a theatre of war as an aggressor or without the sanction or the imprimatur of the United Nations. In many countries, our troops have fulfilled their role as peacekeepers with great dignity and with much approbation from the countries that they have entered in such a manner.

Australia has thrown all of that support away by entering into the illegal war of George W. Bush. We have opened ourselves up to being a terror target, allied as we are to the US, and our close ties with the countries around us are now very remote. If we had been asked to provide peacekeepers to rebuild a country or, through the United Nations, to help the Iraqi people make the changes that they would like to make, then we would have a just cause; this way, we do not. As it stands, this government has committed troops to go to war. Labor strongly opposes the predeployment of troops to the gulf. Our argument is with the government, not with the troops. The defence forces will always have our full support.

I have been receiving messages from all over Tasmania and all over Australia—indeed, from friends all around the world who are aware of the involvement of Australia in this battle of nerves. People are saying that war is not the way to resolve the differences, that there are too many possibilities for things to go awfully wrong. Many people have relatives involved in the forces; they are concerned about them and the likely effects the war can have on them. Not only our people but many civilians in Iraq, particularly the elderly, the women and the children, are likely to be the unwitting casualties in the conflict.

State governments around Australia are also concerned about committing our troops to war. The Premier of Tasmania said:

... whatever people’s personal opinion, my thoughts are currently with those service men and women who are obliged to carry out the orders that are given to them. And I am sure they will, together with their families, who of course will be most concerned about their safety.

He went on to say:

We’ll be hoping for a safe and speedy return home for them and I guess even at this eleventh hour, at five to midnight, it is not too late to hope that common sense will see the light of day and hopefully it is not too late yet for this (war) to be avoided.

Tasmania has a large percentage of young people in the armed forces, and I am sure there will be some involved in this deployment. The Premier is rightly concerned for their welfare, because it becomes very personal when a young person in a family is affected by war.
The current policy of the government puts us all in a danger zone—rather than having our forces as a defence and peacekeeper in our own region, which is where they should be. Labor believes that the government’s first responsibility is to ensure this country’s security within our own region and our own backyard, and that is what the community is expressing to us. Local government also recognises the concern in the community, and the comments coming forward are similar. One council wrote:

While Council is mindful that the issues of international affairs are outside its charter we, as individual members of our community, whilst supporting the Australian Defence Forces overseas, do not support the use of Australian military force in war in Iraq without the support of the United Nations …

This is not an isolated comment. Many councils feel very strongly because they are being pushed by their communities to speak out. Of course, the good thing is that they are able to do that in Australia. Unlike other places that are under military regimes, we have freedom of speech. Our responsibility is to listen to our communities and take on board their concerns.

The other thing I find to be of great concern is the way Bush is threatening the workings of the United Nations. His bullying of countries to go along with his agenda weakens the role and independence of the United Nations, and will ultimately cause enormous difficulties in disputes in other parts of the world. Other regimes in the world have shocking human rights records that have been held in place by outside help. Is this going to be another incident of the US controlling the political agendas of weaker, smaller nations? Australia should not be party to that. How, for instance, are we supposed to deal with North Korea after attention to Iraq is finalised?

We have been pushed into this by a Prime Minister who wants to score political points and take people’s minds off other issues affecting the nation, not defend any particular principle the coalition might have on weapons of mass destruction or get rid of a dictator who is causing a lot of hurt to his people. If he were serious about the latter, he would be ensuring that every effort was made to use diplomacy to enable Iraq’s people to overcome their situation with the help of friendly forces. Throwing out a dictator does not mean that there is not another one in the wings just waiting for their opportunity. John Howard is no Robert Menzies. Menzies was reluctant to send troops into conflict, because he knew the consequences of doing so for the Australian people. He said:

Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that, in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war on her and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.

There was an invasion of another country and thus Australia was involved in supporting Britain because of our ties at the time. We were directly threatened by a possible invasion, too. You cannot say that about Iraq, Menzies went on to say:

Great Britain and France, with the cooperation of the British dominions—which, of course, included Australia—have struggled to avoid this tragedy … They have kept the door of negotiation open. They have given no cause for aggression.

I am afraid one cannot say this of the current government’s approach. The Prime Minister leapt into George W. Bush’s pocket as soon as he thought it might gain him some mileage, and now he has been caught out. The negotiation door closed a long time ago and threats were kept up, so now there is no alternative but to fight. When the decisions were being made in the Azores with the US, the UK and Spain present, where was Australia? Spain has not even committed troops. This decision to take the country to war as one of only three or four countries of the 191 that make up the United Nations cannot be seen as good for our national security. On the contrary, John Howard’s war will make Australia less secure. (Time expired)

The SPEAKER—The member for Lyons will refer to the Prime Minister by his correct title.

Mrs DRAPER (Makin) (2.19 p.m.)—I support the motion moved by the Prime Minister. This is a solemn time in the history of our nation and the world. Despite genuine attempts by so many to resolve the issue of
Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction by diplomatic means, the Iraqi dictator continues to defy the international community and oppress his people. Let there be no mistake: there is no support for Saddam Hussein among the civilised nations of the world. None deny that he has hidden his terrible weapons of mass destruction and that he is personally responsible for the deaths of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of his own citizens. It is a matter of historical fact that he pursued war with Iran, invaded Kuwait, fired missiles at Israel, and used chemical weapons against the Kurds and Marsh Arabs of Iraq.

The international community knows of Hussein’s support for and links to terrorism. It is a matter of fact that he encourages Palestinian suicide bombers to kill innocent men, women and children by providing financial incentives to the families of extremists. For 12 years he has defied the will of the international community. He forced out UN weapons inspectors who were carrying out their duty and embarked upon the production of chemical and biological weapons. The recent return of the inspectors came about for one reason and one reason only: because the United States and its allies gave force to the numerous resolutions of the United Nations that Hussein had simply ignored. Faced with a massive military build-up on his doorstep, Saddam Hussein was forced to allow the return of the inspectors.

The inspectors have done their best under very trying circumstances. Speaking out in frustration, the chief weapons inspector, Hans Blix, has told the world on more than one occasion that the Iraqi regime was failing to cooperate with the inspection team. At one point Mr Blix warned Iraq: ‘It is not enough to open doors. Inspection is not a game of catch as catch can.’ But Saddam Hussein was playing the same game he has played since the end of the Gulf War in 1991: deny all until you are caught and then profess innocence. That has been the modus operandi of all rogues since time immemorial. All these facts are known, and their truth is acknowledged by all the civilised nations of the world. None deny Hussein’s brutal record against his own people, his aggression towards his neighbours, his development of illegal weapons of mass destruction and his support for the actions of terrorists.

Given the very clear danger posed by such a regime, it is a matter of considerable consternation to those of us who regard the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council as being worth something more than just the paper they are written on that it has failed to uphold its own declarations. This failure of will by at least one of its permanent members cannot be understood in the clear light of the facts. Whatever the reasons for this failure, those responsible have not served well the cause of peace and have given rise to questions about the credibility of the decisions of the Security Council. The world cannot afford to ignore growing threats to its safety and security. We cannot allow rogue regimes to play upon the strengths of our democracy—the right of people to freely express their views—to weaken our resolve to protect our citizens and make the world a safer place for all peoples.

Those of us who support the policy of the government and the actions to send our military personnel to Iraq are not immune to the pleas of those who have marched in the streets in the past few weeks. No-one on this side wants war but neither do we wish to live in a world in fear of terrorism and attack from regimes that build and use weapons of mass destruction. Failure to stop Saddam Hussein will not only allow him to continue his policy of terror but send a message to other rogue states that the civilised world is weak and without the will to protect its own people.

That is why it is difficult for those of us who understand the new realities of the international situation to adopt the apparently simple and no doubt heartfelt views of those opposed to taking any action against the regime in Iraq. But peace at any cost has never been a successful method of achieving the peace that we all seek. History teaches us that dictators and tyrants do not respond to messages of goodwill to their fellow man. The 20th century in particular provides us with more than one example of the failure of appeasement. If you truly want peace, sometimes you must be willing to defend it.
According to Matt Price of the *Australian*, those of us who hold these views are in some way cowards. Because we do not agree with his view of the Iraqi situation, we are to be accorded this derisive title. I never cease to wonder at those who set forth to loudly air their views but ascribe mean and base motives to those of us who do not share them. It may come as a surprise to Mr Price, and others like him, that he does not hold the monopoly on compassion.

May I recommend that they read an article written by Mia Handshin which appeared in the *Adelaide Advertiser* on 11 March 2003. It was a very good article, not because Miss Handshin was supporting the government’s policy—quite the contrary—but because of its fair and even treatment of the subject. She reported the truth without incentives to do so, such as concert tickets which were difficult to obtain and so were desperately wanted. Miss Handshin had attended a conference involving six Iraqi women, in her role as an intern at the Brussels based International Crisis Group. The Iraqi women spoke about life under the Hussein regime. They explained how women in Iraq had been ‘severely violated by Saddam and his Baath regime by degrading the role of women in the community’. All six of these women had lost loved ones at the hands of Saddam’s thugs. One of the women professed her concern that the inspectors were looking for the weapons of mass destruction, but no-one was investigating ‘Saddam Hussein’s crimes against the Iraqi people’. She went on to say:

... Iraq under Saddam’s regime has become a land of agony, dismay and fear. A country where people are ethnically cleansed, prisoners are tortured in more than 300 prisons, rape is systematic, and decapitation of women and displaying of their heads on the walls and doors of their houses is an ongoing activity by the sons of the dictator ...

On whose hands will there be blood? Not on the hands of our Prime Minister or those of Bush or Tony Blair. It will be on the hands of those who wish to do nothing, who wish to hide behind the protective apron strings of Hans Blix and the skirts of the French. They are, in reality, the cowards.

I heard President Bush give Saddam and his sons 48 hours to leave Iraq. Who could not forgive the women of Iraq for celebrating their liberation? And celebrate they shall. The Iraqi women told Mia Handshin that, if armed intervention would rid their country of their dictator, they would support that action. Miss Handshin says in her column that the experience of talking with these women was both heartbreaking and personally challenging, not least because she holds the view that force should not be used. Finally, she says that her hope is that ‘diplomacy shall prevail’, as was the hope of us all. Here we have a young woman willing to understand, if not support, the view that action must be taken to stop Saddam Hussein. I commend her for her honesty and fairness. I wish others would follow her example.

For too many people in Iraq, the 12 years in which Saddam Hussein has been allowed to ignore the world community has been a period of personal tragedy and national shame. May their forthcoming liberation lead to the dawning of a new age for the people of Iraq and the Middle East region. May they enjoy the same freedoms that we enjoy—the right to select their leaders and to follow their own destinies unmolested. Surely these are the hopes which can unite us all.

As a former serving member of the defence forces in the WRANS, my hopes and prayers go to our serving members who will be participating in military action. We do have the best-trained defence forces in the world, and I wish that they will all be able to come back home safely. May I also send my best wishes to the families of those Defence Force personnel serving in Iraq. In the end, we must act as we are doing, because, as we all know—and as Edmund Burke said—for evil to prosper, all good men have to do is nothing. I commend our Prime Minister, John Howard, for joining the United States and Britain, along with others, in sharing the burden to fight for peace.

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (2.29 p.m.)—Most of us in this chamber would feel that it is a very sad day to be debating this matter. I think it is sad in a number of ways—even from the point of view of the government that has initiated a war on Iraq. I think most of the members of the government would not be terribly pleased with the
action that they have taken. It is sad day for a number of reasons. Obviously, a declaration of war on another nation is something that most of us would like to avoid. Also, the way in which the debate has taken place in relation to this issue is a sad indictment on the parliament and the way in which the process of parliament has actually worked.

The decision has been made by the executive government of the day and we are now having a debate about acceptance of that decision, in full recognition that the numbers are with the government. So in a sense this debate is essentially a waste of time, and not to have had question time today to scrutinise the government’s decision making processes is also a sad indictment on the way in which this process has been conducted. There has been a continual denial of a vote within the parliament on this issue over the last months. I congratulate the member for Calare for sticking to his guns—if I can use that phrase—in trying to get some sort of definitive vote in the parliament on what the people of Australia actually think about this issue. That has been blocked on a number of occasions. The week before last the member for Calare moved again to have the issue debated. Due to the timing of the motion to suspend standing orders, in question time, the Prime Minister decided—not for the right reasons, in my view, but obviously because he was under the full scrutiny of the press gallery—that he needed to address that issue, and here we are again today debating an issue that has already been decided upon. Australia is going to war.

My job is not to become an international lawyer like most others have over the last few weeks. My job is to represent the people of New England. I have absolutely no doubt at this stage, given the amount of mail and the number of telephone calls et cetera I have received, that the people of New England do not endorse this course of action at this time. The people of New England have expressed a view very similar to that of most other Australians—that they would prefer not to go to war at all but, if war were to be declared on Iraq, it should be done through the auspices and with the sanction of the United Nations. As I have said, the member for Calare, I and others have endorsed that process in the parliament and have been unable to get a vote on that issue. Today we will have a vote when the amendment moved by the opposition is voted upon.

The constituents within the electorate of New England are, as I said, opposed to a war on Iraq without the sanction of the United Nations. I think there are a number of reasons for this. Many of you would know that some 5,000 people marched in a peace rally in Armidale. Those in the rally were not from the loony left of the community at all and they were not even university students, because the university was not in term at that stage; they were a very broad cross-section of people. When a quarter of a town turns out to voice its concerns, it is something that should be noted and endorsed by the parliament. It is also very obvious to me that the polls that are being conducted right across Australia indicate that the populace of Australia does not support a war unless it is sanctioned by the United Nations. In my electorate, amongst thousands who have made a contribution by mail or phone call or by marching and physically identifying themselves in opposition to a war without a mandate from the United Nations, two people have expressed the view that they endorse the government’s view at the moment.

**Mr Downer**—What is the point of being a member of parliament when all you do is just mouth platitudes at demonstrators?

**Mr WINDSOR**—I notice that the Minister for Foreign Affairs seems to know what is going on in my electorate a bit better than I do, apparently. I will be supporting the opposition’s amendment. I believe it is a far more constructive view of what Australians are thinking and particularly what people in my electorate are thinking.

**Mr Downer**—We’ll see; you might be wrong about that.

**Mr WINDSOR**—I believe that the Prime Minister—and, for that matter, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who interjects—is trapped in a situation here. To our regret, he has been unable to extricate himself from this position. I have no doubt that, if we look back on how this situation in relation to the
declaration of war has come about, we will see that it started many months ago in wedge politics. In my view, it started with the *Tampa* experience and the political benefits that came to the government at that stage. It started with the refugee issue and the short-term political benefits that accrued to the government at that stage, and it was working quite effectively as a political weapon driving a wedge between the left and the right in the Labor Party and keeping the opposition in some sort of disarray. That is all very well; that is the nature of politics. But, as a parliament and as a government, we really do have to look a bit further as to the implications of what we are doing—the ramifications of this decision that the Prime Minister and a very small group of people have made in relation to this issue.

The Prime Minister made a fatal error when he deployed the troops early, in my view and in the view of many Australians, because he put himself in a position where he believes it would be to some degree a dishonour if he were to bring those troops home. The gamble he took at that stage was that there would be a United Nations endorsement of the process and that Australia would be well placed in displaying some degree of ‘leadership’ on that particular issue. That has not happened. In the global community the process that has been in place for some 50 years has broken down and we are now in a situation where Australia, along with one other nation—perhaps two—is going to declare war on another nation, 50 per cent of the population of which is under the age of 15 years.

I do not believe there has been any long-term thinking by the government in relation to this issue. I do not buy the rhetoric on the interpretation of international law. We can all go to a lawyer and get an interpretation. At the end of the day, what does it matter? We have declared war. To be arguing the rights and wrongs of the international law interpretation and bringing in different lawyers with a whole range of views is, in a sense, shutting the door after the horse has bolted. I do not understand the Prime Minister’s logic. I wish I did, because I have always had a great deal of respect for the Prime Minister on a range of issues, but I just cannot comprehend his logic in relation to this issue—the logic that says that declaring war without a United Nations sanction is somehow going to create peace in other areas of the world and all of a sudden terrorists will disappear from the face of the earth.

The member for Brand yesterday put it far better than I can when he said something along the lines of what this will create is the very thing that we are all trying to stop. I believe the Prime Minister is genuinely trying to stop this but, because of the situation that he is trapped in, he feels as though he has to pursue this train of events. The train of events that could unfold has horrific consequences and this parliament, while it still has the opportunity, should revisit this decision. It should look at the logic that the Prime Minister is using and recognise that it is only through the globe working together that you will ever eradicate some of these problems. The globe working together may well mean doing something in relation to the causes of some of these problems: the Islamic problems that are occurring around the world; the problem with Palestine—why aren’t we putting more effort into Palestine?

If we do go ahead with this process and declare war, where do we stop? There are something like 20 nations that have chemical and biological weapons; there are probably 17 or 18 that have nuclear capacity. We have the atrocity that is happening in Zimbabwe. Where do we stop in relation to those sorts of things? (Time expired)

Mrs Vale (Hughes—Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence) (2.39 p.m.)—I wish to speak in support of this motion. At the outset I state simply that, like all other members in this House and the vast majority of Australians, including those in my electorate of Hughes, I do not want Australia to go to war. It has been my hope, and that of my constituents, that commonsense and diplomacy would prevail. It has been my unrelenting hope that we do not have to resort to conflict to secure long-term peace and security for the future of our world and that a peaceful solution could be negotiated. Each and every one of us wants to secure a world that is safe
from terrorists and from those who wish to use weapons of mass destruction against others who do not share their view of how we should live our lives.

And that is exactly what we are dealing with here: our security as a nation and our security as individuals. This is about ensuring that a man who has used weapons of mass destruction against neighbouring countries—even against his own people—does not have the chance to use them again. It is further about ensuring that such weapons do not fall into the hands of others who may wish to use them. It is not enough for Australia to sit back and decide that these issues do not affect us, that somehow we have no responsibility for such concerns. We do not have the indulgence of a benevolent fate to believe that, as it is happening in a country on the other side of the world, there are others who should take the responsibility for dealing with it. As we have seen all too readily in the past year, our splendid isolation from other countries no longer protects us from the actions of terrorists and those who find our democracy, our freedom, our Australian way of life abhorrent to their views. The barbarians are not just at the gates; they have already come through the gates. After 11 September 2001 and 12 October 2002, our world will never be the same again.

For over 12 years, the community of nations has been united in its objective to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction and to ensure through ongoing monitoring and verification that it does not restart such programs in the future. Throughout this time, Saddam Hussein has continued to obfuscate and frustrate this process. The continued systematic deception and disregard for the demands of the international community can continue no longer. The Iraqi regime continues to possess and conceal weapons of mass destruction. The world knows that. The regime has failed to account for 6,500 chemical bombs, including 550 shells filled with mustard gas; 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agent, including 1.5 tonnes of the deadly nerve agent VX; 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals, 300 tonnes of which could only be used for the production of VX; and more than 30,000 special munitions for the delivery of chemical and biological agents. For over 12 years, Saddam Hussein has ignored with disdain the calls from the international community to disarm, as he agreed to do after the 1991 Gulf War. While a peaceful resolution now seems unlikely, this outcome remains possible should Saddam Hussein meet the United States’ demands and leave Iraq. It is unfortunate that diplomacy and negotiation have largely failed and we now stand at this threshold. Such failure is attributable to the contempt in which Saddam Hussein holds the world and the just demands of the United Nations.

At this time, the government recognises the great concern within the Australian community for the wellbeing of our ADF personnel. We have a responsibility to ensure that our sailors, soldiers and airmen—and their loved ones—are given as much support as possible. As demonstrated by their work in operations over many years but most recently in East Timor, Bougainville and Afghanistan, our young men and women of the Australian Defence Force do an outstanding job whenever and wherever they are sent in the world. I do not need to reassure the House that they are well trained, well prepared and totally professional. They have justly earned an enviable reputation for excellence and they always punch a lot higher than their weight. Indeed, they are the pride of the nation. They deserve our full support in the face of what is a very difficult and uncertain time, and I join with all true-blue Australians everywhere in saluting their service.

I would also urge all members to acknowledge and support the love that our ADF members receive from their families here at home. A role in the ADF is more than just a job, it is a way of life, and it is a way of life that places unique challenges and pressures upon families. I am pleased to say that the government recognises that and is providing comprehensive support to our ADF personnel and their families before, during and after deployment. We hope that our contribution and deployment is short and we look forward to the young men and women of the ADF returning home safely and quickly.
As the Prime Minister has previously made clear, we can be certain that if the world turns its back on the threat posed by Iraq we will not be rewarded with peace. Peace is not simply the absence of war. The dynamic of international relationships has a life force of its own. As has been demonstrated in the past, Iraq will not disarm and could be encouraged to add to her arsenal. This, in turn, will certainly encourage other states to ignore international conventions to develop their own weapons of mass destruction, and that poses a greater security risk both to our region and to the world.

I am pleased that in Australia we have bipartisan support on the issue of weapons of mass destruction. Australia has long been at the forefront of efforts to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Australia accepts the obligations that go with the global environment in which we live. It is morally wrong to propose that we should ignore our responsibilities and hope that someone else will come to the party and fix them for us.

As all members know, the absence of war does not equate to peace. Sometimes the absence of war can mean surrender to an enemy or submission to a threat. There is always a choice, and reluctantly we face a choice now. I acknowledge that there are many people in our community, including in my own electorate, who do not support the action the government has taken. I respect their right to hold those beliefs and, as a serving member recently commented to the media, that is exactly what ourADF members are working at defending, as well.

Like our fathers and forefathers before us, we are facing the challenge of our generation. The Australian government will continue to make the tough decisions—and there is none as tough as this—in our national interest. We will continue to do so because we believe it is the right thing to do, and I support the Prime Minister for his principled stand in this difficult matter. And I urge all Australians to now rally behind the men and women of the ADF—those excellent, courageous young Australians who are undertaking their vital role in maintaining peace and stability in our world, our region and, ultimately, at home within Australia. They are our sons and daughters and, until they return safely to our shores, they will be within our hearts, our minds, and certainly in our prayers. God bless them all.

Mr WILKIE (Swan) (2.47 p.m.)—I rise to support the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition in relation to this matter. I would like to remind everyone here why Australia is a member of the United Nations, in the first place. The United Nations officially came into existence on 24 October 1945, when the UN Charter had been ratified by a majority of the original 51 member states. It now comprises 191 members. The purpose of the UN is to bring all nations of the world together to work for peace and development, based on the principles of justice, human dignity and the well-being of all people. It affords the opportunity for countries to balance global interdependence and national interests when addressing international problems.

Since its creation in 1945, the UN has often been called upon to prevent disputes from escalating into war, to persuade opposing parties to use the conference table rather than force of arms or to help restore peace when conflict breaks out. Over the decades, the UN has helped to end numerous conflicts, often through actions of the Security Council, the primary organ for dealing with issues of international peace and security. By not complying with the UN process, the Prime Minister has, in effect, flown in the face of the weight of world governmental opinion. It is my belief that recourse to war can never be justified before all non-violent solutions have been pursued.

Instead of listening to the people of Australia, who in the majority do not want to engage in conflict with Iraq and who would prefer to follow the direction of the United Nations—that is, to follow a non-violent solution to the situation in Iraq—the Prime Minister is following the President of the United States into conflict with Iraq without the backing of the UN. I think it is ironic that we will be going to war with another nation on the eve of Harmony Day.

Prime Minister, I believe it speaks volumes when one of our own senior intelligence analysts feels compelled to resign
from our top secret intelligence assessment agency in protest against Australia’s involvement in the looming war with Iraq. My namesake, Andrew Wilkie, is reported by the Australian newspaper to have said that he felt compelled to resign from the Office of National Assessments because he did not believe Iraq posed a serious threat to Australia. He went on to say:

Their military is very weak. It’s a fraction of the size it was when it invaded Kuwait in 1990 ... Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction program is, I believe, genuinely contained ... I don’t believe I can stand by any longer and take no action.

Prior to his resignation, Mr Wilkie, a former lieutenant colonel in the army, was a middle-ranking bureaucrat who knew enough about US and Australian intelligence on Iraq to know what he was talking about. I believe that his information is credible and therefore should be taken into consideration.

The failure so far to find any Iraqi weapons of mass destruction reinforces Mr Wilkie’s comment to the Bulletin that its biological and chemical program is ‘limited and disjointed’ compared with the bigger national program under way before the 1991 Gulf War. Of course, it is impossible to rule out the Prime Minister’s worst nightmare, outlined in his speech to the Press Club last Thursday, that Iraq will give weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. Mr Wilkie’s point, however, is that Saddam is far more likely to do so as a last defiant act during an invasion than if war is kept as a last option.

While on the subject of intelligence reports, we must remember that our Prime Minister is not beyond using intelligence reports for his own political ends. As noted in a just released book, Dark Victory, Mr Howard quoted from an Office of National Assessments report to bolster his claims during the last election that asylum seekers had thrown children into the sea. He gave no hint at the time that this report was based on nothing more than press reports of claims made by the then defence minister, Peter Reith. We all know the rest: after the election the claims were exposed as false and that John Howard presented ONA second-hand information as independent verification that asylum seekers really had thrown children overboard.

Last Thursday Fran Kelly, from the 7.30 Report, asked the Prime Minister:

Will you release ONA reports on Iraq, just as you released the ONA report on the children overboard, here in the National Press Club address 16 months ago?

The Prime Minister’s response was:

Well that particular ONA report ... merely repeated press reports. I am not going to release ONA assessments, almost all of which remain classified. What I said to you today represented their general view.

Why didn’t the Prime Minister follow his earlier example—of using ONA material to back up his children overboard claims—and release ONA material to back up his claims on Iraq? Unlike the classified material on Iraq, Mr Howard replied that ONA was only using press reports in the children overboard affair. Such is politics and the misuses to which intelligence can be put during an election, or a war. As I am sure you will all remember, he went on to say:

In the end, all of these things involve questions of judgment. We are not talking about proving to beyond reasonable doubt ... I mean if you wait for that kind of proof, you know, it’s virtually Pearl Harbour.

That is where the Prime Minister is wrong. In the case of Pearl Harbor, US territory was attacked by an enemy and, therefore, the US had every right to retaliate against that enemy. The scenario that the Prime Minister is proposing is the stance that the Japanese took, not the stance that the US took. The Japanese were the aggressors, and the Americans were the aggrieved. In that case, the US had every right to retaliate.

What concerns me is the question of morality. The majority of Australians seem to be saying ‘no’ as a moral rather than a legal stand, and for good reason. To date, no link has been shown between the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and Iraq and there is no evidence that Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction pose an immediate threat to Australia and its allies. Therefore, given that these two conditions have not been met and the UN Security Council has not author-
ised military action against Iraq, there is indeed no basis for military action.

In the Prime Minister’s address to the National Press Club on 13 March, he said that he was going to present evidence from our intelligence agencies of a link between Iraq and terrorists. So where is that evidence? I listened to the address and I have read the transcript, but I still cannot see the evidence that the Prime Minister promised. The reality is that we all know that Saddam Hussein is an evil man capable of evil acts, some of which defy imagination. The depths to which he will stoop and the misery and deprivation he will inflict on his people are well reported. However, that does not give an outside power the right to go in and strike. We know about Robert Mugabe; he is an evil despot. Three million people in his country are currently dying as a result of his regime. But we have sent a cricket team to Zimbabwe, and this is just hypocritical.

Therefore, I oppose this war. As I said before, it does not have the sanction of the United Nations Security Council. It is not an act of self-defence. This commitment by the Prime Minister to join the US in an attack on Iraq is a clear indication that Australia has walked away from the United Nations. Taking an aggressive stand and committing to war when a peaceful solution could probably still be found is at best irresponsible and at worst criminal. The Prime Minister has blatantly disregarded reasoned opinion and flown in the face of the UN with his decision to follow the call of George Bush. As I said, no-one would argue that Saddam Hussein is not an evil despot who needs to be disarmed. The question is how we go about achieving that disarmament. War must be a last resort when every other avenue has been tried and found not to work. War should never, never be used as a starting point.

We must ensure that, when dealing with evil regimes, we do it in the right way. Unfortunately, in this instance the Prime Minister, in his eagerness to join in this war on Iraq, is pre-empting the UN process of attempting to disarm Iraq without a conflict. It is in Australia’s interest to abide by the international rule of law. The last time we went into Iraq was under the UN banner after the invasion of Kuwait. This time, if we go into Iraq without the sanction of the UN, we will have weakened the United Nations. This proposed action of going to war without UN sanction gives a clear signal to rogue states. If we allow countries to act unilaterally, even in a good cause, what message does that give to regimes that would act unilaterally in a bad cause?

Going to war with Iraq will damage relations in our region. This government has an obligation to cultivate and build relationships in our region to fight terrorism. As the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations admitted yesterday, this act will make us a target. This war will spawn more terrorism and more terrorists. This war is wrong, and the Labor Party will not be part of it. This war is unnecessary, and there is an alternative. As I have said before, recourse to war can never be justified before all non-violent solutions have been pursued. The Labor Party has argued since April that there should be no military action in Iraq outside the authority of the United Nations. Therefore, I commend to the House the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (2.56 p.m.)—The House has been presented today with the opportunity to act to defend our national and international security, to endorse the government’s contribution to the coalition presently assembling in the Persian Gulf region and to bring to an end the threat posed by a rogue state’s development of weapons of mass destruction. The appearance of transnational terrorism committed by stateless terrorists, who nonetheless enjoy the support offered by rogue states, coupled with the very real possibility that these murderers will acquire, in short order, nuclear, biological or chemical weapons from regimes with a propensity to acquire and use them, has become the central security threat of the 21st century. As British Prime Minister Blair said yesterday in his address to the Commons, that threat is chaos—and there are two begetters of chaos: tyrannical regimes with weapons of mass destruction and extreme terrorist groups.

On an occasion such as this and given the extraordinary character of the times in which
we are living, I am loath to attempt historical comparisons. Nonetheless, these words written by Sir Winston Churchill as a historian in The Gathering Storm resonate in the moment:

Still, if you will not fight for the right when you can easily win without bloodshed; if you will not fight when your victory will be sure and not too costly; you may come to the moment when you will have to fight with all the odds against you and only a precarious chance of survival. There may even be a worse case. You may have to fight when there is no hope of victory, because it is better to perish than live as slaves.

Churchill’s words speak to us across the generations. We ought not subscribe to the idea that free people should be passive in the face of rogue states defiantly holding weapons of mass destruction, nor ought we be passive in the face of the evil of terrorism. The time for temporising is past.

Like all members of this House, I had hoped that the United Nations, through the membership of the Security Council, would not evade its responsibility to the nonmembers of the council and to the men, women and children who may be the future victims of chemical, biological or nuclear weaponry. I had hoped that the council—aware of the seriousness of the threat presented by a WMD capable regime that sponsors terrorism, cognisant of the failure of 17 previous resolutions and mindful of the shameful inadequacy of the organisation that it succeeded—might cement its place in future international security considerations with decisive and far-sighted deeds. The disappointment is all the more grave because the Security Council was offered an opportunity to speak with one voice to warn forcefully the Iraqi regime. That opportunity was not the result of necessity or chance. It was a deliberate offer on the part of those council members who realised the dangers presented by Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction development—and it was an offer extended more in hope than in expectation.

But the point is moot. No 18th resolution is required for this danger to be expunged. Attempts have been made to rewrite the history of United Nations Security Council resolution 1441. Those attempts cannot obscure the truth. That resolution was passed unanimously by the council in lieu of immediate military action by the United States. It was a resolution that offered one final opportunity for the Iraqi regime to comply with the demands of the council and the terms of the Iraqi surrender after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait. That final opportunity cannot be said to have been taken by the Iraqi regime. The serious consequences stipulated by the resolution will be. By its very terms, resolution 1441 envisaged the use of force. The action to be undertaken by Australia is well within international law as exemplified in resolutions 678, 687 and 1441. I have read the legal advice on the use of force against Iraq provided by the government’s senior legal advisers, and I agree with it. There are some who have attempted to make the case that pre-emption and, for that matter, regime change in Baghdad may be a transgression of the notions of national sovereignty. Yet the transgression has already occurred, with Iraq’s sovereignty already compromised by the extensive no-fly zones imposed by the United Nations as a result of Iraq’s own past aggression.

Conflict is never simple. There is no foregone conclusion to this action. Yet it behoves this parliament to consider the likelihood that the military action will be over quickly and the Iraqi regime that has so traumatised its own citizenry will be abandoned and in flight. What next? What does the future hold for a liberated Iraq? Just as the coalition of the willing has an obligation to undertake this action, so we have an obligation to contribute to the moulding of a free, prosperous and peaceful Iraq. Those critics of action—and there are very many of them nationally and in my electorate who must be acknowledged—ought to take up the responsibility of holding this government and the American, British, Spanish and other governments to account on this score, for we must help persuade the United Nations to aid the people of postwar Iraq, even if it was unwilling to assist in their emancipation. We must hold President Bush to the words of his address yesterday and to the noble principles he articulated in a recent speech when he said:

The nation of Iraq—with its proud heritage, abundant resources and skilled and educated people—is fully capable of moving towards democ-
racy and living in freedom. The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values because stable and free nations do not breed ideologies of murder. They encourage the peaceful pursuit of a better life.

At this moment, the need for security has converged with the desire for liberty. Our principal mission may be to disarm Iraq, but we also ought to bring to the darkness of the Middle East the light of the democratic model. The Arab peoples, so culturally rich, deserve the chance to live lives free from tyranny, servitude and kleptocracy. Liberal democracy offers the only real opportunity for the emancipation of individual human beings, the maintenance of international peace and the growth of material prosperity. Surely the people of Iraq deserve that opportunity as much as we do. Let us, in short, win the peace as well as the war. We have a useful example to follow—the 1991 Gulf War was a lesson in losing the peace after victory.

There are mitigating circumstances, of course. We tend to forget that in 1991 we still lived in a Cold War world. The Berlin Wall may have fallen but there were still Soviets in the Kremlin. The first President Bush was understandably reticent about regime change and liberation. We now know that this hesitancy has brought great cost, most pointedly to the Iraqi people.

We know that the present Iraqi leadership is a critical factor in the threat posed to the Iraqi people, Iraq’s neighbours and the rest of the world. There is general agreement that Hussein is a murderous tyrant. Geoffrey Robertson QC, referring in his book Crimes Against Humanity to various acts of unmitigated evil throughout the ages, rated Hussein’s gassing to death of over 8,000 Kurdish civilians in Halabja in March 1988 as one of the worst single crimes against humanity ever committed. For peace to be secured, Saddam must go, whether under his own speed and in line with the ultimatum given to him or by force.

Listening to the debate today, one could have been forgiven for imagining that some opposite believe American hegemony poses more of a threat to the free nations of the world than does a rogue Iraqi state with weapons of mass destruction and close ties with international terrorists. The United States is one of our closest allies and oldest friends. I am an admirer of the United States and her international ideals of democracy and freedom. The United States is paramount to our security considerations and those of the free world. The truth is that, even had the UN sanctioned military action against the Baathist regime—had France, Russia, Germany, Cameroon, Guinea and the rest of them sanctioned military action—it would have been up to the United States to take the lead. It would have been, in the main, American troops and resources called upon to enforce the UN resolutions in any event. As it stands now, we and our allies—the United States, the United Kingdom; in fact, some 30 countries in total—are committed to the disarmament of the Iraqi regime. I pray for the men and women of Australia’s defence forces, particularly the officers and men of the Special Air Service Regiment, who I am proud to call my constituents. My thoughts are with them and their families. I commend the Prime Minister’s motion and call upon members of this House to offer their support. (Time expired)
Underpinning the crisis in Iraq are two unrelated terrorist attacks. The first involved the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and on the Pentagon in Washington DC on 11 September 2001. The second, which struck closer to home, was the bombing of the Sari nightclub in Bali on 12 October last year. While these two attacks had nothing to do with Iraq, as far as we know, they had an enormous influence on the thinking of the two political leaders most involved—George Bush, the President of the United States, and our own Prime Minister, John Howard, who was in Washington at the time. The 11 September attack was a massive blow to the pride and self-confidence of the United States. That such an attack on the heart of America could have been planned and carried out from within the United States was a massive breach of security. George Bush, the newly elected President, reacted by striking at the first available target that he could find. That was, of course, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and it was justified because the links were clearly established. So far, the US have been unsuccessful in bringing Osama bin Laden to justice, so they have sought another easy target, Iraq and Saddam Hussein, because they need to show results.

There was justification for driving Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait in 1991; he was the leader of an invading army bent on territorial domination. But the same legal and moral justification does not exist today. Indeed, there is legal opinion that an American invasion without the endorsement of the United Nations would be in breach of international law. It is simply not possible to invade and defeat militarily all the countries that violate human rights, harbour terrorists or are perceived to be a threat to world peace. The Prime Minister believes he can; he believes in the pre-emptive strike as an extension of foreign policy. He has favoured pre-emptive attacks in our own region against terrorist bases that he perceives to be threats to Australia. You can just imagine the backlash that such an act would create for our country.

Saddam Hussein is a brutal tyrant—nobody denies it—but he is only one of many around the world. He may or may not have weapons of mass destruction; we are not sure. The American Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, tells us that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons, like anthrax. How does he know? He knows because he has got the receipts. He was the chairman of the company that sold the chemicals to Iraq in the first place. This is just one of the many hypocrisies that you find littered throughout this debate.

We also know that North Korea, Pakistan, India, the United Kingdom and, of course, the United States all definitely have weapons of mass destruction. They are proud of the fact. The North Koreans were testing in the Sea of Japan only last week. Why aren’t we massing on their border? Last week the Americans unveiled their latest weapon—the Massive Ordnance Air Blast, or MOAB, the ‘mother of all bombs’, as they like to call it. This is the most devastating conventional weapon ever designed or produced. At 9½ tonnes, it could level a city. Of the total population of Iraq, 41 per cent—nearly half—are under the age of 14, and 49 per cent of the population are women. If the United States were to unleash the mother of all bombs on Iraq, the civilian casualties would be too horrendous to think about. Mahatma Gandhi said, ‘What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?’

We cannot forget the fate of the Kurdish minority in the north of Iraq, who were persecuted for centuries. The massacre of 5,000 people at Halabja in 1988 is often given as an excuse for this war. Speaker after speaker on the government side has raised this massacre as an example of why we need to invade Iraq today, yet they have been silent about this massacre since 1988. You would think that it happened only the other day, so outraged are they. They were silent for 15 years and now they speak; yet we are condemned for asking for the United Nations to have a few more months in order to peacefully disarm the Iraqi regime. It might surprise those opposite to know that the Kurds have managed to find some semblance of peace since 1991, with the imposition of no-
fly zones by the British and American air forces.

The Kurds now have some measure of autonomy from Baghdad. But it appears that the US might sell out their future and their safety in exchange for being allowed to base troops in Turkey. Until recently, the Kurdish language was illegal in Turkey and political parties were outlawed. The Kurds have suffered immense persecution at the hands of the Turks for decades. Leyla Zana remains in prison in Turkey, charged with treason and serving a 15-year sentence for saying in the Turkish parliament, ‘I shall struggle so that the Kurdish and Turkish people may live together in a democratic framework.’ Her crime was that she spoke these words in the Kurdish language. For that she was charged with treason and now rots in a Turkish jail.

In many ways the Kurds fear Saddam Hussein less than they fear the Turkish army, but of course the Turkish government are our allies so we just sweep these problems under the carpet. Similarly, the Saudi government flogged an Australian citizen as recently as a few weeks ago. He received 350 lashes for not denouncing his wife, who had been charged with a petty crime. Again, Saudi Arabia is an ally, so the government is silent. I refer to an article about human rights in Saudi Arabia which appeared in the Human Rights World Watch Report 2001. It states:

Capital punishment was applied for crimes including murder, rape, armed robbery, drug smuggling, sodomy, and sorcery. In most cases, the condemned were decapitated in public squares after being blindfolded, handcuffed, shackled at the ankles, and tranquilized. By late September 2000, at least 104 Saudis and foreigners had been beheaded, exceeding in nine months the total of 103 that Amnesty International recorded in 1999. Two of the foreigners beheaded in 2000 were women: a Pakistani in July for heroin smuggling, and an Indonesian in June for murder. Saudi courts continued to impose corporal punishment, including amputations of hands and feet for robbery, and floggings for lesser crimes such as ‘sexual deviance’ and drunkenness. The number of lashes was not clear.

So, quite clearly, there is serious abuse of human rights in some of the countries that are supporting America’s strike against Saddam Hussein.

To be antiwar is not to be pro-Saddam. We are not appeasers, as some might suggest. We simply believe that there must be a better way to resolve this conflict than bombing women and children. Millions of people around the world marched against this war a month ago, and the campaign continues with local gatherings such as the one I attended in Mt Druitt at the weekend. The United Nations is split and the coalition of the willing is getting smaller not larger. To act against the tide of international opinion and the rule of law is to invite disaster. There is currently no evidence of a link between Iraq and September 11. There is no evidence of a link between Iraq and the Bali bombings. (Time expired)

Mr John Cobb (Parkes) (3.16 p.m.)—I hesitated to speak on the floor of the House on this issue, having already done so, but on serious reflection it seemed to me that my electorate and my country have the right to know that it is not just the Prime Minister and the cabinet who have resolved to take the course that we are taking but the whole of the government. I believe that everybody has the right to know why we have taken this particular decision. For the government, it is obviously an awesome decision to take and an awesome responsibility. Obviously there is no bigger responsibility than to make the decision to send our troops into conflict. In the short time that I have been a member of this House, it is the biggest decision that I have seen taken here. We have an enormous responsibility to the people of Australia. The prime reason for having a national government is a nation’s security—in other words, looking after the borders and our internal and external security. It is an enormously serious issue which we do not have the luxury of treating as a political issue—as the opposition is doing. It is very much an issue of the nation’s security.

I can assure you, Mr Speaker, and members of the House that the electorate of Parkes is incredibly proud of the Australian troops for what they have done—as recently as the action in Afghanistan—where they are now and what they will do in the future. I support our action because I believe it is right. I believe it is right from the point of
view of the security of this country. Anybody who has really stopped and thought deeply about what has gone on in recent times, whether it be September 11 or nearer to home in Bali, understands what an enormous issue terrorism is for the Western world.

Anybody who thinks that we are not susceptible to terrorism needs to get out of bed on the other side for a change. The only reason that we have so far not suffered this in our own country is that those who would do such a thing—whether they be al-Qaeda or others—know it is much easier to be caught for it in Australia than in a place like Bali. It is also much harder for them to find people to set themselves up to do it. If they have any of those weapons, be it nerve gas and anthrax or other biological weapons, that Saddam Hussein has—and no-one really denies that he has them—it is much easier for them to come to a country like ours, deposit such weapons and be gone by the time the result is known. It is as simple as that.

I also believe that we are right from a humanitarian point of view, without any doubt. We heard the last speaker talk about humanitarian issues. Recent speakers, commentators and those who are totally against taking any action at all say, ‘What’s wrong with a few more months?’ Saddam Hussein, as we know, is somebody who tortures, kills, rapes and does whatever he has to do to get rid of any opposition or simply because he enjoys being a dictator. This man is obviously a homicidal maniac; he is not a suicidal one. The more time we give him, the more time he has to find ways of getting weapons to terrorists. We are talking about a man who is quite willing to use these weapons on his own people, so why the heck would he not give them to terrorists, whether or not they approve of him? It is quite common and seems to be fashionable to say that al-Qaeda do not think that Saddam Hussein is their type of person—and I am sure they do not. But they do not care who they kill, so I do not think they will care who they obtain weapons from. Saddam Hussein obviously does not care who he kills. If he is quite happy to pay suicide bombers then I think he would be quite happy to give those weapons to people like al-Qaeda.

There is another consideration in the humanitarian debate that we have to acknowledge. Iraq is not like reading about the Second World War—it is not like reading about history—it is actually happening now. It might be an awesome responsibility and a terrible thing to have to put our incredibly professional troops into an area of conflict, but it is also an incredible thing to realise that, when we hear and read about what happens in Iraq, it is not history; it is happening now. In another two months, there will be I do not know how many people lost, but probably as many as could be lost in the next week or two.

When I hear what is said on the other side of the House, I have absolutely no doubt that the French and the Labor Party in Australia have a couple of things in common. The French are opposed to this conflict and to getting rid of Saddam Hussein, his regime and his weapons mainly because they are opposed to anything the Americans do and they simply want to be noticed. The Labor Party too are opposed to anything the government does, no matter how responsible it is, and they want to be noticed. This will come back to bite the opposition without any doubt, because we are taking a responsible position, while they are taking a cheap one—and it is one they are going to have to live with.

The issue of our allies—and the Americans have been our allies and so have the British—is something that also seems to have been unfashionable to talk about. But it is a fact that both these countries—the Americans, especially, in recent times—have been very faithful to us, and I see no reason why we would not be to them, even if it were not in Australia’s interest to deal with terrorism in whatever guise it is in and wherever it is.

I have not yet heard an answer to the problem that the Western world faces and that we face from those who say that this thing should not happen. If we do not go in there and deal with Saddam Hussein, if we do not go in there and get rid of his weapons of mass destruction, what do we do? Do we simply wait a few months for resolutions—which have obviously never worked, not
even come close to working—to work? What do we actually do? Do we just hope that one day this will not come back and visit us on our own shores? We know that terrorism exists, we know that it does not care how it gets us or when and we know that we have got to deal with it. We can do this and, if we are successful—and we will be—hopefully we will never know that we were right. But if we simply take the course of the opposition, we will certainly know if we were wrong.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (3.26 p.m.)—Throughout this debate, many members, including the member for Parkes, have reflected on events in days gone by. I, too, this afternoon want to reflect on some of our own history. On 4 May 1965, the then opposition leader Arthur Calwell stood in this place with a heavy heart to declare that the Australian Labor Party would oppose the decision of Prime Minister Menzies to send 800 Australians to fight an American war in Vietnam. On that occasion Calwell said to the House:

"It is not our desire, when servicemen are about to be sent to a distant battlefield, and when war, cruel, costly and interminable, stares us in the face, that the nation should be divided. But it is the Government which has brought this strategic situation about, and we will not shirk our responsibilities in stating the views we think serve Australia best. Our responsibility, like that of the Government, is a great one, but come what may we will do our duty as we see it and know it to be towards the people of Australia and our children. Therefore I say, we oppose this decision firmly and completely."

He went on to say:

"We do not think this is a wise decision—

that is, the Menzies decision. He continued:

We do not think it is a timely decision. We do not think it is the right decision. We do not think it will help the fight against communism. To the contrary, we believe it will harm that fight in the long-term."

The parallels between the questions and the responsibilities Arthur Calwell’s opposition faced in 1965 and those faced by those of us on this side today are so close it is eerie. You could apply exactly Arthur Calwell’s remarks to today’s debate. The only thing it would be necessary to do is to replace the word ‘communism’ with the word ‘terrorism’. There is only an ‘isms’ difference between the two! And it is true that the decision taken by the Prime Minister is likely not to contain terrorism but to disperse it.

The Prime Minister should have learned from the Vietnam experience—effectively, the only other occasion on which we have acted without international support. Make no mistake about it, by signing up to the coalition of three, the Prime Minister has made the Australian people a key target for terrorist organisations. The government has argued otherwise. It argues that not to act poses the risk of Saddam’s weapons being passed on to terrorist organisations. Yet it presents no evidence to back its case. Today we have heard more evidence—specifically, from the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in the US—that, indeed, the Prime Minister’s actions, alongside those of George W. Bush, have raised the risk of terrorist attacks in Australia.

In forming my own view on this topic, among other questions, I have asked myself whether the Prime Minister’s actions have made the safety and security of my own children any better or any worse. This is a question for which there is no certain answer. But I have decided on balance that, from yesterday on, their safety and security is less certain. This leads me to the other aspect of the Prime Minister’s actions—his decision to embrace this new doctrine of pre-emption.

No-one on the government side could possibly successfully argue that the government’s decision to embrace this new doctrine does not pose additional and significant security risks for Australia. US President Bush, by nominating his axis of evil and pronouncing his belief in the legitimacy of this new doctrine, has led us into a potential valley of death and our own PM has blindly and foolishly followed. George Bush’s actions have heralded a new era in global instability and by backing him without condition we potentially stand to be one of those nations most adversely affected by that instability.

Before now the international community has accepted that only one of two things gave war legitimacy: a Security Council resolution and the doctrine of self-defence. Yesterday the PM embarked upon a course
which is without precedent. There is no Security Council backing for this action and certainly self-defence does not apply on this occasion.

Again, in forming my position on the issue before the House I have asked myself the following questions: is the action being proposed by the PM legal; does it have moral justification; is it in proportion to any threat Iraq poses; has any evidence been submitted linking Iraq and al-Qaeda’s involvement in the events of 11 September 2001; has any evidence been submitted showing Iraq is likely to provide weapons of mass destruction to international terrorists; and has any evidence been submitted showing that Iraq’s weapons capability poses a real and immediate threat to the security of Australia, the United States or any of its allies?

While debate still rages about the first question—that is, the legality—the answer to the remaining five questions is a definite no. Even if the answer to the first question is yes—and that certainly would not be the case if Bush had put his second motion to the Security Council—the legality of the action certainly does not make the decision right. The crucial question before the House today is: what course of action best promotes our national security, the motion proposed by the Prime Minister or the amendment submitted by the Leader of the Opposition? I have no hesitation in backing the latter.

Going back to the historical context, my main reading over the Christmas break was Geoffrey Blainey’s A Short History of the World. In the book, Blainey demonstrates his great talent and skill by managing to squeeze tens of thousands of years of human history into just 600 pages. No doubt readers of the book will be affected in different ways and will be left with various impressions of the history of mankind. For me, war and religion stood out as the dominant events and influences in Blainey’s condensed effort. It is a story of invasion by the most powerful of the day. It is a story of battle and conquest: the Roman Empire expanding its territories, Alexander the Great heading east, Genghis Khan raiding towards China, Napoleon and others making advances on England, Spanish conquests in South America, civil war and world wars—the list goes on. Religious fundamentalism and conflict are also constantly present throughout the book.

It reminds me that the more things change the more they stay the same. The world’s greatest power, the United States, now wants to reshape the geopolitical map and wage war against religious fundamentalism. The outcome remains unknown but one thing is certain: the USA will not be the heavyweight champion of the world 100 years from now. In the future, some other power will be enforcing its own version of international justice upon the international community. It has to be said that it is likely to be a form of justice far different than the one we have hitherto enjoyed and felt comfortable under.

These are matters the Prime Minister should have considered before sending our troops into battle at the request of the current great world power applying its own form of justice but without the backing of the international community. Saddam is an evil and dangerous man and collectively we should be all exhausting every diplomatic option to deal with him and to deal with his regime.

Mr Somlyay (Fairfax) (3.35 p.m.)—The decision to send troops to a war in Iraq is not one for this parliament to make. Under the Constitution, this decision is one for the government; that is, the Prime Minister and the cabinet. The purpose of this motion is to give the parliament the opportunity to give support or otherwise to the government’s decision. This debate allows members of parliament to reflect the views of their respective electorates in this parliament. This debate allows members to explain why we should be part of this coalition of 30—not three as the member for Hunter said.

I support the Prime Minister’s motion. I will explain to the House why I support it. I spoke in this House on 5 February this year in support of the ministerial statement on Iraq. I started my remarks that day by stating that no-one in their right mind wants or likes war. I say again that in my time in parliament I have seen too many graves of, and memorials to, Australian servicemen who gave their lives in places in far away countries such as Gallipoli, the Somme, Flanders, Britain, Pal-
estine, South Africa, New Guinea, Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, Singapore and others.

In 1991, I spoke on the motion in support of sending troops to Iraq. Sending young Australians to war on foreign soil is an action that neither I nor, I would imagine, any other member of parliament would relish. I did not relish it then; I do not relish it now. I supported it then, not because it was proposed by Bob Hawke, John Hewson or John Howard but because I believed that it was the right thing to do. After considering every option, I support it now because I believe it is the right thing to do.

It is the duty of all MPs to represent the views expressed in their electorates, and I have done that without fear or favour for the last 13 years that I have been in this place. Some people in my electorate are passionately opposed to war in all circumstances. The majority of my electorate would not oppose the use of force against Iraq if the UN sanctioned it—and the views in my electorate are consistent with those across Australia, as reflected by all the opinion polls.

I cannot be accused of being selective when expressing the views of my electorate. On 5 February I read into Hansard the text of a resolution at the ‘Noosa for Peace’ rally held on 1 February. That opposition to the war is on the public record, and for that reason I will not read that resolution again. In the past three months I have received only about 60 letters or emails from my electorate about Australia’s involvement in the war. The majority of them oppose the use of force without UN sanction. From the time of the announcement by the Prime Minister until this morning, I received only 80 emails on this issue. There was not a spontaneous outcry of opposition.

I believe, and I think my electorate believes, that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction. We all believe that he should be disarmed. We know of Saddam’s abuses of human rights. The events of 9/11 and 12 October changed the world. What used to be considered science fiction has now become a reality. I believe 9/11 and Bali were beyond the imagination of fiction writers. Now we all know that any horror is possible. The world has no choice but to stand up, do what is right and fight terror. The majority of Australians believe that Saddam has to be disarmed, but only with UN sanction. No-one believes that Saddam Hussein has complied with UN resolutions—and he has not. Eventually, when all other options are exhausted, it boils down to the use of force to force compliance.

The chronology of inaction goes on for 12 years. No-one believes that the weapons inspectors led by Hans Blix would have been allowed into Iraq without the threat of force. Prevarication and procrastination could not go on forever. I believe that, if France had not played such a typically French role in the UN process, war could have been avoided through UN solidarity and strength of purpose. Maybe Saddam would have capitulated and complied if the rest of the world had spoken with a united voice.

After the events in the UN over the past month or so, it was announced earlier today on Sky News that France would enter the war if Iraq used biological or chemical weapons. That is a bit of a turnaround. Community support for the use of force hinges around UN resolutions. It is clear that the majority of Australians support the use of force if it is UN sanctioned. As I said before, a new resolution would have been preferable as a signal of UN strength and unity, but that was to be thwarted by the French through the veto. It is now beyond doubt that UN resolutions 678, 687 and 1441 give the UN the legal authority to use force. The Prime Minister took the unusual step of tabling with his motion the government’s official legal advice. Therefore, Australia’s involvement is on the basis of UN resolutions and is compliant with international law.

I want to conclude my comments by condemning the opposition, particularly the Leader of the Opposition, for their divisive actions on this issue. The comments by the Leader of the Opposition that the Prime Minister is Bush’s lap-dog and that the US is determining Australian foreign policy are an insult to the Australian people and the Australian troops in the gulf. There is no mention of Labour leader Tony Blair—a Labour leader with courage. His name has been remarkably absent in contributions from the
other side. The Labor Party is grasping at straws, desperate to find an issue to prop up its failed leadership. The Leader of the Opposition’s comments to the troops on board the Kanimbla—as my colleague the member for Herbert said; he was present at the time—were demeaning and his comments about the capacity of our SAS troops on the Sunday program this week were disgraceful. With apologies to Stephen Spielberg and Saving Private Ryan, this debate is not about the national interest but more about ‘saving Private Crean’.

Finally, I want to make it clear that this action is not against the Iraqi people; it is against Saddam Hussein. The need to use force has been and is now in the hands of Saddam Hussein. He has 24 hours left. Let us hope and pray that sanity prevails and he voluntarily ends his reign of terror. I also want to offer the support of this side of the House to our troops, those young Australians in uniform in the Army, Navy and Air Force. Our thoughts and prayers are with them for their success and safe return. Let us not let them return to what our Vietnam veterans received in the 1970s with protests, derision and scorn, led by Labor politicians. As the Prime Minister said, take your anger out on the government, not on the troops.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman) (3.44 p.m.)—It is my pleasure this afternoon to speak in support of the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition and member for Hotham, Simon Crean. In doing so I say squarely that the amendment is about principle, and about Australia’s standing not only internationally but also in the region in which we live. This war does not have the support of the international community. It does not have the support of the family of nations, the United Nations. It is not in our nation’s best interests. This war is wrong. This war is immoral. This war makes Australia, a peace loving country, an aggressor for the first time in our proud history. This war destroys Australia’s independence and makes us subservient to the president of a foreign country—a president whose grubby little ambassador continues to meddle in our domestic political affairs. This war will make Australia a terrorist target. This war will make every Australian a target, both at home and abroad.

The Australian community appreciates and understands that the Howard government’s handling of the situation involving the disarmament by force of Saddam Hussein has been a complete shambles from day one. The government’s decision to predeploy troops was wrong and its decision now to commit them to the war of George Bush and Tony Blair is wrong. More importantly, the Prime Minister’s claim that the decision his cabinet has taken is directed at the protection of Australia’s national interests could not be further from the truth. Labor squarely agrees that Saddam Hussein must be disarmed, but the path the Prime Minister is leading our nation down is not in Australia’s best interests. He has committed Australian forces—our young men and women, our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters, our cousins, our neighbours and our nation—to a war that is not under a UN mandate but at the request of one person and one person alone: the President of the United States.

The Bush led coalition of the willing has openly cast aside the United Nations processes that, frankly, should be the cornerstone of democracy in a modern international world. In the absence of an agreed UN Security Council resolution authorising military action against Iraq, there is simply no basis for military action to disarm. The war is immoral; it is wrong. In that regard the Prime Minister is failing the people of Australia, who, correctly, overwhelmingly oppose action against Iraq without United Nations sanction. The Prime Minister may claim, as he does from time to time, that he is speaking for Australia on this issue. But we all know that that is completely false. We saw this frankly on display during the debate yesterday afternoon, when he turned his back on the Leader of the Opposition. That showed his contempt for the Australian community and for the country he supposedly represents, both as Prime Minister domestically and as our leader internationally.

The Prime Minister claims that he made the decision to commit our troops to war because it was in Australia’s national interests. We should simply ask this question: which
nation’s best interests would they be? They are certainly not Australia’s best interests; they can only be the best interests of the nation of the United States. I believe that Australia has historically prided itself on its independence and its willingness to call it as it sees it internationally. In the 21st century, we should not be dictated to by the foreign policy of any other nation. We should put Australia first. We should put security at home first. We should put the people of Australia first. We should put the interests of our region first. Australia has, until today, prided itself on its independence, not its subservience.

I also want to raise some very important questions today about our security at home, which is part and parcel of the debate concerning our involvement in Iraq. It also goes to my responsibilities as shadow minister for transport and infrastructure. I suggest to the House this afternoon that the Prime Minister, through his actions at the behest of George Bush, has made Australia a fragile nation and a prime target for retribution. Whilst the Prime Minister has been trying to convince us that Australia’s involvement in the coalition of the willing is just, his government has taken its eye off domestic security issues and has failed to give a comprehensive guarantee—despite frequent questioning, both in the House and in the community at large—that Australians at home will be safe.

Despite using the events of September 11 and Bali to try to justify Australia’s standing shoulder to shoulder with the US, the government—as I well know from my briefings as shadow minister, both with the private sector and the government—has done nothing to protect us and everything to expose us as a vulnerable target, both domestically and internationally. Mark my words: this war will lead to more terrorism and more terrorist acts on Australians, both at home and abroad. I ask the Prime Minister this afternoon: what is your government going to do to protect our nation’s infrastructure in the event of retaliatory attacks? This question has been put to the government previously, yet the government remains conspicuously silent on this vitally important issue of national security. I believe Australians are entitled to an answer to this fundamental question. From my portfolio responsibilities as shadow minister, I understand only too well the potential for devastation on our home shores, loss of Australian life and the maiming of Australians, both young and old.

I raise these issues because they must be answered by the Howard government. The decision to go to war only increases the vulnerability of our transport sector to attacks by terrorists. Our aviation sector will today be—and will continue to be—under heightened security threat, as will our rail, maritime and road transport sectors, particularly in our capital cities. What about the road tankers transporting fuel across the country or the trucks filled with flammable liquids—not to mention our energy sector and the power stations? These are all prime targets for terrorist attacks. This is all infrastructure of vital importance to our nation, yet the government has done nothing, despite being frequently asked, to assure the people of Australia that it is alert to the threat and that it has acted in the best interests of Australia to protect our nation and Australians at large from this threat.

We have had the government’s anti-terrorism campaign flooding our televisions, airwaves and mailboxes, yet the Prime Minister, through his warmongering, is only adding to these fears. Australians are entitled to go to bed each night with more than a fridge magnet hanging in the kitchen. It is obvious that, in the event of Australia going into an international conflict—a conflict led by the United States without the backing of the United Nations—the result will be a security risk at home, something that this country has never experienced before.

I say in conclusion that this is a black day for our nation and, more importantly, a black day for the international community. To be frank, Australians have had a gutful. They are sick and tired of this government’s compliance with every demand the United States makes. The Prime Minister has no idea what the consequences of his actions will be in committing our troops to the Bush war. (Time expired)

Dr STONE (Murray—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment
On Tuesday, 18 March our Prime Minister announced that Australia had joined a coalition, led by the United States, which aims to disarm Iraq, destroying its prohibited weapons of mass destruction. Today in this parliament we are debating that issue and a motion moved by the Prime Minister which describes why we are committing troops to assist with the coalition—which will try and disarm what numerous commentators, and in fact most Australians, agree is one of the most tyrannical regimes in modern history.

Our commitment to the gulf region is not new, particularly in relation to this Iraqi regime. For example, since 1990 Australian Defence Force personnel have been deployed in the gulf to enforce sanctions—in 1991 for Operation Desert Storm, in 1998 to support Operation Desert Fox and throughout that time as an almost continuous presence with the multinational interdiction forces. We as Australians are not the type of people who say, ‘What’s it got to do with us?’ ‘Surely the Iraqis have nothing to do with the Australian population,’ I hear echoed from the other side of the chamber. I even hear it, sadly, from time to time from those who march in the streets, holding up placards saying ‘No war’. They say, ‘What is this to do with the Australian population?’

We have never been a nation that simply looks for individual or collective self-interest when it comes to responding as a nation to another country’s needs. In the case of Saddam Hussein, his regime—as I said before—is one of the most tyrannical in modern history and one which over the last 12 years has defied resolution after resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council demanding that it disarm. It demands that Iraq disarm not only in the interests of its own regional security in the Middle East but also in the interests of international global peace and security.

Australia has always proudly stood up when there has been a call to arms—when diplomatic solutions seem to have failed. We have done that for the last 100 years. As the member for Murray, an electorate in northern Victoria, I am particularly proud to say that generations of people in that electorate have marched off to war when diplomatic solutions have not been there. They have fought in theatres of war all over the world. In many instances we could not say, ‘Vietnam is of direct relevance to us?’ or ‘Korea is of direct relevance to us?’ No, but we felt that our presence and our support for our allies was going to bring about a greater world peace and was going to relieve the citizens of those countries from serious deprivation of their human rights.

Right now, in Australia, I am afraid that we have a typical response whipped up by an opposition which is desperate for some sort of ‘score on the board’—playing on the natural fears of any family faced with the prospect of sons and daughters going off into places of danger. My own son and daughter-in-law are in the defence forces, and I understand only too well the sacrifice our defence families make. But they are proud Australians and they see it is their duty. They have volunteered on behalf of this nation to go out and represent us in trying to bring about world order or indeed in trying to defend us directly if our own shores are threatened. I am concerned that the frenzy and hysteria which the opposition is attempting to whip up is going to create the shameful atmosphere that greeted our Vietnam veterans when they returned from that war. Even though the majority of Australians supported the Vietnam War at that time, there was a very vocal minority who gave those Vietnam soldiers such a vile return that many of them still suffer the psychological consequences.

In my electorate of Murray we have some 3,500 Iraqi refugees from torture or trauma who were the direct victims of Saddam Hussein. They can tell any Australian what it was like to live under that regime and why the liberation of friends and relations still in that country is so important. I am very proud that we are not just talking about joining our allies in trying to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction; as our motion, our government’s commitment, spells out, we are also determined to win the peace, along with the allies.

We are determined to make sure that the country of Iraq is rebuilt so that the citizenry can experience democracy and access to
education and health services—so that they are not impoverished and are not maimed and killed if they express some opposition to the ruling regime. We will be there. We are committed to helping the Iraqi people, through humanitarian assistance, to build a new Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours. And, as our motion says, we extend to the innocent people of Iraq our support and sympathy during the military action to disarm Iraq of the weapons of mass destruction.

I am proud that Australia stands beside a number of countries—30 in all—who have agreed to be part of the coalition for the immediate disarmament of Iraq. I want to read out the names of these countries because you will see that none of them can be immediately associated with a direct benefit or consequence as a result of the Iraqi situation. Their citizenry presumably are not screaming in the streets, ‘What has it got to do with us?’ Here are the 30 countries who have joined with us in the coalition for the immediate disarmament of Iraq: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Japan, Lithuania, Nicaragua, Romania, Turkey, Albania, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Iceland, Korea, Macedonia, the Philippines, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Australia, the Czech Republic, Eritrea, Georgia, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Uzbekistan. The coalition forces will be led by the United States.

Amongst these countries are some of the poorest in the world, countries who themselves have experienced in very recent times the oppression of a dictator like Hussein. Each country is contributing in the way it can and in the way it deems most appropriate. Mr Richard Boucher, who released this list today, also referred to another 15 or so countries who are going to cooperate should Saddam resort to the defensive response of using weapons of mass destruction. I am proud that we stand beside these other nations big and small. Some of them are global powers, but some like Estonia and Eritrea are poor nations, yet they are willing to do what they can to support a population which has experienced some of the most tyrannical oppression in modern times. Saddam Hussein has not only ensured that his region is at any time threatened with biological, nuclear and chemical warfare; this is a dictator who has also destroyed the environment, who has destroyed whole cultures—for example, by draining their homelands, the swamps of his country—who has created a nightmare in terms of environmental sustainability for his country and who is no less a destroyer of human rights.

I want to assure the 3,500 Iraqi refugees in the electorate of Murray that we will do all we can to bring the same peace and future possibilities for Iraq’s children that they have found in our great country as a result of us opening our arms and our doors to them when they sought refuge. They join with the rest of us—those on this side of the parliament at least—in hoping that the war is short, that the Iraqi regime is disarmed and then, as we move into a new era of peace, that we rebuild that country and support all of those who have long suffered. There have been 17 resolutions passed by the United Nations Security Council without advancing any hope that Hussein would actually obey the resolutions. Resolution 1441 of 8 November 2002 made it absolutely clear that the Security Council was united in its condemnation of Iraq, given its failure to disarm. Do the people marching in the street right now honestly think that an 18th resolution would achieve anything different? Clearly not. Now is the time to stand up and be counted, and Australia, as always, because of its moral and cultural commitment to a world of peace, is going to be there to assist.

Ms ELLIS (Canberra) (4.04 p.m.)—Probably the most grave of issues that we could debate in this parliament is the question of sending our troops into battle. A decision of this magnitude cannot be taken lightly, it cannot be dismissed by glib political lines and, importantly, the views and the opinions of our constituents—the very people we have the privilege of representing in this place—must be as well represented in this debate as is possible. We have on this side of the House consistently argued since April of last year that military action in Iraq outside of the authority of the United Nations is unacceptable. Our political opponents
have criticised us for taking that stand—in fact, they called us appeasers of Saddam Hussein at one point. The interjections across the chamber by some government members during this debate—calling us supporters of Saddam for the stance that we have taken—are offensive to the extreme.

There is no doubt at all that the Saddam Hussein regime is one of the most vile that we could imagine. There is no doubt that the people of Iraq have suffered under his rule. The truth is the Prime Minister is using this humanitarian cause as one of his major reasons for agreeing to send our troops into war with the US, to stop these terrible atrocities being inflicted on the people of Iraq. The point is this: firstly and sadly, this is not the only cruel regime in our world. Does the Prime Minister intend invading all of them or some of them, and in what order? Secondly, during these weeks of debate about our role in the war in Iraq, the government have attempted to justify their policy by reading out endless lists of torture and appalling practices carried out on the Iraqi people. We heard this again yesterday and during the Prime Minister’s Press Club speech. Those Iraqi people who either drowned trying to find refuge in this country or got here to be imprisoned in our desert for months if not years, including women and children, were fleeing that very behaviour. Prime Minister, you cannot have it both ways—one minute condemning them as the type of people you do not want to have here and the next minute wrapping yourself in the emotion of their plight.

This brings me briefly to the question of Kosovo, a point frequently raised as some kind of precedent for the current action. While it is correct to say that we supported the action in Kosovo, this country did not participate militarily. That action was taken and supported by NATO and neighbouring countries, and this country accepted refugees from Kosovo under a temporary resettlement program. I recall very clearly the Prime Minister embracing them as they arrived here. It is quite a different reaction to the Iraqi refugees, we would have to concede—those same people this government now wants to save by this military action.

The government is also arguing that to unilaterally attack Iraq will prevent another terrorist attack like Bali. There has been no case made to directly link the atrocity in Bali to Iraq. I ask the question: will an attack on Iraq stop al-Qaeda or Jemaah Islamiah or Laskar Jihad? This is a very large deposit to put down on a result with absolutely no guarantee—in fact, no proof or link at all. I fear the reverse may occur. Sure, we are a Western country and we have already sustained a shocking attack; however, the extremist element within the terrorist organisations could very well use this Iraqi invasion as an effective recruiting method. We have put ourselves way out in front for their attention. This is a big gamble and I fear the potential outcome.

Most important though is my strong rejection of this policy of an invasion of Iraq outside the sanctions of the United Nations. For a country that proudly boasts about its democratic history, the US does not seem to believe in any democracy within the UN. In other words, come down with a resolution we want or we will do it our own way. To have this opinion does not make me anti-American. My colleague the member for Griffith has clearly stated the situation regarding the American alliance, and I endorse totally his words. The best of friends are always allowed to disagree, and on this point I disagree with our friends the US. We value our alliance with the US. However, we continue to be answerable to the Australian people, our parliament and our nation, where our national security is concerned. I do not doubt at all the feelings of the people of America following September 11. I just do not believe that this is the right response. As the member for Griffith said yesterday:

... America must be careful not to compound the threat of international terrorism by the very action that it proposes to remove that threat ...

The final point I wish to make concerns our service personnel. Some opposite have chosen to virtually paint us as traitors for our opposition to the war. But we do not oppose our troops, who are willing to put their life on the line for this country. We have said it many times and we will continue to say it: we are at odds with the Howard government
for choosing to go to war when there were other options. I would like to stress very strongly that I support our troops and their families and our hearts and best wishes go to them.

At the beginning of this speech I referred to the importance of the views and opinions of our constituents. The overwhelming response from constituents has been horror at the Howard government’s decision to put Australia at war, and the views of my community are well represented in an email from a constituent that I received this morning:

It is not often I get angry about a government decision to bother to do much about it ... I think that would reflect the attitude of most people around the country. The email goes on:

... however the decision to go to war is another matter. I don’t believe it is right for any nation to invade another. War can only be justified as a matter of self defence. If someone attacks you, you have the right to defend yourself. Even if you could justify invading another country, then such action really should be ... after a majority vote of the United Nations.

He concludes his email with the following comment:

I would appreciate it if you could do your best to voice opposition on my behalf. Finally, my heart is with the families of our military personnel serving in this war and with the ordinary Iraqi citizens. We can only hope that the carnage on both sides is minimal, although we may fear not.

In conclusion I would like to refer very briefly to a comment made by the previous speaker in this debate when she referred to the ‘frenzy’ being whipped up by Labor people in relation to the declaration of war on Iraq. The reality that she and people on the other side of this parliament must face is quite simple. There is no frenzy at all being whipped up by me or by my colleagues. The reality is that thousands upon thousands of Australians across this country have been taking part in marches and demonstrations. At one point the Prime Minister referred to some form of ‘moral madness’ or ‘moral crowd’. Those people actually include some of the most well respected commentators in this country on the issue of defence and national security. Those are the people who are trying to impress upon this government the very situation that it has now placed this country in by declaring and going along with this unilateral action led by America against the Iraqi people. That is the reality. There is no doubt that we need to deal with Saddam Hussein. There is every reason in the world to believe that the action undertaken by the US and endorsed by this government is the wrong formula for an outcome.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (4.13 p.m.)—There is little doubt that intervening in Iraq to disarm Saddam Hussein and remove his regime is very much in Australia’s national interest. Yesterday the Prime Minister, in his media interview announcing the commitment of Australian troops, said:

Iraq has chemical and biological weapons and an aspiration to acquire nuclear weapons. If Iraq does not have taken from it those chemical and biological weapons, other rogue states will think they can imitate Iraq and as more rogue states acquire chemical and biological weapons, so the danger of those weapons falling into the hands of terrorists will multiply. If terrorists acquire weapons of that kind, that would represent a clear, undeniable and lethal threat to a western nation such as Australia.

The Prime Minister put very clearly that it is in Australia’s national interest to make sure that terrorists do not gain access to chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, supplied to them by rogue states such as Iraq and others, which can then be used against the Australian people, the British people, the American people—or in fact the people of any nation in the world.

It is clearly in Australia’s national interest to involve itself in a war in the Middle East in order to protect its own people. It is also very much in Australia’s interest that countries in our region like North Korea know that countries like the United States, Great Britain and Australia are serious about stopping them from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, from producing them and from proliferating them through the world. If at this time the world does not stand up to Saddam Hussein and his regime, how can we expect countries like North Korea and other rogue states to take seriously threats that will be made in the future? Someone wrote re-
cently that, when police keep making hollow threats and never arrest the criminal, the law falls into disrepute and so does the police force. Quite frankly, we are in a similar situation. The world cannot make threats to go in and disarm countries like Iraq and not follow through with those threats, because all those other rogue states that would like to acquire weapons of mass destruction and use them will feel that, having not stood up against Iraq, we will not stand up against anybody else.

It is also in our national interest because we are already a terrorist target. The Bali bombings indicated that. The furphy being created that this makes Australia a terrorist target completely ignores the fact that we have already been a target of terrorism. On 12 October last year, 89 Australians were killed in a terrorist attack in Bali. Osama bin Laden has already said that Australia is a terrorist target, not because of any of our activities in the Middle East but because of the role we played in the creation of the independent state of East Timor. It is sheer bloody-mindedness for the Labor Party to assert that by being involved in intervention in Iraq we are somehow creating a situation where Australia is a terrorist target. It is already the case. The West in general has been a target of terrorism for 30 years, especially for Islamic militants. At the Munich Olympics and ever since that time—through the seventies, the eighties, the nineties and into this part of the 21st century—the West has been a constant target for extremist terrorism. Weakness is not a deterrent to terrorism. The only deterrent to terrorism is acting out of strength, and that is why the federal government has committed itself to this action in Iraq.

It is also in Australia’s national interest because of the alternative being proposed. If the alternative is that the world does nothing about Saddam Hussein, that he can continue to play cat and mouse with the West and with the United Nations after 12 years of attempting to get him to disarm, then Saddam Hussein wins, Saddam Hussein keeps his weapons of mass destruction, the United Nations is humiliated, the West and the United States are humiliated. Saddam Hussein gets to continue to oppress his people, Saddam Hussein continues to acquire and use his weapons of mass destruction and continues his nuclear weapons program.

This leads me directly into the legality of the action being taken in Iraq. It has been suggested that this potential war is an illegal war. For 12 years, the United Nations has been attempting to get Saddam Hussein to disarm—since the 1991 cease-fire when the resolution of the United Nations specifically required that Iraq account for and destroy its weapons of mass destruction, that it stop oppressing its own people, that it stop supporting international terrorism and that it establish a weapons inspection regime. Paragraph 4 in the motion moved by the Prime Minister says that the House:

(4) notes that United Nations Security Council resolutions adopted under Chapter VII of the United Nations charter, in particular resolutions 678, 687 and 1441, provide clear authority for the use of force against Iraq for the purposes of disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction and restoring international peace and security to the region ...

I would like to particularly associate myself with that aspect of the motion. The United Kingdom Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, set out pithily and clearly the legal basis for an attack on Iraq. He said:

In resolution 678 the security council authorised force against Iraq, to eject it from Kuwait and to restore peace and security in the area.

In resolution 687, which set out the ceasefire conditions after Operation Desert Storm, the security council imposed continuing obligations on Iraq to eliminate its weapons of mass destruction in order to restore international peace and security in the area.

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Resolution 687 suspended but did not terminate the authority to use force under resolution 678.

A material breach of resolution 687 revives the authority to use force under resolution 678.

In resolution 1441 the security council determined that Iraq has been and remains in material breach of resolution 687, because it has not fully complied with its obligations to disarm under that resolution.

The security council also decided in resolution 1441 that, if Iraq failed at any time to comply with and co-operate fully in the implementation
of resolution 1441, that would constitute a further material breach.

It is plain that Iraq has failed so to comply and therefore Iraq was at the time of resolution 1441 and continues to be in material breach.

Thus, the authority to use force under resolution 678 has revived and so continues today.

Resolution 1441 would in terms have provided that a further decision of the security council to sanction force was required if that had been intended.

Thus, all that resolution 1441 requires is reporting to and discussion by the security council of Iraq’s failures, but not an express further decision to authorise force.

In 1998 the then ALP shadow foreign minister, Laurie Brereton, said exactly the same things as the government is saying today. But in those days he was commenting on Operation Desert Fox, where the United Kingdom and the United States had decided that they would militarily intervene in Iraq to force compliance with UN resolutions. On 3 March 1998, Laurie Brereton, as the spokesman for the opposition, said:

Faced with such a breach, the United States and the United Kingdom were clearly entitled to look back to the underlying resolution—that is, resolution 678, which authorised the use of all necessary means to liberate Kuwait and ‘to restore international peace and security in the area’. Resolution 678 is still in force.

That is a direct quote from Laurie Brereton, the then foreign affairs spokesman. What has changed between 1998 and today? Why is it that in 2003 the Labor Party claims that this is an illegal war when its own spokesman five years ago, in exactly the same circumstances, made it absolutely clear that Lord Goldsmith’s advice was correct and that resolution 678 still applied in Iraq? And it has been followed up by two other resolutions, 687 and 1441.

The reality is that the ALP’s position is simply populist, cheapjack opportunism designed to pull them out of the political hole which they find themselves in because of the failure of their leadership and their front bench to actually develop serious, substantial policy positions in opposition to the government. Instead they attempt to ride the wave of opposition to intervention in Iraq, which will eventually dematerialise, and the Australian people will, I believe, support the position of the government. The Labor Party in preference to real substantive policy work have decided that cheapjack, political opportunism is the order of the day. Paul Kelly called Simon Crean ‘the Jacques Chirac of Australian politics’ today in the *Australian* and he is absolutely right.

Mr Martin Ferguson—And I called you a ponce before too.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Batman!

Mr PYNE—Ironically and tragically the actions of France and Germany have made war more, not less, likely because of Saddam Hussein’s ability to continue to thumb his nose at the West. *(Time expired)*

Mr COX *(Kingston)* *(4.23 p.m.)*—Two months ago I expected that if Iraq would not give up its weapons of mass destruction in the face of diplomatic pressure, there would be an international consensus endorsed by an appropriate Security Council resolution to enforce that disarmament. The international community has failed to reach that consensus and there is now an impasse between most UN Security Council members and those nations who have chosen to join the coalition of the willing led by the USA. That impasse has been reached because the timetable for war has overtaken the United Nations decision making process.

The northern summer and the difficulty of sustaining a large military force on Iraq’s borders over a long period are significant. Labor opposed deploying our forces in advance of a specific UN resolution authorising action because we were concerned a deployment at that time effectively amounted to a commitment to war whether it was a UN sanctioned action or not. Unfortunately, those fears have proven well founded. Australian troops are now committed to a war that will start within days, barring the miracle of total capitulation by Saddam Hussein.

Why do we place so much significance on action being taken under a UN mandate? There are two reasons. Firstly, it was only through a UN process that the possibilities for achieving the WMD disarmament objective by means other than war could be ex-
hausted. In the absence of an imminent threat, exhausting those possibilities is a pre-condition of a just war. Secondly, a specific United Nations Security Council resolution would have provided a proper basis for collective action in the event other possibilities were exhausted.

Certainly last year both Tony Blair and George W. Bush felt that too when they began working through UN processes. They expected a positive outcome if not a diplomatic solution at least to authorise collective action. It is to the world’s disadvantage that neither of those things has been achieved. The coalition of the willing will be seen by many as illegitimate aggressors. While sentiments against the first Gulf War were negative in some countries, the repercussions were limited because the issue was one of meeting an actual act of aggression rather than a potential, though very real, threat and because there was broad international consensus on the response. This time those same sentiments are likely to cause serious repercussions.

We cannot make the assumption that the war itself will be relatively quick. We cannot make the assumption that it will be costless. The likelihood of Saddam Hussein either capitulating or being toppled by a coup within days is slight. The possibility that he will defend a large amount of territory and so expose his forces to an air campaign as they were in Kuwait is remote. The probability is that he will move his most loyal and well-equipped forces into the cities where America’s technological superiority will count for less but the civilian population will be exposed to enormous risk. As suggested by Mr Wilkie, the recently resigned ONA officer, the worst scenario is that Saddam will order the use of WMD as a defensive measure possibly escalating the cost of conflict beyond calculation. We must at all times remember that he has crossed that threshold before; using chemical agents on his own people. The risks associated with these last two possibilities need to be considered against the significant but lower cost of continuing the UN process. We should not understated the very real disarmament task that remains in Iraq.

Last year the International Institute for Strategic Studies produced an assessment of Iraq’s possible WMD capabilities. On nuclear weapons it noted:

Baghdad retains a strong interest in developing nuclear weapons, but it seems unlikely that Iraq has produced, or is close to producing, nuclear weapons from indigenously produced nuclear material.

This assessment assumes that the known status of Iraq’s nuclear capabilities in 1998 was basically accurate and that Iraq was not able to build clandestine facilities for producing nuclear material.

On chemical weapons it noted:

Although Iraq’s current CW capabilities are reduced from their high point in 1990 before the Gulf War, it is probably able to mobilise a limited capability for use on the battlefield or against civilian targets.

On biological weapons it noted:

Iraq possesses an industrial capability and knowledge base to produce agents quickly and in volume if desired.

Aside from conventional military munitions, delivery of BW by individuals or small groups acting as commandos or terrorists remains a plausible threat that is very difficult to defend against.

Opposing Australian participation in action outside the auspices of the UN is not a denial of these threats.

UN weapons inspectors have in the past been successful in destroying significant Iraqi WMD capabilities. The weapons inspectors were achieving progress before they were withdrawn. Certainly the Iraqi threat was being contained. UN sponsored collective action was an option, though not yet. War is about to overtake those possibilities.

That is a matter of very great regret. Even if Labor do not agree with the circumstances in which Australian forces have been committed to this war, we recognise that our troops have been given a difficult and, for many, very dangerous mission by their elected government. Their task is an admirable one: disarmament—the removal of a threat of weapons of mass destruction. They have our full support. We share their families’ concerns at this most difficult time and pray for their safe return.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Burke) (4.30 p.m.)—I oppose Australia’s involve-
ment in a unilateral action against Iraq. The decision to declare war has all but been made by this government before the parliamentary debate has occurred, but I consider it imperative that I record my opposition to the war and outline my reasons for doing so to constituents in my electorate, to the public at large and to my fellow parliamentarians. I consider the decision by the government to put the lives of thousands of Australians in peril to be irrational and subservient to the interests of another nation. It is also a decision that is devoid of any compassion. It lacks reason because it defies international governance. It effectively undermines the sanctity of the United Nations, it replaces multilateralism and collective action with the dangerous notion of the unilateral preemptive strike and, as I said in this place five weeks ago, it seeks to fight a rogue state as a rogue state.

The decision to go to war is also without merit because neither the Prime Minister of this country nor President Bush has provided any credible evidence that, firstly, establishes a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda’s terrorist attack on America or, closer to home, the bombing in Bali last year; or, secondly, would lead anyone to believe that Iraq represents a real and immediate threat to our security. It is becoming increasingly apparent that Iraq is America’s scapegoat. In the absence of being able to bring Osama bin Laden to account, President Bush has shifted his attention to Saddam Hussein; yet no plausible direct link has been established between international terrorism and Iraq.

This is not to suggest for one moment that the Iraqi regime is anything other than undemocratic, repressive and violent; yet these ugly attributes are hardly peculiar to Iraq. If in the opinion of the government unilateral action is justifiable given the nature and conduct of Iraq’s administration, then logically Australia will pursue militarily—and, it would appear, unilaterally if need be—other nation states that have undemocratic, violent and repressive governments. That is the false logic behind the Prime Minister’s basis for declaring war on Iraq.

What are we to conclude about the willingness of only two other nation states to initiate a war without support from the supreme international body? Is it that everybody else is wrong? Is it that all the other countries that are not part of the so-called coalition of the willing sympathise with the Iraqi regime? Are countries such as Canada, South Africa, China, Germany and New Zealand allies of Iraq or the Iraqi regime? Clearly they are not. What of the countries that do sympathise with the American position—Italy, Portugal and Spain? Where are their military commitments to this US-led war? If this war is the right thing to do, the last option available to us, where is the military support from those countries that are sympathetic to the American position?

Spain was present for the determination that formally committed our troops while our Prime Minister was sitting back here waiting to be told our fate. The Spanish government was not willing to commit any military personnel to this conflict but sat in on the decision while we were nowhere to be seen. The fact that the Prime Minister was not at the meeting in the Azores when the decision was formally taken illustrates the extent to which we are taken for granted in this process. Of course, there is one other possible scenario: we did not need to be there because we had given our commitment months ago. We had acceded to the US administration’s request last year and there was no further need to be formally involved.

Either way, it is a sad day for Australia when we surrender our sovereignty to another nation. Just when I thought we had evolved beyond such acquiescence, our retro Prime Minister returns us to a time when we looked to empires for leadership. I know there are some in this place and in the media who think we should follow the United States at all costs, but I look at comparable countries like New Zealand and Canada and their independent decisions not to support the unilateral military attack. New Zealand is the only party to the ANZUS treaty that is upholding article 1 in demanding that any action be undertaken under the banner of the United Nations. Don MacKay, New Zealand’s permanent representative, said in a statement to the United Nations Security Council last week:
We share the frustration of other members of the council and the international community at the slow pace of Iraqi disarmament over a long period. But now—when the inspection and disarmament process is finally gaining traction—is not in our view time to abandon it in favour of the use of force.

Another nation with which we share many values is Canada. Canada, with an economy and a population of comparable size to our own, a country whose future is inextricably linked to the United States, has found the resolve to differ with its larger ally and neighbour on this matter. In speaking out against the appropriateness of war in current circumstances, the Canadian Prime Minister said this week:

The terrorist risk will, if anything, be greater than it was before as a consequence of this war. So for us to suddenly cut and run at the time when the terrorist risk is at its greatest would not be compatible with Canadian tradition and support for our allies.

The contributions by the New Zealand and Canadian governments to the debate illustrate the capacity of allies to say no to a powerful friend in order to restate the principle that war should only occur as a last resort. This decision is also wrong because it is not in our national interest. Not only is it principled to adhere to the rule of international law and the principle of multilateral action but also, as a small to medium sized country, it is in our long-term interests in terms of our security in the world and, importantly, our security in the region.

It is my firm view that our role in this conflict will heighten the threat to Australia from terrorists. Rather than act in a manner that would protect Australian citizens, this government’s willingness to go to war has increased the likelihood of terrorist attacks in our country and in our neighbourhood. Quite pointedly, senior minister Tony Abbott conceded this very point in his own speech yesterday. He asserted there was an increased risk of terrorist attack here in Australia as a result of our declaration of war. So out of the mouth of a government minister we have had it confirmed that this action will not be in our national interest.

I am appalled in particular by the conduct of the Prime Minister in this debate. Having refused to honestly confirm his premature and secret agreement struck with the United States President to commit us to war, having closed down question time today, having cut off proper scrutiny and debate and running from accountability, this Prime Minister has failed to be accountable to the people and the parliament. Watching the Prime Minister’s media conference on the news last night, I was witness to one of his cynical inventions. The Prime Minister rhetorically asked the Australian people not to direct their anger and frustration at the troops but instead, if they wished, to blame him and his government for the decision. Implicit in this pathetic pretence of taking the heat for our young soldiers was the imputation that they were ever being criticised. I say ‘invention’ because there has been no criticism of the troops by anyone in this place, and Labor has unequivocally supported our men and women of the Australian Defence Force deployed to the Gulf. No, Prime Minister, it is you who have betrayed the loyalty of our Australian Defence Force. In a disturbing pattern, you forced ADF personnel to be complicit in your shameless fabrication in the kids overboard scandal and you have compelled them now to act as an aggressor in a war that is not in our national interest. It is the Prime Minister that the troops have to fear, not the people of Australia and not the Labor Party.

Finally, I restate that this decision is devoid of compassion. The argument proffered by the government is that we embark on a scale and intensity of bombing unprecedented in history in order to save the people of Iraq. It is akin to the oft-paraphrased quote of the US officer in the Vietnam War who said, without a trace of irony, that ‘we had to destroy the town to save it’. Tragically, the government’s supposed concern for civilian life is contradicted by their eagerness for war. It removes any remaining opportunity to disarm Iraq peacefully. It shows little regard for the civilians of Iraq, many of whom will be killed and maimed by long distance weapons.

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration) (4.40 p.m.)—I rise to speak
in this debate because of my commitment to peace and because of my desire as a father and a member of parliament to ensure the world is a better place. The issue of Iraq is perhaps one of the most complex and challenging matters that has ever confronted the House of Representatives and the parliament more generally. Since this building was opened in 1988, Iraq has never been far from the radar screen. Today, Iraq is more of a problem than it has ever been. For the past 12 years Saddam Hussein has refused to abide by 17 resolutions of the UN Security Council. He has flouted international law. He has thumbed his nose at the international community. He has continued to threaten international peace and security and has continued to both terrorise and murder his citizens.

The issue of taking military action against Iraq is fundamentally a question of freedom, democracy and human rights. It is a question of sitting back and doing nothing to stop a dictator or standing up and taking action to prevent the ongoing death, torture and destruction of many innocent Iraqi civilians. I have sat in the parliament over the last couple of days and I have listened to the contributions made by those on this side and those on the other side. I am disturbed by the blatant anti-Americanism and by the attitude which seems to criticise our Prime Minister, the British Prime Minister and the American President when Saddam Hussein is not criticised at all. If you listen to some of the more extreme statements made from some members of the opposition, you could be forgiven for thinking that the United States of America was the aggressor in this situation and that Saddam Hussein was the innocent victim of capitalist aggression.

I for one am still confused how the member for Werriwa, for example, could willingly denigrate, belittle and besmirch the President of the United States when he has not even condemned Saddam Hussein. The shadow minister at the table, Ms Gillard, is probably also somewhat confused over some of the comments made by the member for Werriwa. Let us never forget that Saddam Hussein is an evil dictator and Iraq is a rogue state. If you support peace and if you support the basic French notion of liberty, equality and fraternity, you cannot help but support the need to disarm Saddam Hussein and put an end to his reign of terror.

When I open the paper and see stories about the people who oppose military action in Iraq, I see people who quite genuinely want peace. I can empathise with these people and I am sure that everyone in this House can empathise with people who want peace. All of us want peace; none of us want war. Surely there is no sane person today anywhere in the world who wants war. Sadly, people like Saddam Hussein do not share this view. Saddam Hussein has been given 12 years to disarm and abandon his weapons of mass destruction. He has been given every opportunity in recent months to show the world that he has complied with resolutions of the United Nations.

Some people, including France and other members of the UN Security Council, argue for more time for the arms inspectors. Time is up, because Saddam Hussein has had 12 years to prove that he is observing the resolutions of the UN Security Council. He has failed on every occasion to uphold his obligations under international law. Time and time again, he has shown an unwillingness to act responsibly and peacefully. He continues to present a threat to world peace. That is why it is important to take decisive action now to show Iraq and other rogue states that this behaviour is simply not acceptable. If the world does not take strong action against Saddam Hussein, what hope is there for rogue states like North Korea to be brought back into the international community?

As a responsible country, Australia cannot walk away from the threat to world peace and security that is created by the Iraqi regime. Some members of the opposition have suggested that there are only three members of the international community supporting the action to implement the UN Security Council resolutions. The Australian government, together with the governments of 29 other countries, has made a decision to become a part of the coalition for the immediate disarmament of Iraq. I will place on the parliamentary record the names of those countries that so far have joined the coalition.
of countries determined to make sure that Saddam Hussein and Iraq observe international law. These countries include Afghanistan, Albania, Azerbaijan, Columbia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and Uzbekistan. I am informed that another 15 or so countries are cooperating with this coalition, or offering defensive assets in the event that Saddam resorts to the use of weapons of mass destruction.

This coalition has been formed by countries that refuse to be held to ransom by a dictator. These countries are prepared to respect the principles of international law as enunciated by the 17 resolutions of the UN Security Council which have been ignored by Saddam Hussein—the most recent resolution being 1441, which gave a last chance to the Iraqi regime. But this dictator will not abandon his pursuit of reckless aggression. He refuses to comply with the reasonable demands that have been placed on him by the United Nations.

The coalition is of countries that realise the risk associated with allowing Saddam Hussein to continue possessing and concealing weapons of mass destruction—weapons of a biological and chemical nature. And we ought not to forget that Saddam has aspirations to make Iraq a nuclear power. These countries see the risks of allowing Iraq to continue aiding, abetting, training and harbouring terrorists. Let us not forget that Saddam Hussein has already used some of his weapons of mass destruction on his own neighbours and his own people. There is no question about the fact that Saddam Hussein is a murderer.

I get quite outraged by those narrow minded people who have the hypocrisy to suggest that leaders like our Prime Minister, the Prime Minister of Great Britain and President Bush are murderers. Prime Minister Howard, Mr Blair and President Bush—along with the leaders of all the other coalition nations—have had to make some tough decisions in relation to Iraq, and they have not done so lightly. To call these leaders murderers because they have made some tough, difficult decisions on the basis of high principle, because they are committed to upholding our freedoms, liberties and way of life, is quite reprehensible. It is reprehensible because they have taken a tough stand for peace. They have taken a tough stand against a man who has been involved in and condoned eye gouging, rape, the use of electric drills to pierce the hands of people, the use of hot irons and blowtorches to burn people and numerous other forms of torture.

When we talk about peace we need to think about it in the broader sense of the term. We need to think about it in terms of the terror that has been, and will continue to be, unleashed by the likes of Saddam Hussein. When I last spoke to the House on the subject of Iraq I drew on the words of Edmund Burke. Burke once wrote:

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.

If we do nothing, as advocated by the opposition and by many rather noisy so-called peace protestors, then we are not going to further peace. By doing nothing, we are promoting a continuation of the violence and barbarity of a regime that is threatening the peace and security of the world.

At the outset I pointed out that I do not want war. No sane person wants war. I do not want my children, or any other person’s children, filling a war grave. I also do not want my children, or any other person’s children, living in fear or having to live in a world that is threatened by the barbaric acts of evil dictators and rogue states. The time has sadly come for us to take action, once and for all, to remove Saddam Hussein and restore peace and security to Iraq. I am pleased to be able to stand in the House today to support the motion moved by the Prime Minister and I remain convinced that this action is the best contribution that Australia can make to ensuring a better, more peaceful world. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (4.50 p.m.)—This is an important time for Australia, the future of the Middle East, the future role of the United Nations and the future dynamics of Europe. The resolution before the House condemns
Iraq for its refusal, over more than 12 years, to comply with 17 resolutions of the United Nations; for its continued possession and development of weapons of mass destruction; for its continued support for international terrorism; and for its grave abuse of human rights. The motion endorses the government’s decision to commit Australian defence forces in the region, expresses support for Australian Defence Force personnel and commits to the rebuilding of Iraq after any period of conflict.

I am sure all members of this House have received representations from their electorates expressing grave concerns about the action that is proposed. Nobody, it is true, wants war and everybody would want to avoid it wherever that is possible. Much has been made of the need to wait for a UN resolution before action is taken. The fact is that we have already had 17 resolutions of the UN. Resolutions 678, 687 and 1441 give clear authority for the use of force against Iraq for the purposes of disarming Iraq of her weapons of mass destruction.

Particular attention has been paid by the world’s media to the question of whether there will be the full backing of the UN Security Council and, more particularly, to France’s role in the use of its veto. The more important and significant question is not whether France will endorse the action but whether or not the decision made by the Australian cabinet was the right one. I believe that, if we look at the track record of Saddam Hussein, it can be seen that clearly the decision was right.

It is time that we confront the continuing threat of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq and his production of weapons of mass destruction. It was interesting to listen to the Leader of the Opposition yesterday saying to the parliament that he agreed with the objective of removing Saddam Hussein but he disagreed with the method of going about it. Similarly, in discussions I had only a week ago in South-East Asia, a parliamentary leader said that clearly Saddam Hussein should be removed but he hoped that another way would be found. The problem is: how else is Saddam Hussein to be removed? He has institutionalised himself in Iraq by various human rights abuses, he has terrified his own population and the chance of any military insurrection, civil rights disobedience or other alternative occurring is extremely remote. Saddam Hussein has constantly ignored international diplomacy and non-forceful means of behaving responsibly.

There are those who are concerned about the casualties of war, and I am sure that members of this House have had such expressions of concern brought to them—concern for the civilians in Iraq and what this action would mean. This is a real and present issue. Nevertheless, the human rights record of Saddam Hussein also directs our attention to this issue. Saddam Hussein himself, by every accountable means that can be shown to be true, is responsible for the deaths of over a million people. So, in leaving Saddam Hussein in his present role with weapons of mass destruction and the ability to use those in neighbouring countries, the real and present danger is that he will continue to use them. Do we allow this situation to continue, or do we take this real possibility of joining with other members of the international community to take firm, final and deliberate action against Saddam Hussein?

In Iraq there has been systematic abuse by Saddam Hussein of his own population. There has been torture of political prisoners by use of electrical currents. Saddam has imposed the death penalty without trial; in one day some 3,000 people were killed. He has used mustard gas on the Kurds and in one attack killed 5,000 people of Kurdish background. He has attacked Iran using mustard gas and he has sent Scud missiles into Israel. This is the man who we are talking about. This is the man about whom people say, ‘We must not attack this man; we must not attack his regime.’ But this is his record. We have people in the community who normally are concerned about human rights issues but who are saying, ‘We should not move into war with Iraq.’ But the fact is that, if we do not do anything, human rights abuses in Iraq will continue. The potential for mass destruction of people because of the weapons, particularly chemical weapons and other weapons, he has is obviously a threat to the stability of the Middle East. Of course,
people tend to forget that Saddam Hussein has been authorising cheques of some $10,000 for Palestinians who take themselves into Israel in suicide attacks. Each time he does that, he encourages further attacks, further destruction of life, further retaliation.

In terms of the stability of the region, it is important that action be taken. Saddam Hussein must be called to account for the weapons of mass destruction he has held. The chemicals that we know he has held are VX—of which only one drop can cause serious nerve failure and immediate death—and anthrax, which again has the potential for mass killing. Hans Blix, the leader of the UN inspection team, continues to report on Saddam’s lack of cooperation. In terms of accountability, it is a clear fact that Saddam Hussein has not accounted for any arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein and his officers, rather than simply saying to the weapons inspectors, ‘Look, this is where they are; this is what we’ve done with them,’ have continually avoided the issue. The 30 countries now participating in the coalition for the disarmament of Iraq agree. It is not as though Australia is out there by itself; it is clear to many countries.

It is interesting to note that France is now saying, ‘We would use our vote and not our veto in the UN, if weapons of mass destruction were used.’ It may well be too late. If we wait until Saddam Hussein is able to pull the trigger in this situation, the French may find themselves embarrassed by moving far too late to deal with this particular individual.

We also give our full support to the Australian service men and women who are in the Middle East. We send them our prayers, our support and, certainly, hope for their safe return to this country. They have the full support of this parliament. This is an important time for Australia but most importantly for the people of Iraq. Even today, Paul McGeough of the *Sydney Morning Herald* comments that it is possible to detect a flicker of optimism in Iraq. He writes:

People are still talking tough. But there is fear in their eyes and—I now sense—a flicker of hope in their hearts that this might be the end of the nightmare in which they have been ground into miserable poverty by a regime that began as a wealthy welfare state, only to be hijacked by the clan of one paranoid man who decreed that he must be loved—even as he has ruled by torture, death and humiliation.

He also writes about the reaction of the people in Baghdad—that there are indications that they are looking for a better time. I am sure we all hope that this is the end of the nightmare in Iraq—that, when the conflict is over, the people of Iraq can look forward to rebuilding their lives and that this country of Australia will help them in that process. Saddam Hussein has a track record of ignoring international diplomacy. We must face the truth at some stage: it is important that we move and take this opportunity to end this tyranny of human rights abuses, to end the period of the accumulation of weapons of mass destruction and chemical warfare, to ensure a period of stability in the Middle East and to join with the people of Iraq in rebuilding for a better society which will be to the benefit of not only the people in the Middle East but also the wider international community.

Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR (Corio) (5.00 p.m.)—The decision by John Howard and Peter Costello to commit Australia unilaterally to war on Iraq is one that Australians have greeted with a deep sense of shame and that will haunt this proud country for generations. This is the first time in our proud history of international involvement that Australia will join the illegal invasion of another country and become an aggressor under established principles of international law. Since federation, there have been few other actions by a Prime Minister or a government that have so debased the great principles on which our freedom-loving, compassionate and tolerant society and democracy have been constructed. There is a very sick feeling in the stomachs of Australians today, because they know this illegal decision by the Howard-Costello government will contribute to the deaths of innocent men, women and children in Iraq and could also lead to the deaths of our precious service men and women. They are sick in the stomach when they hear the pious justifications from the Liberal and National party members opposite who are so keen to unleash the dogs of war, so enthusi-
astic to send somebody else to do their fighting and so arrogant that they will not allow proper debate and scrutiny of their action in the people’s house, this chamber of the Australian parliament.

I come to this debate with an acute sense of modern Australian history. I was a young man at the time of the Vietnam involvement, when a Liberal-National Party government went ‘all the way with LBJ’ and went ‘awaltzing Matilda’ with our great and powerful friend. You can change the names and you can change the dates, but you can never change the grovelling and sycophantic behaviour of Liberal prime ministers whose great mission in life seems to be to become the deputy sheriff of a US president. I lived at a time when a Liberal government conscripted 19-year-olds, who did not have the vote, to kill and die in the jungles of Vietnam at the direction of a Liberal government that history has shown lied to them about that involvement. Today, as a member of this great parliament, and no doubt along with other members of this place, I help to pick up the pieces of the Australian lives that were shattered by the experience of that war. The deceit, hypocrisy and pathetic self-justification of that time now resonates down through the decades to the present in this chamber as Australians of all political persuasions shake their head in disbelief, in dismay and, indeed, in anger as they see history repeating itself. They ask the simple questions: why war, why now and why in this way? The government and the Prime Minister give them no comfort and give them no coherent answers.

The great tragedy in all this for Australians, and a great source of their intense anger, is the deception by the Prime Minister and his government regarding their commitment to war on Iraq. The commitment to the US President, George Bush, was made in July 2002. The Prime Minister did not have the personal courage to tell the Australian people, and our service men and women at the time of their deployment to the gulf, that the decision was already made for war. This pattern of deception has become the hallmark of this government. This war and Australia’s unilateral involvement in it as a part of the coalition of the willing is simply wrong. It has no moral basis and it is illegal. Australia claims to be a predominantly Christian country, but the justification for Australia’s involvement in this war violates the principles of a just war in Christian terms. In a legal sense, there is no UN resolution stemming from resolution 1441 which authorises military action against Iraq at this time. The overwhelming weight of legal opinion is against the action of the Prime Minister.

This decision for war is not in Australia’s national interest. As a middle power, Australia’s national interests are best served by deploying a strong Defence Force to protect Australia and by securing strong relationships with other countries in our region, not by making mindless decisions that simply fuel anti-Australian sentiment in Muslim countries in South-East Asia. Our interests are best served by a strong and enduring commitment to the rule of law in international relations and by the UN Security Council having a key role in achieving the peaceful resolution of conflict between nations—certainly not by the unilateralism displayed by this conservative government. There is one certainty that we can predict from our involvement in this war: this Liberal Prime Minister has now made Australians an even greater target for terrorists than ever before. In the international arena, the awful precedent established by this involvement will not stabilise the Middle East or the world. It will effectively dismantle the collective security mechanisms that offer the best chance of preserving the peace between nations in the future. But it is the aftermath of this conflict that gives us cause for concern. We know that thousands of innocent lives will be cut short or scarred through this unnecessary war. There will be physical casualties by the hundreds of thousands, but there will be political casualties as well.

Saddam Hussein’s regime may fall, but there may also be regime changes in the most unexpected of places. Here in Australia, coalition members opposite will become the political casualties of their own Prime Minister’s folly. The Australian people will have their day on this matter. Liberal members
who today so enthusiastically support this illegal war will have their promising political careers cut short as the Australian people come to fully understand the consequences of their illegal action.

Let me put on the public record that the overwhelming response from people in my electorate of Corio to the Prime Minister’s actions has been opposition to war. I congratulate those constituents and all members of the Geelong Peace Network for their un-tiring efforts to promote a peaceful resolution to this conflict. I will not name them, but they know who they are. They have become the local keepers of the great Australian conscience in these matters: part of an alternative coalition of the willing, those who are willing the peace. I say to those people: your efforts must continue, for there is much work still to be done in the cause of peace.

I make it clear today that my opposition is directed at members of the Howard government and not at the troops who have been deployed in this war. My opposition is also not directed at the American people. It is up to them to make their own judgments on the actions of their government. My opposition and criticisms are directed at an Australian Prime Minister and an Australian government who could not be honest with the Australian people about this deployment to war. Over the past six months we have seen what is now an obscenity in Australian politics: the Prime Minister, having made a commitment to war, did not have the personal courage to share that commitment at the time with the Australian people or with the troops that he has so willingly sent to this conflict. But he shared it with an American President.

I say this to the Australian Prime Minister: you will be the last conservative Prime Minister who will negotiate on his knees. You will be the last who grovels to a foreign government on these matters. As night turns to day, the Australian people will have their say on this issue at the polls. This involvement in war is wrong for Australia. It is illegal and not in Australia’s national interest. (Time expired)

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (5.10 p.m.)—No-one wants war. The reason why we are debating this motion in the House today is that Saddam Hussein would not surrender his weapons of mass destruction to the world community. As a direct result of Saddam Hussein’s failure to agree to a peaceful solution and to heed the international community, we are faced with the current situation.

In February, I spoke in the debate on Iraq about the need for the world to show that it was united and determined in the task of seeing Iraq comply with the United Nations resolutions, extending back over 12 years, calling for Saddam to disarm. Iraq has shown consistently over that time that it will ignore the rest of the world on this matter. Only when Saddam Hussein believes he is under direct military threat has he ever shown any positive moves towards peace. The Security Council has made 17 resolutions on this issue—most recently resolution 1441. The head of UNMOVIC, Dr Hans Blix, was tasked by the council with overseeing and reporting on Iraq’s compliance. Dr Blix has not been able to report that Iraq has complied. Saddam Hussein has had more than 12 years to comply—with 17 resolutions—and to demonstrate disarmament. He has not done so, nor has he shown that Iraq will do so.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, said publicly last year that, if it had not been for the build-up of forces and the military threat hanging over Iraq’s head, the weapons inspectors would not have been allowed back into Iraq. A strong and united international stance against Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction might have resulted in disarmament. Only the most optimistic people would believe that giving Iraq another month, another year or another decade would result in the disarmament of Iraq and Saddam Hussein. When the United Nations Special Commission, UNSCOM, left Iraq in 1998, they were unable to account for 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agent, 1.5 tonnes of VX nerve agent, some 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals, enough growth media to produce over 25,000 litres of anthrax spores, and over 30,000 special munitions.

More recently, the UNMOVIC team has identified that Iraq has mustard gas precur-
sor, weaponised VX agent, some 5,500 chemical bombs and about 1,000 tonnes of chemical agents, al-Samoud missiles which exceed the permitted range of 150 kilometres—of which, thankfully, quite a number have been destroyed—and a number of chemical rocket warheads. We know that Iraq has produced mustard gas and a number of chemical agents, we know that it has the means of delivering them and we know that it has sought advice about developing nuclear weapons.

We know that the regime supports terrorism and terrorists. Osama bin Laden has declared that he would use such weapons if he had them. As I have noted, Saddam has links with terrorism and terrorists. He has history and he has form. He has a record of not shying away from using weapons of mass destruction. In the Iran-Iraq war, an estimated one million people were killed, including 20,000 from mustard gas and nerve agent attacks. This gave rise to Iraq being named for violating the Geneva protocol banning the use of such weapons—the first time this has happened. Five thousand Iranian soldiers remain unaccounted for from that war. During the invasion of Kuwait, there were 1,000 Kuwaiti deaths and hundreds of foreign nationals, including children, were taken hostage and used as human shields. Two dozen Iraqi torture centres were discovered in Kuwait City after the war, and hundreds of prisoners from that war are still unaccounted for.

Saddam has persecuted people in his own country. In the late 1980s, 100,000 Kurds died or disappeared. Saddam used chemical weapons in attacks on more than 40 villages. Saddam Hussein has issued presidential decrees ordering penalties such as amputation and branding of dissidents. During so-called prison cleansing campaigns he has murdered over 3,000 prisoners since 1997. He declared a prison amnesty last year whereby over 100,000 prisoners were released—but 40,000 political prisoners remain in jail. Saddam’s regime uses torture, rape and blackmail against the Iraqi people to quell opposition to his corrupt despotic regime. The ‘Saddam Cubs’ uses 10- to 15-year-olds and takes them to camps where they are trained in weapons use, hand-to-hand combat and other military tactics. This is abhorrent.

Saddam has form for using chemical and biological weapons against other countries as well as the Iraqi people. Therein lies the threat to the world and to Australia—and that threat will continue until Saddam Hussein cooperates or is disarmed. The choice is with Saddam. If we are to achieve our aim of security and peace, Australia and the international community should not, and cannot, sit idly by as a potentially disastrous scenario unfolds. Saddam has the means—we know that. He has the record—we know that too.

I am concerned about the Iraqi people. The human cost of military conflict is a terrible thing, particularly innocent lives. It should be understood that this quarrel is not with the Iraqi people; it is with the regime of Saddam Hussein. But Saddam is not a benevolent dictator in Iraq; he is a repressive, corrupt and violent dictator. He is an enemy and a danger to the Iraqi people. Difficult decisions are faced by the world community. Innocent people may be harmed in any conflict, and I believe that bears heavily on the minds of all involved.

There has been much discussion about the legality of the use of force to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction. Security Council resolutions 678, 687 and 1441 have been passed pursuant to the United Nations charter. Legal authority exists under these resolutions for the use of force against Iraq to disarm it of its weapons of mass destruction. Security Council resolution 678 gave the authority to member states of the United Nations to use all necessary means to liberate Kuwait and restore international peace and security to the region. Security Council resolution 687 followed the liberation of Kuwait. It imposed a cease-fire which was conditional on Iraq complying with its obligations of disarmament of its weapons of mass destruction. This resolution also reaffirms the Security Council’s authority expressed in resolution 678 and refers to the threat to peace and security in the area posed by weapons of mass destruction.

In resolution 1441, the Security Council recalled resolutions 678 and 687 and noted that 687 was conditional upon Iraq comply-
ing with disarmament requirements. It decided in resolution 1441 that Iraq had been, and remains, in material breach of these obligations. Resolution 1441 provided Saddam Hussein with one final opportunity to comply with these disarmament obligations. The resolution makes it clear that any false statements, omissions or anything other than full cooperation with weapons inspections would give rise to a further material breach. Has Iraq complied with this? No—and Dr Hans Blix has not been able to say in his report to the Security Council that Saddam is complying.

Bearing heavily on me in this debate are our Australian soldiers. I pray for their well-being and safe return. I also pray for their families back in Australia who are enduring anxieties and feelings which are difficult to imagine. Our troops and their families deserve our support and the support of the Australian community. I am pleased that the motion before the House makes special note of their contribution, their professionalism and their dedication to duty and this country.

The greatest price is the price of doing nothing—the price of continued repression and suffering of the Iraqi people and the price of threats to security and peace in the world. I know there are many in the community and in my electorate of Cowper who do not agree that we should be involved; they do not agree with the government’s position. I can understand that, but it is important that they should understand the position of the government and the government’s commitment to the security of the nation and its people. It is also important that the people of my electorate and the nation support the men and women of the Australian defence forces and their families in the task ahead.

Only Saddam Hussein can change this, with full and complete disarmament and cooperation. Responsible nations must rise to these challenges and these difficult decisions. I believe Australia must stand with other responsible countries of the world to stop the threat posed by Iraq. I commend the Prime Minister’s motion to the House.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (5.19 p.m.)—Yesterday was a sad day in the history of Australia. It was the day in our history when, for the first time ever, we were committed to going to war as an aggressor—as part of an invading force; a force that is unsanctioned by the United Nations. Australia goes to this war with Iraq a divided nation, simply because John Howard, our Prime Minister, chose to send Australia to war. He embraced the opportunity to be part of the coalition of the willing—or, should I say, the willing three. In doing so, he ignored the recommendations of the United Nations weapons inspectors, he ignored the United Nations process, he ignored the long-term consequences of this action and he ignored the wishes of the majority of the Australian people.

But there was one person the Prime Minister did not ignore, and that was George W. He waited eagerly for a phone call from George W. Just as eagerly, he accepted the invitation to be part of the coalition of the willing, part of the war on Iraq. I wonder whether, if he had not received that phone call, he would have made a begging phone call to George W. Bush asking to be included as part of the coalition of the willing—just as the coalition government did in the Vietnam War, as was outlined by Michael Sexton in his book War for the asking: how Australia invited itself to Vietnam.

I stand here today in this parliament—a parliament I struggled to be elected to—with a heavy heart. I chose to be a member of parliament because I wanted to make a difference in Australia and I wanted to make our world a better place to live in. Instead, I am in a situation where we as a nation are going to war—and I am part of a parliament that is making that decision. I find that very, very disturbing.

I find it even more disturbing that, as a member of parliament, I can do nothing to stop our Prime Minister from plunging us into war. Yesterday when he addressed this parliament I was so angry and frustrated, and it was all because I was unable to make a difference, to change what was happening in a parliament that I was part of. I was looking through the mail that came in today and I came across a letter from Olga, who lives in the Shortland electorate. I linked into the feelings that she has. ‘For those like me,’ she
said, ‘all there is is a feeling of despair and rage that goes with the feeling of frustration that goes with helplessness and powerlessness.’ I have to say that those are the feelings that I have being a member of this parliament and being so vehemently opposed to Australia going to war.

Everyone supports the disarming of Iraq and acknowledges that Saddam Hussein is an evil dictator, but, in the past, he has enjoyed the support of the United States. It is funny what a few years can do—what a difference those years can make. I believe that this war with Iraq will not free the Iraqi people. Instead, it will lead to death, destruction and homelessness. Eighty to 90 per cent of the victims of war are civilians.

Last night I had a rather sleepless night. I spent a lot of time thinking about the implications of this. I am sure that, for the United States, it is all about regime change—getting rid of Saddam Hussein and putting in place a dictator. First off, it will be an administrator—somebody who is much more sympathetic to the way that the United States thinks. But what will happen a few years down the track? Will they find themselves in the same position, wanting to remove the dictator that they have supported to get into the position? Last night when I was having my sleepless night I was thinking of the ramifications—and there are enormous ramifications for a lot of people. First, there are the ramifications for our troops over there doing their job, and we on this side of the parliament support them fully. After this war starts, their lives will never be the same again: they will be different people, there will be a loss of innocence and that loss of innocence will affect not only them but their families. We only have to look back to Vietnam to see how inadequate was the government’s response in dealing with the changes that took place in people’s lives.

As for Australia, we will become a target for terrorism. There is no way that our action in joining this force will not result in our being a target for terrorism. Then I thought about the Iraqi people. This morning I got up, hopped in my car, came into parliament and went about my everyday duties here in Parliament House. When I go back to the electorate, I will go about my everyday chores within the electorate: I will attend my meetings, I will meet with constituents, I will go down to the shops and buy milk and bread. But what will the Iraqi people be doing? They will be living in fear. They will probably not even have water, let alone be able to go down to the shops and buy milk and bread. Their lives will be changed. They will live in absolute fear and terror, and this is the legacy that we in this parliament are delivering to those people.

For the world, the implications of this pre-emptive strike are absolutely enormous. The question has to be: who will be next? Will it be Korea? What justification will be used for a pre-emptive strike against any other nation that the US may choose to disagree with? The questions go on and on. If it is not the US, what about other nations? They may decide that, if the US can instigate a pre-emptive strike, why can’t they?

That brings us to the future role of the United Nations. The action of the United States and our Prime Minister has undermined the United Nations and ensured that it will never operate in the way it has in the past. We can all be critical of the way the United Nations has operated, but one thing is for sure: it was an organisation that was a lot stronger before the decision was made to attack Iraq without its sanction. The Prime Minister sees a role for it in mopping up after the conflict. That is not what the United Nations was established for. It also will undermine world stability and it will have enormous implications for Australia regionally. Regionally, Australia is part of Asia and the Pacific; it is not part of the USA or part of the UK. There will be ramifications that arise from our involvement in this war, including alienation of those nations closest to us. After the war is over, as I mentioned, I am quite sure the US will put in place another dictator that they see as more benevolent.

This government’s decision to be part of a coalition of the willing and our Prime Minister’s decision to embrace a war with Iraq is a low point in our nation’s history. It is a disgraceful decision by a morally corrupt, unethical government led by a Prime Minister who is a lackey to the United States and who
has destroyed Australia’s independent standing in the world. The Prime Minister is a national disgrace and I am ashamed to be part of a parliament he leads. (Time expired)

Mr HAASE (Kalgoorlie) (5.29 p.m.)—It is with great pleasure that I rise today to address this motion put forward by the Prime Minister. Let me say at the outset, however, that no-one in their right mind willingly encourages the killing of one man by another, whatever the cause. But after 12 years of waiting for a recalcitrant government to attend to the responsibilities imposed by the United Nations, after 12 years of waiting for a tyrannical despot to change his ways and give the people of his nation the opportunity to live without the shadow of fear, nothing has changed. At this stage, it is as though we have been the teacher in class admonishing a recalcitrant child to change their disorderly ways or be sent to detention. The child continues to misbehave, is continually warned but continually misbehaves—nothing changes, but the whole class suffers. Eventually, the teacher has to act or there is a mockery of their status.

That is exactly what has transpired today; it is exactly what has transpired with Saddam Hussein for 12 years. He has relied on the division of the Western world, specifically the gullibility of the ill informed and the misguided to avoid compliance with United Nations resolution 1441. That gullibility has been translated by Saddam and his henchmen as support and approval. That, combined with the United Nations group who share the same philosophy or who are protecting commercial ties with Iraq, has allowed Saddam Hussein to maintain that reign of terror over his subjects.

The irony is that, if the protestors that we see so much of and we hear so much about in the media today were exercising their free will under the reign of Saddam Hussein that they so willingly wish to promote and protect, they would disappear, possibly never to be seen again. Such expression of free will is not allowed in Iraq. I find it ironic that there are many people in this country today who enjoy all of the luxury and all of the opportunities provided for them by a Western democracy, yet it would seem that they are so apt to quickly go to the defence of a regime that would deny them all of those opportunities. I cannot understand why supposedly adult Australians can be swayed in their point of view to criticise a decision by government that has been taken with all of the best intentions of the world for the continual good leadership of the country and why they should be so quick to support the reign of a tyrant and to criticise a government with a leadership that offers them the protection of all the things that they enjoy in the Western world.

We often hear today that the community wishes to enjoy the past—the values of the past, the disciplines of the past—yet I find that many of the people espousing a desire for the past and real disciplines are the very ones who would condemn us today for trying to retrieve some of those disciplines and protections that we have enjoyed. I will give some contrasts. We have, for instance, in the schoolyard—to use the analogy again—a strategy and a policy of no bullying. I constantly hear young parents today talk to me about the great prevalence of bullying in the schoolyard and that every government should do everything in their power to stamp it out. I agree with that because I think a bullying attitude is abhorrent. Bullying retards education and development of character and should not be tolerated. Yet many of those who espouse no bullying in the schoolyard are quite prepared to defend the rights of a tyrant—a tyrant who believes in dictatorship by fear, threat, murder, rape and genocide. Somebody who engages in bullying on an international scale is tolerated. To me, that is an unbearable contrast.

We talk about how vandalism of public property should be prevented and avoided and that such acts should be punished. Yet, in this current climate, if we see acts of public vandalism in a public place, they are hailed as some badge of courage. We see acts by Greenpeace today—acts that would be punishable under our laws and that have been criticised by so many in the community as acts of public vandalism—almost applauded. This has happened before, of course. One of the great recognised leaders of the world today, Nelson Mandela, had his headist
his days of greatest notoriety, if you like—as an ANC bomber engaged in terrorist acts.

Ms Gillard—A bomber?
Mr Haase—Yes—an act for which he was incarcerated for some 20 years.
Mr Albanese—And that was all right, was it?
Mr Haase—that supposedly was all right at the time, and he emerged from jail a hero. The issue today is the contrast between those in our community who would still abhor terrorist acts—who would abhor dictatorships, tyrannical rule and regulation and living under a shadow of fear of corporal punishment if one did not abide—and others. We have this great body of people who would say that that is abhorrent to the free world; yet, by the same token, they stand up to publicly display their support for such a regime. To me, it is an explicable contrast. I cannot understand why good governance is often criticised in view of populist rhetoric. Some would say that it is more pleasing and appropriate to listen to the plaintive cries of the opposition in opposing the government’s decision than to support this government in doing something to stamp out tyrannical rule by assisting in that action in the world. We are urged to listen to the opposition, the ALP, who would denigrate the actions of the government and moreover denigrate the actions of our Defence Force members. I find that deplorable.

The men and women of our defence forces are serving overseas at this stage, not of their own accord—it is not their decision—but because they very willingly joined the forces, they took the training to do the job and they are now deployed by this government. I think it is deplorable that they have to suffer the denigration of this opposition. At the end of the day when our men and women return from the Middle East, after having done their job to the best of their ability—a job I am sure they will do well—they will deserve the wholehearted support of the population of this nation. This nation enjoys the fruits of a Western democracy. I trust that one and all of this nation will give a welcome to those homecoming troops and will support them in the manner that they deserve.

Ms Corcoran (Isaacs) (5.39 p.m.)—I rise this afternoon to strongly oppose the Prime Minister’s action in taking our country into this war. I oppose his warmongering on four grounds. Firstly, this war is wrong. It is the worst option. War rarely achieves anything. It will bring inevitable casualties amongst our own troops. It will inflict death, injury, havoc and destruction on the helpless people of Iraq. Secondly, this war does not have the support of the United Nations. There is an alternative way—a peaceful way—to disarm Saddam Hussein. The weapons inspections process was working, albeit very slowly—more slowly than we would like, but it was working. That process should be allowed to continue.

Thirdly, this war is none of our business. Iraq poses no direct threat to Australia. This war is not in Australia’s interests. In fact, it is clearly against our interests on two fronts: the risk to our troops and the increased risk of terrorist action against Australia because we are perceived as aggressors against an Arab nation. Fourthly, the Prime Minister’s behaviour over the past months has been reprehensible. He has been repeatedly dishonest with Australians. He has been nothing short of sycophantic with respect to the bidding of the United States. The vast majority of Australians oppose our involvement in this war, which is not supported by the United Nations. The Prime Minister has demonstrated arrogance, not leadership, in taking us into this war. It is our troops and the ordinary people of Iraq who will pay for this with their lives.

Let me explain what I do not oppose. I do not oppose the ousting of Saddam Hussein; I support it. He is a cruel and brutal dictator who should be deposed, but war on the people of Iraq is not the way to achieve this. I do not oppose the disarming of Iraq. This regime has the capacity to further destabilise the Middle East. If, indeed, it does have weapons of mass destruction, it poses a direct threat to several neighbouring countries. Disarmament can be achieved by peaceful processes; it may take a while, but what is the great hurry? This question has been re-
peatedly posed, but has never been answered by the protagonists, including our Prime Minister.

I do call on all Australians to support our troops. Whilst I am very critical of the Prime Minister for dragging us into this war, I am not critical of our troops who have been sent into this war. Unwavering support must be extended to our men and women who have been deployed to the front line. We must never repeat the mistakes made during and after the Vietnam War.

This war is wrong. War must always be the last resort, not the first option. Prime Minister Howard has failed to make the case as to why war in Iraq is now the only option for Australia. If the Prime Minister has evidence to support this war, then he should share it with the Australian people. Until that happens, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that this action, this war, is wrong. The Prime Minister has presented no evidence of a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda’s terrorist attacks on America and in Bali. He has failed to present evidence that Iraq represents a real and immediate threat to our security.

I am not interested in the academic argument about whether or not this war is legal. Legality is not the point; the point is that this war is wrong. Australia has always been a good world citizen. Australia has been a strong supporter of the United Nations, its processes and its brief to act to resolve international conflicts peacefully. Why are we now moving away from this position? Since April last year, the Labor Party has argued consistently that there should be no military action in Iraq outside the authority of the United Nations. Unilateralism is the wrong policy for Australia and is the wrong policy for the world. As a constituent of mine said to me this morning, ‘President Bush states he intends to fight for democracy, yet he refuses to accept democratic decisions of the United Nations.’ The President is on record as stating that the United States would attack Iraq even if the Security Council voted against such a move. Is this the voice of someone who seeks to uphold the values of democracy?

Over recent weeks, Bush has worked flat out to convince others in the Security Council to support a resolution authorising war against Iraq. When it became clear that this resolution would not succeed, Bush decided that he did not need another resolution. He decided that resolution 1441 was authority enough. If that is so, why did President Bush spend so much time in trying to get another resolution? Diplomacy and the weapons inspectors must be given every chance to succeed. Weapons inspectors have been achieving results, and they should be given more time to do their job.

For the first time in our history, Australia is a primary aggressor in a war. We are waging war. This undoubtedly will be interpreted by fundamentalist terrorists as an attack on an Arab state. The US President has acknowledged that starting this war has increased the risk of terrorist attacks. He has heightened the security alert in the United States and has instigated greater homeland protection arrangements. Bush has stated clearly that this threat of terrorism applies not just to the United States but also to other partners in this coalition of the willing. He stated this outright yesterday. Even the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations has said this. For months Labor has been asking the Prime Minister about the impact our involvement in a unilateral war will have on our exposure to the threat of terrorism. Now that he has taken us into this war, the Prime Minister must declare what threat that poses to Australians on home soil.

The government’s first responsibility is to ensure this country’s security within our region, our neighbourhood and our own backyard. Instead, the Prime Minister alarmed the region last year when he said that he was prepared to back a pre-emptive strike against another country. That astounded our neighbours and was totally uncharacteristic of the way Australia has conducted its foreign relations in the past. I do not believe John Howard’s decision to take this country to war against Iraq—as one of only three out of the 191 countries in the United Nations to do so—is good for our national security.

John Howard’s war will make Australia more vulnerable to terrorism in our region.
Any attack on Iraq will further polarise the world into Islamic and non-Islamic blocs, and will have very damaging long-term consequences for the stability of the world. I doubt that this is really in America’s interests, but it is certainly not in Australia’s. The Prime Minister’s actions are reckless, dangerous and unnecessary. They have exposed Australians to the risk of increased terrorism. The Prime Minister has done nothing to address this increased risk. In effect he has turned his back on Australia’s people. The Prime Minister has not told us the truth. He committed to war a long time ago and has just delayed telling us until now. The Prime Minister did not tell the troops that they were being sent off to war last January.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—The member for Isaacs would be reminded that the chair is very sensitive to the words ‘truth’, ‘lying’, ‘lies’ et cetera.

Ms CORCORAN—Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Mr Albanese—Come on!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I remind the member for Grayndler of the chair’s ability to remove him from this place.

Mr Albanese—Good!

Ms CORCORAN—Since the inception of the United Nations, Australia has behaved as a good world citizen—a truly democratic country that has supported and abided by the rule of international law.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Grayndler will remove himself from the chamber under standing order 304A.

Ms CORCORAN—Until recently, Australia was perceived as an open country that was willing to welcome people of all colours and creeds from every corner of the globe to share with us our safe and free lifestyle. These national characteristics meant that Australians felt welcome and were free to travel in virtually every country of the world. We have never been under threat of terrorist attack, because we were not aggressors and we posed no threat to others.

In less than two years, this Prime Minister has totally thrown out Australia’s good international reputation. He has presented a mean and merciless face to the world, and has slammed the door in the faces of refugees from the very country he now wages war against. He has declared that Australia will not be dictated to by the United Nations, that his judgment is superior to that of the Security Council and that there is no need to follow its peaceful processes. Australia needs a Prime Minister who will provide real leadership and stand by the principles that have always marked Australia as a free and democratic country that accepts the rule of international law. Instead our Prime Minister brings shame upon us.

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor—Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government) (5.47 p.m.)—This is my first occasion to address the issues relating to this particular conflict. I do so because of the apparent lack of history, facts and logic that has been the means by which most speakers have chosen to address this issue. I think some of those facts and some of that history and logic should be included in this debate. For that purpose, Mr Deputy Speaker, I draw to your attention that, on 2 August 1990, the country of Iraq—on the instructions of its dictator, Hussein—decided to invade Kuwait, and did so. There was a vicious invasion for no good reason, and all the UN could impose was trade sanctions. By 17 January—over four months later, after all the damage that was done to the people of Kuwait—a US led coalition decided to empty Hussein and his villains out of Kuwait. In the process of that war and the retreat of Iraq’s defence forces, a vast number of Kuwaiti oil wells were set alight. The reported cost of that activity was
US$50,000 million. I ask speakers who follow me to give some indication of just how US$50,000 million might otherwise have been spent to assist Third World countries. How could that have been spent to help people—US$50,000 million?

On 28 February a quite untypical conditional cease-fire was announced when the US led forces reached the Iraqi border. I say ‘untypical’ because, as a matter of history—and the two world wars are quite clear on this matter—those who respond to invasions of this nature eventually invade the offending country. This was not done, because the United Nations decided to impose a series of conditions, which were very promptly accepted at that moment by the dictator of Iraq. Those conditions were that he would for all intents and purposes disarm and, more particularly, dispose of his weapons of mass destruction, which he had so cruelly used against the Kurds. What a dreadful statue we have seen of that poor person trying to save their baby from that attack. Both of them died. The conditions were announced just a few days later, on 2 March 1991.

An interesting point of note, however, is a speech made in the Tasmanian parliament by a then Independent member, known as Dr Bob Brown. On 4 April he made a speech demanding that the forces that were then on the Iraqi border proceed into Iraq—attack Iraq—to save the Kurds. It was probably quite a reasonable argument but it highlights a high degree of hypocrisy when we hear the same person today saying, ‘Don’t do it.’

The conditions that were the basis of this cease-fire have never been complied with. What has happened in the intervening period? In the intervening period the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have maintained a continuous and costly cold war with Iraq. We have never been out of the conflict. The sailors and others we have sent up there, making our contribution to the embargo, have been under serious threat. A ship—not their ship but another one—had a suicide bomber drive into the side of it, killing 40 US seamen. That war has been continuous and the threat to our soldiers and defence forces has been continuous.

Let me list some of the things that have gone on in that cold war. There has been the embargo, in which Australia has been significantly involved; there have been no-fly zones; and there has been ground force activity, to which the previous government thought they should contribute at a later date, particularly around February 1998. Of course, we were also very significantly involved in the supply of weapons inspectors, including the director, Mr Butler, at one stage. Contrary to the rhetoric of recent times, Australia has been involved in a costly war with Iraq for 12 years. How many hospital beds, school places and other forms of assistance to the needy in Australia have been diverted to that exercise?

Mrs Irwin—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I seek clarification: I notice that there is no shadow minister at the dispatch box. I draw the Deputy Speaker’s attention to the fact that there is no member, as required by standing orders. I was wondering whether I could have clarification of this matter, please.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—There is no point of order; there does not have to be a member of the opposition at the table.

Mr TUCKEY—That is your problem if you do not want to be in the place. We have to have someone here.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Minister.

Mr TUCKEY—How many school places—

Mrs Irwin—Drivelling again, Wilson.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Fowler.

Mr TUCKEY—Considering her views, I thought the member would have been very interested in how much money Australian governments—including the government of which some of her colleagues were members—have been spending on maintaining a cold war with Iraq. All these years, that money might have done something for school kids, drug addicts and the health system, about which they complain completely. How much longer should that process continue?
We heard the Leader of the Opposition, in his response, drawing our attention to a proposal. ‘What about just another two months of weapons inspections?’ Why not another 12 years, which we have had already? Why have we actually got weapons inspection back on the agenda? It is because three countries have put 250,000 troops around the borders of Iraq. Is it the proposal of the opposition that we keep them there for another 12 years—or two months? Who is going to pay for this? Is it going to be pensioners?

The fact of the matter is that we have got to have a resolution of this issue. Of course, we should be looking at these matters. Is it practical to maintain that level of defence activity while 130 people go looking for a needle in a haystack? After 12 years, in all the rules of the cease-fire, as set down, is it not the right of the country that defeated Iraq in Kuwait to re-engage in hostilities, simply because the deal has not been consummated? In my view that is the case.

In closing, I thought of another interesting point in the opposition leader’s speech: he actually claimed ownership of what went on in East Timor. It is time the opposition went back and looked at how they behaved in terms of the invasion of East Timor and then look at how they want to behave on the invasion of Kuwait and the appropriate response. It was this government, and this government alone, that set in motion all of the processes which freed the people of East Timor. A previous Prime Minister of the Labor government went and signed a—(Time expired)

Ms KING (Ballarat) (5.57 p.m.)—I rise today to state my unequivocal opposition to the war against Iraq, to which the Prime Minister has so foolishly committed this nation. I do so with deep sadness and a great sense of foreboding about what is to come. The Prime Minister has committed 2,000 service men and women to war without the support of the Australian people, this parliament or the international community.

The Iraqi government is undemocratic and Saddam Hussein governs without mercy. He has persecuted, tortured and murdered many thousands of his countrymen. Throughout our history, we as a parliament and as a nation have been largely silent on this matter. Now that the Howard government’s war propaganda machine has developed some momentum, we are in receipt of some of the most detailed descriptions of the horrors of authoritarianism. I look forward to this government’s newfound embrace of human rights. I ask the Prime Minister to come back into this place and explain how that newfound embrace will influence our policies towards Burma and other repressive regimes in our region. Australia is not a world power. Our capacity to influence the affairs of other nations is governed by our standing in the international community. Today, we have a much diminished place in the world. The Prime Minister has turned his back on the United Nations by abandoning the peaceful and lawful disarmament of Iraq.

Like most Australians, I believe that peaceful disarmament of Iraq should have been pursued until no other option remained. The Prime Minister clearly does not agree. What we have heard this week is an argument that Iraqis must be killed in the name of humanitarianism. Let us look at what that argument means in terms of human lives. A war of three months is likely to result in casualties on all sides of between 48,000 and 261,000. Deaths from indirect and other longer-term health effects of the war could total an additional 200,000. Many of these will be women and children.

In September last year I stood in this place and said that we must not commit Australian men and women to war before all diplomatic efforts had been exhausted. I reiterated that call a few weeks ago. Just weeks after that last debate, 2,000 Australian service men and women have been committed to a United States led war without authorisation by the United Nations. Diplomatic efforts have been ongoing. Disarmament of Iraq has been ongoing. The Howard government has abandoned the peace because it has not done all it can to avoid the war. Eleanor Roosevelt said: It isn’t enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn’t enough to believe in it. One must work at it.

Peace is not the soft option the Prime Minister so desperately wants us to believe. It is the hardest option of all. It requires the concerted effort of the international community.
The Prime Minister made a commitment to the United States to back them in unilateral action last year. He did so without regard to the UN, without regard to the views of the Australian people and without regard to our national interest. The Prime Minister is too proud, too stubborn or just too blinded by his own arrogance to back down. The Prime Minister has not worked to achieve the peaceful disarmament of Iraq. His failure represents a failure to understand his responsibility to the Australian people.

The government has been happy to support the UN when it suits it but equally prepared to vilify the UN when it does not. The Prime Minister dismissed the evidence of disarmament presented by UN arms inspectors in the last fortnight because it undermines his commitment to war. He has failed to acknowledge that the UN sponsored disarmament of Iraq has led to the destruction of more weapons than did the last Gulf War. The Prime Minister has not told the President of the United States that he must uphold the spirit of article 1 of the ANZUS treaty by working through the UN to resolve international conflict. We are simply told that it is a matter of doing nothing or going to war. Unilateral invasion of Iraq when weapons inspections were making progress sets a dangerous precedent for the world—a precedent we should not support.

Hundreds of people in my electorate have participated in peaceful demonstration against this war. Many of them have never participated in such action before. They have not participated thoughtlessly. They are not the ‘mob’ the Prime Minister so arrogantly dismissed them as just weeks ago. The people of my electorate know that war is sometimes necessary. They also know that war is fought without cost. The people of Ballarat, just like the rest of the Australian community, have listened to the Prime Minister’s argument for war and have failed to be convinced.

No member of this House believes that the decision to participate in war was made on Tuesday morning. We all know the Prime Minister was committed to war the moment he engaged in secret negotiations to dispatch members of the Australian Defence Force to the Middle East. The Prime Minister tells us that the cabinet only made its decision on Tuesday after he took a telephone call from George Bush. I do not believe him and I do not think the people of my electorate believe him either. Nobody believes him when he seeks to make an unsubstantiated link between Iraq and al-Qaeda. If he has the evidence, he should present it and not allow the fog of war to confuse the connection between unrelated actions and events—actions and events he has so disingenuously sought to link.

Rather than stand up and protect Australia’s national interest, the Prime Minister has subordinated our interests to those of the United States. The difficulty the US and the UK have had in securing the passage of a second resolution through the UN is due to their failure to make an adequate case. The UN did not fail; the US and the UK failed to make the case for war and were judged accordingly. One year ago we joined the United States in a war against terrorism. There was strong support for the united fight against terrorist organisations, to track and stop their flow of money and to cooperate in the sharing of intelligence. Today we are left with a world divided, a world where many of the major institutions that provide our collective security—the UN, NATO, the EU—are also divided. In my view, the US has squandered the world’s firm commitment to the war on terrorism and Australia has acquiesced in this action.

I reiterate the comments that I have previously made in this House concerning support for the 2,000 Australian service men and women amassed in the Middle East. As was simply and honestly stated by the Leader of the Opposition at the departure ceremony for the HMAS Kanimbla, Labor does not support the Prime Minister’s decision to deploy Australian service men and women to the Middle East to participate in a war that lacks the sanction of the United Nations. Labor does, however, give its strong support to the men and women of the Australian Defence Force. For the first time in decades, this nation is divided on the question of whether Australia should send service personnel to war. It is important for service men and
women and their families to understand that this parliament is not divided in our support for them. I say to them: our thoughts are with you as you enter into this conflict. Please come home safely. In concluding, I quote Abraham Lincoln. He said:

There is no honourable way to kill, no gentle way to destroy. There is nothing good in war. Except its ending.

Let us pray that this war ends soon.

Mr PEARCE (Aston) (6.06 p.m.)—I begin my remarks by making three key points: firstly, that I am not a pursuer of war; secondly, that I would have profoundly preferred the UN Security Council to have dealt with this matter; and, finally, that I continue to find this issue deeply disturbing. I share the concerns of all Australians about the tough decisions we are confronted with by Iraq’s continued defiance of UN resolutions. I have listened to the range of viewpoints and opinions in the community—viewpoints and opinions which I believe have been too frequently marred in Australia by rhetoric, slander, personal accusations, untruths and deceit.

While there remains contention over the tough decisions we face, it is clear that a decision must be made and Iraq must be disarmed. As Australians we find ourselves in a terrible and disturbing situation that, despite the extremist claims of some who oppose the government’s policy, we clearly did not seek. We now live in a world where our security threat is not from nation states using conventional warfare but from rogue states and international terrorists who seek and use weapons of mass destruction. In this environment we must ask ourselves two questions: is it right for us to act and is it right for us not to act?

The most compelling reason for disarming Iraq is the human cost of Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi regime past, present and future. That human cost has been, is being and will continue to be borne by the people of Iraq, the Middle East region and the wider world if no action is taken. Saddam Hussein has systematically violated the human rights of his own people since rising to power. Untold numbers of people have been arrested and detained on suspicion of political or religious activity. Those that have survived the torture attest to the horrific techniques used. They include branding, administering electric shocks, beatings, eye gouging, burning with cigarettes, hot irons and blow torches, pulling out of fingernails and toenails, suspension from rotating ceiling fans, dripping acid on the skin, acid baths, rape, the breaking of limbs, piercing of hands with an electric drill, mock executions and the threat of rape and other harm to family members and other relatives. Many of these barbaric acts have been mandated by the Iraqi government through presidential decrees.

The UN Special Rapporteur gave an account in 1998 of Kurds and other detainees being used as subjects in Iraq’s illegal experimental chemical and biological weapons program. Amnesty International reported in 1999 that former political detainees had been forced to have a leg or arm amputated after developing gangrene as a result of extended torture and the subsequent lack of medical treatment. In August 2001, Amnesty International reported that detainees had been threatened with viewing the rape of relatives, including a wife and mother, and some of these threats had been carried out. In 1998, 100 prisoners were buried alive in a pit in a bid to reduce the overcrowding of Iraqi prisons. In early 1998, the Iraqi regime prevented a UN weapons inspection team from investigating claims that Iraq had conducted biological weapons experiments on prisoners during the mid-1990s. The UN Special Rapporteur stated in 1999 that Iraq remains the country with the highest number of disappearances known to the United Nations—over 16,000. In June 2000, a former Iraqi general received a videotape of security forces raping a female relative with a subsequent telephone call from an intelligence agent stating that a further female relative was being held and that he should stop speaking out against the regime. Mothers of Iraqi defectors have been tortured to death for their children’s activities. Iraqi children have had vital food and medicine diverted for the personal use of government officials. Some Iraqi children have been forced to witness the torture of their parents and then have been tortured themselves by having their feet crushed.
Saddam Hussein has persecuted ethnic communities in Iraq—particularly the Kurds in the north and the Shia Muslims in the south. During the Iraqi government’s campaign against the Kurds in 1988, an estimated 100,000 Kurds died or disappeared. The Iraqi military has attacked more than 40 Kurdish villages with chemical weapons. For decades, the Iraqi government has conducted a campaign of murder, execution and arbitrary arrest of local Shiite Muslims. In 1999, during a protest following the regime’s murder of the most senior Shia cleric in Iraq, security forces fired shots into the crowd, killing hundreds of civilians, including women and children. These events bear out the tragic human cost of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq, which has continued to mount even under the current UN policy of containment.

What about what has happened in the region around Iraq? In 1980, Iraq launched a major military attack on Iran resulting in an eight-year conflict estimated to have caused over one million casualties, with the use of chemical weapons by Iraqi troops causing an estimated 20,000 Iranian deaths and many more casualties. More than two dozen torture centres were found in Kuwait following its invasion and photographic evidence confirms reports of electric shocks, acid baths, summary execution and the use of electric drills to penetrate a victim’s body. In addition, many innocent civilians were used as human shields.

The Iraqi regime has long supported, hosted, funded and trained Palestinian and other terrorist groups, including the Palestinian liberation front. The Iraqi regime provides substantial financial grants of up to $US25,000 to families of Palestinian suicide bombers. Iraq has developed and supported local terrorist groups, which undertake terrorist acts against Iran and other countries.

The past, present and future human cost of Saddam Hussein’s regime makes a damning case for the need for action. For 12 years, Australia and the international community have sought a diplomatic resolution and for 12 years the human cost has grown and grown. Why would anyone in their right mind want to give more time to a man who has used the time he has already been given in mounting such vicious attacks on innocent people at home and abroad? Under the current UN policy of containment, Hussein has used the impact of sanctions against his own people. UN sanctions exist because Saddam Hussein will not comply with the cease-fire conditions he agreed to.

Based on Iraqi government figures, UNICEF estimates that Hussein’s manipulation of the containment policy kills approximately 5,000 Iraqi children under the age of five every month—that is, 60,000 toddlers every year. Iraq is allowed to sell enough oil each month under UN sanctions to meet the basic needs of Iraqi civilians, but these resources are diverted by Saddam Hussein for his own administration. It is unfortunate and it is distressing, but it is clear. The Iraqi people, the people of the Middle East and the people of the wider international community deserve better. They deserve a democracy and they deserve to live in peace and freedom. We must act, and we must act now. On the basis of publicly available evidence alone, there is a clear and profound moral case for action in disarming Iraq and building a new Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours. The consequences of inaction for our nation and the world are too shocking to consider.

To all of our Defence Force personnel, our thoughts and prayers are with you and your loved ones. We know that you will demonstrate your courage and skill in the days that lie ahead, just as this parliament must demonstrate courage in taking a decision, which is difficult but essential, in the interest of the people of Australia, of Iraq and of the world.

Ms HOARE (Charlton) (6.16 p.m.)—This is a dark time in Australia’s history, with the commitment of Australian troops to an invasion of Iraq. It is a dark time for the women and children of Iraq, who will end up being the civilian casualties of the invasion. Iraqi families have suffered enough under Saddam Hussein’s regime; they are now going to suffer further. Australia is one of only three countries in the coalition of the willing. That now makes our country, our communities and our families soft targets for terrorism
as all the lunatics of the world use Howard’s position to somehow justify their causes.

Labor has reaffirmed its opposition to the war against Iraq to which the Prime Minister has committed Australia. The Leader of the Opposition has outlined the basic five reasons for Labor’s opposition to the war on Iraq. Australia should not engage in a war with the Americans because world peace and global tolerance can only occur through international commitment and strong leadership in the UN and other international fora.

The Australian troops in the gulf are doing their duty and we must support them in their jobs. We support the troops but not the war. Our argument is with the government and not with the troops. I say to those families in my electorate who have loved ones in the defence forces and in the gulf: I support you and your families. Labor support you and your families and we will do whatever is necessary to provide that support. As a community we must all be supportive of one another in these very sad and difficult times.

There is no justification for this invasion. This invasion, and the Prime Minister’s commitment to it, is wrong. There are many other reasons that I do not support this war. This is the first time in Australia’s history that Australia is the aggressor in a coalition of forces invading another country—a country that has shown no inclination to attack or even threaten Australia. This is the first time that there has not been bipartisan support in this parliament for the commitment of our military forces to either conflict or peacekeeping missions.

There are peaceful options which can be and should be pursued through the United Nations processes. The peaceful proposal known as the Franco-German plan was immediately dismissed by Bush and thus, as we have come to expect, was promptly dismissed by our own Prime Minister. That proposal outlined ongoing containment of Saddam Hussein by scaling up the weapons inspectors and backing them and the human rights of the Iraqis with a coalition of peacekeepers. It was a logical and brilliant proposal to disarm this tyrant and to ensure he no longer continued to abuse his own people. How long does the Prime Minister think the regime in Baghdad could have continued in those circumstances? It could not have continued for as long as the 12 years that it has continued under the more recent processes.

Some members of the government would have their constituents believe that not to support this invasion would have meant an irrevocable collapse of the US alliance. This is wrong. Support for the US alliance is no reason for Australia not to carve out an independent foreign policy that bolsters peace and security in our region. It does not stop Australia’s foreign policy priorities being in our own region—in our own neighbourhood. Australia’s best interests lie in our nation engaging with our neighbours and being a good, responsive, tolerant and leading community member in our region. Support for the US alliance does not mean we cannot do this. The ANZUS treaty allows for Australia to assist the US where and when it is under attack or where US troops are under attack in our region. The ANZUS treaty does not allow for Australia to support the US coalition of the willing—as one of only two other countries to provide military might—to invade another much smaller country, to assist in regime change, to put at risk Australian lives and the lives of millions of innocent Iraqis, and to participate in a war that does not even have the sanction of the United Nations through the United Nations Security Council.

Conversely, the Prime Minister could have been using the alliance to pressure or encourage the US to pursue the disarmament of Saddam Hussein through the UN and through peaceful processes. He could have used the alliance to persuade the US President to pay the dues which are owed to the United Nations. He could have used the alliance to persuade the US to restore its funding to the UNFPA. He could have used the alliance to persuade the US to cancel debt owed by developing countries. He could have used the alliance to persuade the President to encourage multinational pharmaceutical companies to provide affordable HIV-AIDS drugs to those countries where millions are dying. But the Prime Minister only invokes the alliance to bring about military might. This is wrong and this is immoral.
The Prime Minister’s decision yesterday will make Australia less secure from terrorism in our region. As the Leader of the House of Commons was resigning in the UK, the Leader of the House of Representatives was saying in this place, in this debate, that a consequence of Australia invading Iraq is that ‘there is an increased risk of terrorism’. We know that. We know that an un-sanctioned attack on Iraq by three countries will line those three countries up as targets for the lunatics of the world.

Now Australia may be targeted—as admitted by our government and the US government. What has the US done? It has upgraded security right throughout the US. And what has Australia done? Nothing. That is what we also debated here today: what is the Prime Minister doing about the increased threat to Australia’s security? After leading Australia to war and increasing the risk to our national security, he has turned his back on the Australian people and refuses to acknowledge or address these increased threats. This really brings home to all of us the consequences of the Prime Minister’s decision.

We all represent diverse and interesting electorates and people. In my electorate of Charlton, I have underground and open-cut coal mines that are fuel providers; I have electricity generators that are power suppliers; I have a complex and comprehensive public rail system. We all have major shopping centres and venues where people gather for large events—community, sporting and cultural. In our electorates we all have areas which now are possibly heightened security risks. That is why today the Leader of the Opposition insisted that the Prime Minister immediately outline the urgent steps being taken by the government to protect Australia and Australians from the increased terrorist threats following his decision to commit Australia to war without the authority of the United Nations.

Finally, I will speak about the human face of this war. In previous debates on this issue—when we hoped that we would never come to this debate—I have outlined the probable human and civilian cost of invading Iraq. But this time I want to speak of the images that have been emailed by our friend Donna Mulhearn, a human shield in Baghdad. In doing so, I will quote from Donna’s emails, because she is there and these are her words. On Monday, 10 March, as part of quite a large message, Donna said:

It makes me angry. I look around and think what right does the US have to put this nation into a state of suspension and then terror. Who has the right to inflict civilian casualties and call it collateral damage when it’s murder? I kick the ball with the kids next door and I ask myself, who has the right to drive these children underground in concrete bunkers and cower in fear? These people have suffered much over the past two decades with wars and oppression. Who has the right to inflict more suffering—who, I ask?

Donna.

In this next email, sent on Thursday, 13 March, Donna talks about Nora, a baby. She says:

Nora has no arms or legs. She has a little torso and a head with a bright little face. Of all the people who had a right not to smile this day in Baghdad, it was Nora. But oh, she did, and she stole my heart. I met Nora at an orphanage run by four little Indian nuns (from Mother Teresa’s order). She goes on:

This place is a little haven of humanity. No doubt this orphanage is not unlike others around the world, except for one major fact. It’s likely to be blown to smithereens in the coming weeks if this war goes ahead. It’s located about a hundred metres from an important communications centre which will be hit early on. The shrapnel from that blast will be enough to rip this place apart. The US military doesn’t seem to value Iraqi lives and not least the lives of disabled Iraqi orphans. What chance do they have? But I reckon if George W. Bush could meet Nora, he may change his mind. She’s a little treasure. My angel in Baghdad. I don’t know where I’ll be when the bombs start to drop, but if I have my way, I’ll be at the orphanage hugging little Nora. Not just for her sake. But for mine.

In a final email from Donna yesterday, she writes:

Friends. This is an open letter to Alexander Downer that I have sent to newspapers today. Mr Downer, I got your message. You want me to come home because it’s not safe in Iraq. I have actually felt very safe here. It’s been warm, friendly and welcoming. You will help to make it unsafe if you support a US-led military attack on this place. Mr Downer, you say I should come
home. I appreciate your concern and I note it, thank you. But I want to ask — what about my friends who live here? The kids next door, the ladies at the church, the nuns who work in the orphanage, the boys who do the shoe shines? (Time expired)

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (6.26 p.m.)—
This evening I join my coalition colleagues in support of the motion before the House—a motion that condemns Iraq’s refusal over more than 12 years to abide by 17 resolutions of the United Nations Security Council regarding the threat Iraq poses to international peace and security. Under UN Security Council resolution 1441, which was adopted unanimously, Iraq had a responsibility to comply with its obligation to cooperate fully and immediately with UN weapons inspectors and disarm. Saddam Hussein has not complied. It is my belief that the UN Security Council has failed to enforce resolution 1441.

On Tuesday the Australian government authorised our defence forces which had been pre-deployed to the Gulf to contribute to the campaign to persuade Saddam Hussein into compliance with resolution 1441. Australia is joined by 30 countries around the world that have agreed to be part of the US coalition of the willing for the disarmament of Iraq. In addition to those 30 countries, there are another 15 or so that are cooperating with the coalition of the willing in the event that Saddam Hussein resorts to the use of weapons of mass destruction. This level of support clearly demonstrates the international community’s support for the action to disarm Saddam Hussein.

As the Prime Minister said in his address to this parliament on Tuesday, ‘There is no more serious decision for any government than to commit its forces to military conflict abroad.’ Two thousand young men and women have been deployed to secure Australia’s future and the future of the international community. These young men and women include SAS personnel, one squadron of 14 FA18 aircraft, Navy personnel, logistic personnel, planners and other headquarters staff, who are deployed in and around locations in close proximity to Iraq. Our thoughts and prayers are with these brave young men and women and also with their families and loved ones during this difficult time. These bright, courageous and patriotic young people have willingly signed on to the forces and are well trained for the dangerous and difficult challenge that lies ahead of them.

The decision to deploy Australian troops has not been taken lightly and, as a government, we understand that the mission ahead will be difficult. But the government made the decision in the strong belief that it really had no option when it looked at the bigger picture. It would have been far easier not to commit troops to an armed conflict to enforce Iraq’s compliance with its international obligations under successive resolutions of the UN Security Council. But I strongly believe that it is in not only Australia’s national interest but also in the international interest that Saddam Hussein be stripped of his unconventional weapons of mass destruction and his people freed from his brutal dictatorship. The world community has tried the diplomatic route but, 12 years on and 17 United Nations resolutions later, no progress has been made; Iraq has still not disarmed. The Iraqi regime has demonstrated over and over again that it is unable or unwilling to immediately comply with its disarmament obligations and continues to play cat and mouse games. It continues to defy UN resolutions and amass weapons of mass destruction. At this stage, and against the backdrop of terrorism, for the world community to continue to sit on the sidelines would be more deadly than for it to intervene.

There are many arguments against conflict—all well founded and overwhelming. But the reality of the matter is that history has shown us time and time again that there is no diplomatic solution when we are dealing with Saddam Hussein. In this case, the consequences of not dealing with Saddam Hussein in a decisive way would be devastating for the world community. We live in a different world today, and the possibility of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists and the need to take action to prevent that occurring are very strong motivations for the action that our government is taking. The weapons inspectors have failed to disarm Saddam, and there is no other way we can eliminate the threat he represents.
We have seen what he is capable of and what he is prepared to do against mankind, and even against his own people. In the eighties, during Iraq’s war with Iran, Saddam used more than 101,000 chemical warfare munitions. In 1988, he killed at least 5,000 Iraqi Kurds with chemical weapons. His 1990 invasion and annexation of Kuwait was accompanied by murder, torture and pillage. Saddam’s defeat in 1991 was supposed to end his ability to threaten world security. This has not happened, and he has continued to make the most determined and diabolical effort to amass weapons of mass destruction and to blithely defy UN resolutions.

He is one of the few leaders to practice genocide on his own people, and I believe the vast majority of the Iraqi population would welcome the removal of this brutal dictator who has governed by an all pervasive repression and oppression. His regime has been sustained by broad based discrimination and terror, summary and arbitrary executions—including political killings and the continued so-called cleaning out of prisons—the use of rape as a political tool, enforced or involuntary disappearances, routinely practised arbitrary arrests and detention, widespread systematic torture and the maintaining of decrees prescribing cruel and inhumane treatment and punishment.

The Iraqi regime not only participates in the torture and genocide of its own people, it is also a known sponsor of terrorism. The regime has not only brought about misery and death to the Iraqi people and other people, it has destabilised the Middle East and is destabilising world security. If Iraq does not have its chemical and biological weapons taken from it, other rogue states will think they can get away with imitating Iraq. As more rogue states acquire these weapons, so the danger of these weapons falling into the hands of terrorists multiplies. The possibility of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists and the need to take action to prevent that occurring are very strong motives for the action that the government has taken.

For years the world, through the United Nations, has attempted to compel Hussein into stopping his amassing of weapons of mass destruction through the implementation of sanctions. These sanctions exist only because Saddam Hussein has refused for 12 years to honour the terms of a cease-fire he himself signed. These sanctions have prevented the citizens of Iraq from gaining access to food and modern medicine. They have never touched the lives of Hussein and his ministers, who continue to live in vast palaces while the majority of the population lives below the poverty line.

Saddam Hussein’s record of human rights abuse is damning. Since this man came to power, more than one million people have died in internal conflicts and wars which he has generated. Point 8 of the Prime Minister’s motion tabled yesterday notes: … that the government is committed to helping the Iraqi people, including through humanitarian assistance, to build a new Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours.

There is no doubt that the long-term effort required to rebuild Iraq will be enormous. The Australian government is committed to rebuilding Iraq and providing humanitarian assistance to its citizens, many of who are suffering from malnutrition and disease. The humanitarian assistance and rebuilding of Iraq will have to be sustained over a long period of time. I welcome this commitment from both my government and the coalition of the willing. The Iraqi people are desperate for food and medicine and to be free of the all pervading fear they have lived with for decades. Saddam Hussein still has the opportunity to extricate himself from Iraq. He has until Thursday. The ball is now firmly in his court. Saddam Hussein himself can halt this military conflict.

In closing, I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks and prayers to all those service personnel who are deployed in and around Iraq. It is because of these people that the international community has its freedom, peace and security. To secure peace in Iraq and give freedom and security to the Iraqi people, Saddam Hussein must go and this long running conflict must be brought to an end once and for all. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms JANN McFARLANE (Stirling) (6.36 p.m.)—It is a sad time. After the Vietnam
War, I did not think I would ever see the day when Australians became involved in another immoral war. I call this conflict a war with some trepidation. It is more aptly described as an invasion. There is no mistake that it is an invasion, pure and simple. Reflecting on what I have witnessed in this debate, my thoughts were drawn to the teaching of Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest proponents of nonviolence and peace in history. He once said:

What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?

In this debate, we have seen the Prime Minister put his case for war—a war that most Australians believe is wrong. I do not want to turn this speech into an attack on the Prime Minister, as I am convinced that he absolutely believes that he is doing the right thing. I oppose the position that the Prime Minister and his government have outlined in this debate for the simple reason that I believe that it is morally wrong.

It is a great shock to me that Australia, for the first time in its history, is going to be involved as an aggressor in a war. This has deeply affected me. The Prime Minister has obviously been planning for the eventuality of this war for quite a period of time. Although the Prime Minister has publicly denied that Australia was committed to this war some time ago, I think that any sensible person can look past the emotion of this debate and recognise that the pre-deployment of our troops was a sign of this commitment.

Albert Einstein once said, ‘You cannot simultaneously prevent and prepare for war.’ I think that this truism is pretty apt in our present situation. Obviously the Prime Minister has had some time to think about this move and its implications, but I want to share with him the words of one of his great heroes, Sir Winston Churchill, who said:

Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realise that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.

I would like to repeat the last part of the last sentence: ‘... he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.’ The decision to join George W. Bush’s so-called coalition of the willing to invade Iraq has effectively meant the end of the Prime Minister’s control over our involvement in this war. From now on, the fate of our troops in the region is in the hands of the US and Saddam Hussein. What I mean by this statement is that I am concerned that the escalation of this conflict may force either the US or Saddam Hussein to step over the line and actually use weapons of mass destruction. If Saddam uses these weapons first, or in desperation, the US will no doubt retaliate. It is this escalation, the tit for tat exchange without regard for human life, that should scare us all. We have over 2,000 troops in the gulf. If any of these weapons are used, there is a real risk that there will be Australian casualties—an eventuality that no-one in this parliament wants to see happen.

The Prime Minister said in his speech in this debate that dissent against the war should be directed at him and his government and not at our service personnel. I agree wholeheartedly with that comment. Our defence personnel have no say in whether we become involved in this war or not. Protesters should be protesting against the Prime Minister—not against our defence personnel. Thinking about this situation, I was drawn to the comments of Senator George McGovern, who was the Democratic candidate for President in 1972 and one of the main opponents of the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. In a famous speech he reflected on the role of government in sending young people off to fight. He said:

It doesn’t require any particular bravery to stand on the floor of the Senate and urge our boys in Vietnam to fight harder, and if this war mushroom into a major conflict and a hundred thousand young Americans are killed, it won’t be the US Senators who die. It will be American soldiers who are too young to qualify to run for the Senate.

McGovern was referring to the fact that to qualify to run for the Senate in the US you have to be at least 30 years old. His argument still rings true today. Who are we to stand in this chamber and espouse the virtues
of fighting for what we think is right, when we are not the people who could lose our lives turning that rhetoric into reality? Has the world learnt its lessons about war? No. I fear for our troops, and I fear for the victims of war that this conflict will create. I am talking about the dead, the wounded, the homeless and the dispossessed.

I am sick of hearing the arguments that Saddam Hussein needs to be removed. We all know that. If we really cared about the people of Iraq we would have removed him after the 1991 Gulf War. That was when he was the aggressor, and that was when there was UN backing to deal with his aggression. Let us for one moment reflect that the Iraqi people would not have had to suffer for another 11 years under his despotic rule if we had removed him. Why didn’t we remove him? The answer is simple. It was not politically expedient for the US to introduce regime change at that time. This was a mistake that has the potential to haunt us all.

Many of the justifications given for war in this debate involve human rights violations committed against the Iraqi people. How many people in this House can stand up and honestly say that they have consistently spoken out against these violations over the whole of this 11-year period? Not many. This issue is too important to engage in exercises of hypocrisy. I get angry when members lecture me in this debate about the gross human rights violations in Iraq and ask, ‘How can you stand by and let this happen?’ We were all guilty of that for the last 11 years—both sides of the House—and it is not something that we should be particularly proud of. So let us not get morally outraged all of a sudden to support this war, as it would be hypocritical.

I have spoken twice in this place about why I support peace, so I am not going to rehash those arguments. But I wish to examine another issue: what this war will do to our international reputation. I am also worried about the flow-on effects of this war in terms of our relationships with our Asian neighbours and the United States of America. Anti-war feeling in this country is running at an all-time high. I wholeheartedly support this anti-war sentiment. This war is so obviously wrong. As someone who campaigned against the war in Vietnam in the 1970s, I saw first-hand the rise in anti-American sentiment in our community at that time. As the author W.L. George said, ‘Wars teach us not to love our enemies but to hate our allies.’ Unfortunately, one of the effects of our decision to go to war will be an increase in anti-American sentiment in our community. The first signs of this are already becoming evident. What President George W. Bush seems to ignore is that, through his actions and the hawkish position he has taken, he is doing a very thorough job of inciting a wave of anti-Americanism across the globe. This is a real shame, but it is the reaction to aggressive foreign policy.

Australia will also be damaged internationally by its stand with the US and Britain. At this time there are only three countries out of the 190 members of the United Nations who will be engaging in military action. Our relationships with our Asian neighbours, already damaged by the Prime Minister’s comments post the Bali bombing, are set to get worse. On 18 March, Malaysia’s Acting Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi criticised the US government for bypassing the UN. He said that, in doing so, the US was violating the principles of international law. He said that unilateral military action aimed at regime change would amount to an illegal act of aggression, constituting an invasion of a sovereign state.

I am especially concerned by the reaction of Indonesia. The reaction of the largest Islamic country in the world, our northern neighbour, is extremely important. Since the Bali tragedy, the number of young Australian tourists travelling to Indonesia has declined. I am now worried that the decision made by this government to unilaterally attack Iraq will be construed as a direct attack on the Islamic faith by elements in Indonesia. We need to sit down and objectively analyse the way we are perceived by our neighbours. Already the newspapers in Indonesia are condemning the actions of the US and Australia, galvanising public opinion against the war and resentment towards us. In the Jakarta Post on 19 March, warnings about po-
tential instability in the region have already appeared. I quote:

Pleading for all parties to push for a peaceful solution within the next 48 hours, Jakarta said that war would destabilize the entire world. “We regret the U.S. statement as it will spark acts of violence in the region,” Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said on Tuesday after an emergency meeting with President Megawati Soekarnoputri. “We still believe a peaceful solution must be achieved as war will only create chaos around the globe,” he held.

National Police chief Gen. Dai Bachtiar said 250,000 of his officers were on alert. “We are increasing the protection of U.S., Britain and Australian interests, but so far we have yet to receive any major threats against them.”

On the Associated Press wire there is a story by Gary Schaefer in which he interviews an Islamic activist outside a Jakarta mosque. In the story he says:

An Islamic activist made a dire warning outside Jakarta’s main mosque. “Don’t blame the Muslims if the coming war in Iraq gives birth to thousands of new Osama bin Ladens,” said Habib Rizieq Shihab of the Islamic Defenders Front.

It is not only Islamic activists who are making these comments; the head of a 30 million strong moderate Muhammadiyah had the following to say:

I think it’s a very crazy, crazy declaration. I think that with this declaration Mr Bush, Mr Blair, the Spanish Prime Minister and John Howard can be categorised as war criminals.

(Time expired)

Ms LEY (Farrer) (6.46 p.m.)—I rise to support the Prime Minister’s motion on Iraq and, in so doing, to voice my own firmly held conviction that we are, as a country, doing what has to be done. However, I recognise that, while there are many in my electorate of Farrer who support the strong and principled stand of this government, there are many who do not. Many of my constituents have contacted me expressing their strong reservations about this conflict, their concerns that we have not given peace enough of a chance, their feelings that war is not the answer and that Saddam can still be persuaded by diplomatic means and their frustration that the Prime Minister has made this decision without taking into account their feelings. I bring all of their apprehension and distress to this House, and I bring it with great respect and great humility.

For those for whom war is nothing but an abomination, whatever the circumstances, I say to them: ‘When it comes to our different values and philosophies, my conscience is no better than yours.’ However, the question of whether we disarm Iraq does not lie wholly within the boundaries of conscience. At the heart of this argument there are significant moral and national security reasons for us to act. I hope that I can persuade people who reject our government’s stand to carefully consider our reasons and to respect our Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and senior ministers for setting a course and holding firmly to that course. I would prefer that we continue to be screamed at by the anti-war movement across the world, rather than adopt an alternative where we no longer stand on principle and instead associate with governments for whom wisdom is really cowardice, protecting the national interest is really ingratitude and taking a moral stand is actually the resentment of the weak.

I watched the British House of Commons debate this issue last night, and I watched Tony Blair, a Prime Minister under siege, make the case for war. Then I watched the Leader of the Opposition, Iain Duncan Smith, announce that his members would vote with the government on this issue. After agreeing with the broad security and moral arguments, he had this to say as further reason to vote with the government:

We must not deprive the troops of the support they so fully deserve.

The Leader of the British conservatives has put country before party. Sadly, we have not seen the same response in the shabby performances of our opposition here in Australia.

Speakers on the Labor side have a confusing attitude towards the relationship we should have with the US. On the one hand they are keen to recognise the value of the American alliance, saying that America is our friend; we like her and respect her. But, when it comes to choosing to support her, we will decide whether or not it suits us and
whether or not, in the words of the member for Griffith, we should ‘part company’. I do not think that this sort of fair-weather friendship is something on which we can really build a sensible foreign policy or a workable alliance for the future. We do not have the wherewithal to ‘go it alone’ with our own defence. We needed the Americans before and we cannot say that we will not need them again, or at least the promise of their association with us as a powerful reminder to those who would threaten us.

It has been suggested that the US, Britain and Australia are tearing apart the Western alliance. It is actually the French, Germans, Russians and Chinese who are inflicting grave damage on the United Nations. I wonder if the British Labour dissidents and the ‘No War’ movement would be quite so vocal if the effort to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction was being led by China or Russia? I assume the ‘America is always wrong’ lobby wants America and Britain to go home and to take its 250,000 troops off Saddam’s doorstep. What then? Clearly, Saddam will not continue with the limited cooperation he has shown so far, and North Korea will have learned an important lesson in how the new world order operates. Will the Russians and Chinese expect America to help them out in their region, with their local bully boy, North Korea?

I ask those opposed to conflict to stop looking at the past and start considering the future. We have reached the end of the line. We have done all that we could without using force. The conventional methods of containing Iraq have been a complete failure. The Iraqi government has made a mockery of every application of international law. Saddam signed the terms ending the Gulf War in 1991 and has ignored and violated them ever since. We have hung on to the United Nations; we have given them an exaggerated legitimacy that they probably do not deserve. They are not the ‘el supremo’ world court that some would have us believe. Some members are corrupt, some are failed dictatorships and they all have a variety of motives. I am not sure why the US, Australia and Britain need the permission of France, Russia or China to do this thing. Between them, France, Russia and China have invaded the Ivory Coast, made war on the Chechneyans and practically eliminated the people of Tibet, all without consulting the UN.

The Americans are the only power capable of enforcing international law. America’s military power is backed by an economy as big as the next five economies combined. It is prepared to use that power, not in the pursuit of oil or territory but in this urgent cause for a secure world. Lest it be thought that I am giving a ringing endorsement of all things American, I assure the House that this is not the case. I quote the historian Paul Hollander when he says, ‘American mass culture enshrines mindlessness, triviality, the cult of violence, a shallow sentimentality and a pervasive entertainment orientation.’ These things are true, in varying degrees, and, unfortunately, a great deal of the world forms its opinion from the successful export of this culture. It is a pity that America’s and the West’s prosperity, their constitutional liberty, their enlightened and civilised democracy and their individualism and freedom are not equally apparent.

In 1961, the year I was born, the country of my birth, Nigeria, was about one year on from gaining independence, free of the British colonial rule. The handover was not bitter. The British, including my father, stayed on to assist with the transition. At this time there were windmills pumping fresh water, a review of criminal and civil law was taking place in conjunction with the new parliament, smallpox, polio and leprosy were well on their way to being eradicated and the public finance regime was corruption free—an era of prosperity and democracy dawned. Five years later the murder of the northern premier and prime minister ushered in a long slide into chaos, terror and disgrace. Nigeria is now a country where women can be buried up to their navels and pelted with stones until they die.

In the same year, 1961, at the height of the Cold War, the Soviets raised that ugly barrier dividing the city of Berlin—the Berlin Wall. The wall stood for many years, a bitter and constant reminder of the conflict between the free world and the enslavement of Eastern
Europe. It was a wall put up, not to keep people out but to keep them in. President Kennedy visited the wall and made his famous speech, ‘I am a Berliner’. A quarter of a century later, Ronald Reagan stood in the shadow of the wall, challenged the ‘evil empire’ and said those famous words: ‘Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall!’ Those words were like a red rag to the peace protesters, protesting against the Star Wars build-up and cruise missiles. ‘There Reagan goes again,’ they said, ‘making another of those horribly naive statements.’ The cartoonists and the media went to work lampooning and ridiculing. The protestors who chained themselves to the gates of Greenham Common had no idea how much the people who inhabited the miserable, corrupt regimes of Eastern Europe hated them or what it meant to the oppressed people of the Soviet bloc when Reagan challenged the Soviet bloc with his own missiles, inviting it to join an arms race that it could not win.

The point I make when describing the fall from grace of Nigeria and the freedom brought to Eastern Europe is that the West has forgotten the lessons of history. We should not be afraid to take a moral position, to say that we are intervening on humanitarian grounds, that evil should not be allowed to flourish and that everyone, not just the West, has a right to live in a decent country. Through a policy of strength, maintaining a military capability, the West gradually exhausted the communist system. Firm resolution won where compromise and appeasement failed. The multilateral, United Nations, liberal approach—the approach of negotiation, containment, compromise, protocols, communiques and charters—has not worked. I will tell you what it has done: it has given us Rwanda, Srebrenica and 12 years of playing hide-and-seek with Iraq. I will take a world policed by the United States and its allies every day over one in which I have to rely on the guys in the blue helmets to keep me safe.

I have witnessed the various peace marches and protests over recent days and weeks and I noted the large-scale student protests across NSW recently. Students from some high schools in my electorate marched—I am sure with the support of their parents and teachers. I would like to say something to the school girls in these protests, so boldly characterised by the three who were photographed on the front page of the Australian with bare midriffs on which was scrawled ‘Make Love Not War’ and who proudly carried the banners of the Socialist Party of Australia. What I want to say to these young women is: be careful what you wish for. As you stand at the brink of your lives in this lucky country, so bright and so full of promise, spare a thought for the women of Iraq—women who do not live in a free country as you do. Sixty-five per cent of the Iraqi population are women. When some of the provinces were liberated after the first Gulf War, Iraqi women went inside the jails. They found not just men, but women and children as well. They found torture chambers where there were human meat grinders, chemical pools in which people were dissolved and rooms set aside for sexual abuse. Many women enter these prisons when they are 15 to 24 years old. Some manage to get out years later with two, three or four children because of the rape that they are subjected to every day. I say to the women of Australia who protest this war: many Iraqi women are desperate for the American-led forces to remove this regime. One refugee has said, ‘Saddam’s survival is Iraq’s death.’

I am proud that this side of the House is working towards a day when all of the people of the new Iraq, led by the international community of goodwill, can assist Iraq to take its place as a free world nation, founded on the rule of law and of equal rights for all its citizens. I say to the protesters: in exercising your choice and the free will that is yours to protest, you drink deeply from the springs of liberty and freedom, a liberty and freedom you would deny to others.

The arguments about the convergence of weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism have been eloquently and convincingly made. In support of those arguments I ask the House to simply consider this line of thought, put forward by Charles Krauthammer from the Washington Post Writers Group. On a planet that has been around for four billion years, we have cre-
ated the means to destroy ourself in less than 100. These are the stakes. The question is simple. (Time expired)

Ms GILLARD (Lalor) (6.56 p.m.)—During this debate, the Howard government has made one of its key justifications for going to war the brutal nature of the Saddam Hussein regime. This was a theme of the Prime Minister’s address to the National Press Club and his speech in this place yesterday. It was also a theme of Minister Ruddock’s speech to this parliament in the debate yesterday and has been alluded to in the contribution immediately before me.

I agree wholeheartedly that Saddam Hussein is a brutal, bloody dictator. As I have said before in this parliament, the world would be a better place if Saddam Hussein had never been born. But I cannot allow to go unremarked the hypocrisy and the double standards that characterise the Howard government’s approach to the suffering of the Iraqi people. When these people are in Iraq, about to meet whatever fate one can expect during an intense military conflict, the Howard government is full of the rhetoric of compassion. But when called to deal not with a mass of faceless people but with real individuals, Iraqi asylum seekers who need help, the rhetoric of the Howard government is soon exposed as hollow.

Minister Ruddock said in the House yesterday that of the Iraqi asylum seekers who had refugee claims processed in Australia ‘ninety-seven per cent were successful in obtaining a protection visa’. The minister put this proudly, as if it verified the Howard government’s compassionate approach. But what the minister failed to mention is that over the life of the Howard government, the Refugee Review Tribunal has had a set-aside rate of 81 per cent in relation to departmental decisions about the refugee claims of Iraqis. This means that immigration department officials made incorrect decisions 81 per cent of the time when dealing with Iraqi applications. Given that no-one ever appeals a favourable decision, this means that the department had a culture of rejecting Iraqi claims, and the Refugee Review Tribunal had to deal with these incorrect rejections. This set-aside rate of 81 per cent is one of the highest set-aside rates at the Refugee Review Tribunal. The department has consistently got it wrong and meted out negative decisions to Iraqi asylum seekers when the law required positive decisions.

The truth is that Australia’s high acceptance of Iraqi asylum seekers has been achieved despite the Howard government, the minister for immigration and the department he oversees. Yesterday in the House, the minister for immigration referred to the Iraqis who had sought protection as refugees in Australia and failed to obtain it. He said: Among those who failed—and I think the figure was about 86—we have seen some returns.

He went on to say:

Not one Iraqi has been returned to Iraq by way of government action.

But the truth was exposed in Senate estimates on 11 February this year in an exchange between Senator Sherry and Mr Bill Farmer, the secretary of the department of immigration. The question asked by Senator Sherry was:

How is the department proposing to return them to Iraq? There is no agreement with Iraq, is there?

Mr Farmer replied:
The individuals can return to Iraq under a number of circumstances. They can go to a country like Jordan and cross the border, for example.

This is not the only verification that the government gets people to return to Iraq.

The immigration department has stated its view that it is safe for people from Iraq to return to northern Iraq. This was highlighted by Mr Bill Farmer at Senate estimates and is a view that has been stated in some recent letters of rejection to Iraqi asylum seekers. In fact, an applicant was rejected by the department because the department had the view that the applicant was safe to go to northern Iraq. The department deemed that it was safe for this applicant to go to northern Iraq even though this person had never lived there, had no family living there and was not Kurdish. When I say ‘the department’, can we remind ourselves that, under our system of government, this is the department for which the minister is responsible, the department for which the government is responsible.
How can this government say on the one hand that this regime is one of the most brutal, yet this government, as recently as February this year, has had a policy of dropping people in neighbouring countries so that they can find their own way back to Iraq? How can this government talk about torture and human rights abuse in Iraq and say that it is safe to go back to any part of Iraq? This is the height of hypocrisy. In the debate on Iraq yesterday, 18 coalition members spoke on human rights abuses in Iraq and relied on them as a justification for war. To those members I say this: how does it feel to be part of a government that sends people back there?

But the story of hypocrisy does not end there. Many members of this place will have heard the recent disturbing reports of an Iraqi man who was a stowaway on a commercial ship. It seems that, when he came to the attention of the department of immigration in December last year, the officials who interviewed him formed a view that he had not sought to invoke Australia’s protection obligations. A stowaway from Iraq was not seeking protection, in their view. What were these officials thinking? Their next course of action was to serve the ship’s captain with a notice saying that it was his duty to stop the young man reaching shore or face a $10,000 fine. At one stage a private firm of security guards were hired to prevent him from leaving the ship. It was only when union officials contacted migration lawyers, who then went onto the ship and completed an application for a protection visa, that this man was allowed to remain in Australia while a refugee claim was properly processed. That is right: we are talking here about lodging an application—this man being allowed to have his claims assessed. The department did almost everything it could to stop the young man reaching shore or face a $10,000 fine. At one stage a private firm of security guards were hired to prevent him from leaving the ship.

If the Prime Minister is as concerned as he makes out about the human rights of the Iraqi people he must not only speak about it but be ready for the human tragedy that will, without a doubt, result from the war in which he has engaged Australia. The Prime Minister is seriously out of touch if he believes that Iraqi people will not flee from Iraq as a result of this conflict. We already know from very credible international aid agencies that they are expecting hundreds of thousands to do so. He is also seriously deluded if he thinks Iraqi people will rush to return to a war zone.

How much money will this government put to the task of dealing with this looming human tragedy? To date, it has been a paltry $10 million and none of that has gone to the United Nations High Commissioner for
Refugees. Is this government’s stated commitment to compassion going to turn into real action any time soon? I leave that for government members to answer. I trust in the speeches that follow that, instead of the hypocrisy, we will actually learn about those commitments.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (7.06 p.m.)—No-one goes lightly to war. It is the most frightening of all concepts, especially for those on the front line and their loved ones at home. I open my remarks in the sober realisation that our country is embarking on a momentous and dangerous endeavour. But more dangerous than that would be to do nothing and hope that Saddam Hussein and his evil regime would act honourably. We all know that he has not and that he will not. What would be even more dangerous again would be to believe that, if Iraq gets away with thumbing its nose at the UN and the international community in general, other rogue states would not do the same. The spectre of North Korea destabilising the Asia Pacific region excites my deepest anxieties. Potentially, that could be a most harmful and dangerous threat to this country.

As I outlined in my previous contribution on this subject, we must learn the lesson of history—a history as recent as the 1930s and 1940s when Hitler occupied the Rhineland; claimed Sudetenland; annexed, by one means or another, Czechoslovakia and Austria; and was poised to take Poland before the free world said, ‘Enough’. Still, at that time, we appeased him. We had people saying that there was no evidence that Hitler had any predatory intentions. One Australian cleric said that Adolf Hitler was raised up by Almighty God to deliver the German people. Good heavens, that was one of our own clerics. The Jewish people were being sent to ‘resettlement’ in the east. There was no resettlement; there were only concentration camps. People still did not want to believe. Lord Halifax, who might otherwise have been the Prime Minister, was in the Churchill cabinet. He begged Churchill, even after the war commenced, not to do it. All the while, the Germans were building up their capacity to deliver the blitzkrieg. Stuka bombers and panzer tanks were being manufactured at a frenetic pace. After Chamberlain’s futile attempt at appeasing Hitler for the final time in 1938, Hitler said: We have now armed to such an extent as the world has never before seen.

Do we seriously want Saddam Hussein armed with chemical and biological weapons to an extent that the world has never before seen? What seems to worry the opposition and a number of academics is that we might be in breach of international law on this endeavour. The International Institute of Strategic Studies, in its September analysis last year, pointed out that the United Nations Security Council resolution 687, passed in April 1991, established a formal ceasefire between coalition forces and Iraq. Key amongst the terms of that ceasefire was the prohibition of Iraq retaining, acquiring or developing weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles. Iraq had to unconditionally accept the destruction, removal and rendering harmless of these weapons under international supervision. Iraq was also required to submit within 15 days a declaration of all weapons of mass destruction sites and items. Clearly, this did not happen. We would not be destroying intercontinental missiles today were that the case. Nor did it happen with 16 other UN resolutions, to say nothing of resolution 1441, which supposedly was Saddam Hussein’s last chance.

The International Institute of Strategic Studies also found that the war sanctions and inspections had reversed and retarded but had not eliminated—and I stress ‘not eliminated’—Iraq’s nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and long-range missile capabilities. Nor had they removed Baghdad’s enduring interest in developing these capacities. Chillingly, the report concluded that the retention of weapons of mass destruction capacities by Iraq was self-evidently—and note this—the core objective of the regime, for it had sacrificed all other domestic and foreign policy goals to this singular aim. Numerous people have spoken today about how badly the Iraqi people have been treated.

At the risk of being repetitive, we need to know what Iraq has done with the following items: 6,500 chemical munitions; 8,500 litres
of anthrax; 650 kilograms of bacterial
growth media that could make another 5,000
litres of anthrax; 360 tonnes of bulk chemical
agent; 1.5 tonnes of VX; and 3,000 tonnes of
precursor chemicals. That said, up until
Tuesday, members of the coalition of the
willing worked through the United Nations
processes. We supported resolution 1441,
which was supposed to be the last chance for
Iraq. We supported weapons inspectors and
their unfettered access to sites. If it had not
been for American, British and Australian
troops in the Middle East—and Kofi Annan
readily accedes to this proposition—we
would not have had inspectors in Iraq over
the last few months.

We supported the prospect of a new, clear
and definitive resolution, but that was not to
be. The French made sure of that. That is the
same France that was exploding nuclear
weapons in the Pacific in defiance of the Pa-
cific nations. It is also the same France that
took peremptory action on the Ivory Coast a
few months back. Now the French lecture us
and would not consider a new resolution un-
der any circumstances. They said Saddam
had been contained. Of course he had been
contained: the inspectors were back in again
and an army was on his doorstep.

We now face a complex situation—and it
is Saddam Hussein’s doing, not ours. We
should not forget that this regime tortures its
own citizens. It gouges out eyes, drips acid
on skin, indulges in rape and cuts out the
tongues of dissidents. It is a cruel, despotic
dictatorship and it is significant that, as re-
cently as the last week, Iraqi-born Aus-
tralians and their families have protested in fa-
vour of removal of the regime. Against this
background, I was drawn to an article by
Christopher Pearson in the 

*Weekend Australian* on 15 March. In it he quotes Richard
Neuhaus, editor of the respected journal *First
ting*, who says:

As St Thomas Aquinas and other teachers of the
just war tradition make clear, war may sometimes
be a moral duty in order to overturn injustice and
protect the innocent.

He also takes up a theme that I put to the
House in my previous contribution on this
issue, and that is that if the UN cannot en-
force its own resolutions it is likely to go the
way of the League of Nations. The threat of
war has obviously brought out the best and
worst in people in this country. I think that
the *Weekend Australian* articles by Chris-
opher Pearson, Paul Kelly, Matt Price—and a
number from the British *Observer*—although
they did not all agree on the concepts,
showed the depth of Australian journalistic
analysis.

That stands in stark contrast to the opposi-
tion, which indulged in populist rhetoric,
exaggerated anti-Bush sentiment and embel-
lished emphasis on the role of the UN. But
sadly, yesterday, when our country was at the
crossroads on this dangerous issue, the oppo-
sition could not seize the gravity of the mo-
ment. Members of the opposition heckled the
Prime Minister and defied the Speaker, while
hundreds of thousands of Australians out
there wanted to hear a reflective, measured
response from the alternative government.
They did not get it. Whether you agreed with
the Prime Minister’s proposition or not was
not the issue. It was a seminal moment for
our country and for its armed forces, and it
deserved a sober and mature response.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (7.16 p.m.)—In
rising to say a few words tonight on interna-
tional police action in Iraq, I should say that
to me this is really about the defence of Aus-
tralia. The Prime Minister quite rightly said
on *60 Minutes* that we are a very small coun-
try and that we would have great difficulty in
defending ourselves from a serious threat.
Therefore, it behoves us to stay close to the
United States in every possible way as far as
defence and these issues go. If we were to
say to them that we were too busy to help out
in Iraq, it could well be that they would give
us a similar rejoinder at some point in the future.

I cannot help but rise tonight to remember again the absolutely appalling conduct of a former Prime Minister of Australia, Mr Curtin, who not only was so irresponsible with respect to the defence of his own country but also is on record in this place actively supporting the then tripartite group of bandits—Mr Stalin, Mr Hitler and Mr Mussolini—because, of course, they represented socialist countries. He took a very strong line, as did the International Socialist Movement, on behalf of the people of those countries. Three times in this place he voted down increases in the budget for defence, using his numbers to do that. Then, when the war broke out, he allowed all four of our divisions to leave. Three went to defend the Libyan Desert—though I do not know why it needed defending—and a naval dockyard that had no ships in it and was never likely to have ships in it. He was incredibly irresponsible in his attitude.

Winston Churchill made a very famous statement that we hear often: those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it. In Australia here today we are once again picking a fight with and provoking a certain group of people in the world who are of Muslim persuasion. In so doing we are more than morally justified in going in. People here are acting in a way that can be interpreted as saying that there should be no interference in Iraq. We are talking about a man who has the deaths of maybe a million people or more on his conscience. He invaded Iran and precipitated a war in which many hundreds of thousands of people died. He invaded Kuwait and precipitated a war in which many of his own people died. And that is without coming to the matter of the domestic oppression inside his own country. Clearly there is a case here for action against this man, whether it goes this far or not.

But my concern is not with Iraq. My concern is with Australia. If you keep provoking a certain group of people continuously and unrelentingly, you are building up a fund of hatred. The First World War was to get even for what the British had done in the Boer War concentration camps. The Germans very closely identified with the Dutch people, and 28,000 women and children died in those concentration camps. If you keep sticking it into a group of people continuously, you cannot be surprised when they try to get back at you.

Let us turn to East Timor. I am not saying that going into East Timor was a bad decision. It was a morally courageous decision, and people associated with it should be applauded. But they should not be applauded for the fact that, when we went in there, we had one operational submarine, no radar and 50,000 silly little plastic rifles, which the SAS quite rightly has refused to take to Afghanistan and has now refused to take to Iraq as well. That was what we had to defend this country with—although we did have an adequate Air Force.

Theodore Roosevelt had a wonderful saying: ‘Speak softly and carry a big stick.’ We have had a very loud voice of moral outrage and involvement in international affairs, but we have no stick at all. I must be very specific here. I would be letting the people of Australia down if I did not say these things. I most certainly would not be fit to tie the bootlaces of a person like Winston Churchill. Let me say that Winston Churchill said again and again, ‘There is a very dangerous situation arising with Germany and Europe and we must arm.’ He was completely ignored. He was laughed at, shouted down and criticised. He was a minority of one in the British House of Commons when he said, ‘We should be armed.’ In sharp contrast, the leader of the government, Mr Chamberlain, went back with his famous letter and waved it around, and the entire House of Commons broke into spontaneous applause. He was their hero—‘Peace in our time.’

We had four divisions to defend this country when 56,000 Japanese were massed on the Malaysian peninsula. What were they there for—a holiday in Thailand? Of course everyone knew what they were there for. The government of this country were so remiss in their duties and responsibilities that the three divisions were in the Libyan Desert. One was defending a naval dockyard which it had absolutely no hope of defending and which had no ships in it. Not one single division
was back here protecting this country. We hear people applauding Mr Curtin, but I have to say that we are repeating this today. This country has no ability to defend itself whatsoever. It is a joke. If there are people here criticising this government for being tied to America, I would like to know what the alternative is at the present moment. I would like to know what their alternative is—to have no friends and no defence? That seems to be the alternative that they are offering the parliament today.

Stiglitz, in his book *Globalization and its discontents*, outlines the destruction of the Indonesian economy by the interference of the IMF, which is basically another name for the American banks. He is not anti-American—far from it—he was head of the President’s Council of Economic Advisers, he won the Nobel Prize for economics two years ago and he was head of the World Bank. He is a very patriotic American. Chalmers Johnson is also a very patriotic American. His book on Japan, *MITI and the Japanese miracle: the growth of industrial policy, 1925-1975* is a very famous textbook throughout the world. Chalmers Johnson makes the same point: interference by the IMF and the American banks completely destroyed the Indonesian economy.

Rupert Murdoch took three-quarters of a whole page in one of his newspapers to say the same thing and criticised the Australian government—because we backed the American intervention in the economy of Indonesia. Pre-intervention there was an income of $1,600 per person; intervention left the Indonesian economy in a situation where there was an income of $1,000 per person. That was how bad the wreckage was.

I think the intervention in East Timor was more than morally justified, but I can clearly see how a person in Indonesia would take very great umbrage at what occurred there. Some 230 million people are jammed onto six tiny little islands, and we take half of one of the islands off. From their point of view, they would say, ‘Why?’ Because these people are part European and Christian—that’s why.’ This would be very provocative to the people of Indonesia.

Finally, with great passion I will put it to this House for the four millionth time: you are living in an empty country. There is a golden boomerang which is highly populated; beyond that the other 84 per cent of this continent does not have many more people than were here when Captain Cook arrived. Let me be specific and say that about 660,000 people live in this empty continent—that is, on 84 per cent of the surface area of this continent. As Professor Richard Blandy put it in a very excellent article in the *Weekend Australian* some years ago:

How much longer will the rest of the world, a fair-minded rest of the world, continue to accept a situation in which one-third of the population of our neighbouring country, Indonesia, goes to bed hungry of a night ...

That is while we sit on resources in the Gulf of Carpentaria alone which have the ability to feed 100 million people. That is not a figure gratuitously plucked out of the air. These things need to be addressed. *(Time expired)*

Mr NAIRN *(Eden-Monaro)* *(7.26 p.m.)*—As with the previous debate on the Iraqi crisis held in February, it is important that I make a contribution to the debate on this motion. As I said on 5 February, it is important to put my views on the public record and also to inform the House of the representations I have received from people who live in my electorate of Eden-Monaro. The government’s decision to commit our armed forces to a probable conflict in Iraq was clearly a difficult decision to make and one that was not made lightly. The motion before the House reflects that decision of the government and I will be supporting the motion.

Much of what I said in the debate in February still applies. No-one wants war, but the reality of life is that this problem in Iraq was never going to be finalised without some use of force. The facts are clear-cut and cannot be denied. If 17 United Nations resolutions and 12 years in time have not succeeded in achieving what was agreed by the world community, more time and more resolutions will simply further encourage Saddam Hussein to continue his brutal dictatorship. This dictatorship has seen hundreds of thousands
of Iraqis tortured, raped, abused and executed—Iraqis like the 5,000 killed and 20,000 injured in the town of Halabja, which was sprayed with chemical bombs by Sad- dam’s regime. This dictatorship pays the families of suicide bombers, plays games with the world community and would probably be amused to see the lack of will amongst some of that community to honestly address Iraq’s non-compliance.

Australia’s provision of troops demonstrates our support for eliminating one of the sources of weapons of mass destruction—weapons that would inevitably fall into the hands of terrorist organisations. The United States, Britain and Australia, along with a multitude of supporting countries—in fact, at least another 28 countries—clearly have the authority of several United Nations Security Council resolutions to take action against Iraq. In 1990, resolution 687 authorised member states to use all necessary means to force Iraq to leave Kuwait and to:

... restore international peace and security in the area.

We all remember that Iraq ignored that reso- lution, the Gulf War ensued and Kuwait was liberated. Resolution 687 was the cease-fire resolution which called on Iraq to disarm and also reaffirmed resolution 678. Iraq has never complied with resolution 687, so the conditions of the cease-fire have been broken. Effectively, there is no cease-fire. The more recent resolution 1441 says that resolution 678 is still valid and specifically repeats its terms, which authorise members ‘to use all necessary means’—

Debate interrupted; adjournment proposed and negatived.

**Mr NAI RN**—I repeat: ‘to use all necessary means ... to restore international peace and security in the area’. The appropriate legal people in Australia, Great Britain and the United States all agree that any force taken to disarm Saddam Hussein is absolutely in accordance with UN Security Council approval by way of these resolutions. The use of force to disarm Iraq is also justified on humanitarian grounds. The abuse of the Iraqi people by this brutal regime cannot be allowed to continue.

I mentioned that it was important that the representations made by people living in my electorate also be raised in this debate. Over a number of months, I have had a reasonable number of people telephoning, faxing, writing and emailing me on this issue. The majority have been opposed to any military ac- tion, but not all. Since Tuesday’s announce- ment the number of people contacting my office has increased but, interestingly, the number of people who believe that the gov- ernment has made the correct decision has also increased.

A couple of weeks ago I met with a dele- gation from Queanbeyan who wanted to put the point of view of people who had attended a number of rallies in Queanbeyan. At one of those rallies there had been some criticism that I had been silent on this issue. Unfortu- nately, the person making that criticism had not bothered to check the *Hansard*. The par- liament is the most appropriate place for a federal member of parliament to express his or her views, along with his or her constitu- ents’ views, on important issues. Another group that has been active within my electorate is the Monaro People for Peace. They also have organised rallies and meetings and, more recently, forwarded me a letter and a petition signed by 286 people opposing mili- tary action in Iraq. As requested, I will or- ganise to have the petition presented, al- though it is not in the correct form.

While I understand these and all the other people who have contacted me opposing the provision of troops, I remain supportive of the government’s action. However, I am dis- appointed that there appears to be a signifi- cant omission in the majority of representa- tions and public displays opposing the fed- eral government’s actions. The same omis- sion appears in all that the Labor Party says, particularly in the contributions from the other side during this debate. The omission is Saddam Hussein. People have gone to great trouble to make puppets of George Bush and John Howard depicting them in the most demeaning way possible, but there has been no puppet of Saddam, no placards condemn- ing Saddam and no recognition of the brutal- ity inflicted on the Iraqi people by Saddam. There is great concern for the civilians of
Iraq in any conflict. But where is the concern for the same citizens who have been systematically abused and will not be safe if Saddam Hussein is allowed to continue?

The other omission by the Labor Party in this debate is any reference to Tony Blair. The word ‘Blair’ did not pass the lips of the Leader of the Opposition during his contribution to the debate on this motion. In fact, the hypocrisy of the Labor Party throughout the past months on this issue has been outstanding. I give you one small example. The member for Kingsford-Smith spoke in this House back in 1998 when Australia, at the request of the United States, sent troops to the Middle East. There was no new UN resolution at the time, I might add, and the Labor Party was happy to agree with President Bill Clinton and PM Tony Blair. The member for Kingsford-Smith, referring to resolution 687 and another resolution, 707, said:

Iraq’s refusal to allow UNSCOM immediate and unrestricted access constitutes a most serious challenge, indeed a complete and direct challenge, to the authority of the United Nations. It was a clear breach of the terms and conditions of the 1991 cease-fire—terms which had been explicitly accepted by Iraq. Faced with such a breach, the United States and the United Kingdom were clearly entitled to look back to the underlying resolution—that is, resolution 678, which authorised the use of all necessary means to liberate Kuwait and ‘to restore international peace and security in the area’. Resolution 678 is still in force.

That was the member for Kingsford-Smith in 1998 when troops were sent to the Middle East. He and the Labor Party now refute that. What hypocrisy!

I also note that during the Prime Minister’s contribution, when the Prime Minister mentioned the plight of the Iraqi people, I heard the member for Kingsford-Smith call out something like, ‘And there are refugees as well.’ The implication was that Iraqi asylum seekers were not accepted in Australia. The Minister for Immigration knocked that on the head in his speech, as I think the figure for recent years was that 97 per cent of Iraqi asylum seekers in Australia have been successful in obtaining protection visas. So enough of the hypocrisy.

In closing, I recognise Australia’s defence forces and the great job that they do on our behalf. I sincerely hope that all Australians will give our troops 100 per cent support in their role in the Middle East. They deserve that support, as do their families and loved ones here in Australia—and there are plenty of them in my electorate. I support the motion moved by the Prime Minister.

Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (7.36 p.m.)—In my first contribution on the issue of Iraq, in September last year, I began my comments with the following statement:

If we have learned anything from the wars of the last century, it is that we should be quite certain that military engagement is contemplated only as the very last resort. The Australian people rightly expect that any decision by their government to commit troops to a conflict—that is, to risk lives and to take lives—must be based on a dispassionate assessment of the evidence at hand.

I ended my comments with the following statement of my belief:

A new consensus is emerging in the international community that any action against Iraq needs to be undertaken within the context of the United Nations. It is in our national interest to continue to promote an international framework for peace and security in this very troubled world.

Six months later, I still hold very firmly to these two basic principles—that war should only ever be contemplated as a last resort and that we, as a middle order power in the world, should continue as we have done historically to work through the processes and abide by the authority of the United Nations.

The Howard government has not adhered to these two fundamental principles; indeed, it has disregarded them. The goal of disarming Saddam Hussein and getting rid of his store of weapons of mass destruction is a goal that is shared by all in this chamber, and this was feasible and possible by the continuation of the work of the UN inspectors. The Prime Minister of our nation has not made out the case for war, particularly as not all the peaceful alternatives had been exhausted before the decision to commit
military conflict. Hans Blix reported to the UN that progress was being made, although not without some difficulties. But at no stage did Dr Blix or his colleague, Mr ElBaradei, state that in their view Iraq had failed to comply with resolution 1441. In fact, Hans Blix stated on 7 March to the UN Security Council that more time was needed to complete their work. I quote from his statement:

It would not take years, nor weeks, but months. Neither governments nor inspectors would want disarmament inspection to go on forever.

So why has this government not agreed to the extra time that was sought by the inspectors who were entrusted with the responsibility of disarming the regime? If the goal of disarmament could be achieved peacefully and by non-violent means, why has this government turned its back on those approaches in favour of war? There has been no adequate explanation; no justifiable reason for this departure from accepted protocols and for walking away from the authority of the United Nations. Why has our nation joined the so-called coalition of the willing in a war on Iraq in the face of opposition by members of the UN Security Council? Why, when our nation has a proud record of being an exemplary member of the international community and a traditional supporter of international institutions and international law, is it now that we are walking away from those very important international commitments and obligations? Again, no reasonable explanation has been forthcoming.

It is easy for government members to vilify the role of the French government, but it was not alone in rejecting the approach being pursued by the United States. In fact, the reason why they did not put the second resolution to the Security Council was because they were unable to get the majority support required to have it carried by the UN Security Council. Interestingly enough, despite the vilification of the French, the French foreign minister suggested as late as 16 March that the weapons inspectors should be given a finite period of time to complete their work and that this should be underscored by military force if necessary. He said:

… in 1441 there are two stages and President Jacques Chirac gave the inspiration of the resolution 1441 at the beginning of September. He said very clearly that we must respect the two stages. The first stage is the time for inspections. On the report of the inspectors we must analyse how Iraq has reacted. While we are in this time of inspection, of course, we need to have progress. We need to have active cooperation. That’s where we are today.

He went on to say:

In case of a failure, if we are in a deadlock, then it’s different. We are entering the second stage and then we have to take full responsibility with all the members of the Security Council, examine all the options, including you mentioning the serious consequences, including the use of force, and we support the idea.

Let me reiterate that the position of the French government—and many other governments—was that, in the event of failure to comply, if we were in a deadlock situation, then the alternatives underpinned by the possibility of military force still existed. A peaceful resolution was still possible, and not even the French had ruled out the use of force in the absence of continued and active cooperation on the part of Saddam Hussein. I again say that our Prime Minister has not made out the case for war, particularly as the nonviolent alternatives have not been fully explored. It is a grave tragedy for our nation that our country is joining what our leader has described as the ‘the immoral minority’ and turned its back on ‘the moral majority’.

Simply put, in the time I have: I oppose the war. It is neither in our national interest nor in the interests of our national security. There is no evidence that Iraq poses a threat to Australia or its allies. There is no proven link between the horrendous events of September 11 and of the Bali bombings and the regime in Iraq. It will not make our nation a safer place from the threat of terrorism. It has the potential to seriously damage our relations with our immediate neighbours in our region. It is likely to further destabilise the Middle East. It sets a very dangerous precedent for global pre-emptive military action against other nations, many of whom also possess weapons of mass destruction. It reinforces the idea that ‘might is right’. It represents the abandonment of 50 years commitment to the rule of law at the international level. And it will have very unacceptable
humanitarian consequences, which I outlined when I spoke on this matter in February this year.

We are told that in the first 48 hours we will see the greatest barrage of guided missiles and target-seeking bombs in history, with 800 cruise missiles and 3,000 so-called smart bombs dropped from high-flying warplanes every 45 seconds. No wonder the Pentagon planners dub this unceasing onslaught of their missiles as the ‘shock and awe campaign’. This, we know, could have been avoided. The war is immoral, for it is the long-suffering and innocent people who have been the victims of the brutality of Saddam Hussein who will now live through this nightmare and face its consequences both in the short term and for the rest of their lives.

As best as I can ascertain, my personal views are in tune with the sentiments of my electorate. Recently I did a survey which showed that 83 per cent believe that more should be done to seek a diplomatic solution; 92 per cent support the processes of the UN; 82 per cent say the war would not make Australia safer from terrorist attacks; 62 per cent would agree to troops going in if the UN agreed; and an overwhelming 80 per cent oppose the commitment of troops without UN authority.

In my view, there is no justifiable argument for war; none has been produced in this House. The PM has not made out the case for war, particularly when nonviolent alternatives were yet to be explored. The war is not in our national interest. It is not our war. It is a wrong war and that is why I will continue to oppose the government’s decision to commit our troops to this conflict that now befalls our nation. I think it is a very tragic situation for our country. Like other members on this side of the chamber, I wish our forces and their families the very best. (Time expired)

FRAN BAILEY (McEwen—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence) (7.46 p.m.)—This is a debate that I believe none of us wanted. We hoped that Iraq would disarm and prove to the world that it had destroyed its terrible arsenal of biological and chemical weapons. But that was always a faint hope. We hoped that the member nations of the United Nations Security Council would speak with one voice and say to Iraq, ‘We have given you 12 years to disarm and rid the world of the threat of weapons of mass destruction’—and remember they have, until recently, spoken with one voice on this issue—but this has not happened.

One of the questions I ask with regard to this terrible problem of dealing with Iraq and the very real threat it poses to our national security is: how has an organisation that was conceived and developed for the primary purpose of preventing the evolution of rogue states like Iraq become emasculated by its members? Let me remind this House why the UN was formed and how a strength of purpose filled nations like Australia with a sense of hope and optimism for the future. In hosting the first plenary meeting on 10 January 1946, UK Prime Minister Attlee said:

The Preamble to the Charter of the UN sets out the ideals for which men and women laid down their lives during the war. But if the affirmation of principles is easy, the translation into action, the making of a working reality out of an ideal, is very difficult.

He went on to say:

... we have to bring to the task of creating permanent conditions of peace the same sense of urgency, the same self-sacrifice and the same willingness to subordinate sectional interests to the common good...

Fifty-seven years later, the UN—and in particular the Security Council—does not bring that sense of urgency to this decision-making process. And I must say that some members of the Security Council do not subordinate their sectional interests to the common good.

In the current crisis with Iraq, how much did France’s and Russia’s dependency on Iraqi oil determine their threatened use of the veto?

Why has the UN—an organisation formed to prevent a country like Iraq from killing and torturing its own citizens, developing WMD, encouraging terrorist activities and threatening world peace—allowed Iraq to continue unchecked and flout its authority?
That is exactly what has been allowed to happen over the past 12 years.

Let me briefly highlight how Iraq has thumbed its nose at the UN for this period. Article 42 of chapter VII of the UN Charter was used to authorise military action against Iraq in the Gulf War of 1990-91. Resolution 678 clearly provided authorisation for members of the UN to use their discretion about what means they considered were needed to implement UN resolutions—including the use of military force. History has recorded that, following such military intervention in April 1991, the Security Council adopted another resolution, 687, which clearly stated Iraq’s obligation to destroy WMD and allow UN inspectors to verify the removal and destruction of the WMD. History further records that Iraq did not cooperate with the UN weapons inspectors whose job was to verify the removal and destruction of Iraq’s WMD—not to be detectives and find the WMD for themselves. Remember that the cease-fire agreement had been brokered on the basis that Iraq would comply and disarm.

Throughout this whole period there have been three consistent facts: one, the Security Council has unanimously stated that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction; two, the Security Council has unanimously called on Iraq to comply with its resolution for Iraq to disarm itself of these weapons of mass destruction; and, three, Iraq has constantly flouted the UN by putting every obstacle in the way of the weapons inspectors and has breached all 17 of the UN resolutions for 12 years. The truly awful reality is that, as we debate this issue of forcing Saddam Hussein to disarm, his arsenal of chemical and biological weapons remains at his disposal. It includes mustards, which are blister agents that cause damage to any body tissue they contact and, if inhaled, cause death; VX, which is a toxic nerve agent that has a rapid effect when absorbed through the skin or inhaled; botulium toxins, which are the most lethal toxins known and have already been used by Iraq for contamination of food supplies and assassination; and sarin, which is a nerve agent that can kill within two to three minutes. Saddam has used these on his own people, and only the foolish would believe that he will not continue to use chemical warfare and provide it to terrorist groups. There is no guarantee that Saddam will not attempt to deliver these chemicals through his ballistic missiles. Iraq has, of course, previously admitted that it has manufactured warheads for chemical and biological agents.

There is not a shred of doubt that Saddam Hussein supported, hosted, funded and trained terrorist groups, known to include the Abu Nidal and the PLF, and he is suspected of supporting many others. His regime provides $US25,000 to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers. And yet this is the regime whose evil existence, with its proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the UN has allowed to continue. As Jack Straw, the United Kingdom’s Foreign Secretary, said in early February:

After the initial shock and horror provoked by the terrorist acts of September 11, one of my first thoughts was that there were and are no limits to the terrorists’ appetite for slaughter. If they can lay their hands on WMD they will use them. The most likely source of material and know-how are those rogue regimes which show total disregard for the rule of law and share the terrorists’ hatred of our values.

His comments are applicable to not just Iraq but also North Korea. I believe that Australians are entitled to ask: if the UN could not act to make Iraq comply to disarm after 12 years and 17 resolutions, how on earth can we have any faith that the UN will act with regard to other rogue states, including North Korea? I am bitterly disappointed in the lack of resolve by the UN to honour its founding
principles. In this world today of UN diminished capacity, the Australia-US alliance has never been more important. It is my fervent hope that the UN will realise that, just as its members had to subjugate their sectional interests for the greater good of humanity when it was formed, so too will it have to renew its purpose for existence in this changing world and reaffirm its commitment to fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of all people by being prepared to act. I support this motion and, in doing so, thank and honour the men and women of our Australian Defence Force.

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Selection Committee

Report

Mr CAUSLEY (Page) (7.56 p.m.)—I present the report of the Selection Committee relating to the consideration of committee and delegation reports and private members’ business on Monday, 24 March 2003. The report will be printed in today’s Hansard and the items accorded priority for debate will be published in the Notice Paper for the next sitting.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation reports and private Members’ business on Monday, 24 March 2003

Pursuant to standing order 331, the Selection Committee has determined the order of precedence and times to be allotted for consideration of committee and delegation reports and private Members’ business on Monday, 24 March 2003. The order of precedence and the allotments of time determined by the Committee are as follows:

COMMITTEE AND DELEGATION REPORTS

Presentation and statements

1 PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION TO CANADA AND CHINA Report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Canada and China 17 to 30 November 2002.

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made — all statements to conclude by 12.50 p.m.

Speech time limits —
Each Member — 5 minutes.

[Proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]


The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made — all statements to conclude by 1.00 p.m.

Speech time limits —
Each Member — 5 minutes.

[Proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Order of precedence

Notices

1 Mr P. E. King to move:

That this House:

(1) notes the widespread use of mobile phones in Australia, with subscriptions now at approximately 12 million;

(2) commends the Commonwealth Government and Australia’s telecommunications carriers for their cooperative action in developing measures to address the problem of loss and theft of mobile phones, including:

(a) carriers implementing IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identification) number blocking technology, which can render a lost or stolen mobile phone inoperable;

(b) examination of regulatory reform to support IMEI blocking; and

(c) encouraging greater public awareness of this problem and recommending action consumers can take to protect themselves in the event of the loss or theft of their mobile phones; and

(3) notes the success of these measures to date and the recently reported falls in the level of mobile phone theft in Australia. (Notice given 6 March 2003.)

Time allotted — 25 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mover of motion—5 minutes.
First Opposition Member speaking — 5 minutes.
Other Members — 5 minutes each.
Ms Burke to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that statistics may not reveal the true extent of the unemployment problem for the over 45’s;
(2) notes the additional impediments to gaining employment following the loss of a job for those aged over 45;
(3) notes the lack of opportunities for the older worker to change career paths and consider education and retraining before attempting to re-enter the workforce. The skills and knowledge of the older worker also need to keep pace with change so as to not alienate them from the workforce;
(4) acknowledges the benefit to employers of older workers as they generally demonstrate a greater commitment to a good employer and show competence in their dealings with customers; and
(5) calls on the Government to put in place policies that are more specific in tackling mature-age unemployment and that remove age-based discrimination and access to the labour market. (Notice given 4 February 2003.)

Mr Pyne to move:

That this House:

(1) reaffirms its support for the 30% private health insurance rebate which helps give Australians choice and is financially assisting almost 9 million Australians and their families, including one million Australians who earn less than $20,000 a year;
(2) reiterates concern over the impact of increased congestion in urban and outer urban areas on quality of life, health and access to jobs and services for Australians;
(3) emphasises the environmental gains to be made through policy measures that reduce transport emissions, especially by reducing car dependency;
(4) calls on the Howard Government to express its support for the 30% private health insurance rebate or urgently release its private health insurance policy. (Notice given 11 February 2003.)

Mr M. J. Ferguson to move:

That this House:

(1) condemns the Howard Government’s seven years of disinterest and denial on public transport as evidenced by its:
   (a) decision to add a Goods and Services Tax to fares;
   (b) failure to address the FBT disincentives on public transport fares;
   (c) failure to give urban buses a fair go under the Diesel and Alternative Fuel Grant Scheme; and
   (d) stated denial of any responsibility or consideration of public transport in the Auslink Green Paper that purports to lay the groundwork for a national transport plan;
(2) notes with concern the impact of increased congestion in urban and outer urban areas on quality of life, health and access to jobs and services for Australians;
(3) stresses that access to public transport is an issue in all regions, including regional towns and cities, impacting daily on access to jobs, education and services for Australians;
(4) calls on the Howard Government to release any policy option and research papers commissioned or undertaken by the Commonwealth that canvass policy measures and costs associated with tax and regulatory barriers to
increasing public transport usage, including the “Cost Benefit Analysis Study for Exempting Employer-Provided Public Transport from Fringe Benefits Taxation” conducted by the Australian Greenhouse Office in 2002; and

(6) calls on the Howard Government to accept a role for the Commonwealth in relation to public transport and declare that role in the Auslink White Paper due to be released this year. (Notice given 6 March 2003.)

Time allotted — remaining private Members’ business time.

Speech time limits —

Mover of motion — 10 minutes.

First Government Member speaking 10 minutes.

Other Members — 5 minutes each

[Proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins, 2 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this matter should continue on a future day.

House adjourned at 7.58 p.m.

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Williams to present a bill for an act to amend legislation relating to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation to enhance the Commonwealth’s ability to combat terrorism, and for related purposes.

Mr Anderson to present a bill for an act to amend legislation relating to the prevention of pollution from ships, and for related purposes.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley) took the chair at 9.45 a.m.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Seniors Week

Ms ELLIS (Canberra) (9.46 a.m.)—National Seniors Week is being held this week, 16 to 22 March. It is our opportunity to celebrate our 2.4 million older Australians, who are more active and contribute more to our communities than ever before. National Seniors Week is an annual community event that celebrates the valuable contribution of older people to community life in Australia. National Seniors Week also challenges society’s stereotypes around ageing and invites us all to consider our relationships with and attitudes towards the older people that we know. It is important we acknowledge that Australians aged 65 years and over lead very active lives and contribute a great deal to their communities through their volunteer work, assistance to their families and participation in their communities.

Unfortunately, this government constantly portrays our increasing ageing population as a looming crisis. One of the key triggers for the ageing panic was the Treasurer’s Intergenerational Report, which was released along with last year’s budget. According to the report:

... a steadily ageing population is likely to continue to place significant pressure on Commonwealth government finances.

Labor will not allow ageing to become a negative force in policy making in this country. Unlike the Howard government’s Intergenerational Report, Labor does not see ageing Australians through a purely financial framework that turns them into an impost on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, on the age and services pensions and on younger generations in general. The Labor Party sees our ageing population as providing a wonderful opportunity for us to reap the benefits of having an older population with experience and much to offer.

Our community benefits greatly from the experience and contribution made by older Australians. Approximately one-quarter of older Australians participate in voluntary work, and this proportion is on the rise. A report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Older Australia at a glance, found that the primary reason older people undertake voluntary work is in fact to help others in the community. More older Australians in our community are interested in lifelong learning, and as a result we all benefit. For example, there are at least 46,000 older people participating in courses provided by the University of the Third Age. In 2001, there were 866 people aged 60 and over commencing university courses.

Businesses and organisations in our community should ensure that they give older Australians opportunities to participate as much as possible. I urge older Australians who are interested to contact their local businesses and organisations and discuss opportunities for more interaction. Labor will continue to pressure the Howard government to take a more positive view of our ageing population. Labor sees healthy ageing as a positive part of our society, and I call on everyone to join in the celebrations for this year’s National Seniors Week being held this week.

New South Wales Election

Miss JACKIE KELLY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (9.49 a.m.)—The situation in Iraq has overshadowed, and will overshadow, other topics in the me-
The Carr government made a raft of promises at the last election, which have not been honoured. Our schools are still operating out of demountables. They are still unairconditioned in the heat of summer and, even worse, we are seeing some class sizes of 42 children with only a teacher’s aide. We are also seeing a woeful lack of qualified teachers. Some schools in my electorate are several weeks into the school year before classes are assigned a permanent teacher. Recently, the New South Wales opposition leader, John Brogden, visited the Nepean Hospital. In the wake of his visit, several people contacted my office, including one woman who has been waiting 18 months for a double knee reconstruction. She has been told she has to wait another 12 months. Another woman has been waiting 12 months for a hip replacement, and she has been told she has to wait another 18 months. One man has been waiting 12 months for a nasal operation, and he has to wait another 18 months. Generally, there is a 2½-year waiting list for operations involving elective surgery.

With respect to youth crime, in the Emu Plains-Leonay area we have youth gangs. All we have seen from the state Labor government is the closing of police stations at Mount Pleasant and St Clair, focusing on PR rather than policing. At the last state election we saw a raft of police vehicles everywhere—we have not seen them since. The Premier has failed to make the people of Sydney feel safe. The rise in petty crime that costs the citizens of Mount Pleasant a hundred dollars here or a hundred dollars there when they claim, ‘This has been graffitied,’ or, ‘That is smashed,’ or, ‘That has been broken into,’ is really something we do not want to tolerate for another four years.

After years of overdevelopment and cramming more and more units into my area, the government have come out at the last minute promising ‘parkland, parkland, parkland’. To me, it sounds like an M4 tollway promise. I hope that this Saturday the electors in my area will have a good, hard look at the Labor government. Instead of allowing them to coast to victory on promises of antiwar sentiment, let us choose very good governance for New South Wales over the next four years, looking at what will be delivered in our hospitals, our schools and our law and order system. (Time expired)

Health and Ageing

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (9.52 a.m.)—The federal government’s preoccupation with Iraq has led it to neglect domestic issues in this country, none more so than the emerging crisis in aged care. In my electorate of Wills, Baptist Community Care set up the Church Nursing Home in 1995. Indeed, I recall attending its opening. It was and remains a modern, state-of-the-art facility. There are aged care facilities which are run down, but this is not one of them. It is not outdated; it is not outmoded. We discover, on investigating the issue of the recently announced plans to close this facility, that there is a crisis surrounding all 30-bed facilities. Apparently, they are now all losing money because of the federal government’s failure to support them. But we also discovered that Baptist Community Care has two 30-bed facilities, one of which is in Gippsland. Three weeks ago, they announced that both homes would have to close. This provoked a flurry of political deal-making, after which the Gippsland home was granted a reprieve and the promise of capital assistance from an emergency fund to pay for renovations and expansion.
A source involved in the negotiations credited the intervention of the science minister, Peter McGauran, with organising the deal to keep the Morwell home open while new funding and additional bed licences are stitched up. On the other hand, there was no such luck for the Brunswick home, yet I had written to and rung the aged care minister to ask him to visit this nursing home. He refused to do so. The questions that must be answered by the minister for aged care are: was there government interference and was there government intervention to keep open the Gippsland home rather than the Brunswick one? We need to have aged care beds allocated on the basis of need—which is massive in the city of Moreland—rather than pork-barrelling. If Baptist Community Care can keep open the Morwell beds, they can maintain the Brunswick beds too.

The government has established a review of pricing arrangements in the residential aged care sector, to be carried out by Professor Warren Hogan. I publicly plead with Baptist Community Care to keep the Brunswick home open while this review is under way. Why shut it now when possibly the cavalry may be near and relief may be at hand? I also call on the federal government to get serious about Australia’s domestic political issues, instead of sitting by the phone all day waiting for calls from George Bush. John Howard and Minister Andrews should come to the Baptist Church Nursing Home in Brunswick and see for themselves the damage that their policies are doing to elderly Australians who deserve better.

Moncrieff Electorate: Gold Coast

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (9.55 a.m.)—I rise today to talk about a number of issues and a number of ways in which the federal government continues to deliver for the people of the Gold Coast, Australia’s sixth-largest city. On a number of occasions now I have indicated that the Gold Coast, because of its fast-growing population, has a number of unique challenges that present themselves. In many respects, the federal government continues to make sure that the Gold Coast City Council is in a position to meet the challenges which befall it as a result of its population growth. To name but one, I was recently pleased to see that the federal government has contributed $120 million towards the construction of the Tugan bypass. This road is wholly within the ambit of the Queensland state government, yet the Queensland state Labor government, for nigh on a decade, has refused to meet its responsibilities to fund this road. We recognise the importance of this road. Margaret May was a very strong lobbyist, and I recently worked together with Margaret May, since my election, to make sure that this very important project for the Gold Coast was delivered, with $120 million from the federal government.

Likewise, the federal government has contributed record amounts of Home and Community Care funding to the Gold Coast. This means that frail aged people and disabled young people are able to retain a notion of independence in their own homes. Likewise, the federal government has contributed record places of residential aged care facilities for the aged on the Gold Coast. I put some of these things on the record because I have grown tired and frustrated with the insolence displayed by the state Labor members on the Gold Coast, who continue to defy the fact that the information that comes through media and through me to my electorate indicates that the federal government continues to contribute in a very major way to the Gold Coast.

The federal government’s performance is in stark contrast to the Queensland state government’s continued arrogance and ignorance of issues on the Gold Coast. Most recently we saw the Queensland state government thumb its nose at the law and order issues on the Gold Coast—the primary issues that come very loudly and clearly to me from over 240,000 surveys.
that I have distributed throughout my electorate. In that particular area, the Queensland government says that the Gold Coast does not need more police, despite the fact that we have the highest crime rate in the state. In fact, the Queensland police minister, Mr Tony McGrady, insulted hardworking, decent police on the Gold Coast, calling them cowards and liars. I was pleased to see that it only took approximately four days of people yelling and screaming about this to finally get the police minister to apologise and retract his comments. In the same way, the Queensland state government neglects the health needs of Gold Coasters through insufficient funding to the Gold Coast Hospital. Why would I be interested in these types of things? The reason I am interested is that the Commonwealth government, through the GST, provides funds to the Queensland state government. I will continue to hold the Queensland state Labor government accountable for this GST funding.

Banking: Macquarie Bank

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (9.58 a.m.)—The now closed Nardell coalmine in my electorate was operated by Nardell Coal Corporation, an entity wholly owned by Nardell holdings, which in turn is an entity controlled by Macquarie Investment Trust 3, an investment vehicle for Macquarie Bank. The closure of the mine has cast doubt over the entitlements of around 100 employees of the mine. It appears certain that without some external intervention a number of unsecured creditors will be unsuccessful in securing some $9 million they are owed. I raised this issue in the House last sitting week. On that occasion I chose not to attack Macquarie Bank; I was giving it the benefit of the doubt. But my further research reveals what may be one of the greatest acts of corporate bastardry I have seen in my seven years in this place.

Macquarie Bank has closed the mine, denying unsecured creditors $9 million, but of course it had total security over all of the assets of the mine. With a $250 million profit last year and $30 billion or so of assets, Macquarie Bank is okay—but the unsecured creditors have been left wanting. The interesting thing is that Nardell closed down the mine without the authority of the state minister. What it is attempting to do now is reopen the mine to enable it to close it again with the proper authority and, in turn, secure the asset, which is the mining lease. This is my concern. Nardell is now contacting unsecured creditors, asking them to come back and do work for it. My message to unsecured creditors is to boycott Nardell—potentially even picket the Nardell coalmine—to deny Macquarie Bank the opportunity to reopen the mine and resecure the asset which is the mining lease. Use that as leverage against Macquarie Bank to get it to pay out. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—Order! In accordance with standing order 275A, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 3) 2002-2003

Cognate bill:

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4) 2002-2003

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 18 March, on motion by Mr Slipper:

That this bill be now read a second time.

upon which Mr McMullan moved by way of amendment:
That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House condemns the Government for its failures in economic management, and in particular its failings in relation to both income and expenditure policies because:

(1) it is the highest taxing Government in Australian history, and:
   (a) has imposed the highest level ever of income tax;
   (b) is responsible for introducing the biggest new tax in our history; and
   (c) is addicted to imposing ever more taxes and special levies;

(2) it has failed to deliver on its basic responsibilities to the Australian people, for example:
   (a) bulk billing has collapsed;
   (b) there is chronic under-investment in our public schools, TAFE colleges and universities;
   (c) the struggle to balance work and family life continues to get harder; and
   (d) entry level housing is becoming even less affordable for struggling Australian families; and

(3) despite the record tax take, and in spite of declining Government services, the Government has failed to keep the Budget in surplus after nearly a decade of strong economic growth, in that:
   (a) it broke its unequivocal promise to keep the Budget in surplus in 2001-02;
   (b) future surpluses are dependent on the additional revenue provided by bracket creep;
   (c) it has presided over enormous waste and mismanagement including billions of dollars of foreign exchange losses and defence procurement losses; and
   (d) it has lost control over expenditure necessitating wholesale changes to the budgetary management system”.

Mr WILKIE (Swan) (10.00 a.m.)—In speaking to the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003, I would like to make some comments regarding Iraq, particularly given that we have only 10 minutes in the House to comment on that issue. Last Thursday, 13 March, was an important day for the Australian people. That was the day when the Prime Minister was supposed to make the case for war and failed. That was the day when he would not tell the truth to the Australian public about what our commitment to war was.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—The honourable member for Swan should be very careful with the word ‘truth’. He knows what the Deputy Speaker thinks of it. If he could use other words, it would be helpful.

Mr WILKIE—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I actually tempered the language of my speech, compared to what it was like before. Prior to his address to the nation, the Prime Minister promised to produce evidence that would establish a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda. He gave no such evidence. Then, to make matters worse, the Prime Minister refused to answer the question of whether Australia would go to war together with the US without UN authority. The question, of course, has now been answered with a clear ‘yes’. In his eagerness to join George Bush in a war with Iraq, John Howard is pre-empting the UN process that is attempting to disarm Iraq without a conflict. It is my belief that recourse to war can never be justified before all nonviolent solutions have been pursued. Instead of listening to the people of Australia, who, in the majority, do not want to engage in conflict with Iraq and would prefer to follow the direction of the United Nations and try to find a nonviolent solution to the situation in
Iraq, the Prime Minister is determined to follow the President of the United States into conflict with Iraq, with or without the backing of the UN. Obviously, we now know it will be without UN backing.

New details from UK intelligence reports which say there are no links between the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, and the al-Qaeda terrorist leader, Osama bin Laden, are being ignored by the British Prime Minister, our Prime Minister and the US President, as is the information from the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, who has now demonstrated conclusively that UK and US intelligence authorities relied on forged documents to support their assertions that Iraq was trying to buy uranium in Africa to restart its nuclear weapons program. Yet these forgeries have been used for months as part of the justification for an invasion.

If that is not enough and does not convince our Prime Minister, I believe it speaks volumes when one of our own senior intelligence analysts feels compelled to resign from our top-secret intelligence assessment agency in protest against Australia’s involvement in the looming war with Iraq. My namesake, Andrew Wilkie, is reported by the Australian newspaper to have said he ‘felt compelled to resign from the Office of National Assessments because he did not believe Iraq posed a serious threat to Australia’. He went on to say:

Their—
that is, Iraq’s—
military is very weak ... It’s a fraction of the size it was when (Iraq) invaded Kuwait ... Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction program is, I believe, genuinely contained. I don’t believe I can stand by any longer and take no action.

Mr Wilkie, a lieutenant colonel in the Army prior to his resignation, was, I believe, a middle-ranking bureaucrat who knew enough about US and Australian intelligence on Iraq to know what he was talking about. I believe that his information is credible and therefore should be taken into consideration.

The failure so far to find any Iraqi weapons of mass destruction reinforces Mr Wilkie’s comment to the Bulletin that Iraq’s biological and chemical program is ‘limited and disjointed’ compared with the bigger national program under way before the 1991 Gulf War. Of course, it is impossible to rule out the Prime Minister’s worst nightmare, outlined in his speech to the National Press Club last Thursday, that Iraq will give weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. Mr Wilkie’s point, however, is that Saddam is far more likely to do so as a last defiant act during an invasion, which is why war should be kept as a last option.

Earlier this month, I brought to the attention of the parliament the fact that there has been an increase in military aircraft using the Perth International Airport. The information I have managed to get is that Perth International Airport is being used to load cargo and take on fuel. I have not been able to establish what the cargo is, but I assume that it is military supplies, especially as the information I have been seeking is restricted to military personnel. My concern has been heightened, as my information is that in the last week the number of military aircraft using the airport has tripled.

The sorts of aircraft that we are talking about are not small cargo aircraft. One is the world’s largest aircraft, the Antonov An-124, with a take-off weight of 405,000 kilos and a very poor safety record. Another aircraft is the Russian Ilyushin Il-76. The Il-76 has had some 13 crashes in its history, two of which occurred this year—one in East Timor. It is unacceptable that those aircraft are using Perth airport and flying over our residential areas. Perth In-
ternational Airport ranks fourth in Australia in passenger traffic volume and it is the principal international, domestic and regional gateway to Western Australia for commercial aircraft and air freight. The airport has facilities for international and domestic air passenger operations and air freight operations and general aviation. It operates year round, curfew free, 24 hours a day. Within the airport alone there is the potential for an unmitigated disaster if one of these large military aircraft has an accident on take-off or landing.

Add to this the location of the airport. It is located close to densely occupied industrial and residential areas, complete with schools, child-care and recreation facilities, hospitals and large shopping centres. I said earlier this month that it was not unreasonable to be nervous about the use of Perth airport by the Australian and US military, given that we have had three military incidents in the Perth region in recent times. I now wish to add to that concern. War with Iraq is imminent and, as a result of our involvement in war with Iraq, there will be an increased threat to Australia from international terrorism.

I have been trying to establish whether security at Perth International Airport has been upgraded. Representatives from both the Department of Transport and Regional Services and Perth International Airport advised that security for military operations was the responsibility of the Department of Defence and therefore they could not offer any information about the current security arrangements. However, it was suggested that some private security might also be contracted to assist the guarding and patrolling of planes and their cargo whilst they were on the ground. Defence officials at the Pearce RAAF Base were reluctant to discuss security arrangements for any of the military flights, which is understandable.

Australian Protective Service patrols have been increased at the airport and a total of 31 new APS staff have been posted to those positions. That is not enough. There has been no significant increase in security. Now that the government has joined the US in its desire to engage in war with Iraq and is increasing its military use of our civilian airports as loading and transit points for military aircraft, what guarantees about their safety and security is the government prepared to give to people living close to, working at or transiting through our civilian airports? This government is prepared to put the general population at risk of accidents or acts of terrorism by the very act of allowing civilian airports to be used by the military to ferry unsafe cargoes on aircraft with dubious safety records.

This is particularly relevant in Perth, where there is an alternative. The reason most of these aircraft use Perth airport is that the runway at Pearce air base is not long enough to allow these aircraft to reach take-off speed with a full payload of cargo and fuel. As a result, the aircraft will often go to Pearce air base, load the military payload and then come down to Perth airport, refuel—remembering that, for example, an Antonov can take some 230,000 litres of fuel—and then use the main international runway in order to take off and reach their destination. However, there is an alternative. In the north of Western Australia we have Learmonth at Exmouth, which has a runway of 3.3 kilometres. That can carry any sized aircraft in the world, and it has the facilities to cater for refuelling. My view is that these aircraft, instead of using Perth airport and putting the population at risk, should be using Learmonth on their way to the gulf.

When considering issues to do with the war other people have talked about legal issues, but I would like to talk about some of the moral issues associated with this war. When asked by Melissa Doyle on the Sunrise program last week about the morality of his stand, this was the Prime Minister’s reply:

Well morally it depends, with great respect it depends on the merits of the issue. It really does. And then morality is something that in the end, each individual person and nation has to take a view on. And my
very strong view is that if Iraq is allowed to retain chemical and biological weapons, other rogue states will develop theirs. The more rogue states that have them, the greater the risk that they will get into the hands of terrorists, and if terrorists get them, they’ll use them. Now that in essence is my argument, and that is an argument that I hold to very strongly.

If that gobbledegook is the basis for committing to war with Iraq, I am even more concerned about the Prime Minister and his ability to lead this country than I was before. In the Prime Minister’s address to the National Press Club on 13 March, he said he was going to present evidence from our intelligence agencies of a link between Iraq and terrorists. Where was that evidence? I have listened to the address and I have read the transcript, but I still cannot see the evidence the Prime Minister promised.

We all know that Saddam Hussein is an evil man capable of evil acts, some of which defy imagination. The depths to which he will stoop and the misery and deprivation he inflicts on his people are well reported. However, that does not give an outside power the right to go to war. Obviously, there are things which the Prime Minister either does not understand or does not want to understand. What I am not clear about is what those things are. Does he not understand that there is no proven connection between either the September 11 attacks or the Bali attack and Iraq, or does he not understand that Iraq poses no threat in relation to its purported weapons of mass destruction to either Australia or Australian allies? Or does he perhaps not understand about the main role of government, which I have already mentioned: to create peace and security for citizens in both domestic and international relations?

The United Nations Security Council plainly does not support the decision to go to war. Labor is opposed to this war. This war is wrong, and clearly not in the national interest. I oppose this war. It does not have the sanction of the United Nations Security Council. It is not an act of self-defence. The commitment by the Prime Minister to join the US in an attack on Iraq is a clear indication that Australia has walked away from the United Nations. Taking an aggressive stand and committing to war when a peaceful solution could probably still be found is at best irresponsible and at worst criminal, according to some. The Prime Minister has blatantly disregarded popular opinion and flown in the face of the United Nations with his decision to follow the call of George Bush.

There is talk of this being a quick clean war which will be over in a couple of days or weeks. It is my opinion that there is no such thing as a quick clean war. History is full of terrible overexpectations of quick clean results, not the least being the siege of Stalingrad in World War II. War inevitably brings casualties, and this war will be no different. There will be many casualties, many of whom will be civilians, including civilian children, who by the Prime Minister’s own admission have already suffered more than many of us can even imagine.

No-one would argue that Saddam Hussein is not an evil despot who needs to be disarmed. The question is how we go about achieving that disarmament. As recently as yesterday, Hans Blix and the UN weapons inspectors said that Iraq was still destroying its al-Samoud 2 missiles and that it has destroyed 70 to date. The government is quite right when they say that it has already been 12 years; I say why not allow Dr Blix and the UN another couple of months to try and gain a peaceful solution? I believe it is important to acknowledge the progress that has already been made and to give the weapons inspectors in Iraq a chance for further progress. War must be a last resort, when every other avenue has been tried and found not to work. War should never—I repeat, never—be a starting point. Diplomacy is always a good starting point. In this case, it has been difficult, but it has been getting results.
There are a lot of people around the world who are leading evil regimes and need to be dealt with, not the least of whom, I would argue, is Robert Mugabe from Zimbabwe. But what do we do about him? We suspend him from the councils of the Commonwealth until the issue can be addressed by the heads of government at the Abuja CHOGM meeting in December. Mugabe’s is a government that continues to encourage systematic harassment and torture of the opposition and electoral malpractice. It has corrupted legal practices to the point where the rule of law in Zimbabwe no longer exists, I believe, whilst resisting the transparent, equitable and sustainable land reform program its citizens so badly need.

Knowing these terrible things about this regime, the Prime Minister did not decide that we should have a pre-emptive strike. No, Zimbabwe was dealt with in a very severe manner, showing the world what we really thought of the regime—yes, we sent the cricket team to Zimbabwe to play in the World Cup! This, I am sure, sent a severe message to Robert Mugabe in terms of not allowing him to continue with what he is doing in that country. Yes, we committed what I believe to be an outrageous act: we sent a cricket team. One can only wonder what else this Prime Minister has in store for Mugabe.

My point here is that we must ensure that, when we are dealing with evil regimes, we do it in the right way. Unfortunately, in this instance and in the Iraq instance, the Prime Minister, in his eagerness to join George W. Bush in this war with Iraq, is pre-empting the UN process of attempting to disarm Iraq without a conflict. It is in Australia’s interest to abide by the international rule of law. Last time we went into Iraq, it was under the UN banner after the invasion of Kuwait. This time, if they go into Iraq without the sanction of the UN, they will have weakened the United Nations. By this proposed action to go to war without UN sanction, there is a clear signal to rogue states. If we allow countries to act unilaterally, even in a good cause, what message does that give to the regimes that would act unilaterally in a bad cause?

The argument that this has taken 12 years and Iraq has still not got rid of the weapons of mass destruction is not valid. There have already been 12 years go by; another few months will not make a huge difference—but going to war will. North Korea has had since 1984—by my calculations, 19 years—so, using the arguments put forward by the US President and the Prime Ministers of Britain and Australia, a pre-emptive strike must be about seven years overdue. Of course, that is ludicrous—and that is my point. Does it matter how long it has been? The point should be: what can we do to correct the problem in the safest, most humanitarian way? Causing more misery for civilians who have already suffered too much by the edicts of a dictator is not the solution. To go to war with Iraq will damage relations in our region. This government has an obligation to cultivate and build relationships in the region to fight terrorism. This act will make us a target. This war will spawn more terrorism and more terrorists—not, as the Prime Minister would have us believe, reduce or do away with terrorism. This war is wrong, and the Labor Party will not be part of it. War is unnecessary, and there is an alternative.

As I said before, a recourse to war can never be justified before all nonviolent solutions have been pursued. George W. Bush, unfortunately, appears to be determined to engage in conflict with Iraq with or without the backing of the United Nations, and our Prime Minister seems equally determined to join him in that engagement. The Labor Party has argued since April—that is, almost one year ago—that there should be no military action in Iraq outside the authority of the United Nations. The Prime Minister has argued that there are valid reasons why war with Iraq is now the only option for Australia. He has failed to bring the people of Australia into his confidence as to those valid arguments and he has failed to explain to them why war is right. I commend the leader of the Labor Party’s amendment in supporting these appropriations bills and the stand of the Labor Party on the issue of the war with Iraq.
Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (10.18 a.m.)—Although I rise to speak in a debate on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003, people all over Australia will understand when I say it is difficult to concentrate our whole attention on this legislation today as war clouds loom ominously over this parliament, over the nation and over our world. The people of Australia now have their political eyes wide open and are considering closely just what the Howard government stands for in all aspects of Australia’s administration. It is a crucial time in the political history of our nation, a time when no action by this government will or should escape close scrutiny by those Australians who think they have a right to have a say in their country’s affairs and a right to be listened to.

The Australian public have heard the Prime Minister state categorically that he knows what is best for this country, regardless of public representations to him or to his government members and regardless of overwhelming public protest against his actions and his decision to commit this country to war. But debate on the appropriations bills affords the opportunity to have a closer look at this government’s economic and social agenda as well and to work out just what the Prime Minister and his government actually think is best for us, besides taking our young men and women to war, alienating our regional neighbours and friends and departing recklessly from protocols and precedents that have given at least some semblance of integrity to our past involvement in military conflicts.

But to the legislation at hand: these bills do provide top-up funding to Commonwealth departments and agencies so that they can continue to function and implement programs right up to the new budget allocations. Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 appropriates moneys from consolidated revenue for ordinary annual services such as running costs and recurrent expenditure on already established programs. Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 seeks additional moneys from consolidated revenue for purposes other than ordinary annual services. It covers capital works, payments to the states and other purposes not authorised by special legislation. Through the debate on these bills, each member has the opportunity to comment on the financial management of this country and the outcomes achieved through the allocation and management of Australia’s financial resources.

This legislation is pretty basic to most Australians and to their daily lives. No wealth is created without the contribution of the men and women of Australia. Most Australians want to know what has been in it for them. In this debate I would like to reflect on what benefit the people of Australia, particularly the residents of my electorate of Newcastle, have gained from the Howard government’s seven-year reign. I expect even the government must be realising now that, for the electorate, the seven-year itch is setting in, with much irritation getting under the skin of Australians. When considering what bang we get for our bucks, the people of Australia, particularly the people in my electorate in Newcastle, must be seeing that it is not much.

When the average Australian thinks about the government allocating moneys, they would expect that there should be some economic and social benefit for as many people as possible. Most Australians believe in a fair go and looking after your mate, so they would expect to see some inclusion and some egalitarianism in spreading the wealth around and providing safety nets of some kind for the most disadvantaged among us. And that sounds fair to me. Getting the balance right and creating economic growth—but not at the expense of equity and social harmony—would seem to be goals all governments would want to pursue. If asked, ‘How would you expect government to do that?’ most Australians would say, ‘By providing decent education and health services, by making sure people can work and raise a family and by pro-
providing some security for when we get old.’ Keeping the country safe and keeping our environment healthy might also get a mention.

Let us look at some of those things, starting with employment. In the electorate of Newcastle the proportion of people seeking employment and unable to get a job has hovered around 10 per cent for most of Howard’s terms in government, with youth unemployment at 30 per cent. In Australia, one in six children live in a jobless household. That is about 860,000 children, and that figure is steadily rising. Many of these children have never experienced having parents who actually work. When we look at what the federal government has provided in the way of job creation in Newcastle, there does not seem to be much to reflect on at all. The Commonwealth Structural Adjustment Fund has created under 300 jobs, while the state government’s similar Hunter Advantage Fund has managed to completely replace the jobs lost by the BHP closure, creating over 2,000 jobs.

If the government would like some ideas on how to create jobs in the Hunter, we are very happy to remind them of the projects we have been putting forward for some time—projects that Newcastle would like to see assisted and supported in budgets. They include a contribution to a new international standard football stadium. Our state government has put up over $23 million; the federal government have put up nil. Newcastle would like local employment programs, not just Work for the Dole programs, that provide jobs for the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged job seekers. We are seeking a multipurpose terminal and would like the federal government to look at—perhaps through its AusLink program—the infrastructure upgrades that are very much needed to support an MPT. We are still hoping to get a new clean steel industry in Newcastle, but financial investment in these times is very difficult to attain; some government assurances and certainty are needed to attract that sort of investment. As for the provision of broadband services to Newcastle, unfortunately we have seen SaskTel, a Canadian firm, now threatening to pull out of a proposal to provide broadband services to Newcastle and the Hunter because of that lack of financial investment. The construction of the Hunter medical research institute has been on the books for a long time. The community has put the money in, the state government has put the money in and, again, we have received nothing from the federal government.

We would also like increased staffing levels in Commonwealth departments. But let us not be too unfair; let us look at the Regional Solutions Program. In my electorate of Newcastle we have received two grants under this program: one for the establishment of a child safety education centre near our John Hunter hospital and one for the Tiligerry Habitat Multifunction Centre. That does not seem very much for a regional capital. In spite of media articles and editorials that suggest you only get what your parliamentarian applies for, that clearly is not the case. We are not allowed to apply for Regional Solutions funds, but we do encourage our communities to seek this support. The Newcastle Wetlands Centre, as the first Ramsar-approved facility in Australia, would welcome some regional assistance. The Ethnic Communities Centre, which employs 70 people and provides services all over the state, is desperate for its own centre, so it would like some assistance too. A regional transport professional association in Newcastle applied to the Regional Solutions Program over 12 months ago for funds to complete a transport study for the region based on real data to project the holistic transport needs of the region into the future. But it seems their application went back to the future, as the last information I have is that the application has been ‘misplaced’—12 months ago.

What does high employment mean in Newcastle? I think people have to be reminded that what it means is that we are ranked 127th out of 150 Commonwealth electoral divisions in Australia in terms of our median individual income, which is $306 per week. It makes New-
castle the 24th lowest ranked electorate in the country. One would not expect that for a regional capital that has experienced high economic growth. But the jobs do not come with it, unfortunately. That means that 45 per cent of persons aged 15 years and over in my electorate are living on less than $300 per week and that 41 per cent of family households in my electorate are living on less than $800 per week. That means there is not a lot of money to go around and that basically businesses have a limit on how much they can grow. That is unfortunate. So we ask the government to look kindly at Newcastle when Regional Solutions funds come through.

If you have a disability and you would like to work, do not expect any special employment service and certainly do not look to Commonwealth agencies or departments to employ you. In Newcastle, the Commonwealth government departments and agencies employ a grand total of 57 people with disabilities. But Minister Abbott’s department cannot even tell me how many people with a disability are employed in my electorate. This is the same minister who tells us we need to get people off disability entitlements and into work. With Newcastle having the second highest take-up of disability benefits in the nation, this situation provides no comfort to them.

Let us also look at the government’s track record on higher education. The Howard government has managed to rip out more than $5 billion from Australian universities, leaving those like the University of Newcastle managing significant debt. In 2003, there are 22,000 fewer fully funded places than in 1996. Student fees have jumped 85 per cent since 1996, with students and their families now major contributors to the cost of higher education. For our students, that means living in poverty and choosing to study part time just to subsist. At the University of Newcastle, where 22,000 students are enrolled this year, there is a distinct trend towards part-time study. In 2002, only 55 per cent of students were studying full time: a seven per cent decline in just two years. Public investment in universities must increase, rather than continuing the slide that has been allowed under this government. Our students deserve more than that. Currently they plan when they can begin a family or acquire a home according to when they will have paid back their HECS debt. But the government’s only solution is to increase full fee-paying places and to allow universities to increase their charges so that those who can afford to buy their way into a degree can do so, displacing those whose marks are higher but who cannot afford to pay.

In our electorate offices every day, the public tells us that our health system, burdened by an ageing population and the high cost of technological advances, is failing. Medicare does not mean no payment or even just a gap payment to most people now, with bulk-billing being increasingly inaccessible. In Newcastle, bulk-billing of all or most services by local GPs has plummeted to 10 per cent. That is putting pressure on our public hospitals. Private health insurance premiums have gone through the roof and have become unaffordable for all but the wealthy and privileged. Unfortunately, figures confirm that people are abandoning private health insurance, not because they do not want those benefits but because they just cannot afford them. There are real problems in our health system, including the undersupply of doctors and specialists in some fields and a Medicare system that rewards overservicing rather than holistic health care and patient management. The best use of the private health insurance levy has certainly not been achieved, and it should be looked at closely to ensure maximum benefits to Australians. The government wants to increase the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme contribution. In Newcastle, 40,000 people have health care cards, which means they have very low incomes. Every increase to the cost of prescriptions means people on low incomes must make choices about what they can afford.
Let us look at the safety net for those people. We know that many people do receive benefits. In Newcastle, there are 16,000 age pensioners. There are 2,000 people on carers allowance, 10,000 people receiving the family tax benefit—and that is a very long story!—and nearly 11,000 people receiving rent assistance. So my electorate certainly has many people who are within that safety net. Unfortunately for those people and for many others, they would really like to get a job. Employment tax credits have always been supported by Labor as a way of assisting people from welfare into work. Tax credits help families to avoid high tax rates when they move from welfare payments to slightly higher wages, but this government has introduced legislation that gives with one hand and takes with the other. The government will only introduce tax credit changes if the opposition agrees to extend the breachng system to wider target groups. That simply is not fair.

We are struggling to provide accessible aged care. It seems that aged care is no longer a public responsibility, and so it is commercially run. This means that no-one wants to take on the less profitable high-care clients. No new high-care beds were applied for in the electorate of Newcastle because providers just cannot afford them. That has pushed our aged citizens needing care further out from their homes and families.

Our aged population have seen their retirement incomes depleted by a superannuation system that has a built-in gambling element. No longer are their investments for their future assured. Fund managers are poorly regulated and are often poor performers. Income earned from retirement funds is at the whim of the stock exchange and global trends. I am sure that those who invested in Telstra and relied on that for their income were not happy to see $1 billion written off because of a poor investment in Hong Kong. That $1 billion could have been spent on improving telecommunications in Australia. But many of my citizens in Newcastle have part-time jobs. Many of them will never have a superannuation fund. They will be lucky to have any retirement savings by the time they reach an age where they can no longer work. Unfortunately, they will become the poor of the future and will struggle.

For families, declining fertility is a major concern. The fertility rate is now 1.7 and, although 30 per cent of the work force are women, they get little encouragement to have children. Labor would love to see paid maternity leave introduced and increased child-care places made available. In my electorate, 41 child-care providers have significant debts to be paid back to the government because, unfortunately, the government could not get its accounting system right. In Newcastle, the family tax benefit has been a disaster, with over half the people on that benefit accruing debts through it or receiving incorrect allocations. One of the government’s answers to all these problems has been the baby bonus. As an election promise, that was not means tested. The baby bonus was made available to anyone—but only for the first child, and I do not think the concept of boutique babies should be introduced into this country. Families need to be treated fairly and to be assisted at a time when raising children is very difficult.

Families have also found housing particularly unaffordable. Mortgage costs have rapidly increased, and we now have record low rates of saving and record high bank fees being paid. In March 1996, the average monthly mortgage repayment took up 38.9 per cent of median monthly family incomes. It now chews up 43 per cent of family incomes, and in Sydney and desired urban areas it can be as high as 54 per cent. But first home owners receive their benefits no matter how wealthy they are.

We also must not forget that this is the highest taxing government we have ever experienced. We now have the GST and, of course, income tax, as well as those hidden taxes called special levies, which I think people overlook. There is the aircraft noise levy, the firearms buyback levy, the stevedoring levy, the dairy industry adjustment levy, the Ansett levy and the
sugar industry levy. Collectively, those levies cost us $3 billion. In most cases, they are just extra consumption taxes on top of the GST, which is also a consumption tax. The government is avoiding putting up income tax, and that looks good, but the levies act as taxes on all of us.

Australians are now burdened with record household debt, which has more than doubled in this term, while credit debt has more than tripled and our services have reduced. At the moment in the Newcastle suburb of Stockton we are dealing with a very difficult situation with outsourced mail delivery services. We have had three contractors in 18 months, and medical alert bracelets and wills are going missing and mail is being found on the side of the road. Australia Post tell me that outsourcing has cut their costs by 50 per cent—but the service provided has declined to well below 50 per cent of its former standard. This government has also prevailed over the greatest corporate losses, through HIH and One.Tel and the failure of the insurance industry. It may also face civil action for legal liability because of the lack of sound corporate regulation—and the Australian public will pay for that.

So there is much to say in this debate about a government that is so completely out of touch with the Australian people of this new century. Its erroneous and flawed judgment will now be assessed by the Australian people, as its leader, John Howard, so readily commits our nation to war, prejudicing world peace, prejudicing stability in our region and placing our people at immense risk. That has all been done without even consulting the Australian people or giving them the opportunity to be heard. Support for war on terrorism, unfortunately, has not been quite so rigorous.

This government’s judgment on matters of domestic significance will also now be assessed. I hope that, through this debate, people will see that the economic and social management of this nation has been neglectful, reckless and also unfair. I remind this chamber that this is the highest taxing government in Australia’s history. In addition, it has failed to deliver on its basic service responsibilities to the Australian people. But, despite the record tax take and in spite of declining government services, the government has failed to keep its budget in surplus after nearly a decade of strong economic growth. It certainly has not been good enough for Australia, and it has not been good enough for the electorate of Newcastle.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (10.38 a.m.)—The Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 will allow additional funds to be made available where the initial appropriation for the financial year is insufficient. These additional appropriations, known as additional estimates, are extra spending requirements—for example, for cost overruns in existing programs or for new programs not foreseen when the budget was presented.

While we have had a number of unforeseen events in this country—and ones that really need to be assisted, such as bushfires, droughts, et cetera—it seems to me that this government has not dealt properly with the taxation regime. Funds need to be raised more appropriately and spent more fairly—for instance, topping up so-called benefit schemes, such as Family Tax Benefit. It is a pity that such a mechanism was not used to assist those people who suffered as a result of the changes to the family assistance tax benefits scheme, which was supposed to be of most assistance to low-income families but was changed in July 2002 to send a lot of the most needy into debt.

I want to speak today on the way in which family payments have proved disastrous for families in Tasmania and other parts of Australia. These are not isolated cases, and at times trying to help people deal with the burden can take several days or even a week. As has already been pointed out by previous speakers, the administration of the scheme has turned it into a family debt trap, leading to a situation in which about half the families eligible for fami-
ily payments in Australia receive incorrect payments. Some 650,000 people have family payments debts, as the shadow minister has already noted by asking questions in the estimates committees. These figures have been confirmed for the year just past: it is anticipated that some 600,000 families will receive a debt in excess of $600. That is a lot of money to pay back when the income was family income supplement in the first place. People are being saddled with debts that they cannot avoid. People who have played by the government rules and have given notice that their income has changed are still receiving debt notices.

The minister has said that, if a family is concerned about how much they might earn in a year, they should overestimate their income. This completely bypasses the whole rationale for having family payments, which is to assist families to feed, clothe, educate and house their children on a weekly and fortnightly basis. Children do not stop growing for a year. They do not stop eating for a year. According to the government, the solution is to take less than you are entitled to or to make nothing during the year. Many who were encouraged to do that and were told by the government that they would receive a top-up payment in return for foregoing their payments have been duped, because the government put in a sneaky clause saying that, unless claimants claimed their top-up payments within 12 months, they would not be eligible to receive them—unlike other aspects of the taxation system where people have four years in which to put in their claims.

So once again people have been hit coming and going. Many people need the money on a fortnightly basis. If their income varied because they worked overtime or because they were casual employees and got more hours, they will now get a debt. Many of those who claimed less than they were entitled to could not access the top-up payment because they were beneath the tax threshold and therefore did not pay any tax from which to get a refund. This proves that this scheme is a shambles, a debt trap and a burden on hundreds of thousands of Australian families. It is a cruel and unnecessary way of making the government’s books balance. It is totally unfair.

This situation seems to be typical of this government since they became elected. If people are well educated and in secure jobs, they are more likely to understand the vagaries of the tax system. But even many of those people find it difficult to estimate their incomes for a year. It is not an easy task. For a young couple who have three children and are battling on one income the task becomes almost insurmountable. They are the people who most need some sort of assistance, but they probably gave up trying to gain help because of the complexities of it all.

I can speak of one case, in particular, which is typical of many. The last child of a family with three children turned 16 in December 2000 and they received no further payment from Centrelink. The family then received a bill from Centrelink for overpayment of some $1,800 after apparently not estimating their income properly. The circumstances appear to be that, once the child turned 16, the wife went back to work. She managed to pick up some seasonal work, and the husband had been working part time. Although neither earned a full wage, they apparently earned more than they had estimated for the latter part of the year.

They were totally bewildered at receiving a bill. They had always stated their income during the time they were employed, and they knew they would not receive further benefit after December because their child turned 16. There was no information given to them at the time of estimation as to how the transition might be made, despite both the department and the family knowing what was going to happen halfway through the financial year. They have no money to pay such a bill. The three kids are still at home. One continues school this year, one will start an apprenticeship and the third is starting some other training. They all still need feeding, clothing and medical care. How are these people supposed to find the money? It was
suggested by some far-sighted person that perhaps the kids’ Austudy money could be accessed to pay this bill. Excuse me!

Another one came to light today. An ex-Ansett employee who has two small children came to me and said that she had received a bill due to a family benefit overpayment. This came about because she had applied for the benefit after she lost her job, when she had no idea of when or if she would get anything from a redundancy package, so she could not accurately state what her income might be for the following year. When she finally received something, which was not completely what she was entitled to but was something, she rang Centrelink and reported same. When the end of the financial year came, she found instead of a refund from the tax department a debt for most of the money she had received while she was waiting for redundancy funds to come through. She is still not working, but she had to survive on a small Centrelink payment until she got some of the money due to her. It still has not been finalised, and now she is stuck with a bill. What sort of assistance is that? The problem with this method of collecting overpayments is that it is unfair and unreasonable.

I have gone into the background of the changes that took place from 1 July 2000. The family tax benefit can now be received in three ways: one, paid fortnightly, as was the previous family allowance; two, claimed as an income tax deduction against the salary earned by the claimant; or, three, claimed as a tax deduction at the end of the financial year. The difference between this and the old scheme is that the new income testing arrangements for family tax benefit A and family tax benefit B now feature the use of the current financial year income. So, when a person is claiming payment for the 2001 calendar year, the income in the 2000-01 financial year is used. This contrasts with the pre-July 2000 arrangements, where the 1999-2000 year would have been used.

For those who elect to have their FTB A and/or FTB B paid at the end of the financial year, like a tax return, this payment methodology requires no estimate of income to be made at claim and there is no potential for overpayment or underpayment. For all those electing to be paid immediately at claim by way of fortnightly instalments or as a tax deduction in their pay before their 2000-01 year income is known, this requires an income estimate and a reconciliation. For those paid on the basis of an estimate, a reconciliation is then conducted once the 2000-01 financial year tax assessment is complete and the exact level of income is then known. Where income estimated at claim is overestimated, an overpayment is made and arrears are paid. This contrasts with the pre-July 2000 arrangements, where no arrears were paid because there was no need as the estimates were more accurately made. When the income estimate at claim underestimated the income earned in 2000-01, an overpayment is made and a debt raised. Before July 2000, debts were raised only where income exceeded the estimation by 10 per cent or more.

This sounds complicated when talking about it here. Can you imagine how complicated it is for a person confronted with this after they have made their estimate, believing that they have taken into account everything they would be earning? Many do not understand that the system works in a financial year, that an income is assessed for the year and that, if the circumstances change during that financial year, they are penalised for using the funds when they most needed them.

We are talking about people who may have only casual employment, who are waiting for a redundancy package, who are seasonal workers or, as in one of the stated cases, whose last child has turned 16. The benefit is not achieving what it originally set out to do—that is, be a supplement to the current wage, which is very low. If, for some reason, there is no need for it
on a set date, then that should be taken into account at the time—or, as originally happened, when they work out the estimation on the previous financial year’s income. The least able to average an income are the ones who are being penalised. A lot of people who have no real change from year to year do not have a problem; they can choose which way they wish the payments to be delivered. But those who are in real difficulty, who are really cash-strapped, are the ones who do not have a choice. Those are the people who cannot be put in a situation of having debts build up without their knowledge or understanding.

The poor in this country are most definitely getting poorer and the rich are being given an even greater amount of assistance, either through the taxation system or through generous giveaways to company directors whose views differ from those of their board or shareholders and who are therefore asked to retire. It is just not good enough. The system in place before July 2000 worked reasonably well, and there were ways to ensure that overpayments were recovered. They were not huge amounts anyway. The promotional material talks of helping families with the cost of raising children. It is paid for dependent children up to and including the age of 20 years, and for dependent full-time students up to the age of 24 years who are not getting youth allowance or similar payments like Abstudy or the education supplement for veterans’ children.

The benefit is payable to those making up to the maximum of $30,806 per year and is reduced by 30 cents for every extra dollar of income. A total family income of $30,806 is not considered a very high wage at all and therefore the benefit will hardly come close to covering the expense of raising a family, as this government likes to project. If you then include this ridiculous clause of averaging over the present year, any gains that may have been made in half a year for a really low-income person are stripped from them if they happen to get a job that pays marginally more than the dole. What is the point of people seeking work? Why should people put themselves through this indignity, only to be hounded for a few measly dollars? The government should amend the current scheme to allow the beneficiaries of the family tax benefit to get some benefit from it. I will be seeking to have the assistance formatted in another way to overcome this ridiculous problem. In conclusion, I think we can do much better in dealing with people on low incomes so that they do not feel like criminals and outcasts when it comes to a few extra dollars being allocated to them to bring up their children over some very difficult times.

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (10.54 a.m.)—It is a privilege and an honour to follow my good friend and colleague the honourable member for Lyons in his contribution on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003. I was hoping that I might be forgiven for complimenting the ABC on their recent TV series about a high school in my electorate, Plumpton High. The program was about a school with an inspirational principal who provided the opportunity for those young teenagers who were at school and fell pregnant to return to school and complete their education. I said ‘inspirational’; I think he is a champion and he came across as very human.

By any account, Glenn Sargeant, the principal, could have said, ‘This is not my problem. We are in the business of teaching students, not dealing with students who happen to be pregnant.’ But what he did was to own the problem. Interestingly, so few of those students were actually pupils of Plumpton High. In other words, Christian schools and public high schools referred these students on to Plumpton High and they found a happy home there to further their education. Glenn would be the first to say, ‘I didn’t do this on my own. It required the cooperation of everyone: my teaching staff, parents and citizens, and not least of all the students themselves at Plumpton High.’ He demonstrates a philosophy that schools are about
caring for all the students and every student—a philosophy, I might say, not always practised in reality.

I thought there were a couple of interesting things that came out of Plumpton High. Firstly, in all the comprehensive high schools in my electorate, Plumpton High is the one school that had the highest number of students—seven, from memory—who, in completing their HSC, actually got in the highest 10 per cent in one of the subjects that they undertook. So this caring philosophy about all students obviously rubs off on the rest of the school. It is not a welfare philosophy; it is an education philosophy. It is about empowering students. Here, I think there is evidence that this inspirational program has a whole range of benefits for all the students. I also thought the other interesting fact was that so few of the participating students were actually students from Plumpton High. In having this group of young mums at Plumpton High, Glenn and the school really were, if you like, providing some of the best real-life sex education for their students, and the students at Plumpton High actually benefited in that way.

I take great pride in the fact that the Chifley electorate has been a real crucible for education reform in New South Wales public education—and there are many things that I could point to directly. But today I want to celebrate this wonderful success, this wonderful story, and the inspiration that has been provided by Plumpton High, particularly by the principal. Any study that looks at schools will tell you that the principal is the key ingredient, the key success driver, of any school. But, as I have said, Glenn would point to so many others as being equally responsible. He would say, ‘I can accomplish nothing on my own. I have to bring the whole school with me.’ And so he has, and I commend and congratulate him on his outstanding success.

This school has tried so desperately, and generally successfully, to give people who we would otherwise discard and who we would otherwise say are of no value or deserving of no special treatment the opportunity—in his words, ‘empowered them to succeed’—to make successes of their lives and to provide a great parent model for the children that they have. Congratulations to Glenn Sargeant, congratulations to Plumpton High School and congratulations to all those associated with this program. I do not want to score cheap points, but of course this government always says what it is doing for child care. I say to my friend opposite: wouldn’t it be nice if we actually had a child-care centre in the Plumpton High School grounds—readily provided, without the issue of not having enough space? For all that you say you wish to do about child care, why can’t we have a child-care centre in the grounds? It would make a huge impact if we did.

I want to say a few things about the budget in the available time I have. Before I go to the generality of how families have been affected in Australia, particularly in my electorate, I will say that I know, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, that both you and I share a concern about defence. I am surprised, at a time when the Prime Minister has said in a melancholy statement to the nation that we will soon be at war with Iraq, that this government has ripped out in this budget $660 million from defence. Over the next couple of years, that figure will grow to nearly $1 billion. At a time when the defence tempo has never been higher, this government is not giving defence extra money but is saying, ‘We are going to rip off $660 million this year in the budget and a total over the next two years of nearly $1 billion.’

How are they doing it? This is money that the government are recovering from Defence through property sales. There is a general proposition that this is a very worth while and appropriate thing to do. How can it be so today when, in 24 hours, we will be seeing a situation where some 2,000 troops who have been pre-deployed will be at war? I do not think we can
pretend that sending 2,000 troops to be pre-deployed is doing anything but straining our de-
fence forces beyond belief, given our other commitments in East Timor and Bougainville.
This is the proposition from the coalition benches—that Defence could not usefully use this
$660 million. I would be very interested to learn of any coalition member standing up here
today debating these appropriation bills and advancing the argument that there are no logis-
tics, no equipment and no additional personnel in terms of recruitment where this $660 mil-
lion could be usefully deployed.

To finish on this issue, it is a tragedy that, of the top 20 capital items being purchased by
Defence, 16 are delayed—16 of them have exceeded the budgeted time. The overexpenditure
in terms of these capital equipments is some $5 billion. I am amazed that this does not receive
greater attention from the government. At a time when we want to have confidence in what
this government is doing in terms of predeploying 2,000 troops, it is amazing that it is ripping
out of defence nearly $660 million in this budget and over the next two budgets nearly $1 bil-
lion—and not handing it back. At the same time, its capital equipment budget is shot to pieces
in performance, both in terms of delivering the equipment and in terms of the cost.

It is true to say that Western Sydney families have never faced a greater tax burden than
they are facing at the moment. They are burdened with record levels of debt, they are increas-
ingly living off the credit card and Australia has a mammoth savings problem. Mortgage re-
payments are taking up more and more of the family budget. Consumer confidence is down
and will be affected, no doubt, by this war and the threat of terrorism. Families feel insecure
about whether their breadwinners will have jobs and whether their wages and salaries will be
able to pay for the things that they need. The Treasurer’s own budget papers reveal that he
will increase the income tax burden on Australians—it will be even worse than it currently is.
This is the highest taxing government since Federation. We recently celebrated the Centenary
of Federation. This is the government that takes out the all-time prize. All the tax cuts that
were promised as a result of the GST have disappeared in bracket creep—they are gone. This
is the highest taxing government that Australian workers and their families have ever seen.

If you are a member of the opposition, you pay a great deal of attention to question time. It
is one of the most unfair contests I have ever seen, although I had a different view when we
were in government. Time after time the Treasurer says, ‘Look at what we’ve done for interest
rates. Look at the savings that families are enjoying as a result of the reduction in interest
rates on their mortgages.’ There is some substance to that claim. I always felt it was a pity that
the Treasurer would not explain how renters were also presumably benefiting from this. Of
course, they do not. They are the big losers. They have not benefited. Can the coalition mount
the argument that people who are paying mortgage payments today are better off because of
these lower interest rates when compared to those under Labor? Even though the Treasurer
reminds us of what interest rates rose to under Labor, the truth is that a greater percentage of
people’s earnings is now going into those mortgage payments than it ever did under Labor.
Families in Western Sydney, families in the Illawarra, families in Newcastle and families all
over Australia are now using a greater proportion of their earnings to repay mortgages than
they ever did under Labor, notwithstanding the fact that interest rates are at a record low. Isn’t
that the real test—not the rate of interest on your home mortgage but the percentage of in-
come you are paying into that mortgage? In 1996, when the coalition took over, these mort-
gage repayments were on average taking 38.9 per cent of median monthly family income. By
2002, that figure had grown to 43 per cent. If you live in Western Sydney, as I am very proud
to do, it is now 54 per cent. For every $1 that a family earns, 54 per cent is going into their
mortgage repayments ahead of anything else—ahead of their electricity, ahead of their food
and ahead of their car.
Some people in my electorate get upset—and I have been accosted a couple of times—when I talk about struggling families. They say, ‘We’re proud of what we’re doing. Don’t label us as struggling families.’ Well, they are struggling. Those statistics—54 per cent of their income going to repay the mortgage—show what a diabolical state Western Sydney families are in. Who are the most vulnerable? It is not people of my age; it is the new families. Not families that have perhaps just moved into a house but families who have moved in the last few years, have a couple of children and cannot have both parents working—they are doing it absolutely tough. And this government should be doing something to address their needs. What is the government doing? What is the so-called champion of Howard’s battlers, Jackie Kelly, my neighbour and the member for Lindsay, doing when she is talking to the people of Glenmore Park or any other new subdivision where families are facing 54 per cent of their income going into their mortgage repayments?

The other side of the story is the Treasurer, who gets up at question time and says how wonderful it is that interest rates are so low and we are saving so much on the average mortgage—and has done so day in and day out since they have been in government. What is happening to the First Home Owners Scheme? It is, at the moment, at the second lowest point it has been at in some time. The first lowest point was, of course, when Mr Costello himself became Treasurer. Now he has hit the double. The First Home Owners Scheme was all about trying to help ordinary people get into a home. And what is happening? Ordinary people are being denied access to the scheme while we are happily funding people into million-dollar homes. Is that what equity means? Is that what helping ordinary families means? Does it mean that we should have a First Home Owners Scheme in which people who go and buy million-dollar properties benefit, but ordinary workers who aspire to having their own home—their first home—are priced out of the market and see the scheme rorted and twisted in such a gross way? We need to have another look at the First Home Owners Scheme. It ought not to be about helping people into million-dollar homes. I do not mind people going into million-dollar homes—good luck and the best of British to them—but are they the most needy in our society? Do they need the Prime Minister’s or Mr Costello’s help to get into these homes? I say that that is an absolute abomination.

Before my time runs out, I need to say a couple of things to finish up. We have had a terrible current account deficit. The Prime Minister promised us that his first priority would be bringing down foreign debt and bringing down the current account deficit. Foreign debt? It has doubled in the lifetime of this government. Mr Deputy Speaker, you used to have a debt truck running around all sorts of electorates, saying, ‘We’re worried about foreign debt.’ The debt has doubled, and I would like to hear from the coalition what they think about that. Should we be relaxed and comfortable about a doubling of foreign debt? You said that this was going to be diabolical for the country. Well, it is double, so is it doubly diabolical? Struggling families in Western Sydney are under a lot of pressure, and a lot of it comes from this government.

Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (11.14 a.m.)—In speaking about Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003, I take the opportunity to make some general comments about economic mismanagement by the Howard government. I do so on the basis that, as a newly elected member of parliament, the last budget was the first one that I had the opportunity to sit through as an elected member. It came with great surprise, because the government members have always prided themselves on being great economic managers. There I was in the chamber sitting through my first budget as a member of parliament, and, despite years of record economic growth—a lot of it of course bequeathed by the legacy of
Labor in power—it ended up being a budget that was in deficit, brought about by people who profess to the Australian community that they are great economic managers. That came as somewhat of a surprise.

The second surprise that has come to me over the past year is the fact that the Howard government is now the highest taxing government in all of Australia’s history. The community were told, weren’t they, that with the introduction of the GST there would be a rationalisation of the tax system, the burden of taxes would be lifted and a growth tax would be provided that could be relied on to fund essential community services? We have a situation where not only do we have a budget that is in deficit but we have a government which is the highest taxing government in Australia’s history.

Down the line, we are not seeing the benefits in basic services that were supposed to come with this new growth tax. Everywhere you look, basic services are under a great deal of stress, whether it be in the area of health, with significant declines in the rate of bulk-billing; in higher education, where massive cuts to outlays are putting greater pressure on students and their families; or at a local level when you look at child-care provision, as I have recently done in my electorate. There is enormous pressure to cater for the needs of an increasing number of families where both parents are in the work force and are unable to find places to care for their children before and after school hours.

In racing parlance, we could talk about the trifecta; but unlike the racing trifecta, where the punters think it is going to provide some gain and some benefit, the trifecta from this government has produced the exact opposite—the first leg of the trifecta is a budget in deficit; the second leg of the trifecta is the highest taxing government in Australia’s history; and the third leg of the trifecta is that basic services everywhere are being cut and families are under pressure. People are seeing through the rhetoric of the government, which professes to pride itself on being a great economic manager. Ordinary families are saying, ‘Why is it that with all the promises that were made we are finding it harder to make ends meet?’

Tax from income is the highest ever as a percentage of gross domestic product. The irony is that Australians are paying more income tax than they were before the GST. The GST alone will reap the government about $30 billion this year. If that was not bad enough, it seems that the government cannot resist imposing more and more taxes—be it the dairy tax, the sugar tax, the medical indemnity tax or the Ansett ticket tax—which, on top of the income that comes with the GST, are adding further burdens. So life is becoming harder for the average family in this society under this government that professes to care for the plight of families and the battlers in our society. Debt levels are exploding. The average household debt is now about $81,000. And families as consumers are being slugged everywhere with high credit card interest rates and bank fees. With record levels of credit card debt, it is no wonder that Australians are saving less than ever before. More and more families are finding it harder to get ahead.

Many families in my electorate of Throsby fall into the category which we describe as the increasing numbers of working poor. Many are realising that a bit of extra overtime or a hard-won pay rise simply is not worth it after this government takes its unfair share of that extra income by way of the tax system. As my colleague the member for Chifley mentioned in his contribution, we all know that bracket creep is pushing many ordinary struggling families and workers into the very top tax rate for every dollar that is earned over $60,000. Far from the promised review of the tax system easing the burden and eliminating the duplication and multiplicity of taxes in the system, we are finding that the top tax rate is now penalising many workers who are out there struggling to make a living to provide for their families.
I want to quote from a letter which I recently received from one of my constituents. It is easy to fall into the jargon of 'effective marginal tax rates' and 'looking at the global picture' without appreciating the impact this is having on ordinary people. The letter I received a week or so ago from one of my constituents, Margaret Geeves, says it better than all the figures in the world. She says:

I am writing to you in the hope that something can be done about the taxation system that the Government has in place. It is not a fair and just system for all Australian people. There is no incentive to better oneself as I am about to explain in our situation. I challenge you to find someone in Government to justify and clarify why my husband is only $207 ... better off after receiving a work bonus of $1000.

We are a single income family of six ...

I am a stay at home mum by choice, which is my right as a mother and without family nearby for support. We knew this would be a struggle without two incomes but we thought there would come a day when my husband was on a better wage and all would be worthwhile. We now find this is not the case ...

A friend advised me to phone Centrelink to see if my son, Rodney 18, was eligible for Youth Allowance as he is going to University this year and hasn’t been able to get part-time work ... On ringing I discovered that Rodney wasn’t eligible unless he left home and also that our Family Allowance would be reduced because my husband received a large bonus last September pushing us over the threshold. She goes on to say that her husband, again because of work performance, is expecting another bonus later this year but that, when they did the calculation at home, they found that for each thousand dollars over the threshold they actually lose lots of money. She says that, out of this $1,000, they are left with $230 which, when spent, incurs 10 per cent GST, leaving them just $207 extra coming into their household which is not much of an incentive, she argues, for being a stay-at-home mum and losing Family Allowance, especially with teenage children who cannot get part-time jobs. She continues:

We aren’t extravagant. We drive old cars ... We rarely eat out. We don’t wear designer or surf brand clothes. We don’t have a holiday very often as it is too expensive to accommodate six people as we need to book two rooms. We haven’t been away for three years and we were thrilled with the bonus and planned a holiday for July but it looks like we will have to cancel, as there is not much of this money left to use.

She ends her letter to me as follows:

I hope there is someone in Government who knows what I am talking about when it comes to family matters ... The question I ask is how as a family can we see past today if the Government wants to take most of our well earned money?????

As a mother I feel I have contributed to society by being there for my children and am very proud to say that they are genuinely very nice people. I will never regret being there for them but I will always regret that the Government made it so damn hard to survive in a system that takes so much from middle income families on one wage who are unable to claim much tax relief. I know we are not the only ones going through this fate and would like the Government to realise that people like us with large families on single incomes do not fit into the rich category of paying the highest income tax and losing family tax benefits.
I raise that case because I have looked at the raw data. We talk a lot about how people are punished through bracket creep and by the loss of family support and other benefits that government provides. But here is a real case—one of many, I am sure, in my electorate—of a family that is struggling to do the right thing under a system which is penalising low- and middle-income earners.

I want to say something about a government that has little regard for the growing inequalities in our society. It does not appreciate the predicament of middle-income earners on one income, and it does not realise or deal with the growing inequality and injustice that we see everywhere around us. One-tenth of Australians now own 50 per cent of our nation’s wealth, yet the poorest 50 per cent control just seven per cent of our nation’s wealth. So the rich are getting richer, the middle is being squeezed out and the poor, while nominally making ends meet, are not sharing in the benefits of the kind of economic growth that we are seeing in our country. As a result of this, I think in this country we are losing our notion of a fair go. One thing we have always prided ourselves on is that there are opportunities in this country for families who are at the lowest socioeconomic end; wealth is not the measure of the opportunities open to people. Wealth was never the measure of whether you could access quality education and quality health care or—as is increasingly becoming the case in my electorate—ever see the front door of a tertiary institution.

As these economic disparities grow, they are impacting on our regions. The further away you are from the capital cities, where the big growth has occurred in many of the industries that are part and parcel of an increasingly globalised economy, the harder it is for many families and their communities. I am appalled to think that this government is refusing to support a modest increase in minimum wages in our nation. The ACTU is seeking a $456 minimum wage per week. I know that people say that politicians live in an ivory tower, divorced from the realities of life, but I put it to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that we are well away from understanding the pressures of raising a family on less than $25,000 a year. While the income of the top 100 CEOs in our country is now in the order of $38,000 a week, this government—which professes to be on the side of the battlers—is denying battlers a wage increase which would bring the minimum annual wage to something like $25,000. The government washes its hands of regulating executive salaries, sits back while the golden handshakes are there in abundance and says very little other than a few tut, tut, tuts. It is denying people at the lowest end of the income scale the opportunity to raise their wages to $12 an hour, or $456 a week before tax.

Again I looked at the data, because I think sometimes simple comparisons prove the point I am making. The minister, the member for Warringah, comes into the chamber beating up on the low paid. Let us look at the comparisons between his electorate and mine. In my seat of Throsby, just under 30 per cent of families survive on an income of below $500 a week. This places Throsby in the bottom third of all electorates. It is a startling figure when you compare it to a number of blue-ribbon Liberal seats. A good example is the seat of the minister for workplace relations, who comes into the House telling us that we should not support a rise in minimum wages, arguing the furphy that somehow it will cost jobs. In the minister’s seat of Warringah, only 10 per cent of families have an income of below $500. So the comparison is 30 per cent in Throsby and 10 per cent in the electorate of Warringah. Conversely, 53 per cent of families in the minister’s seat of Warringah earn $1,500 or more a week. In Throsby, less than 19 per cent of families can claim that level of income support. The median weekly income in Throsby is $859; in the minister’s seat it is almost double that at $1,572.

That small example proves the point I am making: this government is presiding over an economy that is not delivering benefits to all people. While the government talks a lot about being on the side of battlers, it has no idea what a struggle it is for families in my electorate.
and in many electorates throughout this nation to make ends meet. Families are finding it harder to make ends meet because of the economic mismanagement of this government. About 70,000 people in my electorate receive some form of Centrelink payment. The example that I cited from one of my constituents, Margaret Geeves, shows that, when the family comes by an unexpected wage bonus because the husband has met performance criteria at work, the family allowance is reduced and the family is pushed into the marginal tax rates which the millionaires in this country never have to face.

It is a sad indictment of this government’s economic policies and its mismanagement of the economy that it produced a trifecta where the budget is in deficit, it is the highest taxing government on record, and the GST is imposing additional burdens because it is a regressive tax. People at the low end of the income scales are hit severely by that. We are also seeing basic services in areas like health, education and child care continue to suffer. In a few weeks time, as a newly elected member I will participate in the second budget brought down by the Treasurer. With the budget last year the government exposed itself as not having the right to claim that its members are great economic managers. They benefited from the legacy of the Keating and Hawke years in opening up the Australian economy. They have traded on the benefits that low inflation and high productivity brought with them. They should stand condemned for their failure to manage economic growth on the basis of delivering fairness and justice across this nation.

It will not be too long before people understand that the kind of wealth inequalities and regional disparities we are seeing under this government mean that it is not a government that governs in the interests of all. This government has its eye on protecting those with the greatest economic advantage at the expense of all others. A government is elected to govern with the quality of life and living standards of families always at the centre of its concerns. The government over the last seven years has failed in that. More and more families are under pressure as this society becomes increasingly unequal, unfair and unjust. (Time expired)

Mr KERR (Denison) (11.35 a.m.)—All of us will have an opportunity to speak in the House of Representatives on the large international issue that is facing Australia—the looming war—so I will not address that matter today, although plainly it is in the forefront of everyone’s mind as they come before whichever chamber of this parliament. Instead I want to talk about some issues that relate specifically to my electorate and to concerns expressed to me by my constituents in areas that I believe warrant the attention of this parliament and the government.

The first issue I want to raise relates to growing concern that we do not have in place proper mechanisms to enable the complaints of those who are disaffected by long delays or difficulties in judicial proceedings to be heard and determined in an effective way. I, first of all those who might rise to speak in this house, regard as the most precious of our constitutional freedoms the fact that we have an independent and respected judiciary. That said, it is important to recognise that no human institution will ever be a perfect one and there will be instances of failure within the courts and tribunals as with all other institutions. Redress is an issue which has concerned many disappointed litigants. I don’t mean those litigants disappointed by results; litigation is of its nature a process where one side often is disappointed because they lose. The kinds of matters I am speaking about are instances where there are delays, where there are discourtesies, where situations arise which ought not arise within an effective and fully functional judicial system.
I raise this matter because, over recent months, it has become plain to me that there is substantial concern amongst a large number of practitioners in my own state of Tasmania about delays in the Family Court. By mentioning this fact I certainly do not wish to take the parliament into any of the specifics. It would be unfair to those who have raised these concerns with me and it would also be substantially unfair to the judicial officers who are concerned, because I am not in a position to determine whether or not those complaints are well founded in each particular instance. All I will say, however, is that there is substantial concern and it has been expressed not by a single practitioner but by many and by a large number of constituents. That being the case it raises the issue of how we address such matters.

There is, of course, a constitutional way to address those matters. It is open for this parliament, by an address of both houses, to remove a judge who is unfit to serve. But such matters are exceptional in their nature, they are extremely controversial and they are simply not appropriate for instances where the deficiency might be one of protracted delay in particular matters or a series of matters, or where the matter might be better dealt with by counselling of the judge or finding some other mechanism of addressing a deficiency in conduct which might amount to, for example, rudeness in an instance. I am not making the suggestion that all those instances have been the subject of complaints that have been addressed to me. The complaints that have been addressed to me have related to excessive delay. The question is how do we address these matters?

When the Keating government was in office, former Attorney-General Michael Lavarch and I as justice minister spoke of establishing judicial charters within all courts. That is—recognising that it is not for the parliament or for the executive to step in and decide such matters because it would compromise the independence of courts—it was appropriate, nonetheless, for the executive to work with the courts towards developing appropriate mechanisms that would enable such complaints to be effectively addressed. The idea of a judicial charter is for each court to establish benchmarks for performance standards and to establish within the courts appropriate forums where complaints of breaches in those benchmarks could be made with no prejudice to parties that were advancing them. That is a very important point because, whether fair or otherwise, there is a sense that a complaint made in the course of proceedings to the chief justice or other officers of a court may indeed prejudice the manner in which a proceeding is being determined. That is an unfair view but nonetheless it is held, particularly by litigants, and one can understand that apprehension when there are no transparent complaint procedures in place.

A court charter process would establish within each court a framework where the court would publish performance standards. For example, it would say that after filings of proceedings an initial hearing to work through interlocutory stages would be heard and would be set down within a particular time frame. It would say that within filing of the certificate of readiness, or whatever documentation completes the paperwork in a particular court, hearing time would be provided within a particular framework. It would also indicate that after the conclusion of argument judgment would be handed down within a particular framework. These would only be guidelines, because plainly there are going to be cases where the complexity of those cases and the circumstances warrant greater than normal time being given to consideration of those complexities. But there ought to be an ordinary rule of thumb guideline which anyone can advert to to see the way in which proceedings should be determined. There also ought to be a mechanism for a person who feels that those guidelines are not being complied with to be able to have that matter dealt with in an effective way within the court system, fully respecting the independence of the judiciary.
I say this because I think our confidence in institutions depends on their capacity to accept that not all criticism directed against them is malicious. Indeed, part of their strength is their capacity to respond to proper concerns, which are addressed by the profession and by individuals who come before these institutions for the disposition of their matters. I know that most judges are fully determined to do all they can to deal with proceedings expeditiously and I know that there have been steps taken by the establishment of judicial institutes designed to encourage effective conduct within the courts. Those processes have the support of the chief justices of all the courts, but we have yet to establish effective mechanisms to deal with these instances. There needs to be some intermediate way of dealing with deficiencies that would never warrant an address of both houses of this parliament to remove a judge. Such a method is required which would enable instances to be addressed within the judicial system where a particular judicial officer does not meet those benchmarks. Hopefully they would be addressed as well as counselled and remedied. Also, those processes would need to be available and transparent to our public.

In this regard, the other remedy that currently seems available to those who feel they are suffering unwarranted and unconscionable delays is to take proceedings to the High Court of Australia for mandamus, directing that a decision be made and that judges, who are the officials of the courts, do the duty conferred upon them by the parliament and by their office. Again, that remedy is so exceptional that I am not aware of it having ever been resorted to—it is there as a reserve, but it should not be the kind of mechanism we need when these instances can be better addressed through transparent court charters that the courts themselves work to enforce.

It would obviously need a degree of collegiality within a court. Within each court the judges themselves are, properly, fiercely protective of their own individual independence as well as of the institutional independence of the court. They would not surrender that to any of their fellow judges, and nor should they. However, we are not talking about the decisional elements of a case. We are not talking about how a case is decided, or its outcome. We are talking about process issues, and there I think the courts are as accountable to the communities they serve as anyone else is. The responsibility that courts have to give efficiency and courtesy in the discharge of their functions is no less great than anyone else’s. Their independence is conferred to preserve their objectivity so that they will not be influenced in any way by any process that might interfere with the best exercise of their judgment as to the merits or otherwise of any particular case. I have written to the Attorney-General on this subject in somewhat greater detail than I am going into in the House, but I thought I would take this opportunity to reinforce my concern by addressing this matter in the Main Committee today. I do regard it as one of substantial concern in my own jurisdiction of Tasmania.

The second issue I want to raise concerns the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. It is the issue of the licensing of the community radio station Cadence FM. Cadence FM was a small community broadcaster operating out of fairly primitive accommodation—basically, the transmitting facilities were run out of a domestic house. Cadence FM had a small and dedicated niche audience. It particularly served those that most broadcasters, including community broadcasters, do not serve. It served the aged, the handicapped and a number of other community groups, giving them an opportunity to present programming that was not available more broadly and to direct that to that niche audience. It also broadcast a lot of general community information, regularly interviewing aldermen and public officers and, in the lead-up to every election, offering the opportunity for extended interviews.
with all political candidates from every side. In that way, it played a small but important part in the life of the city of Hobart.

It is a great sadness of mine that Cadence FM has had its license removed recently. That license has now been conferred on a radio station that is being run out of the University of Tasmania. Students undertaking programs on that station become accredited as part of their media studies program. I think that university station is a damn good new radio station, and I have no dispute with its being conferred a licence. The problem is that the lack of intervention by the ABA and the minister has seen this play out as a zero sum game. The licensing of the new broadcaster was by way of competition, and the new winner only gained a licence as a result of the loss of Cadence FM’s broadcasting licence. That was unnecessary. It was a stupid, intolerant, bloody-minded and quite unjustifiable outcome.

The university based radio station made submissions that it did not want to see Cadence FM lose its licence. When it was forced into a position where it was in competition with Cadence FM, naturally it went for the throat. The two radio stations argued their cases in the public domain, and now the enmity between people who should be of goodwill is tearing decent Tasmanians apart. I am not suggesting that every Tasmanian is overwhelmed by this debate; it involves only handfuls of Tasmanians, but those handfuls feel passionately. They are entitled to have their views listened to and given greater respect, but the ABA and the minister have chosen not to do that.

There is no technical reason why two licences could not exist. Unlike Sydney or Melbourne where the frequencies may be limited, in Hobart there is no plausible justification for controlling and limiting the number of community broadcasters for reasons of spectrum. There is plenty of spectrum. Having another broadcaster would not interfere with anyone else’s broadcasting entitlement. We have now reached what I think is an absurd position, where a small, dedicated, community minded radio station has been driven out of business and is forced to litigate in the courts to test the procedural validity of the licensing program. If it wins that litigation the outcome will be that the university radio station will lose its licence, and the whole process will have to be gone through again.

I have written to the ABA and to the minister saying, in effect, ‘You are mad. You are ripping people apart unnecessarily. Why don’t you do the sensible thing: stop all this defensiveness of past conduct—the court proceedings and the like—and simply get on with the job that you are supposed to do, which is to allow those who are not represented in the commercial domain—who are not able to get licences for commercial broadcasting and do not want to broadcast other than to particular niche markets as non-commercial free-to-air broadcasters—an opportunity to do the task that the licensing system was designed to implement?’ Thus far, I have found the responses to be incomprehensibly unhelpful. The minister refers the matter back to the ABA. The ABA says that it will be for the courts to decide. Now their lawyers are seeking costs. Who are they seeking costs against in relation to proceedings that are partly on foot but not fully developed? They are seeking costs against people who run community broadcasting on a shoestring basis!

This is one silly mess. For the life of me, I cannot understand why somebody does not just bring the ABA into a room and say quietly to them, ‘Can’t you fix this up? You’ve got plenty of spectrum. You’ve got a small broadcaster, Cadence FM, that had a niche audience.’ I have tabled petitions from 2,000 constituents seeking re-establishment of Cadence FM’s licence. It probably only had 3,000 or 4,000 listeners, tops. Maybe on an average day it had only 200, 300 or 400 people listening to it, but those are people I have met. I have met the elderly who listened to it. I have talked to them. I have met the people who suffer from disabilities and who used the service. They now do not have the effective resource that they relied on. The
university has a good station; let us keep that. Why this had to be resolved in a zero sum game, where one must win and one must lose, is beyond me. Sometimes politics works that way, but good administration need not. *(Time expired)*

Mr TANNER (Melbourne) *(11.55 a.m.)*—In my contribution on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003, I wish to deal with two matters. The first is the importance of medical research to the future of Australia’s economy society. The second involves a matter relating to misuse of taxpayers’ money. I will turn to that after I have dealt with the question of medical research.

The medical research community has a very strong presence in my electorate, particularly in the Parkville precinct. There are a substantial number of institutes and organisations there that are involved in medical science and medical research. Many of those have a proud, internationally acclaimed record and have produced enormous breakthroughs on matters that are of great concern to people not only in Australia but also throughout the world. Australia has produced four Nobel Prize winners from the field of medical research—Peter Doherty most recently, of course, but also John Eccles, Howard Florey and Macfarlane Burnet. We have a long and very glorious history in the field of medical research in our country, and I want to put the case today for greater support for, funding of and commitment to medical research from the government and the nation as a whole.

We are up there with the world leaders in many areas of medical research right now, including areas such as mental health, particular childhood diseases, asthma, arthritis, cancer, cardiovascular disease and various other areas of medical research that are all ultimately connected with improving people’s lives, saving lives and ensuring that more people—both in Australia and around the world—can lead better, more productive lives, free of disease and free of the threat of premature death which arises from so many diseases and illnesses. I wish to cite a few contemporary examples of the benefits that are emerging from Australian medical research, to illustrate the point that this sector is critical to our future, economically, and is producing great results and great outcomes for our society.

My first example comes from Western Australia, where the Lions Eye Institute has created an artificial cornea. That is something that scientists have struggled to develop over many years. It gives a better option for people than the previous approach of human donor implants—which has been applied for some people. This has been in the development process for around 12 years, with funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council. It is now approved for use in the United States, in the European Union and in Australia. Argus Biomedical, which is manufacturing the product, has built a production facility in Perth. The product is called AlphaCor. It is a major step forward in the battle against eye disease, and it has the capacity to give new hope to people who are suffering from particular eye problems. We now have the capacity to offer them an artificial cornea—something that has been developed in Australia with the assistance of government financing through the National Health and Medical Research Council.

My next example comes from Adelaide. At Adelaide University, in concert with a biotech company called GroPep, we have seen recent research on infertility that has identified a particular protein called the transforming growth factor beta, or TGFβ. It is believed this may hold the key to understanding the problems of recurrent miscarriage and persistent infertility which ensures that women are not susceptible to successful IVF treatment. This research may ultimately lead us to some dramatic changes that will ensure that the curse of infertility is sub-
stantially diminished as a result of a greater understanding of the origins of infertility and the precise factors which are involved in causing it.

Another example comes from Monash University, in my home state of Victoria, where they have been doing substantial research on hamstring injuries. This research may sound a little less vitally important than work relating to issues such as infertility and eyesight. Nonetheless, it is very important for many Australians and indeed people in many other parts of the world. These injuries are the bane of many people in sport, particularly elite sportspersons, and this research is about identifying the particular susceptibility factors which tend to cause hamstring strains. Any members who, like me, follow AFL very closely will know that some players have a history of being susceptible to hamstring strains and get them very often, while others, for various reasons, get them much less often. This research is about determining the susceptibility factors—the elements in a person’s make-up or muscle structure which mean they are more susceptible to hamstring strains—and developing better training techniques and better approaches to the use of muscles to ensure that the incidence of these kinds of injuries is diminished substantially. Although that is not a life or death benefit, it nonetheless will be of great benefit to many people, as we will see fewer injuries of this kind for people engaged in sport—not only at the elite level but also at the ordinary Saturday afternoon level which so many Australians do participate in. The more we improve that experience so that more people are able to participate, the better our health outcomes will be and the better will be the outcomes for our society as a whole.

The final example I want to cite is from the ophthalmology department at Melbourne University, which is in my electorate. They have made developments with respect to age related macular degeneration, which is a phenomenon that causes significant eyesight problems later in life. Essentially, deposits of fatty material in the retina cut off nutrient supplies, severely damaging people’s eyesight. Research at Melbourne University has found that this condition is linked to a gene which governs the amount of cholesterol in the system, and it is possible that the appropriate use of anticholesterol drugs may enable this problem to be solved. Again, through appropriately funded medical and scientific research, a serious problem that does diminish the lives of many Australians is being addressed and a solution is being developed.

Not so long ago, I visited the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in my electorate, which also has a very proud, strong record of innovation and research on a pretty modest budget. It now has a cooperative research centre connected with it, as well as a variety of programs and commercialisation with individual companies. That institute has delivered great returns for our society over the years—in recent times it has done that through developing things like drugs to tackle the widespread problem of influenza and in times gone by it did that through work on a range of other problems. It is an outstanding example of the many medical research organisations in my electorate which deliver great outcomes for our society.

I want to make one final comment on this issue. I want to make a plea that this sector be treated seriously when dealing with government money. In recent times, we have seen a pattern where state governments—and to some extent the federal government—provide one-off subsidisation to a range of economic activities. Sometimes there have been contests between individual state governments to get particular facilities sited in one state rather than in another state. This has gone on over call centres, back of office centres, factories and, in some cases, installations that were always going to occur somewhere in Australia. For example, we had a bidding war between states over the location of Virgin’s aviation headquarters, something that was an intrinsically domestic activity that was always going to be located somewhere in Australia. Mostly, these kinds of bidding wars are absurd. Ultimately, they involve a waste and misuse of taxpayers’ money. They often involve jobs which will not necessarily last into the
longer term—particularly things like call centres—and they do not necessarily involve high-skilled or well-paid jobs. They are a sign of desperation on the part of particular state governments, desperate to be seen to be producing employment outcomes of whatever sort. They are not necessarily the most appropriate way to allocate scarce taxpayers’ dollars to produce better economic outcomes.

Medical and scientific research—and, indeed, some related fields such as the manufacture and design of medical instruments—have great prospects as a base for future export activity and the development of skills and knowledge that will drive a first world living standard for our economy into the future. Several years ago in the wake of the Wills review, the government, to its credit, significantly increased the amount of money dedicated to medical research, but that amount of money is going to run out in the next couple of years, and this issue will be back for reconsideration.

It is vital that we now start the debate about our society’s commitment to medical research and the national government’s commitment to funding it, so that people in the sector know that there will be an ongoing commitment. Aspiring researchers—who are not particularly well paid—need to know that the opportunities will be there to achieve great things for our society and for the health and wellbeing of Australians and people around the world. Ultimately, that is what motivates them. People do not enter these fields for reasons associated with earning high incomes or great money; they enter them predominantly for reasons associated with the idealistic belief that they can improve lives.

It is up to us, as the parliament of Australia, and it is up to the government of Australia—of either political persuasion—to make sure that we have the capacity as a nation to mobilise that idealism and to fund research in a way that ensures that we can maintain and improve our position as one of the world’s leading locations for medical and scientific research. That, in turn, will produce an array of very important positive economic spin-offs that will ensure that our nation continues to enjoy a high standard of living and to have a very large number of well-paid skill based and knowledge based jobs, giving Australian kids something to aspire to in the future.

The second matter I wish to turn to is the totally inappropriate use of taxpayers’ money to further the influence of a very powerful Liberal Party powerbroker. Several Fridays ago, the Financial Review carried a 16-page colour supplement advertising the Grand Prix in Melbourne. According to sources within the Fairfax organisation, this supplement cost the Grand Prix organisation $120,000. It was negotiated directly with Fairfax by the chairman of the Grand Prix Corporation, Ron Walker, who also just happened to have been appointed to the Fairfax board.

This is a highly peculiar advertising strategy with respect to the Grand Prix. The Financial Review is a national newspaper with a relatively small circulation of, from memory, about 95,000 per day. A large percentage of the Financial Review’s readers are not based in Melbourne. A very substantial proportion of those who read the Financial Review, given that it is predominantly consumed by people in the corporate sector on higher incomes, would be people who, if they were going to the Grand Prix, would be attending as guests of their own or other companies, in corporate boxes and corporate entertainment facilities for which they are not actually buying tickets. So why the Grand Prix Corporation would be spending $120,000 to advertise in the Financial Review in this way is very difficult to explain.

It is of great concern that the Victorian government provides significant subsidies to the Grand Prix, and there has been much controversy over the years about the level of transpar-
ency and accountability associated with the involvement of taxpayers’ money in the Grand Prix. This $120,000 payment to Fairfax is highly questionable, as it has been orchestrated by a member of the Fairfax board who is in complete control of the Grand Prix organisation. Ron Walker has effectively used Grand Prix and taxpayers’ money to buy his way onto the Fairfax board. There is an obvious conflict of interest between his role as a Fairfax board member and his role as chairman of the Grand Prix Corporation in this matter.

I put these matters to Fairfax a week or so ago, seeking an explanation and asking whether these facts were correct. The only response I have received has been a stonewall, indicating that Fairfax does not give out information about particular advertisements—how they come about or what amount of money has been paid for them. No attempt was made to provide any kind of justification or explanation for the events that have occurred and no refutation was offered of the facts that I have just outlined.

This kind of corporate misbehaviour is typical of the corporate world, the business world, under the Howard government. If Ron Walker is to continue to run the Grand Prix as a personal fiefdom and to handle advertising matters of this magnitude personally, including the implicit subsidy from taxpayers, he should resign from the Fairfax board. We are again seeing the ugly side of Melbourne Inc.—which was inaugurated under the Kennett government and which is still resonating, in some respects, since the Kennett government’s demise—because corporate governance is an issue that is dealt with at a national level and this behaviour is being allowed to continue by the Howard government. Ron Walker should not be allowed to misuse taxpayers’ money to further his personal corporate ambitions in this way. There is an obvious conflict of interest, and it should be ensured that he does not participate in these kinds of activities in the future. He should resign from the Fairfax board to ensure that all of these matters are dealt with in an appropriate, transparent and accountable way.

Mr SCIACCA (Bowman) (12.11 p.m.)—We have just seen the seventh anniversary of the election of the Howard government. In considering the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003, we have a timely opportunity to examine the spending patterns of this government, the areas in which it has chosen to invest and, perhaps more tellingly, the areas that have been neglected and the ramifications of those decisions on ordinary Australians. While indicating that Labor will support these appropriations, my colleague the shadow Treasurer, Bob McMullan, has moved an amendment, which I am pleased to support, condemning the Howard government as the highest taxing government in the nation’s history. This government not only sees fit to impose on the Australian people the highest ever level of income tax but also has an insatiable addiction to increasing taxation by stealth, by imposing levies and other special charges. Certainly the people in my electorate of Bowman in Queensland are not fooled by this trickery. They know that a tax by any other name is still a tax that adds to the burden shouldered by local families.

Just last week I was approached by Mr Malcolm Lack, the manager of a small business based in Capalaba in my electorate, with regard to the huge impost that the sugar levy, introduced by this government to recoup the cost of the sugar industry reform measures, has proved to be for his operation. Mr Lack runs the Alchemy Cordial Co. and produces an extensive range of cordials and coffee syrups. It is a great example of a thriving locally based enterprise and has been recognised as such, having been named runner-up in the Telstra Small Business of the Year award for the last four years. Alchemy employs six local residents on a full-time basis, and during peak production periods between 10 and 12 employees will be on board. The company has doubled its trade every year since its doors first opened six years ago and, until recently, had entertained very realistic expectations that this trend would continue and distribution figures would again double within 12 to 15 months.
But, given that at present production levels Alchemy goes through over 150 tonnes of sugar a year, the sugar levy of 3c per kilo is a heavy burden for this small business and, understandably, my constituent has some questions that he wants answered. Most importantly: how long will he be liable to pay the sugar levy, and will there be any support available from the government should his business suffer as a consequence of the sugar levy? Mr Lack says that food and beverage manufacturers are already suffering the effects of the rising cost of sugar, which has gone up $50 a tonne over the last few years. As the levy costs cannot be passed on to the consumer, the additional $30 a tonne charged on all domestic sugar sales comes straight out of Alchemy’s bottom line.

So the sugar levy has the very real potential to slow down the growth of the company, limiting the company’s capacity to expand operations and offer more employment opportunities in the Redlands area of my electorate. Although a rebate is available when sugar purchased by manufacturers is used in the production of food and beverage items for the export market, my constituent points out that this is of little assistance to local enterprises, which tend to be small to medium sized businesses and have a limited capacity to fund the research and marketing needed to expand into overseas markets. Alchemy does export to the UK and has just dispatched its first order to New Zealand, but the vast majority of its product is sold on the domestic market through department stores and coffee shops.

Mr Lack is not alone in his concerns that the sugar levy is putting Alchemy and other Australian food processors in a vulnerable position. The Australian Food and Grocery Council also contends that the sugar levy puts domestic food manufacturers at a direct disadvantage against all imported and foreign-made food and beverage products. But the levy is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. Mr Lack understandably wants to know if something can at least be done to lighten the burden of the compliance and administrative costs associated with the levy.

Currently, Alchemy is being billed for the sugar levy at the end of each quarter, which can be a huge imposition on the cash flow of a small business, especially when the bill falls due at the same time as the BAS statements and payment of the superannuation surcharge for employees. My constituent suggests that many businesses would find the bitter pill of the levy easier to swallow if they were able to pay at the time sugar is purchased. I understand that it is currently projected that the levy will be in place for approximately five years. As such, I am sure that the many small businesses like Alchemy, a sector the government claims as its natural constituency, would appreciate a reassessment of the method of collection to ease the burden on their time and budget incurred under the current system of administration.

The amendment moved by the opposition recognises that, while it has managed to eat away at the budget surplus of which it was so proud, the government has failed to deliver on its basic responsibilities to the Australian people. Quite simply, the government’s priorities are dramatically out of step with the concerns felt by ordinary people about bread and butter issues—both in my electorate of Bowman and across the country. During the last sitting week, we saw the Prime Minister turning his back on universal health care, articulating his intention to reduce Medicare from a system that provides quality health care for all Australians to a second-class safety net for pensioners and poor people. This is clearly out of kilter with the views of my constituents in the Redlands and Bayside suburbs of Brisbane. Every day, my office receives calls from constituents concerned that they cannot find a doctor who will bulk-bill, that they cannot afford to pay the growing gap between the rebate amount and the fees their doctors charge, much less find the funds to pay $35 up front each time they go to the GP and then wait for a rebate from Medicare.
A recent survey of surgeries in my electorate undertaken by my office found that only 10 practices had at least one GP who would bulk-bill indiscriminately; one clinic would bulk-bill existing customers but not new patients; 13 surgeries offered bulk-billing only to pensioners, veterans and health cardholders, although two of those extended bulk-billing to consultations with children; and 10 practices offered no bulk-billing at all. Health department figures released during Senate estimates reveal that in the last two years there has been a 12 per cent drop in the number of bulk-billing services in my electorate of Bowman. In the Wynnum-Manly area and the Redlands, patients are now being asked to pay an average of $13.48 each time they visit the doctor. That is an increase of 70.5 per cent on the out-of-pocket costs that patients in our community experienced two years ago.

The Prime Minister’s plan to dismantle the universal health care system, guaranteeing access to bulk-billing only for those with a health care card, together with his plan to put the price of prescription medicines up 30 per cent, would mean that individuals and families earning over $30,000 could lose access to bulk-billing. If families do not have a health care card, they will need a credit card when they get sick. It is a daunting prospect for families like the Fornos of Cleveland. Glenn and Kate Forno have lived in the Redlands for nearly 20 years. During that time, they have been heavily involved with the Redlands Swimming Club, the Thornlands primary school and the Cleveland District State High School, where their children were educated.

They are also mainstays of the local asthma awareness group; it is something they know a lot about, as Kate is a chronic asthmatic. Both of the Forno children suffered from severe asthma and during their childhood required constant care and supervision because of their condition. Upon hearing of the government’s proposal to downgrade Medicare into a second-class safety net for pensioners and health care cardholders, leaving everyone earning more than the modest income of about $30,000 a year paying more for the health care on which they depend, Kate Forno wrote to me seeking my assistance to ensure that this government is aware of the impact such a move would have on families like hers living with chronic illness.

Kate writes:

I am now a severe asthmatic, requiring nebulization at least four times a day. I also have diabetes from the asthma medication and I have just had a Fundoplication to repair the damage caused by constant coughing. I have been hospitalised 3 times in the last 6 months.

I am very concerned about the proposed changes to Medicare. I visit my doctor once every fortnight as part of a Government initiative to control asthma and prevent complications from the disease. I see an asthma specialist as required, an endocrinologist bi annually, a gastrologist as required etc. The drain that my medical and pharmaceutical costs place on our family income are enormous and the fact that my GP bulkbills me for visits helps greatly. If this small concession is removed we will cope, but when the time comes for my husband to retire it is going to be nearly impossible for us to maintain our current level of health funding.

Kate goes on to say that the chronically ill should be able to access quality health care without the worry of how the cost of treatment will impact upon their family. She concludes by saying:

I do not feel that the chronically ill should have their peace of mind constantly undermined by a Government seeking to justify its spending in other areas. Stress plays a major part in my illness and this is one stress I don’t need.

Another area in which my constituents are really feeling the ill effects of cuts to government support for basic services is child care. Child care not only assists parents to balance their family and work commitments but provides our children with a vital opportunity to develop
social skills and begin a lifelong path of learning. Accordingly, ensuring families have appropriate access to child care should be amongst the government’s top priorities. Sadly, under the current government this is not the case.

I regularly receive phone calls and letters from parents in our community who are unable to find suitable child care. In particular, parents are unable to access services for children up to 15 months old. I understand that each child-care centre is limited to offering eight places for this age group. In areas like the Redlands that are experiencing an influx of young families, demand for infant care far exceeds the number of places available. The situation is becoming so dire that many centres have unborn babies on their waiting lists, while one service has reported being contacted by parents seeking advice on the best time to have their baby in order to secure care.

While family day care centres will provide care for infants, they are unable to offer parents a place for their child, having had no increases in the number of places available in the last two budgets. I noticed that the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs was recently on Channel Seven’s Sunrise trying to allay parents’ concerns about the shortage of places and reminding them that long day care places are not capped. This is great news if your children are aged between two and five and you will only ever require assistance with care between six and six from Monday to Friday. But it offers little solace to the growing number of families who work long or irregular hours, whose child-care needs cannot be met by long day care centres and who rely on the flexibility that family day care can provide to balance their work and family commitments. It also fails to address the concerns of parents of many school-age children who are unable to secure a place in outside school hours care. During a recent meeting with service providers in my electorate, which was also attended by my friend and colleague Nicola Roxon, the shadow minister for children and youth, a community based OSHC service told us that, although they have 150 places, they have 60 children on their waiting list. Some parents have resorted to giving eight-year-olds house keys because they cannot find a place for them in supervised care.

While the government is to be commended for introducing quality assurance, QA, in recognition of the importance of ensuring that children are being provided with the best possible care, the distribution of QA information by the National Childcare Accreditation Council appears to have been badly botched due to budget restrictions. During our meetings recently, care providers explained that, although they had received copies of a workbook aimed at providing parents with an overall explanation of the QA system translated into a variety of languages, the quality practices guide which provides care providers with information about the standards they are required to meet has only been produced in English. The National Childcare Accreditation Council advised centres that there was no money to produce translations, which puts carers who have English as a second language in a difficult position in their attempt to get up to speed with QA.

At the Bayside Family Day Centre alone, carers come from five different language backgrounds. In other centres around Brisbane, I am aware that as many as 24 of 28 carers come from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Yet, even if centres are prepared to foot the cost of having guides translated to assist carers, they have been issued with a warning that translating the guide will amount to a breach of copyright. This leaves centres between a rock and a hard place. They are required to meet the government’s standards and are committed to providing quality care to children in their charge, but to do so they need to be able to provide carers with every assistance to become familiar with the six quality elements and 32 principles that summarise and define quality in family day care. They are not being offered the support they need...
with regard to carers from a non-English-speaking background. Broadband funding—which covers the administration of quality assurance and accreditation, the operation of subsidy family day care services, Aboriginal services, training money, the disadvantaged areas subsidy, the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme and much more—is currently under review by this government. Parents and carers alike have told me that each one of these areas is in desperate need of increased funds.

The situation confronting the Rogers family in Capalaba is a compelling example of why this review should not be limited to an examination of the current division of resources amongst the competing interests that I have just mentioned; it should extend to a careful re-examination of the amount of funds provided to these important programs—which is currently a measly $174 million and is set to increase to only $180 million in the next financial year.

Kevin and Yuki Rogers have just had their second child. Their eldest son, Mark, is three years old. He suffers from spinal muscular atrophy, which prevents him from walking, crawling or sitting up without support. He is totally reliant on an electric wheelchair. If Mark were a healthy three-year-old, he would be able to take advantage of the fact that long day care places are not capped and would be able to secure a place in a child-care centre without too much difficulty. But because he requires special care and needs one-on-one attention, his ability to access child care is reliant upon the availability of funding under the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme.

During the last few months of 2002, Mark was able to attend Redlands Child Care Centre at Alexandra Hills but, without renewed SNSS funding, they were unable to offer Mark a place for 2003. Community based service programs Access and Play Care had been able to offer some assistance in caring for Mark, but this support has also been discontinued due to budgetary constraints. Having a child-care place for Mark is an invaluable resource for the Rogers family. The time that Mark is in care allows Mrs Rogers not only to have a break from the pressure of the constant and careful care she provides to her son but also to have time to attend English literacy classes at TAFE. As a relatively new migrant to Australia from Japan, these classes not only help her to develop her language skills but also offer her a valuable social outlet.

Mr and Mrs Rogers have no family in Brisbane whom they can call on to assist in caring for Mark, and Mr Rogers is often away from home with work commitments. Therefore, access to a child-care place is essential if Mrs Rogers is to continue to attend her classes and have the opportunity to meet new people, thus breaking the cycle of isolation that might easily set in if she had no support to care for Mark. Nationwide, there are more than 600 children on the waiting list for SNSS funding, children who, like Mark, have severe medical conditions or disabilities and have ongoing high support needs and are seeking to be included in the programs of eligible child-care services. I was disappointed that, when I wrote to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs about the Rogers’ situation and their increasing anxiety about being able to access care for Mark, he offered not even a glimmer of hope that the subsidy would be extended to meet the needs of the hundreds of families affected. He advised:

I am unable to give you an indication as to when funding will become available, as this is dependent on funds being released by children leaving the scheme.

That is just another example of the government’s disregard for the basic services families need. The government knows that there is an unmet need—it acknowledges that openly—but it is not prepared to do anything about it. To my way of thinking, this government is sadly out of touch with community values. It is happy to subsidise private health insurance subscrip-
tions across the board regardless of income levels, but it will not even contemplate investing money to assist the families of children with disabilities to access child care and thus give those children a valuable opportunity to mix with their peers.

It is fair to say that generally people do not mind paying their fair share of tax, but they do like to see that they are getting something in return in the way of government services. With the highest ever level of income tax and a raft of levies and special charges in place, the Howard government is the highest taxing government in Australian history. What does the average man or woman on the street have to show for it? The basic needs of families in our local communities are being neglected: the burden of basic education costs is increasingly being shifted onto parents; entry-level housing is becoming less affordable; waiting lists for public housing continue to blow out; the government is withdrawing support for the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement; Medicare is under unilateral attack; having already been hit with the responsibility for administering the government’s GST, small businesses involved in food and beverage production have now been stuck with the sugar levy; and, across the country, 50,000 children are waiting to access appropriate child care, while children with special needs are excluded from the mainstream system. It is time for the government to reassess its priorities, to respond to the concerns of its constituents and to deliver on its basic responsibility to ensure that access to housing, health care, education and support for families is a right for all Australians and not just a privilege for those fortunate enough to be able to afford it.

Finally, I refer to comments made this morning by my colleague the shadow minister for families, Wayne Swan. He was talking about the fact that this government at the present time is only concerned, naturally, with the most pressing issue of the day—which is, of course, the impending war on Iraq and Australia’s association with it as part of the coalition of the willing. I make the point that, yes, it is a very serious issue for Australia, and it is one that is being debated in the House at the moment. But what this government is doing, quite wrongly, is taking its eye away from the ball. Wayne Swan made that clear this morning when he said: There are many other pressing issues in this country regarding basic services and what government’s responsibilities are to the people of Australia that are being disregarded. People may be coaxed away from thinking about these issues while we have the big issue of the war, but sooner or later—and it will not be too long—people will be asking this government to be held to account. Services are sadly lacking in many areas and services need to be improved, and this government should know what it is doing in this area. (Time expired)

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (12.31 p.m.)—The Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 serve to remind us that the budget is in very difficult circumstances, notwithstanding the Treasurer’s aura of self-satisfied conceit. The government has resorted to an ever increasing number of special levies and charges—in addition to the GST—record income tax collections and skyrocketing HECS charges. At the same time it has failed to respond to pressing community needs. Nothing has been done to reverse the collapse of bulk-billing throughout vast areas of Australia or to respond to the growing demands of the public hospital system. The government has failed to invest in our public schools, TAFEs, colleges and universities, and is set to demand that students pay more. It continues to stall on paid maternity leave and ignores the declining affordability of entry level housing for struggling young families in regions such as Western Sydney.

Today also serves as an opportunity to canvass a number of budget related issues that face our migrant communities. The additional estimates statement for the immigration portfolio details some minor adjustments to the budget provision for migrant settlement services. These
are, as I say, quite modest in nature. However, the big issue facing migrant welfare agencies at present is Minister Hardgrave’s review of migrant settlement services announced out of the blue in August last year. It is being conducted entirely by DIMIA and the minister’s office and it is supposed to be looking at client access to services, integration of services, funding, accountability and innovation, and flexibility in service delivery and funding models. From the outset there has been an understandable suspicion concerning this review because of the manner in which it is being conducted. Previous reviews of migrant settlement services involved committees of independent outside experts and extensive community consultation. That was certainly the case with the Galbally review, which reported to the Fraser government in 1980, and the Jupp review, which reported to the Hawke government in 1986. Both of those reviews contributed significantly to the development of an excellent migrant settlement system that was inherited by the current government and is constantly promoted by them overseas.

The latest review is notable for the complete lack of any real involvement by groups or experts outside the department. Rightly or wrongly, this has created the suspicion that the current review is designed to deliver a predetermined outcome. According to DIMIA, over 140 written submissions were received in relation to the review. In addition, over 1,000 people attended the 13 consultations chaired by Minister Hardgrave or the further 26 consultation meetings conducted by the department. Since then there has been absolutely no feedback to those who made the effort to convey their concerns, experience and suggestions to the review. All we are told is:

... the results of the consultations, together with analysis of submissions, will be incorporated into a final report which will be presented to the Government in early to mid-2003.

There is no firm timetable for the presentation of the final report and, as yet, no guarantee that the public will ever see the release of this document. There is a particular concern that the review may result in a reduction or complete withdrawal of DIMIA funding to longstanding, established ethnic communities. Currently, a number of these communities—such as the Italians, Greeks, Poles, Ukrainians and Turks—receive CSSS grants in individual states and territories, often for projects that focus on the elderly or on young people. These are under threat.

There is a feeling afoot that some in the government believe that DIMIA settlement services should be restricted to a narrowly defined category of new arrivals. They argue that after some arbitrary initial settlement period, such as five years, the welfare of migrants should be the responsibility of mainstream welfare services. This thinking seems to presuppose that migrants do not face ongoing settlement issues. It also simply assumes that mainstream services have the resources, language and other skills and staff to provide the community development, information, advocacy and casework services that established migrant welfare agencies obviously provide. To a significant extent, both these assumptions are based on a purely theoretical view of the world that does not accurately reflect the realities of life in multicultural electorates such as my own.

The government has issued two recent signals about this direction in the review. Firstly, in the recent DIMIA portfolio additional estimates statement, it revealed that an extra $575,000 had been allocated to the CSSS in 2002-03 to continue funding to established community groups. It said it was doing so because all the budgeted CSSS funding had been diverted to new and emerging ethnic communities. Interestingly, the extra allocation is for 2002-03 and 2003-04 only, with the allocation for next year reducing to only $192,000. We have not yet been told the identities of the established ethnic communities who are affected by this move or what the future holds for them once this one-off funding ceases. From my travels around this country I can assure the minister that significant concern is felt by established communities, in particular by those from Eastern and Southern Europe and parts of the Middle East.
The second signal that significant changes are afoot came when funding applications were called for in early February for the 2003 program. Minister Hardgrave’s media release of 3 February included two paragraphs that are worth quoting in full. It said:

Outcomes from the Settlement Services Review, which will more effectively target and maximise migrant services across agencies, will be announced later this year. Until then, the national funding priorities remain the same.

In 2003, funding is available for periods of nine or 21 months from 1 October 2003 in order to align the scheme with the next financial year. The sector was advised of these arrangements at the time of the 2002 grants announcement. To allow outcomes of the Settlement Services Review to be advised to the sector in 2003, a third year of funding is not available.

Taken together, these statements leave the government room to make substantial changes in the months ahead. The published national priorities for the scheme only remain in place until the review is finalised, and all CSSS grants will expire in either June next year or June 2005. The 2003 funding round will be the first in many years in which funding of three years duration will not be available in any circumstances whatsoever.

I will now turn to the issue of translation services. One of the longest established services is the Translating and Interpreting Service, or TIS, which was established by the Whitlam government 30 years ago. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It employs around 2,000 contractors and covers more than 100 community languages. Anyone familiar with the settlement service would realise that governments of all persuasions have traditionally been forced to set strict priorities for TIS. Access to fee-free interpreting is limited to doctors in private practices, unfunded community organisations, emergency services, councils and trade unions—excluding compensation or litigation cases. That provides settlement assistance to permanent residents. Other Commonwealth or state agencies, private businesses and those helping temporary residents must pay to use TIS’s telephone or on-site interpreting service.

The document translating service provided by TIS is even more restrictive. Basically, it only provides fee-free translations of approved documents such as birth and marriage certificates, statements of educational attainment and employment references for newly arrived permanent settlers within their first two years in Australia. On its web site, DIMIA states: DIMIA does not provide translations to other individuals or clients such as provisional and temporary visa holders or government agencies. A commercial provider will need to be sought for such cases.

Knowing this, I was very surprised to discover that Minister Hardgrave conducted a mass mail-out on 3 March, forwarding an Arabic translation of Mr Howard’s 4 February speech on Iraq. He said he was doing so ‘so that all members of the Arabic-speaking community can have access to it’. As we now know, the translation turned out to be in back-to-front Arabic that was totally unreadable.

While the mistranslation is extremely embarrassing for the government, that is not the limit of our interest in this matter. The broader questions involve the extent to which DIMIA and its resources should be used to disseminate partisan propaganda about the foreign policy of the coalition government. In this debate about appropriations, we are entitled to ask the following questions. Who authorised the use of DIMIA resources for this exercise and on what basis? On what basis was it determined that the Arabic community was not fully aware of Mr Howard’s position on Iraq? What liaison occurred through Mr Howard’s office in deciding to conduct the mail-out at taxpayers’ expense? Was a TIS contractor used to prepare the translation? If so, was this not in contravention of the TIS business rules that indicate that they do not prepare translations for other government agencies? If the translation was prepared by a private...
firm or contractor, what was the firm and how was it selected? Who was responsible for checking a translation that was totally unreadable?

How many organisations and individuals were sent the document, and how and by whom were they selected? I understand there have been figures of about 150 recipients tossed around. To how many organisations that are not Arabic, do not use Arabic script and do not speak Arabic was this Arabic text to the Prime Minister’s speech sent? For what value it would have been sent to them, I cannot work out. What was the total cost of the exercise, including the translation costs, printing costs, staff time for its dispatch and postal costs? Who met these costs? Under what appropriation item were these costs incurred? Who decided to authorise a further mail-out last week, enclosing a second, corrected and, pleasingly, readable translation of Mr Howard’s speech?

This farcical episode has blown up in Minister Hardgrave’s face. It is high time he had a good look at the way he relates to Australians of Arabic background. He seems to apply double standards to them and imply that they will be treated as second-class citizens if they raise public debate about legitimate domestic and foreign policy issues. His original appointment was to try and give a nice face to government, given the erosion of support in some ethnic communities in this country. He was to be the backslapper, the friendly face to counter the concerns about refugee policy. To some extent he has succeeded in that. With regard to the Arabic community, I think we have had a few worrying developments in how he seems to think he should fulfil his role.

We had him sending out a special warning to the ethnic media in this country that they should be careful about how they increase tensions in this country with regard to foreign policy issues. He did not send it to the *Daily Telegraph*; he did not send it to the *Herald Sun*; he did not send it to a number of other groups which inflame tensions in this country and stereotype people. Politicians on his side of politics should perhaps have been good recipients. He did not do any of that. He gave a special warning to the ethnic media: be quiet, be careful and do not increase tensions, because we have you in our gun sights. Similarly, when in Sydney there was an attempt by the Arabic-speaking community to raise questions about the suitability of suggested ASIO and terrorism legislation proposals, he once again went into the public saying that Arabic speakers should not raise their heads too high and should not put their views too clearly, because this would increase tensions in our country. As I said earlier, there is a clear pattern of trying to force the community to be quiet and to acquiesce in government policy. To my mind, there is a degree of intimidation in the way he is performing in this portfolio.

I recently met with representatives of the Community Broadcasting Foundation and the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters Council to discuss their budget proposals for the community broadcasting sector. It is not well understood that the community broadcasting sector has expanded rapidly in recent years, with the freeing up of the issue of broadcast licences. In fact, over a five-year period, the number of licensed stations has more than doubled—to 420 long-term community radio and television stations. These include 260 community radio stations, 104 ethnic community radio stations, and smaller numbers of religious and Indigenous stations and stations for the print handicapped.

Unfortunately, the expansion in licensed stations has not been accompanied by a parallel increase in federal government funding. As a result, the average amount of core funding per station has actually fallen by 46 per cent, forcing stations to resort to greater voluntary fundraising efforts and levies on user groups. This process cannot be allowed to continue because, quite clearly, it is extremely difficult for these stations, which are performing a very important public role, to raise this kind of money in a very competitive market.

**REPRESENTATIVES**

**Wednesday, 19 March 2003**

**MAIN COMMITTEE**

**13025**
I am especially appreciative of the efforts of our diverse and internationally respected 104 ethnic community broadcasting stations. They perform a vital but often unrecognised service for established communities and new arrivals. In fact, the sector now broadcasts in some 97 languages each week, vastly exceeding the reach of other media sectors. Volunteers are the lifeblood of the community broadcasting sector: 25,000 of them assist at present, including 4,000 volunteer ethnic broadcasters.

For some years the Australian Ethnic Radio Training Project has provided skills training for new ethnic broadcasters. I have seen the work of the project at first-hand. I have seen young people who have been involved in conducting programs, running interviews and learning the technology later on going out into the broader broadcasting sector in public roles and becoming recognised in important jobs in this country. I have had nothing but positive feedback about the project, which has operated for several years with minimal government funding. Unfortunately, the initial funding provided to the project will be exhausted by the end of this financial year. Further funding is needed for the project to continue and be extended to the rest of the community broadcasting sector. I strongly support the project’s continuation and emphasise the need for the government to allocate the necessary ongoing funding.

I referred earlier to the correspondence the minister directed specifically to the ethnic broadcasting sector in which he tried to say that it should be careful about arousing tensions in this country by being too controversial in regard to Middle East foreign policy positions. I have said it before and I will say it again: the community broadcasting sector in this country is vital to us, because the reality is that a number of foreign stations are now able to broadcast into this country and into homes in our electorates and make available broadcasting from overseas. I have to say that not all of this material is attuned to the multicultural tolerance of this country and not all of it goes towards harmony and understanding. Some of the material broadcast is of a very extreme nature, pushing hard agendas of intolerance and the stereotyping of other groups. We have to be aware that this is a new difficulty with globalisation and with the expanding penetration by foreign media of various countries. This is another reason why I say that it might be preferable if the government, rather than attacking Australia’s national community broadcasting sector and trying to intimidate it and push it around, put greater emphasis on supporting it, because this sector often is a bulwark, a hurdle for these overseas stations to defeat in the marketplace. This sector includes people who have migrated to this country and become citizens and permanent residents. They understand the culture of the country, they understand what is expected of them and they are very much attuned to the needs of the country. Regardless of the fact that people occasionally get upset about comments or political statements by the sector that are not in tune with the views of official political parties, it is a very worthwhile sector.

I return to the question of the migrant resource centres. Once again, the opposition puts on the record its strong support for community involvement in this field. I have had the opportunity to visit the vast majority of the MRCs around the country. They involve large numbers of residents; people who have many skills and a commitment to the community and who provide their time to help new arrivals and established communities. There is a danger that this government will move towards erosion of community control and be more inclined to bring in— as it has in the welfare and the labour market employment sectors—charitable and religious organisations which, although they are not per se groups that we attack, may not have the experience or the life-knowledge of these MRCs.

On occasion it has been necessary for Labor and coalition governments to take funding away from some MRCs because of a variety of problems. We have been supportive of some
closures in the last year or two when it was clear that there were indefensible practices in some centres. We are not saying that we support mismanagement, theft et cetera. We are saying that, as a broad concept, community control is desirable and it should be supported rather than undermined by the coalition. MRCs want real support in this review, not backslapping and various polka dances around the room from the minister. They want long-term community support. As I indicated earlier on the question of funding, the more established communities—whether they are Croatian, Portuguese, Italian or Greek—still have problems. Their funding should not be reduced in any fashion with the excuse that they can now be dealt with fully by mainstream services.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (12.51 p.m.)—In speaking on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003, I thought it would be appropriate to look at the total gamut of the government’s actions, where they have taken us to today and what this means in terms of the budget, the economy and where Australia is heading in future. In this time of war I am sure there are many issues that are weighing very heavily on the minds of ordinary Australians as they sit around their kitchen tables and ask where the government has taken them, the country and our troops.

Yesterday I spoke on the declaration of war by the Prime Minister. I put on the record my opposition to war without the sanction of the United Nations, the international community and the Australian people. I believe it is very important for all members of parliament to take the opportunity available to us to put on the record where we stand personally, not just as party members, on these issues. Yesterday I also listened intently to a number of speeches made by government members of parliament, and I was very disappointed because I found that government MPs were struggling to articulate a clear message as to why their government had decided to send this country to war. They could not quite come to grips with the reasoning; they could not articulate any sound reasons. They went backwards and forwards in their speeches about how we actually came to this point. The majority spoke of their views on countries like France, Germany and others, and they spent most of their time attacking these other countries—much as will happen in this war. I thought it would have been more important for government members to outline the process the government used to make the decision. The reason they did not is quite obvious: it is that it was a very poor decision making process. I was also extremely disappointed with the gutless silence of government backbenchers—I am not going to mention ministers. I hardly heard a peep from any backbenchers. On the crucial matter of this country going to war, there was not a word. The silence was deafening, as they say.

Further, the government have silenced this parliament by cancelling question time today. There is a real scrutiny available through question time that is not available in any other forum, but the government have decided that there will be no question time today. Just like their decision about the war, it is not acceptable. Question time should go ahead today. There is ample time to have both the question time forum to scrutinise the government and the debate for government and opposition members to speak on the issue of war. As it stands already, the opposition have agreed to cut the speaking time on this issue from 20 minutes to 10 minutes so we can accommodate all members, but this is no excuse to now turn around and say that question time should not go ahead. The government really are turning their backs on the Australian people by not allowing question time—that very important debate—to take place today. This also reflects on the way the government manage business in the House and the way we have to deal with matters in here. For quite some time, there has been a lack of management, a lack of professionalism, in this House with respect to how time is actually allocated to make sure we get our full opportunity to speak and put on the record the views of our con-
constituents. The Howard government were first elected on this platform of reform and they talked very much about the Howard battlers. What I want to do today is talk about the Howard battlers.

* A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

**Sitting suspended from 12.56 p.m. to 1.15 p.m.**

**Mr RIPOLL**—As I was saying before the suspension, I want to turn my attention to the so-called ‘Howard battlers’ who were so prominent in speeches by John Howard during the 1998 election campaign. It is quite obvious now that the Howard battlers are all but gone from government focus. This government has completely forgotten all the battlers out there—all the workers, all the ordinary people—that it said it would govern for. In fact, I remember the Prime Minister making a promise that he would govern for all Australians. Instead, over the past seven years we have seen a government that governs only for those who are well-to-do—for those who can afford things and for those who can fend for themselves—rather than for those who need assistance from the government.

This came to me very clearly over the weekend. I held a community forum in my electorate on families and I invited the local community and some guest speakers. One of the guest speakers at the forum pointed out a range of issues that I think are really important about the inequality and the great divide now being created in the community by this government’s policies. This speaker was Morrie O’Connor, President of QCOSS, the Queensland Council of Social Services. He spoke on a range of issues, but most importantly he drew people’s attention to the inequality created when some families can afford two new cars, or two very good quality cars, whilst other families struggle to get by with one old vehicle. A family with two vehicles can afford to do a variety of things and go to work, but a family struggling with one vehicle cannot. They have to run the kids to school and then go to work. It is much harder when they have to share a vehicle. In the same vein, some families out there not only own their own homes but are purchasing other homes and properties for investment. At the same time as this is occurring, more and more Australians are finding it difficult to purchase their first home and more and more Australians are actually homeless or struggling with higher rents as rental property values increase. Morrie O’Connor also pointed out the issue of shares. There are many families out there now buying shares to create more wealth, but unfortunately there are even more families—more than ever—who cannot share in any of the wealth that is being created in this country.

If you look at the issue of jobs and training, some people in the community have better access to jobs. They have better access to highly paid, full-time jobs with bonuses that carry an amount of security. Unfortunately, many people in the community do not share that luxury because, under this government’s policies, they are getting part-time work, casual work, work that is not secure and work that does not deliver bonuses—work that makes life very difficult for them. These are the differences. It is good that people can better themselves. I am not talking about people not bettering themselves; I am talking about the growing gap, the great divide in this community, being created by this government. When we look at work, that is of particular importance.

When we look at tax, we can see that a greater number of earners at the high-end can minimise their tax. Proportionately, they can reduce the amount of tax that they pay to government. Another great advantage they have is that, because they are higher wage earners—much higher than previously—they can use all sorts of advantages to make life easier. At the lower end of the scale are the majority of Australians—the growing majority of Australians
that the Howard government said that it would govern for—and they are missing out. They have no access to tax minimisation. They have no means by which they can improve their lot. They pay their PAYE tax—they pay all of their taxes—and then they are slugged even further with other taxes, the taxes that are hidden through the GST and so forth. When we look critically at the proportion of a person’s income that goes out in tax, it is those at the lower income end who pay by far the most tax in total—not only the total of all of their income and earnings but the most in the whole scheme of tax that the government collects as revenue. When we examine who has the greatest burden of tax on their shoulders, we see that it is not those who earn the most—it is not proportionate; it is in no way fair and equitable—it is those who have the least capacity who pay the greatest proportion.

If we look at the area of education, again there is a growing gap between the elite—those who can afford access to the best schools and the best facilities—and everybody else struggling on tighter and tighter budgets to even afford a state education. These people struggle to afford books and uniforms and to give kids a little bit extra and get them to the school camp once a year or on an excursion or a field trip. There is a growing inequality between those who have access at the higher end and those who do not. These are things that we have seen distinctly over the past seven years through appropriations, through budgets, through what this government has squandered in spite of the great advantage it has had: the great advantage of a strong economy. The government always talks about a strong economy. Great! What are you doing with that strong economy? What are you delivering for people who need to have something delivered from a strong economy? It is being wasted; it is being squandered. At the educational level we will miss out in the future. The people who will miss out are the young kids who do not have the sort of access and resources they need, the young kids going from school to TAFE, university or vocational training programs.

If we look at the area of health, what have the big differences been? What really marks the seven years that the Howard government has been in office? For most people, the area of health is probably the most critical and the most crucial. We have seen a dismantling, a pulling apart, a running down and a denigration of our health system in this country. It has been run down to the point where very shortly—and this is happening at an incredible pace—the credit card will be mightier than the Medicare card and access to health care will be based only on what you earn, not on what you need. This will be a great tragedy in this country, more than any other issue, and it will be the hardest one to fix. Again, the government talks about its great low interest rates, the strength of the economy, how it managed to survive the Asian financial crisis and all of these things. But what has it done with it? Where is the delivery of services? Where are the things that people need on the ground? Where are the health care services that this government has a responsibility to provide? They are not there.

In terms of universal health care, we are seeing the Prime Minister’s aim over the last 20 years finally coming to fruition: the dismantling of the health system. It is a two-tiered system. You have one system for those who can afford it; they pay and they get health care. Then there is a minimal, bottom of the line safety net for those who do not have any other choice; they pick up the scraps. The scraps of health care are what they will be left with. It is a two-tiered health system which we see in countries like the United States of America, and it is criticised by many countries. Under the United States system of health care, when you come into the hospital emergency ward, whether you are bleeding to death or not, they ask you: ‘What sort of health insurance have you got? How are you covered? How are you going to pay us for saving your life?’ The care you get is based on that ability to pay. This is something I never want to see in Australia. This is something that all Australians should rise up against. Health care will be the biggest issue—bigger than war, bigger than any other issue in this
country. Ordinary people—the families, the mums and dads, the aged and those struggling—understand that when they have to take their family down to the local GP, who has been the mainstay of the health system in this country, they will now be forced to pay up-front fees. There are fewer and fewer doctors bulk-billing. Families with two or three kids often ring my office and say: ‘I’ve just gone down to my local GP and they’re no longer bulk-billing or taking new patients on their books. They want us to pay up front.’

Quickly do the sums: if it costs $45 to see the GP and you have three kids, that is a big whack out of your already minimal income for the week. Most people use 50 per cent or more of their total net income to pay for just housing. If you start taking anywhere up to $150 out of their weekly income, they are really struggling and probably cannot afford to put food on the table. This is something that is being completely ignored by the government, and it is something they should be absolutely condemned for. They should be condemned for what they have achieved in their seven years in areas like health care, health access, housing and a whole range of others.

The picture that I have painted for people listening today or reading these words is a picture of reality; it is a picture of what the government have strived very diligently to do. They have not been slack in moving forward in their campaign to ensure that the best services go only to the wealthy and everybody else has to pick up the scraps. It does not matter where you turn; I have talked about health, education and tax, and I want to also talk about housing. Housing has become very unaffordable under this government. The government have driven the market to a position where people have been priced out of it. Ordinary people can no longer afford a home. The First Home Owners Scheme is a good scheme; it has flaws in it, but it is a good scheme. It has flaws in it because, under this scheme, millionaires buying their first home—a million dollar home—are being subsidised by this government with taxpayers’ money, while many other people out there are struggling to buy their first home because they get very little assistance from this scheme. They cannot even get into the market because the prices of many homes throughout Sydney, Melbourne and most capital cities around this country have been driven up in a false market. I believe, with low interest rates. While low interest rates are obviously good for people, it also means that many people miss out. They have also driven up rents. For people who cannot afford to buy a home and who are renting, rents are now becoming out of reach as well. As I said earlier, for many people, more than 50 per cent of their income is spent on their housing. Do your sums on that. If you are a member of parliament, if you are a high wage earner, and 50 per cent of your total income is going towards just providing a roof over the heads of your family, it does not leave a lot for education, health and many other things.

This government has forced people into a system called Lifetime Health Cover with the threat that, if they do not pay up, they will miss out. Many people jumped on board out of fear. What we are now seeing is that many people are hopping off that truck because they know they have been conned—and they also know that they just cannot afford it. The Prime Minister made very loud promises about the introduction of Lifetime Health Cover and said that forcing people to pay private health insurance would force down premiums. I can remember him saying over and over and over: ‘This will be good for the economy, good for people, good for families. It will force down premiums.’ But what have we seen in reality? What is the fact today? Premiums are going up consistently and constantly. The government has just approved the increase in premiums by another seven-plus per cent. This is a system that does not work. It is costing the taxpayer a recurring debt, every single year, of between
$2½ billion and $3 billion—and that will only get worse. These are the sorts of debts that this government places on the heads of ordinary taxpayers with the little they can afford.

This is also the highest taxing government in history—not only in direct taxes but also in indirect taxes through the GST and other taxes. There has been the sugar levy, the airline ticket levy, the milk levy, gun levies and the East Timor levies, and I will make a wager with people here that there will have to be a war levy of some kind. This government is prepared to commit our troops to war, but it does not know how it will pay for it. It is prepared to introduce more taxes and more levies and rip money out of the pockets of ordinary families, but it does not know how to spend it properly. This is a government that is out of control, that has lost its way, that has forgotten the battlers it talked about when it first came to office—the Howard battlers. Never forget the Howard battlers. Where are they today? They are struggling. They are often homeless. They are the ones who need better health care. They are the ones who need entry level access to housing. They are the ones who need their kids to be better educated so that they have more opportunities to get the higher paying jobs that those in the top five per cent of this country now get. It is a disproportionate redistribution of the wealth in this country, and it is a sad, sad indictment of the government. This week was a black week, as the Leader of the Opposition said, in terms of the war, but it has also been a black seven years—black on the economy because, while it does well, only the top five per cent get to share in it. The government should be condemned for its views, its actions and its policies. (Time expired)

Sitting suspended from 1.30 p.m. to 4.01 p.m.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (4.01 p.m.)—I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003. I particularly want to talk this afternoon about our present direction on Australia's environmental policies and to map out a future course. Let me make two opening remarks before I get into a more conceptual piece. If you looked at the House of Representatives Notice Paper, you would think that Australia was an industrial relations basket case. I admit that the agenda for this week has been somewhat altered, but the Notice Paper lists five workplace relations bills for debate next week: the Workplace Relations Amendment (Protection for Emergency Management Volunteers) Bill 2003, the Workplace Relations Amendment (Transmission of Business) Bill 2002, Workplace Relations Amendment (Simplifying Agreement-making) Bill 2002, the Workplace Relations Amendment (Choice in Award Coverage) Bill 2002 and the Workplace Relations Amendment (Award Simplification) Bill 2002. On this week's paper, there is also the Workplace Relations Amendment (Termination of Employment) Bill 2002, Workplace Relations Amendment (Compliance with Court and Tribunal Orders) Bill 2003 and Workplace Relations Amendment (Improved Remedies for Unprotected Action) Bill 2002.

The situation is pretty similar on the Senate's order of business. There is the Workplace Relations Amendment (Fair Dismissal) Bill 2002 [No. 2], the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002 [No. 2] and the Workplace Relations Amendment (Prohibition of Compulsory Union Fees) Bill 2002 [No. 2]. If you looked at the Notice Paper and the order of business, you really would think, from that focus on the part of the government, that we are living in a workplace relations nightmare—an industrial relations basket case—whereas the government frequently informs us that there is very little going on in the way of industrial action.

By comparison, the agenda for many other policy areas—including the environment, my own area of portfolio responsibility—is threadbare. Next to nothing in the way of legislation in that area is coming forward. Compared with our industrial relations situation and with many other portfolios, the environment is an area of real stress and difficulty. That has been
pointed out by independent reports such as the *State of the environment* report, which was released last year; the land and water audit; and information put forward by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the CSIRO and a host of other independent and authoritative sources. All those independent assessments said that there are real problems. I intend to turn to them in more detail shortly. It really is astonishing to see this government’s legislative priorities according to the *Notice Paper*.

The other introductory comment I want to make concerns the issue of ethanol. Since ethanol levels in motor vehicle and other engines have been noted at levels of up to 20 per cent, motorists and consumers generally have been concerned about this issue. Motor vehicle manufacturers have said that ethanol at levels in excess of 10 per cent could damage motor vehicle engines and that use at this level would void manufacturers warranties. Major motor- ing organisations around the country—the NRMA et cetera—have called for a 10 per cent cap on ethanol levels to protect motorists.

In September last year, Labor acted on those legitimate concerns by announcing a clear policy on ethanol content in petrol. We would cap the ethanol content at 10 per cent and we would require labelling where ethanol levels exceeded five per cent—a clear policy to protect motorists and consumers. Did the Liberal government adopt this policy? No. Did it take any action at all? No. Treasurer Costello said that motorists should be careful, that they should not buy petrol with too much ethanol in it. How are they expected to know, when the federal government has failed to use its powers to require labelling? The Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Dr Kemp, said that action was a matter for the states—a classic piece of buck-passing.

The Howard government commenced a fuel sampling program in April 2002. It tested 520 fuel samples from service stations across Australia. Of those, 42 samples—or eight per cent—contained ethanol. Most of those had ethanol contents of between 15 and 20 per cent, while several had ethanol contents of more than 20 per cent. Most of the results above 10 per cent were from New South Wales. This information was released to the opposition in answer to questions we asked at Senate estimates hearings. The Howard government, having done this testing, has been in the unique position of knowing that petrol with ethanol content in excess of 10 per cent was out there in the marketplace, but it has refused to tell anybody about it or to do anything about it. The way the government has sat on its hands over the ethanol issue is improper and inappropriate.

Why hasn’t the government been prepared to take action on ethanol? Why hasn’t it been acting in the best interests of motorists and consumers? Perhaps the answer lies in the AEC return from Manildra Flour Mills for 2001-02, which shows that since the 2001 federal election Manildra has donated over $70,000 to the Liberal Party and $52,000 to the National Party—and, in case anyone is interested, nothing to the Labor Party. Manildra, run by Dick Honan, a good friend of the Prime Minister’s, is Australia’s largest ethanol producer. Australia needs a Prime Minister, a Treasurer and an environment minister who will make decisions based on the best interests of motorists and consumers, not on political donations received.

I said that I wanted to make some remarks about environmental issues in Australia more broadly. I first became interested in environmental issues as a boy. I got interested in Australian birds, plants and animals, and I became involved in efforts to protect them through protecting Australian bushland. When I was a teenager, I got involved in the conservation issues of 1969 and 1970 in Victoria—the protection of the Little Desert and the Lower Glenelg. It was indeed these interests which led me into politics, and many years later I was delighted to
be given the opportunity to serve as shadow minister for sustainability and the environment in Simon Crean’s shadow cabinet.

Australia is unique. It is one of a handful of countries with mega-diverse flora and fauna. For example, it has over 700 different species of birds. It is particularly unusual in being a politically stable country with mega-diverse flora and fauna—for example, the northern part of our country has tropical rainforests and Cape York Peninsula has tropical savanna. Other areas of the world with similar botanical regions, such as the Amazon Basin, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, simply do not have a similar level of political stability. This is, by any yardstick, a ripper country. Anyone who is born in Australia or who comes to live here has pretty much won Tatts Lotto.

When we ask ourselves what it is that is so special about Australia or when we ask migrants and tourists what it is that they love about Australia or, for those of us who have had the opportunity to travel overseas, when we ask what it is that is different about Australia compared with other countries, one of the first things that comes to mind is the quality of our environment—the quality of our air, the quality of our drinking water, our unspoilt beaches and our unique and diverse wildlife. All these things make Australia a special place, and having these things imposes on us a special obligation to protect them and to hand them on to our children in as good a state as we found them. We have an obligation to protect our environment for our children and, indeed, to protect it on behalf of the rest of the world.

Australia can and should be an environmental showcase. We have a wonderfully diverse array of habitats. We have ancient and beautiful flora and fauna. We have breathtaking scenery—mountains and beaches which stir and invigorate the soul and deserts and plains which calm and repair it. Notwithstanding European settlement, we are still in the position of having cleaner air, purer water and more unspoilt beaches than any other country on earth. But we will not keep these things just by sitting on our hands. They are threatened by climate change, by indiscriminate land clearing, by profligate use of water, by erosion and by salinity. I believe that the biggest environmental issues confronting Australia are climate change, land clearing and our use of water.

I mentioned earlier the State of the environment report released last year. It must serve as an urgent wake-up call for all of us. The report details a litany of failures. Increasing areas are affected by salinity and land degradation—dryland salinity is predicted to affect two million hectares of native vegetation by 2050 and 5.7 million hectares are now affected by or at risk of salinity. Greenhouse gas emissions are increasing—in 1998 they were 16.9 per cent higher than in 1990. With regard to land clearing, only four other countries exceeded our rate of clearance of native vegetation in 1999. Around 400,000 hectares of native vegetation are cleared in Australia every year, which in turn kills up to 10 million birds, including threatened species. We have unsustainable levels of fishing in some fisheries, and sediment and nutrients from land based activities are placing pressure on coral reefs. The rate of production of non-renewable energy is growing faster than the rate of production of renewable energy, and we have the highest per capita level of hay fever sufferers in the world. We have significant increases in the extraction of surface water for irrigation, and we have declining surface water quality.

In launching the report, Professor Bruce Thom said that its primary finding was that Australia is still not sustainable in environmental terms. There is little evidence to suggest that we have made any headway since the last State of the environment report in 1996. For every step forward, we appear to have taken many more backwards. I believe we have to tackle these problems, but I believe that the task need not be to our economic detriment. In the words of former US President Bill Clinton, ‘If we do it right, protecting the climate will yield not costs,
but profits; not burdens, but benefits; not sacrifice, but a higher standard of living’. There is a huge body of business evidence now showing that energy savings give better service at lower cost with higher profit.

One of the critical issues confronting Australia today is water. This year, 2003, is the International Year of Fresh Water. We have just been experiencing one of the worst droughts on record, and many of Australia’s river systems are in poor and declining health. We need to use 2003 to devote much more attention to the health of our river systems. A key new year’s resolution, if you like, for 2003 must be to secure more water for the Murray-Darling Basin. The mouth of the Murray River would now be closed if it were not for dredging. We have scientists estimating that, unless we do something urgently, Adelaide water will be undrinkable two days out of five within 20 years.

Scientists tell us that the rivers of the Murray-Darling Basin have a moderate chance of survival if we deliver an additional 1,500 gigalitres of water and even less chance if we do not. The federal government, in consultation and partnership with the states, must deliver a long-term plan which will support the provision of 1,500 gigalitres of extra water for the Murray-Darling Basin over the next 10 years. We need to act to secure and restore the health of our river systems, by guaranteeing water flows to ensure basic river health, providing flexibility of water allocation that recognises that natural flows vary seasonally and over time and clarifying water access entitlements and the responsibilities that go with those entitlements.

Governments can find solutions. The once mighty Snowy River had become a trickle but the New South Wales and Victorian governments together have started putting water back into the Snowy to ensure that it will flow again. In the International Year of Fresh Water, we need a national water policy. Our task is to find water for our farmers and irrigators, environmental flows for our stressed rivers and sustainable supplies for our cities and urban industries. Last year’s national land and water resources audit found that 84 of Australia’s surface water management areas are either close to or overused compared with their sustainable flow regimes. Many river basins in New South Wales have a greater than 100 per cent water diversion as a percentage of sustainable flow regime. There are too many nutrients in 43 river basins, water is excessively turbid in parts of 41 basins and water is too saline in 24 basins. In much of the state of Victoria, water combines all three of these problems. I believe the Year of the Outback was a disaster for the outback. We need to make sure that the International Year of Fresh Water is a year of progress for our stressed river systems.

I want to talk next about the related issues of salinity and land clearing. If we are serious about salinity, we must tackle its principal cause, which is land clearing. The best way to prevent salinity is to control land clearing. Unregulated land clearing is the principal cause of rising salt levels in our soils and rivers. It also destroys the habitats of birds and animals and degrades the land, and cleared and rotting vegetation contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Unless we are able to control land clearing, we will face even greater devastation and loss of productive land, continuing greenhouse gas emissions and the extinction of a range of native birds, plants and animals. Since European settlement, Australia has cleared 90 per cent of native vegetation in the eastern temperate zone, 50 per cent of rainforests and one-third of forest or woodland.

Back in August last year, the actor Jack Thompson spoke stirringly at the National Press Club, calling on the government to control land clearing. Some of the disturbing statistics on land clearing that he highlighted included the following: a piece of land the size of a football...
field is lost to salinity every day, 60 per cent of coastal wetlands in southern Australia have been lost and 20 billion trees have been cleared since 1788, with over 70 per cent of Australia’s native vegetation cleared or substantially modified. Thousands of volunteers plant hundreds of thousands of trees each year on days like National Tree Day. They know that we have a problem. But, because the laws preventing indiscriminate land clearing are inadequate, for every tree planted by volunteers, 100 are cut down. We need to stop the year in, year out decline in our native vegetation cover.

I want to turn now to the critical global issue of climate change. The CSIRO has reported that New South Wales will be 2.7 degrees Celsius warmer by 2050, with double the number of droughts. The number of Sydney days over 35 degrees Celsius will rise by 50 per cent. Insurance and reinsurance companies the world over are already taking a bath as a result of the increasing frequency of extreme weather events—

Mr Georgiou—Was that a pun?

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—Indeed. We have had cyclones, storms, floods, bushfires and the like. A document was released by the environment minister at the end of last year entitled Living with climate change: an overview of potential climate change impacts on Australia. The following were some of its findings. Firstly, Australia’s water supply and hydrological systems are likely to become increasingly vulnerable to climate change due to projected drying trends over much of the continent, with stream flows in parts of the Murray-Darling Basin decreasing by as much as 45 per cent by 2070 and increased river salinity and saltwater intrusions to ground water from rising sea levels. Secondly, natural ecosystems may undergo significant and irreversible damage, with the World Heritage listed wet tropics of Queensland potentially reduced by as much as 50 per cent and endemic species decreasing their current range size by 63 per cent. Thirdly, the RAMSAR-listed Macquarie Marshes, semipermanent and ephemeral wetland vegetation, may reduce by up to 40 per cent of their original area by 2030, resulting in less frequent breeding events and local extinctions.

The report recognised that we will get natural adaptation, but that will probably be too slow to avert a decline in the quality of our coral reefs, with increased incidence of coral bleaching, damage from cyclones and reduced growth rates from higher CO₂ levels. At the other end of the spectrum, the report indicated that the alpine ecosystems are highly vulnerable to climate change, predicting that a 1.8 degree Celsius temperature increase will cause snow areas to decline by two-thirds by 2030, significantly reducing alpine habitats. This finding was reinforced by the Victorian government’s Alpine resorts 2020 report, which shows that climate change is soon to have a significant effect on Victoria’s snowfields, with a reduction in snow cover at alpine resorts predicted within 20 years.

In south-west Western Australian, a study on climate variability and change found that there has been a decrease of up to 20 per cent in winter rainfall over the past 30 years. It has been predicted that a long-term decline in rain in the south-west will occur between now and 2070. An increase in temperature since 1960 has already occurred and a further increase of up to three degrees in the average maximum is predicted over the next 68 years. The conditions for drought are going to worsen over the next half a century, and climate change is resulting in conditions that are more variable and less predictable than they have been previously. South-west Western Australia has, in effect, suffered 25 years of drought conditions—that is climate change, clear and simple.

The work by the CSIRO makes it clear that, if we do not do something to curb it, climate change will make our future droughts more frequent and more severe. Australia can and should be an environmental showcase. If we take action to halt land clearing, if we take action
to contain greenhouse gas emissions and to curb climate change and if we use our water more wisely, we will become an environmental showcase. We need to resolve to do everything we can to see that we do become an environmental showcase and to ensure that we can pass this beautiful country on to our children in at least as good a condition as we found it.

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (4.21 p.m.)—I rise in this cognate debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 to highlight some of the important issues affecting my region of central Victoria. I have raised the Calder Highway funding issue many times in this House. I again demand that the Howard government fund the Calder Highway in the forthcoming budget, and I demand that it commit itself to the Bracks state government’s completion date of 2006. The betrayal by the Howard government on the issue of the Calder Highway is a matter of major political concern in the Bendigo and central Victoria region. Bendigo is the only major provincial centre in Victoria that does not have a fully duplicated highway to Melbourne, and that means that both Geelong and Ballarat have a big and unfair advantage over Bendigo. That rankles with central Victorians, who pay big fuel taxes and see them siphoned off by the Howard government to fund big city freeways like the Scoresby Freeway.

I now want to place on the public record some of the history surrounding the Calder Highway funding project. The Howard government declared the Calder Highway between Melbourne and Bendigo a road of national importance in November 1996. The Commonwealth has the primary responsibility to declare Australian roads roads of national importance. The states put forward proposals, but ultimately the Commonwealth decides if it will or will not declare a particular road a RONI. The Calder had been funded previously using federal government funds from the national arterial road program. The Hawke Labor government funded the duplicated section from Big Hill to Ravenswood from this program. The highway received its road of national importance status because of its role as a strategic road link from Melbourne to north-west Victoria.

On 3 June 1997, the then transport minister, John Sharp, declared the Calder Highway, from its intersection with the Tullamarine Freeway at Essendon to the city of Mildura and any deviations between these locations, to be a national arterial road. Only that section of the Calder between Melbourne and Bendigo has the RONI classification. The full highway between Melbourne and Mildura is classified as a national arterial road. This enables the Calder Highway between Melbourne and Bendigo to be upgraded under the RONI classification, 50 per cent of which is funded by the Commonwealth from the national arterial road program, while the remaining 50 per cent is funded by the state government. Treasurer Costello was very careful in his response to the Bendigo media during the 2001 election campaign when he said, in Bendigo, on 31 October 2001:

“The government is committed to fund it [the Calder Highway] in partnership with the State Government, so as the State Government commits to construction, the Commonwealth will match the funding under the program of Road of National Importance”.

The position is straightforward, as set out by the federal Treasurer. The Calder upgrade to Bendigo is funded fifty-fifty, with the Commonwealth matching the state funds when the state makes them available.

I also recall the federal Minister for Transport and Regional Services, Mr Anderson, when he was in Bendigo only weeks before the budget of May last year—and I am holding up a copy of a picture that was in the press at the time—making the same pledge to match state funding for the Calder when it was allocated. The pledge was promptly forgotten. When Mr
Anderson released his transport budget in May, there was nothing to match the $70 million allocated by the Bracks government for the next stage of the duplication from Kyneton to Faraday. In fact, when Mr Anderson brought down his transport budget, he protested that he had been ambushed by the Victorian government, which had allocated funds for the next stage. Having committed himself some weeks earlier to matching the state government’s funding, Mr Anderson then claimed he was ambushed. This alleged ambush came after he had already promised federal funds.

On the federal department’s web site under the heading ‘Transport Programmes—Roads of National Importance’ the last sentence states:

The Government’s election commitments will have priority.

We can see how much notice they take of that. In spite of this, the federal government have not matched the state government’s May 2002 commitment of $70 million. After all, that is the very reason that sparked the Bendigo Plus petition being taken to the federal parliament. The department’s webpage dealing with Victorian projects, under the heading ‘Calder Highway’, states in the fourth paragraph:

... the highway is principally a state arterial road and the responsibility for meeting Victoria’s strategy rests with the Victorian Government.

That is correct. It is the responsibility of the state government to arrange planning studies and routes and to tender for construction, but the decision as to whether the federal government will fund a highway as a RONI is a decision that only the federal government can make. The Bracks government has determined that the Calder duplication to Bendigo could be completed by 2006 and has set out a strategy to achieve this in partnership with the Commonwealth’s RONI program. It allocated $25 million—50 per cent of the total cost—for the Carlsruhe section in its first budget. The federal government refused to commit its share of the funding and in fact stalled the project for another 12 months.

After a concerted campaign involving several speeches in federal parliament and intense media coverage of the issue, the Howard government finally allocated its share of the costs and the Carlsruhe project was commenced and is currently still under construction. The Bracks government allocated a further $70 million in its last budget for the Faraday section, which is the next stage of the project. The Commonwealth has so far refused to commit to this stage, in spite of Treasurer Costello’s pre-election 2001 commitment. The Commonwealth has also refused to commit to the completion date. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, John Anderson, in reply to a question on notice, stated that the Calder duplication to Bendigo was originally scheduled to be completed by 2002-03. This has been conveniently ignored by the media, the coalition spokesperson and the Bendigo Plus spokesperson. The Deputy Prime Minister actually said some years ago that the whole project should be completed by 2003, and it is not even half finished. We should note that, if the original completion date of 2002-03 set by the conservatives had been honoured, the Calder Highway upgrade would now be complete. Instead, the Howard government has starved the Calder since 1999, diverted Calder funds to other highway projects and left a big stretch of the Calder unfinished, with no finishing date in sight. I notice that paragraph 6 of the Bendigo Plus media release of Wednesday, 27 November states:

Since the petition had been launched, Mr Poyser—

their spokesman—

said that the State Government had pledged to complete the Calder upgrade rather than wait for their Federal counterparts.
National Party MP Mr Damian Drum has also been issuing similar statements. This is blatantly wrong. At no stage has the Bracks government said that it would complete the Calder by going it alone. The Bendigo Advertiser, accurately reporting Mr Bachelor’s comments on 8 November 2002, said:

The Bracks Government will make a start on two remaining sections of the Calder utilising the $70 million allocated in its last budget. The completion of these stages will depend on the Commonwealth allocating its $70 million as part of the RONI and election campaign commitments.

The then chairman of the Calder Improvement Group, Mr Geoff Neil, stated on ABC Radio on 16 December that the rules had changed and that the states had to nominate major roads for federal funds. That is no different from the RONI classification. He further stated that there were no national classifications. Mr Neil referred to AusLink, the Howard government’s new integrated transport funding proposal, which was announced by Minister Anderson on 7 November 2002. The AusLink fact sheet on the department’s web site states:

AusLink will not involve a reduction in the Commonwealth Government’s transport expenditure. It will not affect any of the current projects funded by the Commonwealth Government, or any projects where there has been a firm Government funding commitment.

They are the key words: ‘a firm government funding commitment’. The last paragraph in the minister’s 7 November press release states:

The AusLink green paper is open for comment until 7 February 2003 and will be supported by a series of consultation meetings in metropolitan and regional Australia. The Government will release a formal policy statement or white paper next year. AusLink will commence from July 2004.

The current road funding arrangements remain in place and will not change until at least July 2004. The Howard government is currently preparing its next budget, scheduled for May 2003. Unless considerable pressure is brought to bear, there is little chance that the Commonwealth will allocate any funds for the Calder until well beyond 2004. Labor—state and federal—have been and remain totally committed to the Calder duplication. The conservative parties—state and federal—together with their spokespeople have deliberately set out to obstruct and distort Labor’s position because of the federal government’s bloody-minded refusal to honour its previous federal election commitments.

I would now like to talk about another issue which is equally important to my area of Bendigo. I refer to the need for an MRI facility to be established at the Bendigo Health Care Group to service the surrounding region. I request the government to urgently approve a licence for a proposed MRI machine to be developed at the Bendigo Health Care Group. I first raised the lack of MRI services in June 2001 and, unfortunately, the Howard government has still so far refused to allow a licence for this facility in Bendigo. This is in spite of over 7,000 people from central Victoria having signed a petition calling on the Howard government to approve a licence for an MRI service for the Bendigo Health Care Group. The petition was presented to this parliament in February this year.

I am delighted that the Bracks government, during the recent state elections, committed $3 million for the building and equipment to establish an MRI service, provided that the Howard government allocate a licence. It is vital that the federal government provide the licence to enable those using the service to claim most of the costs on Medicare. Without the licence, the majority of central Victorians would be prevented from accessing the service because of the huge costs involved—around $600 for an average consultation.
Bendigo is one of the largest health service regions in Australia, but it is one of a few regions that do not have MRI services. Labor believes that the service should be available to all those who need it, not just those who can afford it. Currently, people have to travel to Melbourne or Ballarat to access the service, which is becoming increasingly vital. Unless the Howard government issues a licence, central Victorians will go on suffering this major disadvantage. I see the Howard government’s refusal to approve a licence for an MRI machine for Bendigo as further discrimination against the Bendigo electorate. The Howard government approved a licence for Ballarat’s MRI service over two years ago. It is hard to understand why it has been so unwilling to provide a licence for Bendigo, but the end result is that it treats the people of the Bendigo electorate as second-class citizens and denies them facilities that exist in Melbourne and Ballarat. It is a repeat of the unequal treatment the Howard government is meting out to the Bendigo region over the Calder Highway. Ballarat has a modern, upgraded highway to Melbourne; Bendigo does not—and the federal government is the reason.

It is gratifying that so many people expressed their wish for the MRI by signing the petition that my office initiated last year. I am angry that the health minister, recently in Bendigo, refused to make any commitment to approve the licence. She claimed that the matter would be handled by an independent committee. This is just a cop-out. It is an excuse for doing nothing for Bendigo. We have been waiting for two years for that committee to make a decision.

I would like to refer now to the need for renewed energy from the government to get more doctors into regional and country areas and stop its destruction of bulk-billing. The Bendigo electorate is among the hardest-hit victims of the government’s strangling of bulk-billing. Recent health department figures reveal that the seat of Bendigo has the fourth lowest level of bulk-billing of all the federal seats in Victoria. The same figures also reveal that the Bendigo electorate has had the third highest percentage increase in the out-of-pocket expenses faced by patients for seeing a doctor. Of the 38 federal seats in Victoria, Bendigo had the fourth lowest level of services bulk-billed by doctors last year, at only 48 per cent of services. In the whole of Victoria, there are only three other country federal seats with lower levels of bulk-billing. This includes the neighbouring electorate of Murray, which is second from the bottom, with 32.4 per cent. At the same time, out-of-pocket expenses incurred by seeing a doctor rose from $8.08 to $10.16 in the last two years. This is an increase of 25.7 per cent. Only one city electorate and one country electorate in Victoria experienced a higher percentage of increased cost.

What we are seeing is the destruction of bulk-billing and the sabotage of Medicare by the Howard government. We in central Victoria are among the prime victims of the coalition’s dislike of Medicare. Prime Minister Howard said in the 1980s that he wanted to tear Medicare apart and put an end to bulk-billing. Now we are seeing the mischief of the real John Howard and of the coalition parties. What they have achieved is to make it harder for country people to get a doctor and harder for them to get a doctor who bulk-bills. People on low incomes feel the cost very heavily. Many go to public hospitals to get medical services that should be available in the community through their GPs. At the same time, as more country GPs withdraw from bulk-billing, greater pressure is being placed on other GPs who continue to provide it. The winding down of bulk-billing is a major regional and country disadvantage inflicted by the coalition parties. Even with the rapid decline of bulk-billing under the Howard government, there are still federal seats in Melbourne where it is comparatively easy to get a doctor who bulk-bills. Last year, for example, in the metropolitan seat of Maribyrnong, 90.4 per cent of services were bulk-billed and 88.2 per cent of services in Gellibrand were bulk-billed. This is nearly twice the level of bulk-billing experienced in Bendigo.
In Bendigo, we have a new dimension to the government’s mishandling of health care. This is the charade that has developed over services to veterans who have a gold card and should be receiving free medical services but are not. Recently I attended a function where there were many veterans. A number of them came to me and told me of their anxiety over the fact that doctors were not treating them under the gold card scheme. They specifically asked me to publicise their plight. In a number of cases, doctors are not accepting patients who have a gold card and the patients therefore have to find another doctor—or the doctors are seeing them, but only if the patients make an additional payment of between $10 and $20. This can mean that some veterans will have to travel a considerable distance to find doctors who will accept the gold card.

Medical services are essential to everybody, and they should be available and affordable. I believe it is essential that the Howard government act in the forthcoming budget to bring forth genuine solutions that will end and repair the damage that this government has been doing to Medicare, bulk-billing and the gold card.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (4.36 p.m.)—I would like to take this opportunity to join my colleagues and add my voice to the debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 currently before us. I would like to take this opportunity to examine them in close detail and to look at the effects and the impact of these budgetary measures on the constituents in my electorate of Calwell. The electorate of Calwell is an electorate which has many families that are currently feeling financial pressure. For the last seven years, that pressure has increased under the regime of one of the highest taxing governments in our nation’s history. This will be the legacy of the Howard-Costello budgets for the people of Calwell.

I note with interest that more than $406 million, as I understand it, is being allocated to the foreign affairs and trade portfolio. I can assure you that we all will be looking forward to counting the cost of our current military commitment to Iraq and the effect that it will have on current, pending and future programs and services. The government’s ‘alert but not alarmed’ campaign has been shown to be a complete fiasco and an outrageous waste of taxpayers’ money because, far from providing assistance to the so-called campaign against terror, it has done nothing but make a mockery of our national senses and increase division in our community. But of more immediate concern to me is the impact that this campaign is having on our social cohesion and, in particular, the impact it is having on Australian Muslims, with particular reference to the large Muslim community in my electorate of Calwell—a community whose sense of security and safety, as with the Gulf War and immediately after the events of September 11, has been compromised once again. The Muslim community in the electorate of Calwell has had to cope with increased vilification, particularly those women who choose to be veiled and, of course, children, as they face increased suspicion and fear from their neighbours. Paradoxically, many Australians are experiencing increased insecurity as a result of the tax dollars being spent to supposedly protect us from this government-created fear.

The financial cost of Australia’s military involvement in Iraq is estimated by Access Economics to be at least $700 million for pre-deployment and military action, and this for a short conflict. Imagine the cost in the event of a long conflict! I understand that there will also be additional costs to our economy, somewhere in the billions, as a flow-on from our involvement. After truth, the next casualty of this war will be, of course, welfare and services for Australians. I have already been approached by several program providers in my electorate who have been told by various government departments that they are not to expect any further funding for next year in preparation for what we expect to be a very tight budget—a war
budget. Yet there are areas that are in urgent need of government funding, and they continue to suffer.

One such area suffering as a result of the government’s neglect and failure to uphold responsibility is that of health—in particular, bulk-billing. The Prime Minister seeks to rewrite history, and has done so for some time now, with semantic arguments over the meaning of universal provision of health services. Australians are beginning to realise that this government has no plans to restore bulk-billing to respectable levels. The Treasurer has already said that there will be no new funding for health, indicating that we can do nothing but expect to see the continuing free fall in bulk-billing.

While state governments throughout Australia have continued to warn the Commonwealth about the additional pressure being placed on the emergency departments of our public hospitals, rather than responding with a solution this government responds with rhetoric and blame shifting. Ultimately, the states have nothing to look forward to other than a cut in real terms in public hospital funding, a continuing decline in bulk-billing, and a comparable rise in private health insurance premiums and the associated costs of the private health insurance subsidy through the 30 per cent health insurance rebate.

Bulk-billing levels in my electorate of Calwell are still relatively high compared with those in other regions—and I noted that the member for Bendigo referred to the decline of bulk-billing in his electorate—because we have a large number of low-income, working families living in the area who have been serviced traditionally through the Medicare bulk-billing system. To these working families, universal access to Medicare means exactly that—access to bulk-billing whenever they need it. Ultimately, the states have nothing to look forward to other than a cut in real terms in public hospital funding, a continuing decline in bulk-billing, and a comparable rise in private health insurance premiums and the associated costs of the private health insurance subsidy through the 30 per cent health insurance rebate.

Bulk-billing levels in my electorate of Calwell are still relatively high compared with those in other regions—and I noted that the member for Bendigo referred to the decline of bulk-billing in his electorate—because we have a large number of low-income, working families living in the area who have been serviced traditionally through the Medicare bulk-billing system. To these working families, universal access to Medicare means exactly that—access to bulk-billing whenever they need it. Recent figures—also, paradoxically, for my electorate of Calwell—indicate that in the last quarter we have had one of the highest increases in out-of-pocket expenses in the country. On the ground, the effect of the free fall in bulk-billing levels is illustrated best by the experience of the Dianella Community Health Service. For years, that service has provided for those who cannot afford non-bulk-billing practices. Dianella has always been committed to providing a range of services, including aged care programs, a dental and general practice, and school based health. It has ensured that its services are provided on the basis of being culturally, geographically and socioeconomically accessible to patients.

Dianella’s after-hours bulk-billing is now under threat because of rising costs, and it has for some time contemplated terminating the service. Should this happen, there would be no other after-hours bulk-billing service anywhere in the outer north-western suburbs of Melbourne. The effects of this would be far-reaching because, in addition to the people in my electorate, other people who live in the north-western region would have to face the possibility of attending hospital casualty wards in order to get some medical attention in the event that they or their children get sick. That would have the effect of further clogging up the hospital emergency wards. Their other option would be to wait for hours on end for a locum doctor, as I and others have on many occasions. In addition to waiting for hours on end, that usually means that you have to pay about $100 up front, on the spot, at any time—at one, two or three o’clock in the morning. That is a further strain on sick families, because many of my constituents, especially in the Broadmeadows area, cannot afford this fee. Not too many of them have that kind of cash on hand at home, so often they may be forced to choose between tending to their children’s health or letting it go for yet another day or so before getting medical attention. Sometimes that can cause distress, especially to kids.

Further to this, the government has shown a great reluctance to deliver on the promise it made of $100 million in funding to provide outer metropolitan areas with increased access to GPs. The unfulfilled promise of increasing access to specialists is also a problem in my electorate of Calwell. We do not have very many specialists. As is probably known to everyone,
specialists have a tendency to concentrate their practices on one side of a particular city at the expense of the other side. The north-western side of the city is not attractive to specialists, so we have a great problem in getting access to specialist services. The incentives that the government certainly indicated it would like to implement to deal with these sorts of problems in the outer metro areas do not seem to be coming to fruition at this time.

My concern is that the government, rather than confronting the fact that the bulk-billing system is indeed in crisis, has refused to acknowledge it. On the contrary, the Prime Minister, in order to defend himself, attempts to rewrite history. Since the Howard government came to office seven years ago, bulk-billing has fallen by an astonishing 11 per cent, with more than half of that decline being in the period since December 2001. Nevertheless, the government has sat on its collective hands hoping that, if it cannot kill Medicare up front, it will just wait for it to die off.

The Howard government also continues unabated in slugging families that can least afford additional expenses. Another area that families can expect to be hit hard in is pharmaceuticals. Rather than trying to reduce the struggle that many Australian families face on a daily basis, in the 2002-03 budget this government chose to increase the cost of prescriptions for families, pensioners and cardholders. When Labor left office, cardholders paid $2.70 for each prescription and non-cardholders paid a total of $16.80. In its seven years in office, the Howard government has increased both amounts by 70 per cent. No-one can deny that there has been a blow-out in pharmaceutical use, but that blow-out should be addressed in a manner which is equitable and with minimum financial hardship, rather than additional burdens, for people. We should do this by perhaps reviewing the pharmaceutical schedule rather than increasing the cost of basic medicines.

It is also indicative of a government that has simply failed to deliver on its basic responsibilities to the Australian people, typified by the imminent collapse of bulk-billing and by other measures that are generally making it harder for families to struggle with balancing work and family life, increased costs and so on. At the same time as the government imposes greater conditions and hardships on Australian people, it targets the ones who can least afford it—and I have an electorate where there are lots of people who can least afford it. We continue to hear of inadequate nursing home care, for example, and extended waiting times for elderly people to be placed in nursing homes. In a recent report, the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency initially found one particular nursing home in my electorate to be noncompliant in providing a safe and comfortable environment consistent with residents’ needs, with reports of strong odours, urine in hallways and one room in particular with faeces smeared on curtains and walls. Another nursing home has been found to have a long history of significant non-compliance with quality standards, including complaints of inadequate physiotherapy for residents, who are now unable to walk. But it still received its accreditation and it still receives taxpayers’ money. The issue of nursing homes and the fact that some nursing homes are substandard—although this issue did blow up some time ago and was discussed—continues to be a problem for many residents who have the fortune or misfortune to be placed in a nursing home.

Working families in Melbourne’s north-western suburbs have also been hit hard by the government’s family tax benefit debts, and that is well known, is well publicised and has been spoken of at considerable length both here and elsewhere. In my electorate of Calwell, there are some 7,000 local families who have been caught in this monumental stuff-up. Families trying to obtain child care or after-hours care find it increasingly difficult to access these support structures. The waiting lists are very long and often they can only, at best, hope for in-
adequate places. The government, of course, is responsible for bringing about this unaccept-
able situation in child care, and it is spending $800 less per child-care place than it was seven years ago. Local families are working longer hours, seeing less of their children and paying more for their education, health and child care.

Another area which is of concern in my electorate of Calwell is the area of disability. Cal-
well has a very high number of people who are on the disability support pension. The changes proposed recently to disability support pension recipients will have a devastating effect in my electorate, where some 8,000 residents rely on that pension. Put aside for a moment the confidence-shattering effect that such changes to eligibility conditions will create in the lives of these people, the changes that were introduced in the May budget threaten to have a sizeable impact not only on disability support pension recipients but also on the group known as sup-
ported workers. They are the people who work in supported workplace environments. I have a very large such community in my electorate—BRITE Industries—that I often visit. I have had the opportunity to witness what these people are doing and to speak to them, to their carers and to their families. I can tell you that they are desperate and they are anguished. They do not know what these changes mean for them personally. Many of them anticipate losing, as a re-
sult of working more than 15 hours per week, anything up to $54 a fortnight from their pen-
sion. These people do not necessarily work to earn a living; they work because it gives mean-
ing to their lives. If they lose this opportunity to remain in the work force because their pension would suffer, I am certain that there will be other issues that they will have to confront. They are in a happy environment—I know that one of my colleagues here has been to visit them—and I would hate to see any changes brought to bear that will affect the tranquillity and the happiness of their current working regime.

This government also continues to underinvest in our public school system, in our TAFE colleges and in our universities. My electorate is one that has, unfortunately, tended to receive the rough end of the stick when it comes to tertiary education funding. Recent figures show that entry to university and year 12 retention rates in our region are among the worst in the state. That is traditionally the case, particularly in the northern areas of Calwell. One of the greatest impediments to people from low-income backgrounds participating in higher educa-
tion is the fear of debt. At a time of speculation about the introduction of more full fee paying places in Australian higher education, the government is happy to leave struggling local stu-
dents to their own resources. The government is happy for good Samaritans such as the Smith Family to pick up the pieces. The Smith Family do this admirably, I must say. For example, in my area they run a local welfare program which subsidises the education costs of disadvan-
taged families, thus doing their bit to ensure that the local kids have the same opportunities as the kids from the more privileged postcodes.

I have a particular beef, as I guess many do, with the current Minister for Education, Train-
ing and Youth Affairs. I believe that he is engaging in a disgraceful campaign, as he is telling young people—certainly those in my electorate—that they should know their place. His mes-
sage is this: ‘Unless your parents can pay for your education and can get you into the elite private schools, and unless they have the social standing needed, you can forget about going to the top universities. You need to keep your hopes low and not expect too much from us,’—meaning the government. The minister for education is also saying: ‘We will not be wasting government funds on providing those of you who cannot afford it with resources and an edu-
cation of a high standard. In other words, we will not be giving you a leg-up. That is reserved for the privileged on the other side of town.’ Brendan Nelson is telling my youth that they are to look forward to being low-skilled fodder, that they should be proud of it and that no-one
should try to make them feel inadequate because they do not have aspirations to go to university, because, as he says, not everyone can go to university.

This government should stand condemned for the fact that it is the highest taxing government in Australian history. It is responsible for the introduction of the biggest new tax in our history in a long time—the GST. It appears obsessed with imposing more taxes and levies at every opportunity. It raises revenue at every opportunity but fails to concern itself with families put under increasing financial pressure as a result of its policies. Such insensitivity is best typified by its decision to sell the historic Maygar Barracks, situated in my electorate of Calwell. It is a historic piece of land comprising buildings and facilities, some of which were refurbished less than 20 years ago. My local community and sporting groups would love to be given the opportunity to make good use of it. But, unfortunately, there is no such luck. The government's interest in Maygar Barracks is driven purely by financial motives. It has shown no interest in the palpable community value that will be put to waste if the decision to sell off then demolish the facility proceeds.

The community of Calwell would benefit from the opportunity to use the Maygar Barracks as a community resource. We have written to the Minister for Defence asking that a portion of the land be allotted to the community for use but the response has been, 'Sorry, but we can’t help you.' We intend to pursue a campaign to convince the federal government and the Minister for Defence that, rather than pursue the sale of the Maygar Barracks, it would be better if it were gifted to the community. My community, which is a relatively poor community, could make use of the very good facilities which would be demolished if the site were sold to developers or to industry. Not only would the facilities go to waste but a very important part of our military history would go to waste with them.

In closing, I want to make the point that it appears that the government can save millions. Recently we saw the government bow to pressure and gift parts of Point Nepean to the community. We hope that we can apply the same pressure to it to gift the Maygar Barracks to the community of Calwell. It is a campaign that the community will undertake with much fervour and I look forward to participating in it with them. I look forward to convincing the defence minister to show some compassion to the community of Calwell and at least gift part, if not all, of the Maygar Barracks to our community for much needed use as community and recreation facilities.

Ms ELLIS (Canberra) (4.56 p.m.)—I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003. I would like to use this debate to highlight two important issues which fall within government appropriations: funding for unmet need in disability services and ageing. Under disability services, the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 seeks an additional $15 million ‘as a result of the supplementation offer made to the states and territories as part of the third Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement’. I am very pleased about this appropriation. However, I am appalled at the way in which the Howard government has handled negotiations with the states and territories in relation to the third Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement. The number of people with disabilities and their families who need but do not have access to accommodation, respite and day care services is reaching crisis proportions.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that there are 12,500 people with disabilities who cannot get any accommodation or respite places across Australia. Tragically, many young people with disabilities—including brain injury, MS and other neurological conditions—are currently living in aged care nursing homes. The decision to place a young per-
son in a facility for the care of the frail elderly can be devastating for all involved. According to the Young People in Nursing Homes advocacy group, there are 6,000 people under the age of 65 who are permanent residents in nursing homes across Australia. Of these, 1,100 are under 50 years of age and 30 are under 25 years of age. In the meantime, the Howard government has not been able or willing to sign the next Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement, which should have commenced in July 2002. Consequently, the Howard government has withheld the $15 million in additional funding for unmet need during this financial year.

To make matters worse, in the February Senate estimates Senator Vanstone threatened to withhold funding by not back paying the additional funding when the agreement is eventually signed. Senator Vanstone’s threat to reduce the Commonwealth’s already inadequate offer by failing to pay the full $15 million promised for the 2002-03 financial year is offensive to the thousands of people with disabilities and their families who are currently missing out on services. I hope this appropriation is a sign that that back payment, which the states and territories desperately need, will be made in the near future.

I also have major concerns about the way in which the Howard government is treating the disability employment sector—something which my colleague the member for Calwell made reference to in her contribution just before my speech. Major reforms, which I support in principle, have been forced upon the sector within a very short timeframe. These reforms include quality assurance reforms and the introduction of case based funding to business services. Employers, employees and their families have all raised their concerns with me about how these reforms will result in the closure of some business services and the loss of employment for some people with disabilities. I have heard little from the Howard government about what it will do to ensure minimal closures and to protect the working rights of people with disabilities. In my view, it is extremely important that people currently employed in those business services within the disability sector have every protection possible to allow them to continue their employment into the future.

I will now move to the policy area of ageing. The second issue of importance is National Seniors Week. This is our opportunity to celebrate our 2.4 million older Australians, who are more active and contribute more to our communities than ever before. National Seniors Week is an annual community event that celebrates the valuable contribution of older people to community life in Australia. National Seniors Week also challenges society’s stereotypes around ageing and invites us all to consider our relationships with and attitudes towards the older people whom we know. It is important that we acknowledge that Australians aged 65 years and over lead very active lives and contribute a great deal to our communities through their volunteer work, their assistance to their families and their participation within their communities. Unfortunately the Howard government constantly portrays our increasing aged population as a looming crisis.

I am sure the figures are very familiar to you, Mr Deputy Speaker Lindsay. The number of people in Australia aged over 65 is likely to grow over the next 20 years from 2.4 million to around 4.2 million. This aspect of Australia’s demography is being presented, in lock-step with figures on the declining birthrate, to produce what I call a panic scenario. But there should be no need to panic. It is certainly not the role of government to induce panic; rather, we need to distinguish clearly between the issues that are cause for concern and need policy changes to address them and the issues that are merely aimed at softening up the electorate for spending cuts in other areas of social policy. Blaming elderly Australians for a budget shortfall of your own making seems to me to be a rather cheap trick.
One of the key triggers for ageing panic has been the Treasurer’s Intergenerational Report, released with last year’s budget. According to that report:

... a steadily ageing population is likely to continue to place significant pressure on Commonwealth budget finances.

Labor will not allow ageing to become a negative force in policy making in this country. Unlike the Howard government’s Intergenerational Report, Labor do not see ageing Australians through a purely financial framework that turns them into an impost on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, on the age and service pensions and on younger generations in general. The Labor Party see our ageing population as an opportunity to yield the benefits of an older population that has experience and much to offer. Our community benefits greatly from the experience and contribution made by older Australians. Approximately one-quarter of older Australians participate in voluntary work, and this proportion is on the rise. A report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Older Australia at a glance*, found that the primary reason older people undertake voluntary work is to help others in the community.

More older Australians in our community are interested in lifelong learning and, as a result, we all benefit. There are at least 46,000 older people participating in courses provided by the University of the Third Age. In 2001, 866 people aged 60 and over commenced university courses. I hope that businesses and organisations in our communities give older Australians opportunities to participate as much as possible. I urge older Australians who are interested to contact their local businesses and organisations to discuss opportunities for more interaction. Labor will continue to pressure the Howard government to take a more positive view of our ageing population.

Another priority for Labor in the ageing portfolio is to pressure the Howard government to take action rather than conduct numerous reviews of the ageing sector. As I understand it, the government is running quite a number of reviews of the aged care sector. For example, the pricing review, the internal community care review, the national model care documentation system review and the recently completed resident classification scale, or RCS, review.

Firstly, I would like to outline my concerns in relation to the RCS review. It clearly demonstrates the Howard government’s lack of commitment to any real reform in this sector. The Minister for Ageing announced the RCS review in May 2002. In a media release, he said:

> It is clear a model is needed for the resident classification scale and I have asked my department to investigate alternative options as a priority. It is an unfair burden on nurses.

The minister was referring to the paperwork burden faced by nurses in residential aged care facilities. According to the Australian Nursing Homes and Extended Care Association, it is estimated that nurses spend in excess of four million hours per year filling in paperwork. The RCS review report was published last month and made 20 recommendations which, if acted upon, would reduce the paperwork burden for nurses considerably. But what was the government’s response to the review? Over one-quarter of the RCS review recommendations have been referred to the pricing review, which will not report back to the government until at least the end of this year, although, conservatively, I believe it will probably be early next year. This means that any reforms arising from the recommendations are unlikely to occur until at least 2004 or even 2005.

Another quarter of the recommendations will lead to pilot programs and trials. Rather than take immediate action to alleviate the burden on nurses, the Howard government is going to spend more time and more money. The Aged and Community Services Association—
ACSA—a peak body representing residential aged care facilities, had this to say in its national report about the minister’s response to the review:

DHA’s response effectively delays any wholesale or even remedial action in the near future.

It goes on to say:

It—

that is, ACSA—

will tell the Minister that the DHA response falls far short of industry expectations, and will continue to press for real reform.

I am, sadly, appalled that the minister is deferring any real action and is doing nothing to reduce the paperwork burden on nurses in residential aged care facilities. Another concern I have relates to the pricing review, which has a whopping budget of $7.2 million. The issues under examination in the pricing review are very important, and they deserve serious attention. But we should be very clear about one thing: it must be the needs and the capacities of older Australians—especially those who are disadvantaged—which drive the policy resulting from this review. And that includes the need for adequate infrastructure, which has suffered from a now chronic lack of capital funding under the Howard government. The minister’s pricing review into the aged care sector cannot be allowed to be a recipe for winding back the Commonwealth’s responsibilities to older Australians.

I now turn to the government’s internal community care review, which should really be called, I think, the mystery review, considering the way in which it is being kept under wraps. Very little is known about this review, which is being undertaken within the Department of Health and Ageing. Key stakeholders have outlined to me their concerns about how little they know about the review. Through Senate estimates, I now know the terms of reference and the time frame. At a Senate estimates hearing in November 2002 this was said:

It is expected that the major stakeholders in the community care system will be consulted in early 2003.

I have been travelling around the country meeting many key stakeholders and none of them has been involved in any consultations relating to this review. Apparently, a report has been written but it is not a public document. So I ask the question: why the secrecy and why the mystery?

The last issue that I want to bring to the attention of the House is an issue of great concern to me, and it will be to the community. The Howard government appears to have played favourites by offering support to a nursing home in one of its electorates while allowing a similar nursing home in a Labor held electorate to close down. Two small Victorian nursing homes run by Baptist Community Care were planning to close down. Both have 30 beds, and both offer high-care services to the frail and elderly. One is in Morwell, which at the next federal election will be within the Gippsland electorate held by the Minister for Science, Mr McGauran. This is a marginal seat, I believe. The other is in Brunswick, in the Wills electorate held by Labor MP and shadow minister for sustainability and environment, Kelvin Thomson. As I understand it, Minister McGauran is credited with intervening to save the Morwell nursing home, and the Howard government will now provide capital assistance to prevent its closure. Meanwhile, the Brunswick nursing home is closing down, and residents and their families are desperately searching for places in homes across Victoria—and I understand that quite a number of them have already moved out of that facility.
The member for Wills has been vigorously pursuing the Minister for Ageing, asking that he visit the Brunswick nursing home and seriously consider providing capital assistance to ensure its financial viability. In a letter to the member for Wills, Minister Andrews admitted:

... members of my staff have recently met with Baptist Community Care.

The minister then declined the invitation to visit the Brunswick nursing home. If the Howard government is making decisions about nursing home facilities based on political judgments, the community has the right to be outraged. I have written to Minister Andrews asking him to explain how and why this decision was made; how much additional funding was or will be provided to the Morwell nursing home, and from which budget; and why the plight of the Brunswick nursing home appears to have been ignored. I am yet to receive a reply to that letter. The point is that, as was said in this very chamber earlier today by the member for Wills, the facility in Brunswick was only opened in 1995. It may only have 30 beds but it is an extremely up-to-date facility. It is not being closed down because of some decrepit capital infrastructure; I am sure that it is actually an acceptable building under the accreditation system.

I believe that there are extremely important questions that need to be answered on this issue, and I am looking forward to receiving the minister’s reply. I would like to think that the reply I get will debunk what I have been told and will say that the government is not acting in that way. I would like to receive that assurance. Nursing home beds in this country should be allocated according to the needs of the population on a basis of proper planning and not a government’s need to win votes in a marginal electorate at the next federal election. Unless I hear otherwise, one could not be blamed for believing that that is the point.

Ms JANN McFARLANE (Stirling) (5.12 p.m.)—I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 to paint a picture of how Australia has changed since the Howard Liberal government was elected in 1996. It was recently the seventh anniversary of that election, and I read articles in some of the major national newspapers that examined this event. When I look back at the changes in our society since 1996, I often get a queasy feeling in my stomach. What has this government done over the past seven years? I could be here for the rest of the week if I chose to focus on the irreparable damage that this government has done to the fabric of Australian society. Gone is tolerance, gone is harmony and gone is the Australian belief in a fair go. Today’s debate will focus on some of the major economic problems that this government has given birth to in its time in office.

Firstly, we have all been burdened with the GST—the tax that the Prime Minister would ‘never, ever’ introduce. It is a tax that has contributed significantly to the taxation burden of the Australian public. The amendment to this bill proposed by my colleague the member for Fraser contains the following statement:

Whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House condemns the Government for its failure in economic management, and in particular its failings in relation to both income and expenditure policies because:

(1) It is the highest taxing Government in Australian history, and:

(a) has imposed the highest level ever of income tax;

(b) is responsible for introducing the biggest new tax in our history; and

(c) is addicted to imposing ever more taxes and special levies...
Looking at this statement in the amendment, I thought I would reflect on the three points contained in it. The first point is that this government is the highest taxing government in Australian history. This was highlighted in the *Daily Telegraph* on 4 November 2002 in an article by Fleur Anderson entitled ‘At $187bn, we are now paying more tax than ever’. In that article, Ms Anderson stated:

The total amount of tax, including GST, paid to the Federal Government has soared to $187 billion, or 24.9 per cent of GDP.

In addition, the introduction of four new levies is expected to collect as much as $365 million this year.

In this statement, Ms Anderson has completely encapsulated the first part of the amendment proposed by my colleague the member for Fraser. What this government has done is effectively shift the tax burden onto Australian families as well as increase it. When faced with questions by this journalist, the Treasurer released a statement that said, ‘The new tax system has not failed and has in fact achieved each one of its stated aims.’ So are we to gather that the increase in this burden on the average Australian taxpayer was predetermined and an integral part of this government’s aim in the first place?

I remember quite vividly the debate in this House when many of the members opposite argued that the introduction of a GST—or, in politically correct terms, the Treasurer’s A New Tax System—would lower the tax burden. It would not make people worse off; in fact, they claimed it would make us all better off. The members opposite said that no-one would be out of pocket and if, by some strange fluke, they were disadvantaged then they would be compensated handsomely. The Treasurer and members opposite also said that it would make the tax system fairer and simpler. If I wanted to score political points, I could trawl through the Hansard speeches of those opposite in the GST debate and spend the rest of my time reading out the rhetoric and their false claims to embarrass them. But I will not do this, as I wish to talk about other, related issues that are hurting my constituents in the electorate of Stirling.

Remember those advertisements on television that told us that the GST would rip away the chains that shackled us? In the article that I quoted earlier in this speech, Mr Peter McDonald, the National Director of Taxpayers Australia, who accused the Howard government of a rip-off which lowered disposable income and standards of living, presents a most damning view in support of my argument today. He goes on to state that 2.8 million taxpayers are worse off because of bracket creep. He also says that, by not indexing the income thresholds, the government effectively raises taxes without having to raise the rates. Bracket creep and the GST have combined to make the lives of many Stirling electors and their families that little bit harder. The tax cuts that were supposed to compensate us for the introduction of a GST have been eroded away by bracket creep.

So who now shoulders the burden of tax in this country? It is simple—the average working family. The super-rich do not pay any more tax; they can afford to pay someone to help them avoid paying their fair share. Corporate Australia had its tax reduced on the recommendations of the Ralph report, so it is okay. The normal everyday family carries the burden. So where does the money come from? It comes from the pockets and household budgets of my constituents, amongst others. I have not spoken to one person since the introduction of the GST who can tell me that they are paying less for everyday goods. I really feel for those Australians who are on fixed incomes or low incomes. They bear the brunt of this insidious tax—a tax that invades every facet of our lives.
I, together with the shadow minister for retirement incomes and savings, recently held a meeting for superannuants and retirees at the Nookenburra tavern function room in Innaloo. At this meeting, there were still levels of anger towards the government about how the GST and associated taxes had eaten into the retirement savings of these people, who felt that it took a real bite out of their nest egg—for which they were never fully compensated—and put them on the back foot. Many of the people the shadow minister and I spoke to were worried about how they would be able to afford to remain independent during their retirement and not have to end up on the age pension as their only source of income. It is in our interests to ensure that we develop policies that allow these people to remain independent. The Treasurer talks about his Intergenerational Report and its findings, but he needs to do more than just recognise the problem. He should start developing policies that will have an immediate, practical effect.

Apart from bracket creep and the introduction of a GST, this government should take a leaf out of its drug strategy and say no. In this case, I am talking about saying no to new taxes and levies. As my colleague the member for Fraser points out, this government is addicted to imposing even more taxes and special levies. I think most Australians have forgotten or simply just do not know how many levies and taxes this government has introduced. I will take the time to list these taxes so that my constituents in Stirling and other interested people can get some concept of the enormity of this tax grab. Special levies are a favourite tool of this government. I will not talk about the aircraft noise levy in detail as it is not particularly applicable to Western Australians, but this levy, originally meant for Sydney, was applied to Adelaide Airport as well. At the end of the last financial year, it had raised about $395 million. One levy applying to all Australians that was introduced by this government was the increase in the Medicare levy in 1996-97 to fund the firearms buyback. This levy raised about $500 million. I supported the implementation of this levy as it funded the reduction of firearms in our community—a noble cause.

The next levy introduced was the stevedoring levy. This was introduced to pay for the redundancies caused by Peter Reith’s ideological war on the waterfront. This government is happy to slug the taxpayer to fund its political agenda. Not content with using thugs wearing balaclavas and using guard dogs to win its war with the Maritime Union of Australia, it made us pay for it as well. This government also uses special taxes and levies to prop up industry sectors that it has hurt with its so-called reforms. People might think that this is not such a bad thing. However, when we examine the motives behind these moves, we find that they are done to prop up sectors that have been destroyed by the economic rationalist agenda of this Liberal government. Reform without benefits is not reform; it is vandalism.

The two levies that come under the umbrella of this category are the dairy industry adjustment levy and the recent sugar industry levy. I do not want to attack these industries for any perceived inefficiencies, but I will share the following comment with the chamber. I find it quite ironic that the National Party—a once great party that produced such prominent agrarian socialists as Earle Page, Blackjack McEwen and Doug Anthony—has resorted to slugging the taxpayer to aid in the destruction of the once proud industries it used to promote and protect. The sad thing about Australian politics has been the transformation of the National Party from a powerful force—a party that on a number of occasions determined who became prime minister—to what it is today. It is now nothing more than a pale, senseless imitation of an economic rationalist Liberal Party. I am sure that all the residents of the Stirling electorate will reflect on what happened to the National Party’s commitment to rural industries when they put a spoonful of sugar into their morning tea or coffee. Each spoonful of sugar will be more expensive, as this government’s levy is passed directly on to the consumer. My constituents
are paying for the National Party’s surrender of rural Australia to be sacrificed on the altar of free market forces by the high priest of economic rationalism, the Treasurer.

Before we look at what has happened to all this extra revenue that has been raised, I would like to draw the chamber’s attention to a taxation arrangement that will net the government substantial revenue now that we are going to war. During the petrol price hike after the introduction of the GST, when fuel went over $1 per litre for an extended period of time, I released a fuel tax calculator, which I supplied to all households in Stirling. What this calculator showed was that, every time the price of petrol went up, the amount of revenue received in the form of fuel excise and the GST increased also. If my memory serves me well, I remember that the government was forced to make an embarrassing backflip on fuel excise due to the Australian public’s backlash to its policy. I do not think it will come as a surprise to anyone in this place that war will cause a significant increase in fuel prices. I would like to draw the attention of the chamber to an article in the *Herald Sun* on Tuesday, 4 March 2003. The article is entitled ‘Call to cut fuel tax’. I will quote some of the article:

Drivers hurting from soaring petrol prices have united to plead for fuel tax cuts.

Victoria’s peak motoring group, the RACV, claims rocketing fuel costs could pump up to $750 million a year extra into Federal Government coffers.

... ...

RACV government relations spokesman David Cumming said constantly high fuel prices could grab up to $250 million extra a year in GST, and up to $500 million more from a resource rent tax levied on oil producers.

The motorists of Australia will pay for this immoral war. I find it somewhat ironic and a little bit sad that the public are paying for a war that they do not support.

Even though this government is the highest taxing in Australian history, it has failed dismally on some of the fundamental and most basic responsibilities to the Australian people. The first of these is bulk-billing. The media has only just cottoned on to the fact that the public health system in this country is under threat. Medicare, which has been the linchpin of the health system for almost 20 years, is being systematically dismantled by this government. Bulk-billing, which is relied upon by many in our community, is becoming rarer. Doctors, who are so often maligned in our community, are now finding it more and more difficult to bulk-bill their patients.

Why are they finding this more difficult? Last Friday, I attended a public meeting held by my state colleague and Western Australian health minister, Bob Kucera, at the Osborne Park RSL sub-branch. At this meeting, which dealt with health issues, one of the guest speakers was Dr Moira Sim, who is the President of the Osborne Division of General Practice. What Dr Sim told the meeting is that hardworking doctors such as her are being forced to stop bulk-billing for two reasons: the first reason is that the cost of running a practice has increased significantly over the past 10 years while the Medicare rebate has remained pretty static, and the second reason is that many doctors who bulk-bill are seeing their patients for shorter periods of time due to financial constraints. This has caused a crisis of care, where the GPs have chosen to abandon bulk-billing as they feel it is affecting the quality of care that they can give their patients.

There are a number of perspectives in the bulk-billing debate. State governments blame the crisis in accident and emergency wards on many different people seeking treatment there instead of seeing their GPs, due to the decline in bulk-billing. Statistics are beginning to show
that low-income earners are no longer able to access health care through their GP and are waiting until they are quite sick before going to their hospital. What can we do about this? The obvious answer is to increase the Medicare rebate. The problem is lack of money. The Liberal government has tied up a lot of taxpayers’ money in the ineffectual 30 per cent private health insurance rebate. Maybe one option would be to redirect some of the funding from that rebate to increasing the Medicare rebate. The problem with this idea is that the AMA refuses to have any conditions tied to an increase in the Medicare rebate. There are real fears that doctors will do as they did when the complex birth rebate was increased. Data from the health department showed there was only a small reduction in out-of-pocket expenses for patients. The Australian Consumers Association in an article entitled ‘Bulk billing unravels’ is sceptical of the AMA position. The ACA states:

An increase in the rebate with no conditions would simply be a licence for doctors to increase their incomes without providing any guarantee of better access to bulk billing.

The ACA provide a pretty good summary of the problem facing our health care system. Their assessment of the problem reads:

While we have a system of primary care that is based on fee for service medicine—and it seems this will be the case for some time—bulk billing remains the best chance consumers have of getting access to affordable GP consultations. Bulk billing is an integral part of Medicare, and if the Commonwealth Government is serious about maintaining Medicare, then it has to be serious about maintaining bulk billing as well.

The last comment in that quote is the crux of the problem we are facing. I will repeat it:

... if the Commonwealth Government is serious about maintaining Medicare, then it has to be serious about maintaining bulk billing as well.

At the end of last year, I surveyed the people of Stirling about health. About 80 per cent of respondents identified bulk-billing as one of their top two issues. As a result I produced a bulk-billing guide, which I sent out to respondents and advertised in my electorate newsletter, Jann’s Journal. This is a little thing I can do to help the constituents of the Stirling electorate. If Labor were in government, I could do a lot more to help them.

The last point I am going to talk about in this debate is one that is beginning to severely affect more and more of my constituents. This is the issue of the Howard government’s fundamentally flawed family tax benefit payments system. In the last three editions of Jann’s Journal, I have highlighted the inequities of this system. I asked questions last year about how many families had been affected. Last year when I asked the question, I discovered that almost 3,000 Stirling families had received a debt letter in the previous year. But what hit the families hard late last year was the government taking this debt out of their tax returns. I had hundreds of calls from mothers who had received a bill from the tax department instead of a cheque. Not only are those on low incomes being affected by this problem; due to the casual and contract nature of today’s workplace, many middle-class families are also being hurt.

The problem with this debt is twofold: not only does the payment create a debt trap but also, if you use the government’s stated solution of overstating your income, it can make your family ineligible for payments for services such as child care. What a great idea from the Howard government! They are saying, ‘To avoid a debt from our unworkable payments system, why don’t you just overstate your income so that (a) if you really need the payments you won’t get them and (b) you will make yourself ineligible for a whole range of payments and services?’ This is the sort of narrow thinking that we are seeing from this government. They need to urgently review the family payments system. It is unworkable and it is causing stress.
that is not needed by Stirling families, who are already struggling to balance work and family commitments.

What can I do? I can continue to highlight this injustice in parliament, and I can continue to pressure this government to act responsibly. I will be asking the Minister for Family and Community Services further questions about the number of local Stirling families who have received more than one debt since the payment was introduced. It is time for the minister to look at the hard numbers and have a complete rethink of his failed policy. Please remember this point, Minister: reform without positive changes is simply vandalism.

Time has defeated my efforts to highlight further problems caused by the Howard government’s programs. There are so many other issues that I did not have time to deal with here today. These include the crisis in aged care, the chronic underinvestment in public schools, TAFEs and universities and the fact that housing is becoming more and more expensive for young families. All of these are problems that, in some degree, require the use of public funds in an attempt to achieve a positive outcome. Money is tight; going to war, losing billions in foreign exchange gambles by Treasury and cost blow-outs in defence procurement do not help the situation. This government needs to focus on the things that are important: our people and their lives.

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (5.31 p.m.)—I am happy to follow my colleagues in this debate. I have listened to a number of the contributions today, both here and in the House. In particular, I have taken note of not only the previous contribution but also a number of others, because they go to the question of bringing the government to account for what it has either done or not done since the first budgetary appropriations were undertaken. What we are dealing with here today in the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 is the catch-up phase of the budgetary process—the period in which the government asks for more money and gives some accounting of not only what it has spent but also what it may have saved so far in the budgetary process. ‘Saved’ means that, even though it promised to spend a certain amount of money, the government did not actually get around to it. That is taken as a saving. We have seen time and time again in this place examples of the government promising a certain amount of money to be spent in particular program areas, only to find that that is rejigged as the time comes for additional estimates and that moneys that were promised were not spent. It has been a tactic the government has used to seem to be far more generous than it is.

The member for Stirling indicated—quite reasonably, I think—that, if you look at a broad range of areas where the government has been entirely deficient, the things you need to look at are the impact of the government’s taxing policies on a wide range of service delivery areas and the impact of the government’s taking extra amounts of money opportunistically. We know that, so far, there is no indication at all that the government will entertain properly the idea of giving back the extra amounts of money that have been kept as a result of bracket creep. All governments in the past, willingly or unwillingly, have been forced into a situation where the amount of bracket creep is so great that they have to give that back; this government has been extraordinarily reluctant to do so. But why is that so? Contextually, if you cast your mind back to February-March of 2001, the government was in deep, deep trouble. Its electoral prospects were very poor but, in the six months after that, it spent in the order of $20 billion to buy its way back into the graces of various interest groups within the community. That is a significant amount of money, considering the fact that you have got about a $50 billion total expenditure in the normal budget appropriations. It helped to lay the basis for the government to use the Tampa situation to launch itself back into power.
In the last budget and in what we are facing now, we are seeing the excesses of the past coming home to be accounted for. But, of course, the accounting standard the government has adopted has made that much more difficult to do than it was in the past. The government has taken to its heart the accrual accounting process it introduced. In the old days, through most of the period of this Commonwealth, there was a cash accounting framework. What that meant was that, when you got to the budget and also when you got to this process—the additional estimates—you could actually see, line by line, what was supposed to be bought and the amount that was supposed to be paid out in cash for those things. You would get a broad list, and then each department would lay out in detail what it intended to spend its money on in that year.

What we have faced since 1999-2000 is an increasingly obscure process—effectively, it has been a process of obfuscation. A whitened glass has been put up in front of the budget processes to make sure that as little information as possible is actually presented to help people make an assessment of what the government is really up to and what it is doing. I have commented on this before. I comment on it here again, because it means that the question of accountability—the accountability of the government to the parliament, including its own members as well as the members of the opposition and the community at large—has been fore-shortened.

To give an example of that, if you take any of the series of measures outlined in Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 and attempt to track it back down to what has actually been spent, by and large you are faced with the problem that accrual accounting is like American behaviourist theory: that is, you make a broad statement—that is what it is based on—of what your goal or outcome is expected to be and then you make another statement of what the behaviour of the department is supposed to be in order to achieve that outcome. What you are left with is flummery—broad statements with virtually no meaning in them whatsoever. For instance, the defence department states that its key aim is to look after Australia’s defences; to do that, they will have inputs and outputs and they will have a series of new jargon to work with, not just new weaponry. It is very hard to track anything down.

If you look at the second reading speeches on these appropriation bills you may get some indication of what they are about. If you go to the Parliamentary Library and look at the Bills Digest, you get a bit of an indication. But the library has almost given up trying to be specific about this as well. In Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003, the sum of $108,065,000—a significant amount of money—is appropriated for the Defence portfolio. Of that, $80.4 million has been classified as ‘indexation adjustments’. That does not tell us a great deal. What are those indexation adjustments for? I thought that the CPI was pretty low—that it was not running up too high. But ‘indexation adjustments’ is all we get to explain that $80.4 million.

It is suggested in the footnotes to the Bills Digest that you can go to the defence department’s web site and look at their index in relation to these budget estimates in order to get more information. I did that. I wasted about an hour this afternoon trying to trawl through the defence department’s web site to look at the very thing that was suggested by the Bills Digest. I was trying to pin down exactly what was spent here. You will not find the information I was looking for. What you will find is another set of behavioural statements about what the good outcomes and goals and challenges are for the defence department. You will actually find some information about what they have spent their money on—particular weapon systems and changes, but for the life of me I could not find the information I wanted. Nor could I, in dealing with the much more extensive footnoting relating to Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-
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2003, pin down how they spent the $124,768,000 allocated to so-called ‘equity injections’ for the Defence portfolio. What are equity injections? What does that mean?

This government has taken up corporate accounting models, which I think are quite inappropriate. You need a translation for the community at large, as well as for parliamentarians. What you are talking about is money being put into the defence department to enable them to do things. The notion of putting equity in suggests that they have more cash to go and buy more defence equipment. What specifically are they buying? I could not track that down. I could only find a general view of the things that have been approved and the things that have been looked at.

There are certain hints of what the core of this budget is about. It ranges over further appropriation. As was pointed out by the member for Stirling and other colleagues of mine who have spoken in this debate, there are a range of areas—health, ageing, education, foreign affairs and trade—where particular appropriations were sought and given but where bringing the government to account was extremely difficult. For instance, we are told that Treasury want almost $30 million extra from Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 for effective government spending in taxation arrangements. That will tell the Australian public at large a great deal about what that is supposed to be for. With respect to the parliament, the government, by simply saying, ‘That’s the outcome we’re looking for, that’s the general view, that’s the aim and that’s what we’re going to do’, is treating it with absolute disdain.

I can guess at some of the other expenditure, because some directly impacts on my electorate. In his second reading speech, the parliamentary secretary was able to say that $5.5 million more is being given to support the national aerial firefighting strategy. I know that is money well spent because the helicopters are based at Bankstown Airport in my electorate. I have attended functions at the airport, including functions with the young people who train in air squadrons. They have also been involved in finding out about the aerial firefighting strategy, because the people involved in the strategy have been very good and have allowed these young people to look over the aircraft. The job they are doing, based in Bankstown in the middle of Sydney, is extraordinarily good. The federal government, after great pressure from the state governments, has taken the proper initiative to support the cost of providing that infrastructure, meaning that it has been possible to combat the extraordinary fires that we have had in a better way. You can support that allocation. You can say, ‘Yes, it is good,’ because it is actually put up front.

At a time like this, when we are involved in a war against terror, you can also say that committing $7 million to enhance Australia’s travel document screening system is a reasonable and sensible commitment of moneys. If you want further examples, there are not many more that give you a practical indication, but I want to take up two. They give indications of the times in which we live, particularly given yesterday’s occurrence and what will occur after 12 o’clock on Thursday when President Bush’s 48-hour deadline has been reached.

There is a $10.2 million payment to enhance physical security at Australia’s overseas posts. That is utterly necessary, not just because of the attack on our civil population in Bali but because of the apprehended attack—the one that could have taken place but was stopped—at the Singapore High Commission. It is very necessary that we have a higher level of physical security at our posts overseas. That money is well spent, because we have entered entirely different times since the outbreak of the war on terror. For the United States, terror had manifestations in the decade before this one. There was the attack on the USS Cole and there were attacks on US embassies. Now, as a result of the actions of al-Qaeda and other groups who have directly attacked us, we also directly face that kind of threat.
So you can rightly say to the Australian people, including the people in my electorate of Blaxland, that, if you know the details of this and the government actually provides you with the information and you can work out the context, it is a good and appropriate expenditure of extra funds—or you can condemn it as being inadequate or inappropriate. But these figures also tell you more about the underlying pressures on governments, and they also tell you more of the story about what is hidden away.

In Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003, the government has appropriated, over $406 million all up for a range of things, including commitments to the International Development Association and to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. The government has also done something else that is necessary due to the times. I quote from the library’s publication:

The Schedule lists an additional $1,984,000 for the Australian Secret Intelligence Service to ‘enhance Government understanding of the overseas environment affecting Australia’s vital interests and take appropriate action, consistent with applicable legislation, to protect particular identified interests’.

The figure specified there was $1,984,000, and that extra money is to be expended on ASIS. You would think ASIS would need a substantial amount of money, given the task it has been charged with. ASIS is to ‘enhance government understanding of the overseas environment affecting Australia’s vital interests and take appropriate action.’ I actually think they would need a lot more money to achieve that aim with this government, which is so blind, so myopic and so challenged when it comes to understanding our region, the world in which we live and the fact that our vital interests are utterly affected by what happens in the overseas environment that it yesterday lined up with the United States to take what is effectively a unilateral approach—although, because the Prime Minister is one who is given to semantics, you can call it a trilateral approach—although, because the Prime Minister is one who is given to semantics, you can call it a trilateral approach—to an attack on Iraq.

This is the new holy trinity: three driven Christian fundamentalists, President Bush, Prime Minister Blair and Prime Minister Howard, who have determined to go down a road on their own, putting aside the UN and its Security Council, putting aside the possibility of a vote on the second resolution that they tried so desperately to get. Prime Minister Blair tried in order to save his government from falling to pieces, and Prime Minister Howard tried in order to save his political bacon in Australia. Nearly $2 million will not be enough to do the job of educating this government about the nature of our region. It will not be enough to do the job of educating this government about the direct threat from overseas terrorists—al-Qaeda and others of their ilk—that they have brought to these shores by the actions they undertook yesterday.

After more than six months of total subterfuge on the Prime Minister’s part, the real decision that he took in October-November last year was finally brought to book at cabinet in the half hour after 8.30 yesterday morning. We finally had the weasel words put aside; we finally had the decision, which had always already been made by the Prime Minister, to follow George Bush wherever he might go with respect to this. We need a greater commitment for ASIS and our other operatives in the region, because the danger is now so much greater.

After Bali, it was evident that terrorists, if they could, would continue to operate not just in Bali but also in Australia. I do not think the majority of terrorists worldwide would care too much about the demise of Saddam Hussein. They know that his regime, the Ba’athist regime, is a socialist and nationalist government that is based not on fundamentalism of a religious kind but on a secular fundamentalism particular to the area. What they will do is use the situation of those three Western powers going in alone without UN sanctions to run a harder terror-
In the final analysis, that is not really a problem for the United States of America. The reason for that is that the United States is now a superpower, if not an absolute world hyperpower. With the money and the capacity it has, it can defend itself. We are different. In his resignation speech before the British parliament, Mr Cook, a former British foreign secretary and until yesterday the Leader of the House of Commons, indicated very powerfully what should have been motivating this government in all its considerations of Australia’s position in the region and the world. His words were powerful, and well directed and they went to the core of the problem for Australia. He said:

The US can afford to go it alone but Britain is not a superpower. Our interests are best protected not by unilateral action but by multilateral agreements and a world order governed by rules. No stronger nor more apt words could have been spoken in Britain and no stronger nor more apt words could be spoken in Australia. If that is the case for Britain as a former world superpower, then a middle-ranking power like Australia could heed those words very strongly. Multilateral agreements and a world order governed by rules are what can protect Australia. Operating within the aegis of the UN is in Australia’s interests and in Australians’ interests. These bills have extra expenditure in the security and defence areas. It is small compared to what will be demanded in the budget coming up and in additional estimates in the future because this Prime Minister, acting unilaterally, has not taken the advice of the former British foreign secretary. *(Time expired)*

**Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR** (Burke) *(5.51 p.m.)*—I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003, against the backdrop of war. Yesterday, upon receiving a call from the United States President, as we all know now, the Prime Minister committed us to military action. It is therefore a sad day and a sad week for this country and, in particular, for its ADF personnel, because of the imminent danger that they are now placed in, and for their families. When I was looking at these bills some weeks ago, I was looking specifically at those things that went in the budget and at the way in which, in particular, the domestic matters of this nation would be affected. The views I had on the parlous state of the budget have now been compounded by this reckless and aggressive act by the government of the day.

My first concern is the likelihood of the needless deaths of potentially thousands of innocent civilians and military personnel that are sure to occur as a result of the decision made by the government to declare war upon the Iraqi regime. My second, but also important, concern is the adverse impact this decision will have on our economy and the high price that Australians will pay as a result. You only have to look at petrol prices in the states—other than in Queensland, which has a rebate—to see that the prices at the pump are now exceeding $1 in every state, and even Queensland is not far behind the rest of the country. I think this is just one manifestation of the effects that decisions like these have on the economy. That is not to say that there is not a multitude of reasons for these things occurring—high prices in oil can occur for a variety of reasons. However, it is fair to say that there is a causal link between the decision that has been made by a very few nation states to go to war and the effect that has on a number of things. I suppose it is going to be very difficult for us to calculate with any certainty what the economic impacts will be, but they are something this government has to start having regard to. This government has entered the war for a variety of reasons, not least of which is that the Prime Minister felt, having made a secret and premature commitment, that he could not get out of the arrangements he found himself in. As a result of that, we find ourselves in a situation where, from the Prime Minister’s point of view, he was not able to re-
verse that decision. That is an unfortunate thing. It is a result of him not wanting to lose face personally as much as anything, and it is a tragedy that he would actually place his own personal pride above the lives of our defence personnel.

The other thing that the government has to have regard to is the economic dimension. In many respects, it is clearly failing to deliver dividends to the Australian community and the services the community expects in the areas of health and education, which are really lacking at the present time. In having regard to those things, the government has to factor in and extrapolate from the evidence it has—and I do not think it has done this in any professional or concerted way—the adverse effects that this war will have on our economy and as a result our community at large. The government has decided to place us at the heart of this conflict, and it is accountable for that. It is therefore accountable for the economic consequences of that.

These appropriation bills alone provide a compelling reason why ordinary Australians believe that the Howard government has stopped caring about and listening to the bulk of the population. These bills highlight the disregard this government exhibits towards families doing it tough, families in need of decent social services, families expecting the provision of decent health care throughout the community. The government has presided over the ever widening gap between the haves and the have-nots in this country, and there has been no effort to arrest that trend. In my own electorate, I am constantly confronted by locals who raise concerns about the inequity of the current application of the family tax benefit and the way in which people are expected to pay inordinate amounts of tax if they are to secure any income by their own earnings. Not only is the family tax benefit acting in an adverse way for those receiving the lowest incomes in this country but it is clearly acting as a disincentive for those who are in receipt of it to go out and work.

We know the majority of Australians, where they are physically and mentally able, would prefer to work than receive benefits if given the option. Therefore, I do not think it is right that this government fails to have an adequate social policy to provide an incentive for people in receipt of social welfare to work with dignity. That is something that this government seems to have completely disregarded. I have noticed that, in an attempt to reinvent himself, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations has started to show some ostensible regard for this problem amongst recipients of the family tax benefit, but I do not expect him to do anything in reality. I hope that his government does something, but I would suggest that his comments are more about his efforts to refashion himself so that he can suggest that he has some heart ticking away in his chest that cares for Australians. Other than those meek efforts by the minister for employment, who by the way does not have responsibility for this particular area of policy, the government has made no effort to have regard to that very important area. I think it is an area which shows a failure by this government and which the government has to have regard to. I hope it will do something about it.

One area that has been focused upon now for some time is the decline in bulk-billing—the slow killing of bulk-billing—that seems to be occurring throughout this nation. This government has said in recent times that it is all for Medicare, but it acts in a way that belies its words. It tries to have one believe that it is interested in maintaining a decent, accessible Medicare system, but its actions prove that the contrary is true. I find it quite disturbing that many of those electorates which have the lowest access to bulk-billing are held by coalition members but you will not find many government backbenchers raising—certainly in any public way—the issue about the decline in, and lack of access to, bulk-billing. They follow
blindly their Prime Minister and this government in allowing its decline, while many of their communities are worse off.

The people in the electorate of Burke can be assured that I will not stop raising this matter. The electorate of Burke has historically had a reasonably decent level of access to bulk-billing, but it too has declined in recent times. That decline has occurred, not surprisingly, since this government was first elected, and in the last year or so the decline has been very rapid. In certain areas of my electorate—particularly in Melton, which is the largest community in the electorate of Burke, and in Sunbury, which is where I live—there have been major problems about ensuring that there is access for those people who require bulk-billing. Again, we should not be surprised, because we know that the Prime Minister is on the record as saying that he would like to do some grievous bodily harm to bulk-billing—‘stab it in the stomach’ I think were his words. He certainly wants to do that, and he is achieving his objective in ensuring the decline.

The decline in bulk-billing is also happening at a time when we have had a 7.5 per cent increase in private health insurance premiums, which occurred only last week. So we have a number of problems in this area. Firstly, people are having difficulties accessing bulk-billing. Concurrently, those who are able to afford private health insurance are paying premiums which are increasing at a rate which is in excess of inflation. So people are paying in real terms a greater cost for their health, but I have to say that there has been no real return. The services have not improved or broadened; in fact, the services provided by private health insurers have narrowed. So a multitude of factors are really bringing the health area under question. In particular, the public health system is under enormous strain, and this government has failed to respond to those things.

The Prime Minister and the Minister for Health and Ageing, Senator Patterson, would have you believe that no-one out there who is truly in need is unable to actually access bulk-billing, but that is not the case. I would ask the minister for health and the Prime Minister to tell that to Cathy, who resides in Melton in my electorate. Cathy has three kids at school. She has a kidney condition which requires medication which costs $100 a month. She pays the Medicare levy, but her doctor no longer bulk-bills. She has indicated to my office that she would even be in support of an increase to the levy if it meant a better Medicare system.

I do not think that looking at increases to levies is an area to which any government would prefer to go, although this current government is becoming a master of increasing and introducing levies. However, the reason why Kathy made that point to me, I think, was to say, ‘The main problem for me is not being able to access the health services I require.’ It was only in that context that she raised the issue of being willing to pay an increase in the levy. The fact is that this woman and her children are not on social welfare—she is not a pensioner and she does not have a concession card. Despite her condition, she is gainfully employed. She is not able to receive bulk-billing, and it is really hurting her and, most importantly, hurting her family. These are things that the government should be attending to, but they are failing to.

Another local constituent, Joan, also of Melton, has increased difficulties in making ends meet. A mother of five, Joan—who, by the way, is also privately insured—has told me that she needs bulk-billing, particularly to cover the health care of her children. Hers is a one-income family. She has no health care card but is in need and finds doctors’ services and the application of Medicare insufficient to provide her with the medical assistance that her family needs. She also is at a loss to know what she should do. She said that she did not know what she would do if all her children were ill concurrently; she did not know how she could pay the bills. Kathy and Joan are income earners but are finding affordable services very difficult.
Along with a number of my Labor colleagues, I would also like to touch upon this government’s record on taxation. It has now been established and universally accepted that this is the highest taxing government in Australia’s history. The shadow Treasurer has provided this House with the remarkable statistic that our current Treasurer is responsible for the five highest tax to GDP ratios, and that includes the only occasion that the Commonwealth government has taken more than 17 per cent of our national tax in income tax. Above and beyond this outrageous and unforgivable financial impost, we have been hit with the highest and broadest indirect tax, the GST. Not only has there been an unprecedented level of tax; it has also been a regressive impost, with the burden impinging harshly and inequitably upon those who can least afford it.

This government has collected more taxes, and increasingly those taxes have been recovered from lower income earners, given the reliance of this government on the goods and services tax. But the government’s expenditure for those in need—expenditure for much needed health and educational services—has fallen away. To me, that is particularly indefensible, and I think this government stands condemned for its failure to deliver those things. The effects of an unprecedented level of income tax would have been mitigated if services had been provided to those in the community who need them to live their ordinary lives well and to have a decent quality of life. The community could then understand the tax increases under this Treasurer and government. What is not explicable is that the tax has risen at a dramatic rate but the services have declined in many areas—although not in all areas—of health and education.

I now have a particular local problem in Sunbury. The hospital, which has been under the operation of Mayne Health, has decided to close its doors. I have been attempting to have discussions with Mayne Health. They have decided to sell their business, and I wanted to act in a very proactive and positive way with Mayne Health to see whether we could maintain the same services—the staff and the expertise of the staff—for the community in order to ensure that potential patients within the region have nothing to fear.

As Mayne have refused to meet with me, I am becoming less surprised about Mayne Health’s reputation as a provider of health services. Because of all the calls I have received from the community, from Sunbury in particular, about this issue, I would have thought it incumbent upon Kaye Rollinson, the CEO of Sunbury Private Hospital, to meet with me when I had made two requests to meet with her. She did schedule meetings, but ultimately she deferred two of them and eventually said, in effect, that she did not want to meet with the federal representative of her patients. I found that to be really indefensible.

Mayne have now sold their business to Primelife, and I will be looking to engage in discussions with this new company. However, there is some speculation that this company is only going to enter into the business of aged care services. I welcome the increased provision of aged care services, but I am very concerned that this is going to adversely affect the services that we already have in Sunbury and in the region. If this hospital closes down and all we receive in its place are aged care services, we have a major problem. Therefore, I think we have to start to rethink how much of the health budget we would like to see going into the hands of private operators who cannot seem to look after health in the long term and to look after patients before profits. *(Time expired)*

Mr DANBY *(Melbourne Ports)* *(6.11 p.m.)*—The last few days have been quite momentous for this parliament. We have debated various important issues relating to the conflict with Iraq—weapons of mass destruction, post-conflict rebuilding in Iraq—and this afternoon we
heard about musicians. That is right: musicians. I was listening closely to some of the contributors to the debate, and the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, the member for Hughes, talked about musicians. Given her position, I expected a very deep and insightful contribution on defence matters relating to the deployment in Iraq. Instead, while listing Iraq’s weapons, she included ‘12,000 musicians’. I am sure she meant 12,000 unexploded chemical or biological warfare munitions—either that, or Iraq has some truly dreadful musicians.

However, I rise to speak about a matter that is affecting tens of thousands of Australians, including thousands of my own constituents, and that is the bungling and maladministration of Centrelink, particularly in the areas of the family tax payment and the child-care benefit. I want to outline a number of my constituents’ cases and then look at what action I have taken on their behalf and what the minister and the government need to do. Firstly, Steven and Louise—not their real names—were receiving the child-care benefit, which they received through a reduction in their child-care fees. I would like to say that the opposition supports measures to assist working parents. Balancing family and work is increasingly difficult, and it is made all the more difficult by the way this government has treated child care, but that is a debate for another time.

This couple received the child-care benefit for a number of years and at all times informed Centrelink what income they were receiving. They had no problems until they received a notice of debt for around $2,500. There was no allegation of fraud or mistake on behalf of Steven or Louise. In fact, Centrelink admitted that both Steven and Louise had provided Centrelink with the correct information. Naturally, these two constituents appealed to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal. The SSAT is an independent review tribunal which has the power to amend, overturn and make new decisions. The SSAT said that the authorised review officer at Centrelink:

... concluded that the over-payment was solely caused by computer error of the Family Assistance Office—

the office at Centrelink that deals with these matters—

but that the debts could not be waived.

The SSAT continued:

... there is no dispute that there were errors and that the errors continued despite [Steven’s and Louise’s] best efforts to provide accurate information to Centrelink.

Yet still they refused to waive the recovery of the debt. The matter is continuing. My constituents put a carefully reasoned settlement offer to Centrelink. They wrote:

The FACS web site referred to Beadle and D-GSS (1984) 1AAR 362. The AAT held that, in order for “special circumstances” to exist, it must be possible to say that the circumstances in the case in question are “markedly different from the usual run of cases”. The circumstances must have “a particular quality of unusualness that permits them to be described as special”.

There have been a series of compounding errors committed by Centrelink—

which makes them special, in my view—

which have been acknowledged in previous correspondence. In addition, it has been recognised that my wife and I notified Centrelink of the errors and kept Centrelink updated of our income in a timely fashion et cetera. These facts are contained in the various documents of the SSAT and AAT. Surely the Respondent is not trying to submit that the litany of errors in this case (which have been admitted to by Centrelink) are “usual business practice for Centrelink” and thus can avoid the waiving provisions of section 101.
The content of the offer made by my constituents to Centrelink was that they would repay all moneys ‘owing’ prior to 25 February 2002, when they renotted Centrelink of their income. After that point, it was Centrelink that failed to fix the error. Steve and Louise said that Centrelink should waive the debts accrued after that date. Given the monumental stuff-up by Centrelink, I wrote to the Centrelink officer handling the case and to the parliamentary secretary to the minister who had previously dealt with this case. Despite the fact that I am yet to receive a response from the parliamentary secretary, and there does not appear to have been any correspondence between Centrelink and the parliamentary secretary, Centrelink knocked back the offer last week. My constituents have not been informed, nor have I been informed directly. This is a serious issue that I will return to. That is the first case that I want to cite.

Secondly, the case of Rebecca—again, not her real name—arrived in my office yesterday. She is a student who is receiving a RAMUS scholarship, administered by the Department of Health and Ageing, to encourage rural and regional students to enter medicine. Once again, it is a worthy goal that has been bungled under the administration of this government. I suppose this is another case of the ends not justifying the means, which is being debated in the main chamber in relation to Iraq. The ‘ends’ here is very worthy, as is the child-care benefit, but this government simply cannot seem to operate this scheme.

Rebecca received a $10,000 RAMUS scholarship for 2002, but the scholarship did not start until 29 May, when she received $4,000 as a back-payment for January, February, March, April and most of May. Once again, it is a gem of good administration—you can imagine a student having to live, having come from the bush and trying to study medicine for all of those months, without the support of the scholarship. As soon as she received notification that she would receive the scholarship, which was even before payments started, she told Centrelink. Centrelink said that she did not need to inform them until the payments had started. It seems that Rebecca is being penalised for being too organised and for telling Centrelink too much. She continued to provide Centrelink with all relevant information, including bank statements and letters about the scholarship payments, but she was still overpaid.

This year she received another debt notice. However, the notice did not detail when or how the overpayments had occurred. On 17 February, Rebecca wrote to Centrelink requesting a review of its decision, reasons for the decision, access to her file and suspension of the debt pending a review. To date, she has not received the information requested, despite Centrelink being under a legal obligation to provide such information under the Privacy Act, the Freedom of Information Act, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act and the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act. This government seems rarely concerned with legal niceties, such as the legislation passed by this parliament.

It would seem that Centrelink programmed into Rebecca’s file that she had received both the $10,000 scholarship and the $4,000 lump sum, despite Rebecca providing Centrelink with all the paperwork showing the $4,000 was a back-payment. Rebecca has written to the Minister for Family and Community Services, the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs as well as to various secretaries to the departments and to the CEO of Centrelink. Although I cannot identify Rebecca, I urge these recipients to carefully consider the letter and to provide her with a thoughtful and timely response.

The third case I want to raise involves Peter—again, not his real name—who is receiving family tax benefit and child-care benefit. There is a letter from him where he says:

The series of events that have occurred between the family office—
the part of Centrelink that deals with these payments—

and us since this point could almost be comical if not for the serious discomfort it has caused and the financial implications it is likely to cause later. It involves an overpayment of $5,827 and a federal government waiver of $2,000 of our outstanding debt, which then stood at $3,827. It became apparent to us through a series of inquiries that our figure was inflated due to the fact that we claimed a loss of rental property, which is classified as income by the family office. I beg to understand how anybody, and especially ourselves, are expected to make such assumptions that this definition of taxable income, first of all, differs from that of the ATO’s. On top of that, as the rule was introduced for the first time that financial year and a decision was not made to rent out our residence until my wife moved to Melbourne in late July/early August...

All these cases are current and I am just one of 150 members of this House of Representatives. Imagine how many other cases there are.

We have asked the Minister for Family and Community Services questions, the answers to which would, I think, be of interest to all members of this House. These questions include the following:

(1) What is the procedure for raising and recovering a debt against Centrelink clients.
(2) What is stated in any letter informing clients of the debt.
(3) At what stage do payments start to be reduced in order to repay the debt.
(4) What happens to repayments or reduced payments when appeals to an Authorised Review Officer, Social Security Appeals Tribunal, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or the courts are pending.
(5) What happens to repayments or reduced payments in the time allowed for an appeal following an adverse decision.

These questions—No. 1540 on the Notice Paper—and those I asked on 16 October last year, remain unanswered. Question 1000 asks:

(1) Has the Government placed advertisements in newspapers Australia-wide advising recipients of payments like Newstart allowance or Parenting Payment to let Centrelink know when their circumstances change in order to not only keep the social security system fair, but also so that they will not have to pay back any overpayments.
(2) Were all individuals who provided Centrelink with up-to-date information on their personal details not asked to pay back any overpayments.
(3) In 2001-2002 how many recipients of the Child Care Benefit were overpaid despite providing Centrelink with up-to-date and accurate information on their income.
(4) In 2001-2002 how many recipients of the Child Care Benefit were overpaid but later received a waiver for the overpayment.

I have placed a number of other questions on the Notice Paper on this matter, and they all relate to the incredible bungling of this payment. In my view, they relate to a fundamental fault in the government’s legislation in the area of family tax payments. I think that was best explained by the shadow minister for family and community services and the Manager of Opposition Business, when he said that two-thirds of all family couples have more than one income. One in three of all families in this country who are receiving this benefit—some 600,000—got into debt.

It is not simply the view of Mr Swan that these families, who are attempting to notify the government of changes to income, are ending up with enormous debts; it is also the view of the Ombudsman. The opposition has a basic attitude to this that I think would solve all the
problems we have got ourselves into since the current government brought in this change. Our suggestion is that we go back to the system where people claim these benefits on the basis of previous income. Let me read a summary of some of the views of the Ombudsman with regard to how this matter has been handled by the Howard government.

The credibility of the government on its family policies has been stripped away by the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s special report on family and child-care benefits. The Ombudsman’s investigation attacked the government’s family payments system and admits that, without fundamental policy changes, it will continue to trap families in debt. The report attacks the estimation rules at the heart of the family payments system, arguing that they ‘inherently result in a large number of debts and that many debts are significantly high’ and that they ‘are affecting many lower income families’. It also says that ‘debts may be unavoidable’. The Ombudsman concedes that, even if his recommendations were implemented in full, the scheme is likely to continue to result in significant numbers of unavoidable debts for families. The government’s refusal to correct the design of the system shows how completely disconnected it is from the daily struggles of Australian families. The Prime Minister’s concern for family assistance reform should now be clearly seen for what it is: a belated admission that his system punishes Australian families.

The Ombudsman’s report should be seen by all members of this House. It is highly critical of many elements of the current system, which the government has refused to address. Some of the recommendations he makes include that the government abandon its controversial upfront stripping of tax returns, that it extend the current provisions relating to the waiving of debts that arise from administrative error and that the current limitations relating to top-up payments, which saw 25,000 families denied nearly $30 million in payments last year, be abandoned.

I conclude by saying that I will continue to pursue the various ministers who may be able to assist my constituents with the outrageous injustices that have been done to them in these particular cases, but the problem is systemic. Unless the family tax benefit system is altered and based on previous income, these kinds of debts incurred by low- and middle-income families are going to occur in everyone’s electorate. We ought to go back to the previous system; the current one has failed.

Mr Griffin (Bruce) (6.27 p.m.)—I intend to take the opportunity tonight in this debate on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 to expand further on the issue of the coming war with Iraq, to take up some time of the chamber to go into a bit more detail on some of the issues that we face as a nation and to expand on comments I have made previously in two other earlier debates on this issue, including last night. I thought I would, as a starting point, go step by step through the motion moved by the Prime Minister yesterday on this issue and make a range of comments about aspects of that motion. In some cases I agree with what the Prime Minister has said but, in many cases, I disagree with what has been moved. The motion said:

That this House:

(1) condemns Iraq’s refusal, over more than 12 years, to abide by 17 resolutions of the United Nations Security Council regarding the threat it poses to international peace and security;

I would like to make it very clear to the House that I totally agree with that condemnation. There is no doubt that Iraq’s behaviour over the last 12 years—and, frankly, for a long time before that—has been that of a barbaric regime. I am on the record as stating quite clearly that
I agree with the terminology that describes Saddam Hussein as the ‘Butcher of Baghdad’. I believe that his treatment of minority groups and dissidents within his own country is abhorrent, disgusting and disgraceful and that he certainly has no credit as an international leader. In fact, he is someone who deserves to be removed—there is absolutely no doubt about that. I would also make the point, though, that I think he shares that with a number of leaders on the international scene. There are other countries that we do not seem to hear as much about these days which have leaders who also behave in a dictatorial and disgraceful manner towards their own people and towards other peoples.

I think you also have to look at just what the situation has been with Iraq and Saddam Hussein and what support his regime has received from various sources over that period of time. In the last 24 hours, we have seen comments from Robin Cook, a recently resigned member of Tony Blair’s cabinet, which go through a range of very serious points on this issue. In particular, he has made points about the question of the support that the Hussein regime received from the Americans and from the British for the development of some WMD—weapons of mass destruction—capacity and also about the question of arming the Iraqi army for the war which took place some years ago with Iran. Can we say that Saddam Hussein is evil? Yes. Can we say that he and the country that he leads ought to be condemned for their activities over that 12-year period and for their refusal to accept and abide by those 17 resolutions of the United Nations Security Council? Absolutely. But I still ask the question at the end of those points: does that lead us to the conclusion that is now facing this country and the world?

Part 2 of the motion asks the House to recognise:

(a) that Iraq’s continued possession and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, in defiance of its mandatory obligations under numerous resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, represents a real and unacceptable threat to international peace and security;

(b) that Iraq’s behaviour weakens the global prohibitions on the spread of weapons of mass-destruction, with the potential to damage Australia’s security; and

(c) that, as more rogue states acquire them, the risk of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists multiplies, thereby presenting a real and direct threat to the security of Australia and the entire international community...

I will address those points in order. Firstly:

(a) that Iraq’s continued possession and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, in defiance of its mandatory obligations under numerous resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, represents a real and unacceptable threat to international peace and security ...

I think it does. The question is: to what degree are we seeing that continuing? That is why we have had weapons inspectors in Iraq doing their job. That is why those weapons inspectors have asked for more time. That is why those weapons inspectors have been making progress. That is why those weapons inspectors are saying that that time could be used usefully to try to get to the bottom of the question of what Hussein and his government are up to. Why not allow a few more weeks? If, as the motion states, we are talking about a situation that has developed over 12 years, then why not allow another 12 weeks? What in particular is likely to happen over that 12-week period? If that period were to allow us to get to the stage of having a far greater international consensus if action were required, or if circumstances were shown to be such that the Iraqi capacity for dealing in these weapons was not as great as feared, then why would we want to try to fix that by a massive conflagration?

Point (b) asks the House to recognise:
... that Iraq’s behaviour weakens the global prohibitions on the spread of weapons of mass-destruction, with the potential to damage Australia’s security ...

I accept that in a general sense. I accept that any nation or any group that acts in a manner that can lead to the spread of weapons of mass destruction has the potential to damage international security—and, from that, Australia’s security. Again, I question whether Iraq is the major threat that we face today that we must act upon. I strongly believe that there are other threats—for example, North Korea and al-Qaeda—that pose a more direct, clear and present threat to Australia’s security and to international security than that posed by Iraq at this time.

Point (c) of the motion asks the House to recognise:

... that, as more rogue states acquire them, the risk of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists multiplies, thereby presenting a real and direct threat to the security of Australia and the entire international community ...

I agree with that point. However, I raise the question again of whether taking action now of a military nature, as is clearly proposed by the US and the British, with our support, is the best way to address this issue at this time. I do not believe that we cannot allow a little bit more time to try to give peace a chance in these circumstances.

Point 3 of the motion calls on the House to abhor:

(a) Iraq’s continued support for international terrorism; and

(b) the institutionalised widespread and grave abuse of the human rights of the Iraqi people over many years ...

I absolutely agree with that point. The problem I have is that Iraq’s support for international terrorism in the context of al-Qaeda is largely unproven at this stage. Obviously its support for international terrorism in a general sense is abhorrent, but again I come to the question: is that a reason at this time to act in this manner in a situation which is going to lead to enormous acts of violence and, I believe, enormous loss of life for the Iraqi people in particular? As for (b), frankly I am really pleased to see the government recognise ‘the institutionalised widespread and grave abuse of the human rights of the Iraqi people over many years’. I am really pleased to see that the government has recognised now and over the last few months the enormous pain and suffering of the Iraqi people and the grave abuses of human rights that they have suffered over many years. It was only a few months ago that Iraqi people were trying to escape Saddam Hussein’s regime and endeavouring to go elsewhere in the world as refugees—and to come to this country in particular—in order to try and establish new lives. It was only a matter of months ago that these people were being rejected. It was only a matter of months ago that this government did not really see a problem or an issue with respect to large parts of the Iraqi population or those who were trying to escape from Saddam Hussein’s regime. I guess it is a good thing that the government has belatedly come to this conclusion, because until recently the actions of the government have not shown this at all in relation to refugees from that part of the world and from Iraq in particular.

Point 4 of the motion notes:

... that United Nations Security Council resolutions adopted under Chapter VII of the United Nations charter, in particular resolutions 678, 687 and 1441, provide clear authority for the use of force against Iraq for the purposes of disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction and restoring international peace and security to the region ...
I do not agree with that notation. I am not a lawyer. There is certainly a great deal of speculation internationally and within this country about the legality of this action as it is now proposed. I do not propose to get into that debate in any great detail because it is not a debate that I am qualified for. But what I would say is that, if it were so clear cut and so certain that this was a reasonable action, I do not believe the US, the UK and Spain would have so desperately sought a further resolution from the United Nations. If it were so clear cut that the capacity was there under those resolutions for this action to be taken, I do not think so many other nations would have taken the view that this was an unreasonable action to take under the circumstances. In my view, it has only been in the context of this particular resolution that we have had a concentrated debate about the fact that the end result will be military action on a massive scale. We have seen threats made in relation to Iraq’s behaviour plenty of times. There have been plenty of times when actions have been taken along those lines, and those resolutions are examples of that. But, in terms of the explicit statement of fact around time lines and interventions of a massive military nature, I do not believe that we have seen that occurring previously.

When we come to the question of the legality of it, my point is that only a matter of days ago this resolution was seen as something that had to be pursued in order to gain international support. It was seen as a resolution which there was significant opposition to, but the British and US governments were putting enormous diplomatic efforts into it to try and get support from a range of countries. It is a situation which has seen significant international criticism of the French, the Germans, the Russians and the Chinese on the question of vetoing or otherwise opposing the resolution.

When you look at that, you have to say that there was a reason for those diplomatic moves and a reason for that debate. Although, technically, there may be an argument on a legality, the fact is that it was clearly understood and seen to be a situation where that resolution was required to gain international support. In my view, from a legal and moral perspective, that resolution was required to be passed, and it was not. Some of the arguments that have gone on since then such as, ‘We really didn’t need it,’ or, ‘It wasn’t really that necessary,’ or, ‘We’ve got what we need anyway,’ point to that fact. It also reminds me of the words of a former US President, Harry Truman, who said something along the lines of: ‘If you can’t convince them, confuse them.’ Certainly, I think that we have seen a situation in that debate where, when there was no ability to convince those nations to take that action, more efforts were made to confuse the international community as a result.

Point 5 of the motion says that the House:

... endorses the government’s decision to commit Australian Defence Force elements in the region to the international coalition of military forces prepared to enforce Iraq’s compliance with its international obligations under successive resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, with a view to restoring international peace and security in the Middle East region ...

I do not endorse that decision, and I think I have made that pretty clear in my contribution so far. I do not believe that it is the right decision to make under the circumstances. I want to make a couple of points following on from that. These forces were put there some time ago, with the intention of clearly heading down this path and being in the situation that we now face today. In those circumstances, I believe that you have to question when this decision was taken, when the Prime Minister came to the conclusion that he announced publicly only yesterday after a call from the US President. I firmly believe that this was a decision that was made some time ago and that, once we put ourselves as a nation on the slide down into this
abyss, it was always going to be difficult for this government to pull back. Frankly, I do not believe there was ever an intention to pull back.

Point 6 of the motion states that the House:

... expresses its unequivocal support for the Australian service men and women, and other personnel serving with the international coalition, our full confidence in them and the hope that all will return safely to their homes ...

I absolutely, totally agree with that. The Australian service men and women who are involved in this activity are there at the behest of this government. Although I vehemently disagree with what the government has done in terms of its commitment, I believe that these men and women are following its orders. Those orders, from the government’s point of view, are orders that they have to follow and they have every right to expect and get our support. They certainly have my support, and I join with the opposition leader and so many other members of the Labor Party across this country and in this parliament in saying that we completely support our forces in their activities. I certainly pray—and I do not pray very often—that they will all come back in one piece as soon as possible.

Point 7 states that the House:

... extends to the innocent people of Iraq its support and sympathy during the military action to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction and the reconstruction period that will follow ...

On that point, I certainly have a great deal of support and sympathy for the innocent people of Iraq, of which there are many; many of them are about to die, I suspect, as a result of this action. I certainly believe that the situation they face is that of non-combatants in so many wars: that they will be the large part of the true tragedy of what is about to unfold. I certainly hope and pray on their behalf that the disaster that I think is about to unfold is nowhere near as bad as I suspect it may be. I certainly hope that this is, as it now appears to be, a war that will be quick and that casualties will be low, because the alternatives for that community and for the world as a whole are too depressing to consider otherwise.

Point 8 states that the House:

... notes that the government is committed to helping the Iraqi people, including through humanitarian assistance, to build a new Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours.

Given that that appears to be the situation we are going to face as a result of this military action, I certainly endorse that. I certainly believe that support will be needed in Iraq after the events of the coming weeks, because I believe that the level of force that is about to be unleashed and the circumstances facing the Iraqi people will be quite horrific. They will require our support after the event to try and rebuild the country. I am certainly hopeful that that can occur at that time, although it pains me greatly to be in a situation where that is what we face.

I do not believe the case has been made clearly by this government—or by anyone, for that matter—about why we cannot wait just a few more weeks. I do not believe that a convincing case has been made—by this government, by this Prime Minister or by anyone else—to show that a few more weeks to allow the weapons inspectors to do their job would not stop this action being required. I believe that with a bit more time that opportunity could be taken up, and I am hopeful that that might lead to a good result. But let us say it does not lead to a good result, to a peaceful result. That would mean that in a few weeks time we would probably be here again debating the same issue. But if we were to be here in a few weeks time debating
the same issue, I think we would find a great deal of increased international support for the
action that is about to be taken, on the basis that we had exhausted the opportunities that were
there to try and sort this issue out relatively peacefully. That is not what has been allowed to
occur.

Again to paraphrase Robin Cook’s comments: to see how the international support for a
war against terrorism that was there post September 11 has been squandered diplomatically
over the last few months by the United States—and, to a degree, by Britain—has been, I
think, breathtaking. The fact is that the opportunity to have a united front and to actually
move forward and address some of the real problems has been severely curtailed by these ac-
tions of the US administration and by the way they have handled this whole issue over several
months. We can see that President George Bush has been bent on this activity for quite some
time now. I think we are now about to see just how horrible that will be. (Time expired)

Mr RUDD (Griffith) (6.47 p.m.)—It is important to be able to participate in the debate on
the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003 in
such a considered manner. The question of how we shape Australia’s future rests on how we
shape our long-term national security policy, our long-term foreign policy and our long-term
defence policy. We on our side of politics have had a view for the better part of half a century
that the way in which we shape that future rests on three fundamental pillars. Those pillars are
our alliance with the United States, our policy of engagement with the United Nations’ system
of collective security, and comprehensive engagement with Asia. For Labor, these have al-
ways been the underpinnings of a balanced national security policy for Australia, given the
unique geostrategic circumstances in which the nation finds itself. Our nation lies adjacent to
the largest Islamic country in the world, the Republic of Indonesia, a country of 230 million
people. Our nation lies adjacent to a region of half a billion people, the majority of whom are
also Muslim.

Comprehensive engagement—this third pillar of Labor’s approach to national security pol-
cy—is, for us, fundamental. The question which we deal with as we look to the country’s
future is: where are we, after seven years of the Howard government, on the security of this
country in Asia? The proposition I wish to submit to the parliament is that after seven years
this country is less secure in Asia than it has ever been. This country has fewer friends in Asia
than it had seven years ago and this country now has more enemies in Asia than it had seven
years ago. This is not an impressive report card. It is report card which, in terms of its conclu-
sions, goes to the core of our security in our region, our own neighbourhood, our own back-
yard.

When it comes to the South Pacific, the report card is much the same. After seven years of
the Howard government, are we more secure in the South Pacific or less secure? Do we have
more friends in the South Pacific than we did seven years ago? Do we have more enemies in
the South Pacific than we had seven years ago? The report card and the conclusions contained
in it are remarkably the same. If we go beyond our immediate region of South-East Asia and
the South-West Pacific—the two great strategic corridors which shape Australia’s security
circumstances—and look further afield, we could ask the same questions about the Middle
East.

Does Australia, seven years into the Howard government, have more friends in the Middle
East than we had seven years ago? Do we have more enemies in the Middle East than we had
seven years ago? Do we have more friends in the Islamic world than we had seven years ago?
Do we have more enemies in the Islamic world than we had seven years ago? When we put
the questions as starkly as that in relation to these great regions which shape so much of our
country’s future, I fear for our country’s future. I fear in a way in which I have never feared before, because we now face a more unpredictable set of national security circumstances than we have faced at any time in my living memory.

Australia, in shaping its future in Asia, has had a difficult past to overcome. Viewed through the eyes of the region, what was this thing called Australia? It was seen as a white colonial outpost of a European empire which itself had been hostile to many, if not all, countries within the region. Prior to the beginning of the 20th century, Australians had seen Asia, by and large, as a place for foreign missionary endeavour, a region ripe for the harvest of souls. After the earliest part of the 20th century, this sense of missionary endeavour was replaced by a sense of strategic paranoia as we saw the rise of Japan, the rise of China and the beginning of the emergence of what American strategic analysts described at the time as the domino theory. From 1905 to 1975, Australia perceived Asia as a neighbourhood of increasing strategic concern to us. Of course, those concerns came to fruition at the time of the Second World War.

Australian perceptions changed with the fall of Saigon. In the quarter of a century following the fall of Saigon, Australia’s view of the region became one less of strategic paranoia and more one shaped by economic opportunity. Until the Asian economic collapse of 1997, effectively that paradigm prevailed.

We come to the present period—that of the Howard government—which is not simply the product of the events of the last year or two but which is the product of the last century or two in terms of the region’s perceptions of us and our perceptions of our region. The importance of that background, given Labor’s policy and then the nation’s policy of comprehensive engagement of Asia, therefore becomes transparently obvious: Whitlam’s recognition of China; Hawke’s establishment of APEC; Gareth Evans’s establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum; and Keating’s continuation and expansion of both institutions, which enhanced this region’s sense of multilateralism both in an economic sense and in a strategic sense through the ARF, and also his development of strong bilateral relationships with the countries of greatest importance to us. When you travel in the region today, it is impossible to go past a single capital and not have Whitlam’s name, Hawke’s name or Keating’s name presented to you as names of great men in this country’s foreign policy history—men who carved out Australia’s new image in our own region, an image of engagement as opposed to an image of hostility or an image of disinterest.

Regrettably, in the last seven years we have seen so much of that legacy unravel before us. The unravelling began back in 1996-97 with the Prime Minister’s temporary embrace of Hansonism. We saw the Prime Minister engaged in the most obscene of Voltairean embraces of Pauline Hanson, saying on the one hand that he did not necessarily agree with everything that Mrs Hanson had to say but on the other hand that he defended passionately her right to say it. We all know, in the politics of this country, what that was code language for. Unfortunately for the Prime Minister and unfortunately for the Australian national interest, this double message was read equally clearly across the countries of our region. In newspaper after newspaper, radio outlet after radio outlet and television station after television station, month in and month out, year in and year out, we had reports of this Prime Minister’s partial embrace of the policies espoused by Pauline Hanson.

From that time on—that is, from 1996-97 on—slowly the pillar which had been established over a quarter of a century, a pillar of comprehensive engagement with our region, began to crack. It cracked further following our engagement in East Timor, when the Prime Minister
again announced to the region in a monumental feat of foreign policy insensitivity that Australia was now the deputy sheriff of the United States in Asia. That was the deputy sheriff doctrine. Australia had had enormous success in what turned out to be the independence of East Timor. The enormous failure lay in the way in which the Prime Minister ‘celebrated’—and I say that in inverted commas—that success in an interview with the Bulletin magazine. He described himself as the deputy sheriff of the United States. He said that Australia’s future strategic role in South-East Asia was to act as the surrogate of US foreign policy interests. In Australia, the debate about the deputy sheriff was dropped within a week. In Asia, the debate was kept up for not just a year; it continues to the present. Once again in newspaper outlets, on radio and television, at academic seminars and in government statements, the good name of this country as a country engaged intimately in the economic and social development of our region came undone.

But it did not stop there. Once again, in December last year, we had the Prime Minister announce to the world and the region that Australia reserved for itself the right to engage in a doctrine of regional military pre-emption against the sovereign territory of our neighbours in Asia. Personally, in terms of the interests of Australians in South-East Asia, I can think of no more irresponsible statement that this Prime Minister has ever made. In making that statement, he sent a signal not just to governments across the region but, much more importantly, to disaffected groups within the countries of the region that Australia represented an external and potentially hostile force. How on earth the Prime Minister could conclude that the announcement of this second Howard doctrine, the doctrine of regional military pre-emption, would in any way enhance this country’s national security defies my imagination and understanding. How it could possibly enhance the Prime Minister’s ability to work cooperatively with governments within the region on counter-terrorism defies my understanding. How it could have assisted Australians in securing a better outcome for their own personal physical security in South-East Asia defies my understanding.

But the deterioration in our national security circumstances that has occurred over the last several years did not simply stop there. Not just statements of diplomacy, not just statements of foreign policy and not just statements of national security policy but also so-called soft statements and actions on the part of the Howard government have unravelled much of the fabric of our engagement with the region over not just the last quarter-century but the last half-century as well. Here I speak of the demise of Radio Australia. Nothing could have been more retrograde in terms of this country’s standing in Asia and South-East Asia than the wilful decision of this government to emasculate Radio Australia’s capacity to broadcast its message to South-East Asia and beyond.

Prior to this government being elected, Radio Australia was one of the strongest broadcasters in Asia. We had the capacity through the Cox Peninsula transmitters to send an Australian message not only across all of South-East Asia and the South-West Pacific but across the bulk of Asia itself, to northern China and to the border between India and Pakistan. We had the capacity to send an Australian message about what kind of nation Australia is in the 21st century and about what kind of nation we see ourselves as being in our dealings with our neighbours in Asia. Yet what happened? The Howard government sold the Cox Peninsula transmitters. The Howard government sacked 130-odd foreign language translators working for Radio Australia. This great institution, set up by Menzies—not by us—was brought to its knees, and it has not effectively recovered. When Radio Australia wishes to broadcast an effective message to the world and to the region, it must buy space back from the time available from the Cox Peninsula transmitters, which are now in the ownership of an organisation called Christian Vision, to which the Howard government sold it. It must buy space back from
various other commercial transmitters around the world, owned variously by the Taiwanese and by others. Is this the mark of an independent country seeking to carve out its future in the region? I would think not. If you look around the rest of the world, Deutsche Welle, Radio Netherlands, the Voice of America and the BBC are all adding to their own nationally owned transmission capacity in a region which is not even theirs—namely, Asia. At the same time, what has this government done to our national broadcaster? It has emasculated their capacity—step by step, employee by employee, transmitter by transmitter.

I cannot possibly explain to the House how deeply I feel about this act of wanton vandalism. But it is bettered by one other: the wanton vandalism we have seen by the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs in the recent decision not to fund the National Asian Languages and Studies Strategy for Australian schools. This project was embarked upon by governments, both Labor and Liberal, across this country over the better part of a decade. I had something to do with this project. In 1994, Prime Minister Keating, together with the six premiers of Australia and two chief ministers, Labor and Liberal, commissioned me to draft a report for the Council of Australian Governments on Australia implementing a national Asian languages and studies strategy for Australian schools. Why did that become necessary? Apart from the obvious—which is that Australia had to create for itself a generation of Asia-literate Australians, comfortable and familiar with the languages and cultures of our region—we had for the previous 25 years fiddled around the edges of this great national need. Sixteen reports had been commissioned by the governments from Gorton to Keating on the importance of achieving the creation, through our school system, of a generation of Australians comfortable in the languages of our region. They were not all simultaneous interpreters, not all fluent in one, two or three languages, but a solid and emerging cohort of young Australians comfortable in the principal languages of our neighbourhood: Mandarin, Japanese, bahasa Indonesia, bahasa Malay and Korean.

We managed to achieve consensus on this. In 1994, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to the report and, most critically, to the funding recommendations underpinning the report that were designed to be implemented from 1995 on—and they were. It allocated funding from the Commonwealth and the states in a joint funding partnership to ensure that these languages critical to Australia’s economic future and our strategic future would be taught comprehensively across our school system. The consequence, up to the year 2002, was that nearly 5,000 schools across the Commonwealth of Australia—schools in each of the electorates represented by the members of this House in this chamber now—were teaching Chinese, Japanese, bahasa Indonesia, bahasa Malay or in some cases Korean. How many students did we have learning these languages in Australian schools at the end of last year? We had 750,000 young Australians studying these languages, the languages of our future.

This was a tribute to all governments concerned—Labor and Liberal, federal and state. It was a tribute also to former minister David Kemp that he sustained funding for this program during the initial years of the Howard government. I cannot express my outrage more deeply at the fact that his successor, Brendan Nelson, has not continued the funding for this program. He said it was because the financial resources of the Commonwealth did not permit it for the year ahead. In one fell swoop he has torn up a contract between the Commonwealth and the states going back the better part of a decade. In one fell swoop he has torn up an agreement between the Commonwealth and the states which, up until now, has resulted in the expenditure of some half a billion dollars on creating this generation of Asia-literate young Australians. What was his reason? It was that the responsibility now lies with the states.
I have some familiarity with the agreement that underpinned this great program, NALSAS, because I drafted it. It was a fifty-fifty joint funding agreement made between the Commonwealth and the states for 12 years. It was not supposed to terminate until 2006, by which stage we would have had an entire generation of children having gone through the program in the school system. This man, this would-be minister, this would-be leader of the Liberal Party, has taken this great national initiative and ripped it up in one single action. What he has done is unspeakable in terms of the long-term damage it does to the nation—not to mention the damage it does to those schoolchildren across Australia today, in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and every state of the Commonwealth, who now face the fact that their studies are under question and challenge. Some of the teachers can no longer be afforded and the curriculum work has begun to be wound back, as well as actual classrooms no longer being resourced to do their jobs.

Regrettably, what has happened on Asian languages fits the pattern of what has happened elsewhere. Radio Australia, the Howard doctrine of regional military pre-emption, the first Howard doctrine of Australia as a deputy sheriff of the United States in Asia and this Prime Minister’s embrace of Hansonism are all part of a sickening pattern of comprehensive disengagement from our own region. Who will pay the price for this? It will be the Australian people of the next generation. We tried to carve out a future for that generation. This government has caused that future to be fundamentally undermined.

Mr Byrne (Holt) (7.07 p.m.)—I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2002-2003 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2002-2003. These bills give us the opportunity to talk about a fairly wide range of matters. In particular, I want to discuss a matter that deeply impacts on my electorate and seems to be wantonly and brazenly disregarded by both the Howard government and the Health Insurance Commission—and I will touch on both those bodies later on in my speech. First, I want to give a snapshot of my electorate and paint a picture of a problem that has arisen as a consequence of the demographics of my electorate. This is a problem that is not being addressed by the federal government. Its ramifications are dire. They range from people not being able to access medical services to people not being able to access psychiatric services.

I understand that the federal government is currently considering a report by a non-government organisation that looks at the issue of mental health. When we look at national priorities, mental health is a consistently overlooked priority. As a consequence, there are people literally dying in our streets and our suburbs. Because it is not a ‘sexy’ subject, and because models and athletes et cetera are not running around talking about it, the issue of mental health is ignored. But it is a massive social problem, and it is one that will continue to exist until both state and, in particular, federal governments actually solve the issue and commit appropriate funds to it, particularly given the costs involved.

I worked as a chief executive officer of a non-government mental health organisation, and I was involved in the National Mental Health Strategy that was brought in by the Keating government in the early and mid-nineties. It was recognised then that, unless the issue of psychiatric and mental health was addressed, there were going to be continuing deleterious effects on the community. Unfortunately, this issue has not been addressed properly, as I said, by either state or federal governments. Until it is, we are going to have people dying in our suburbs, literally.

The problem is that psychiatric services are stigmatised. Mental health is an issue that governments do not want to address because there are no quick fixes to it. When you have people experiencing schizophrenia or chronic depression, those are not things that will suddenly go
away, even with pills. Those conditions exist, but their net effect includes the disruption of
families, the destruction of lives and jobs and the destruction of opportunities for our young.
The effect of governments not addressing mental illness can be seen in the increase in suicide,
particularly youth suicide. It can be seen in the increase in the rates of depression. The rate of
uptake of antidepressants in this country is skyrocketing. That affects the health budget. Not
only does depression affect the health budget; by 2020, it is going to be the leading cause of
disease in this country and, in fact, the world. It is a significant issue, and it must be ad-
dressed. I understand that there will be a report tabled by, I think, the Mental Health Council
of Australia, and tonight I call on the House to ensure that this issue is taken seriously by the
electorate. If we are looking for areas that need to be addressed in future, mental health fund-
ing is one key area.

I would also like to touch on the provision of health services to the community and to peo-
ple in my electorate. We have a lot of young families in my electorate. In fact, in a particular
belt within the City of Casey we have 20,000 children aged between one and four years.
Many young families have shifted into the area. It has a very high mortgage rate. These young
families are doing it very tough at the present time. They have come in in a period of low in-
terest rates. In my view, in many cases they have overborrowed, and they are funding their
dreams and opportunities by debt. They have to. A number of families in my electorate are
paying for their food bills and school fees by credit card. These people are groaning under
excessive debt. This issue has also not been addressed by government, and it must be, because
if interest rates rise—and that is a possibility, particularly with the imminent war—a number
of these families are going to go bankrupt. They are just holding on. My question is: at this
time, in this day, why is it that many young families, in many cases with dual incomes, are
struggling financially? That is an issue that needs to be addressed.

As a consequence of the large numbers of families that are struggling, the attack on the
health system—on bulk-billing and on Medicare—is very keenly felt. It is much more keenly
felt in my area than it is in, say, High Street, Armadale, which happens to be in the Treasurer’s
electorate, or in the inner suburbs of Melbourne. This is an area I want to touch on. The de-
struction of Medicare is a key concern. We do not just pay this lip-service; it is a key concern
for many young families in my area. It is an issue that they discuss quite openly. We receive
many representations about this. People are very concerned that this universal health care sys-
tem is going to be destroyed. We recall particularly that the bulk-billing rate in Holt was 91
per cent in the year 2000. It has actually dropped by 14 points to 77 per cent since then. That
is a massive drop in two years. The GP bulk-billing rate has declined by 11 per cent since the
Howard government came to power. Australians, particularly those in my region and in my
electorate, are being forced to go without. In 2002, Australians visited their GPs 1.75 million
fewer times than in 2001. The New South Wales government released a report showing that
by the end of the year only 22 per cent of New South Wales GPs are expected to continue to
bulk-bill; 40 per cent currently bulk-bill.

From 1983, every year that the Labor Party was in government the rate of bulk-billing in-
creased; every year since John Howard has been elected as Prime Minister the rate of bulk-
billing has decreased. Not only has the rate of bulk-billing decreased, but the out-of-pocket
cost of seeing a GP has increased by 54 per cent since the Howard government was elected.
The cost of seeing a GP who does not bulk-bill has gone up by over 50 per cent. The average
out-of-pocket cost of visiting a GP who does not bulk-bill has gone up to $12.57. It has risen
substantially in Holt. That is an outrageous increase for families in Holt. Doctors in my re-
region, when asked, maintain that they are not receiving an adequate rebate. They currently re-
receive $25.05, while the AMA believe that, in accordance with the relative value study, the rebate should be between $40 and $50. I think that is an issue that should be looked at—not necessarily universally, but perhaps selectively—particularly in areas and regions like mine, and in rural areas where we are struggling to attract doctors.

That touches on another point I want to make, and that relates to the chronic shortage of doctors in the outer suburbs. The destruction of Medicare has only increased the problem. It is difficult to get doctors into our region. It is not financially viable now for them to set up practices in the area. When people cannot go to a doctor—particularly in our area, where they cannot reach a doctor at night even with a locum service—they go to a hospital. The major regional hospital in my electorate is the Dandenong Hospital. Anne Peek, the Chief Executive Officer of the Dandenong District Division of General Practice, which represents about 260 doctors in the region, has envisaged a situation where not one doctor will be bulk-billing in the electorate of Holt within the next five years—not one doctor! The government has to consider redirecting funding from the outer metropolitan doctors initiative—taking the $80 million that is being talked about there and reallocating it to potentially high Medicare rebates or some other scheme that attracts and keeps doctors in the region.

The strain on bulk-billing doctors has been brought to my attention by the specific example of Dr Zorika Bogetic, a sole practitioner with over 4,000 patients, of whom the majority do not speak English. There is a very high concentration of people from non-English speaking backgrounds in the Dandenong area. People from 142 nationalities reside around the city of greater Dandenong. Many of those people are suffering trauma as a consequence of their past experiences. We have the highest uptake of refugees in the state of Victoria. These are people with special needs, yet they cannot find doctors, particularly ethno-specific doctors, who can cater for them. In Dr Bogetic’s case, we are talking about a Serbian doctor with over 4,000 patients. She is suffering from overload. She cannot obtain another Serbian trained doctor to work in her clinic. Two have applied for work, but they have been refused.

Dr Bogetic has approached the Minister for Health and Ageing for help, but she has been turned away. Her workload is so extreme in catering for these communities—and they are not only Serbs but also Bosnians and Croats—that she has not been able to complete things like basic legal reports. In one case, this has led to a threat of prosecution. She received a letter from a legal firm that had requested a report, and the letter said that if she did not submit the report she would be taken to court or to the medical board. In response, Dr Bogetic stated:

I would be happy for you to report me to the Medical Board, as it would be my final chance to be able to secure another doctor for my surgery.

I understand that the Medical Board is present to uphold the high health standards that are expected in Australia, but as you are aware the health system is in crisis in Victoria with a chronic shortage of General Practitioners. My first priority is proper care for my 4,000 patients who can’t speak English and came to this country as refugees, with reports for solicitors being a secondary priority in terms of urgency. I am a solo practitioner with ... 4,000 patients.

There is a classic example of a specific area of need that is not being addressed. This person has approached the Minister for Health and Ageing. Further, when the lawyers were talking about prosecuting her, Dr Bogetic said:

In addition, it would be of benefit to me if the Commonwealth Minister for Health, Kaye Patterson and Federal MP for Dandenong, Mr Anthony Byrne were present for my case.

She would like us to testify on her behalf. I would certainly be prepared to, particularly given that she has something like 27 reports outstanding to legal firms. These reports are late be-
cause her case load is so great and she is not able to attract a doctor to assist her who is compatible with the clientele that she services. It is just ridiculous.

As a consequence of doctors being unable to bulk-bill, people are forced to visit the emergency room of the Dandenong Hospital. There has been an 11.3 per cent increase in the number of people going to the emergency department of Dandenong Hospital since March 2001. It is quite clear that this is a consequence of the crisis we have in the health system in my region. People go there either because they cannot afford to go to a GP or because they cannot get a GP because there are virtually none. They cannot access basic services. When you think about the numbers of young families in this region with sick children—some of whom can be very sick—the fact that they cannot access services in some of the supposedly affluent parts of my electorate is a disgrace.

But the government will not act to arrest the devastating decline in bulk-billing; it is threatening to reduce funding to public hospitals. Just imagine if funding were cut. In terms of her allocation of priorities, the health minister refused to attend a meeting with state and territory health ministers to discuss the Australian health care agreements. I wonder what that means in terms of demonstrating a commitment to the health of Australians in general. There is one particular issue which I have to keep on banging away at like a drum, because no-one seems to be listening, particularly not the government and the Health Insurance Commission. It relates to my ongoing campaign to secure a Medicare office in the Fountain Gate shopping centre. As I was saying, young families in Holt sometimes have to go to the doctor three or four times a week. They cannot afford to go but in some cases they cannot afford not to go, particularly if the developing illness becomes quite serious. As a consequence of the decline in bulk-billing rates, they go to the doctor and pay their fees up-front, and then they have to go and lodge their forms. But in some cases where they have gone three or four times and had to pay their fees up-front, there is no Medicare office for them to go to because there is not one Medicare office in the city of Casey.

The city of Casey now has a population of 191,000. I think the 2001 census put the figure at about 179,000, but it is much greater than that. The population of the city of Casey is growing at 10,000 people per year as young families stream into the region, but it does not have a Medicare office and it takes something like three weeks to obtain the 85 per cent rebate. As I have said to you, many of these young families have very high mortgages and are struggling as a consequence of this. It would be simple if they could go to a Medicare office and have the rebate paid up-front, but they cannot. They have to wait because there is no Medicare office.

I must admit, I am getting sick to death of speaking to bureaucracies that do not have the needs of Australians at heart. I have to mention the Health Insurance Commission. I am sick to death of its blase dismissal of 19,073 people who wanted a Medicare office, of its dismissal of my ongoing campaign and of its dismissal of the efforts of a government member—Bob Charles—who has been lobbying for this Medicare office for 11 years. Bob is prepared to support me in my quest, so this has bipartisan support. I will not tolerate the Health Insurance Commission putting up these lame excuses as to why they deny the people of Casey a Medicare office. It is just not on.

I would like to take this opportunity to address some of the issues pertaining to this Medicare office in more detail, particularly given that one of the arguments put forward was the fact that other Medicare offices are close by. I will read an excerpt of a letter that I sent to Dr Jeffrey Harmer of the Health Insurance Commission, in which I detailed some of my concerns and addressed some of the concerns that have been raised. In part, I said:
According to the data taken from the 2001 Census, the City of Casey has a population of approximately 179,341. This is expected to rise to 228,683 by 2011.

I went on to say that it is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in the country. I further said:

Residents of the City of Casey are being forced to travel to locations such as Dandenong, Knox and Warragul to access Medicare services. The lack of a local Medicare office has caused widespread discontent within the local community, and Holt constituents advise me of their frustration and annoyance in regard to this matter on a constituent basis.

I note that the City of Greater Dandenong, which does possess a Medicare office, has a population of 124,536 residents. Though the City of Casey is populated by a further 54,805 residents, it is not in possession of such a facility. The negative population growth experienced in the City of Greater Dandenong is in sharp contrast to the current and projected population expansion of the City of Casey and again highlights the strong future need for a local Medicare office for the area.

For comparative purposes I included a list of the populations of various councils in metropolitan Melbourne and Medicare offices within the same areas. I want to touch on some of these because it is instructive: Bayside City Council, which has a population of 80,480, has a Medicare office in the Southland Shoppingtown. The city of Boroondara has a population of 153,860 and has a Medicare office in Camberwell. The city of Greater Dandenong has a Medicare office in Dandenong. The city of Knox, with a population of 141,408, has a Medicare office at the Knox City Shopping Centre. The city of Monash, which has a population of 160,862, has three Medicare offices: one in Mulgrave, one in Glen Waverley and one in Chadstone. The city of Whitehorse, with a population of 149,174, has two Medicare offices: one in Forest Hill and one in Box Hill. The city of Manningham has a population of 112,000 and has a Medicare office in Doncaster. Maroondah has a population of 96,000 people and has a Medicare office in Ringwood. The city of Casey has a population of 179,341, as listed on the 2001 census figures, and it has none.

Why does the city of Monash, with a population of 160,862, have three Medicare offices established within its boundaries, yet the city of Casey has not one? The establishment of such a facility not only would meet the immediate needs of the area but would cater for strong, explosive growth over the next 10 years. I understand that the residents of the city of Casey may be denied the establishment of such a facility on the grounds that the said residents can travel to the Dandenong Medicare office. That is ridiculous. They say that it is close because it is a distance of 8.18 kilometres. The distance between the Medicare office in Mulgrave and the Medicare office in Glen Waverley is 5.4 kilometres. Are we going to take one of those offices out? There is a Medicare office in Forest Hill and a Medicare office in Box Hill, with a distance of 6.55 kilometres between them. Are we going to take one of those offices out?

There is an office in Glen Waverley and an office in Knox, with a distance of 7.95 kilometres. It takes 11 minutes to get there. If you accept that rationale, which office will the Health Insurance Commission take out? I find this situation and the contention of the Health Insurance Commission an outrage and an affront. If they think they can hide behind this bureaucratic response to a sincere and genuine demand for a service, they have got it coming. I will continue to lobby to ensure we have a Medicare office. I will present another petition if it is required, but I will not rest until the families of the city of Casey, in my electorate, get what they desperately need and deserve: a Medicare office.

Debate (on motion by Mr Hawker) adjourned.

Main Committee adjourned at 7.28 p.m.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

Australian Taxation Office: Staff Disciplinary Action
(Question No. 95)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Treasurer, upon notice, on 13 February 2002:

(1) Is he aware of reports that his electorate officer, Margaret Nicolls, contacted the Tax Office on behalf of a constituent, and was told by an officer of the Tax Office that it was about time the Treasurer knew what people were experiencing with the delays and current workload of the ATO.

(2) Is it the case that bad language used by the Tax Officer was the subject of a report to him.

(3) Has the Tax Officer concerned been the subject of disciplinary action; if so, what action was taken against him.

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

(1) to (3) Disciplinary action is the responsibility of Agency Heads. This question should be directed to the Commissioner of Taxation who is an independent Statutory Officer.

Taxation: Superannuation Guarantee Charge
(Question No. 96)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Treasurer, upon notice, on 13 February 2002:

(1) How many workers and what classes of workers will be affected by the decision of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in the case of Quest Personnel Temping Pty Ltd vs Commissioner of Taxation (AATA 124).

(2) Does the decision apply retrospectively or just to payments made to workers in the future.

(3) How will the Government ensure that all employers comply with the decision.

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

(1) On 12 February 2002, the Federal Court confirmed an AAT decision which means that Quest must pay the Superannuation Guarantee Charge (SGC) as assessed by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) in relation to casual workers for the 1997 and 1998 years. Quest will also need to assess its liability to the SGC for the 1999, 2000, and 2001 years. Quest will need to make superannuation guarantee contributions for the current year by 28 July 2002.

The Superannuation Guarantee (SG) applies to casual workers as well as full time and part time employees. The decision by the Federal Court affirms the ATO’s long held position in relation to the ordinary hours of work of casual workers. That is, that generally SG applies to all hours worked by casual employees. This is a view the ATO has consistently expressed in advice given to both employers and employees.

The application of the Federal Court decision will affect all workers who are engaged on a similar basis to those of Quest. This would apply equally to full-time and part-time workers engaged on the same basis. Where the casual workers are engaged under an award, the provisions of that award will determine the casual workers ordinary hours of work.

(2) See above. The SG has always applied to casual workers. If employers have not paid SG for past years they will need to pay the SGC for those years.

(3) The Government remains committed to ensuring that all eligible employees receive their SG contributions. Training and reference materials for ATO auditors conducting SG audits, and for ATO staff operating the Superannuation Infoline on 13 10 20, have been updated to include the decision in Quest Personnel Temping Pty Ltd vs Commissioner of Taxation. The decision is consistent with the long held position of the ATO and so does not represent a change in the ATO’s administration of SG.

The ATO will continue to ensure employers comply with the provisions of the Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992 through a program of audits and education. This financial year the ATO expects to contact 50,000 employers on a proactive basis and to complete around 15,500 other SG audits. This includes following up all notifications of employers providing insufficient superannuation support for their employees.
Prospect Electorate: Child-Care Centres
(Question No. 1353)

Mrs Crosio asked the Minister for Children and Youth Services, upon notice, on 4 February 2003:

(1) How many child care centres are located in the electoral division of Prospect.
(2) How many applications for child care places have been made in the electoral division of Prospect in (a) 1999-2000, (b) 2000-2001 and (c) 2001-2002.
(3) How many child care places have been made available in the electoral division of Prospect in (a) 1999-2000, (b) 2000-2001 and (c) 2001-2002.
(4) What has been the average cost of a child care place in the electoral division of Prospect in (a) 1999-2000, (b) 2000-2001 and (c) 2001-2002.

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

(1) How many child care centres are located in the electoral division of Prospect.
As at 17 February 2003 the following numbers of Commonwealth approved child care services were operating in the Prospect electorate:
36 Commonwealth funded Long Day Care (LDC),
1 Family Day Care scheme (FDC),
1 Occasional Care (OCC),
2 In-Home Care (IHC), and
33 Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services

(2) How many applications for child care places have been made in the electoral division of Prospect in (a) 1999-2000, (b) 2000-2001 and (c) 2001-2002.

Applications Received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>LDC</th>
<th>FDC</th>
<th>IHC</th>
<th>OSHC</th>
<th>OCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/02</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) How many child care places have been made available in the electoral division of Prospect in (a) 1999-2000, (b) 2000-2001 and (c) 2001-2002.

Places allocated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>LDC</th>
<th>FDC</th>
<th>IHC*</th>
<th>OSHC**</th>
<th>OCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/02</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* places allocated for Western Sydney including Prospect electorate.
** Includes new and re-allocated places

(4) What has been the average cost of a child care place in the electoral division of Prospect in (a) 1999-2000, (b) 2000-2001 and (c) 2001-2002.

The detailed information required to answer the Honourable Member’s question in relation to average cost of child care place in the electorate division of Prospect is not readily available. I do not consider appropriate the expenditure of resources and effort that would be involved in collecting and assembling information for the purpose of answering this question.

Taxation: Superannuation Surcharge
(Question No. 1362)

Ms Burke asked the Minister representing the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, upon notice, on 5 February 2003:

(1) What was the total revenue collected through the superannuation surcharge in (a) 1997-98, (b) 1998-99, (c) 1999-2000, (d) 2000-2001 and (e) 2001-2002.
(2) What was the average cost of this surcharge on those to whom it was applied in (a) 1997-98, (b) 1998-99, (c) 1999-2000, (d) 2000-2001 and (e) 2001-2002.

(3) What sum was collected in (a) 1997-98, (b) 1998-99, (c) 1999-2000, (d) 2000-2001 and (e) 2001-2002 from individual taxpayers whose taxable income was less than (i) $100,000 (ii) $150,000 (iii) $200,000 and (iv) $500,000.

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

(1) The revenue collections for the financial years specified are listed in the Commissioner of Taxation Annual Reports relevant to those years.

(2) This information is not available. As a result of the scheme of the legislation, superannuation providers are generally liable to pay superannuation contributions surcharge assessments. Consequently, information which is held by the Australian Taxation Office about the payment of surcharge generally relates to providers rather than individuals, although assessments are calculated in respect of those individuals whose adjusted taxable income exceeds the threshold. The exception is a very small percentage of cases where individual taxpayers are personally liable to pay the surcharge.

(3) See 2 above.

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**Education: Funding**  
(Question No. 1388)

**Mr Jenkins** asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, upon notice, on 6 February 2003:

(1) What sums were provided to (a) government and (b) non-government schools in (i) 2002 in the postcode areas of (A) 3074, (B) 3075, (C) 3076, (D) 3082, (E) 3083, (F) 3087, (G) 3088, (H) 3089, (I) 3090, (J) 3091 and (K) 3752 and what was the (I) expenditure on, (II) location of, and (III) purpose of, each grant.

(2) Using the criteria referred in part (1), what are the allocations for 2003.

**Dr Nelson**—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The majority of schools programmes could provide assistance to schools in these postcode areas. These include programmes such as General Recurrent Grants, Establishment Grants, Capital Grants, Schools Short Term Emergency Assistance, Strategic Assistance for Improving Student Outcomes, Enterprise and Career Education, Country Areas, English as a Second Language – New Arrivals, Languages Other Than English, Job Pathways, Partnership Outreach Education Model Pilot, Career and Transition Pilot and Discovering Democracy. However, under programme administrative arrangements with the States, Territories and non-government education authorities, the Commonwealth only collects data by electorate for certain programmes. Information on these programmes is set out in the attachment.

(2) The Department’s funding allocations for 2003 are set out in the attachment.

---

(1) **COMMONWEALTH GENERAL RECURRENT GRANTS TO NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN 2002**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLIENT’S NAME</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>ANNUAL ENTITLEMENT</th>
<th>POSTCODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St John’s Primary School</td>
<td>Thomastown East</td>
<td>$925,380.00</td>
<td>3074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Clare’s School</td>
<td>Thomastown West</td>
<td>$1,281,540.00</td>
<td>3074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Luke’s Primary School</td>
<td>Lalor</td>
<td>$1,313,340.00</td>
<td>3075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Catherine’s Primary School</td>
<td>Lalor West</td>
<td>$594,660.00</td>
<td>3075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open House Christian School</td>
<td>Lalor</td>
<td>$67,431.00</td>
<td>3075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Peter’s Parish Primary School</td>
<td>Epping</td>
<td>$1,764,900.00</td>
<td>3076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Monica’s College</td>
<td>Epping</td>
<td>$7,010,660.00</td>
<td>3076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Francis of Assisi Primary School</td>
<td>Mill Park</td>
<td>$3,364,440.00</td>
<td>3082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of the Way School</td>
<td>Kingsbury</td>
<td>$534,240.00</td>
<td>3083</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### COMMONWEALTH CAPITAL GRANTS TO GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN 2002

#### Non-government schools—2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Postcodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$318,000</td>
<td>St Clare’s School</td>
<td>Thomastown West</td>
<td>CONSTRUCTION OF: MULTI-PURPOSE FACILITY, CANTEEN AND STUDENT AMENITIES. (DALTON ROAD CAMPUS)</td>
<td>3074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$142,937</td>
<td>St Monica’s College</td>
<td>Epping</td>
<td>CONSTRUCTION OF: FOOD TECHNOLOGY CENTRE.</td>
<td>3076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$105,000</td>
<td>Plenty Valley Montessori School</td>
<td>Diamond Creek</td>
<td>CONSTRUCTION OF: GENERAL LEARNING AREA. ASSOCIATED SERVICES. SITE WORKS. FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT.</td>
<td>3089</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Government schools—2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Postcodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$270,000</td>
<td>Thomastown Meadows Primary School</td>
<td>Thomastown</td>
<td>PROVISION OF: GENERAL PURPOSE CLASSROOMS, MUSIC FACILITIES AND STAFF ADMINISTRATION. UPGRADE OF: GENERAL PURPOSE CLASSROOMS, MUSIC, DRAMA, GRAPHICS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, LIBRARY, CANTEEN, STAFF WORK SPACE AND STUDENT LOCKER SPACE. CONSTRUCTION OF: MUSIC AND DRAMA FACILITY AND STAFF WORK SPACE. UPGRADE OF: GENERAL PURPOSE CLASSROOMS, GRAPHICS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, LIBRARY AND CANTEEN.</td>
<td>3074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$450,000</td>
<td>Lalor North Primary School</td>
<td>Lalor</td>
<td></td>
<td>3075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$450,000</td>
<td>Lalor North Secondary College</td>
<td>Lalor</td>
<td></td>
<td>3076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$430,000</td>
<td>Greensborough Secondary College</td>
<td>Greensborough</td>
<td></td>
<td>3088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(2)

COMMONWEALTH GENERAL RECURRENT GRANTS TO NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLIENT NAME</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>ESTIMATED ANNUAL ENTITLEMENT *</th>
<th>POSTCODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St John’s Primary School</td>
<td>Thomastown East</td>
<td>$925,380.00</td>
<td>3074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Clare’s School</td>
<td>Thomastown West</td>
<td>$1,281,540.00</td>
<td>3074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Luke’s Primary School</td>
<td>Lalor</td>
<td>$1,313,340.00</td>
<td>3075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Catherine’s Primary School</td>
<td>Lalor West</td>
<td>$594,660.00</td>
<td>3075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open House Christian School</td>
<td>Lalor</td>
<td>$70,014.00</td>
<td>3075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Peter’s Parish Primary School</td>
<td>Epping</td>
<td>$1,764,900.00</td>
<td>3076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Monica’s College</td>
<td>Epping</td>
<td>$7,010,660.00</td>
<td>3076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Francis of Assisi Primary School</td>
<td>Mill Park</td>
<td>$3,364,440.00</td>
<td>3082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of the Way School</td>
<td>Kingsbury</td>
<td>$534,240.00</td>
<td>3083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Damian’s School</td>
<td>Bundoora</td>
<td>$1,400,472.00</td>
<td>3083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northside Christian College</td>
<td>Bundoora</td>
<td>$742,465.00</td>
<td>3083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parade College</td>
<td>Bundoora</td>
<td>$6,464,920.00</td>
<td>3083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyola College</td>
<td>Watsonia</td>
<td>$4,098,927.20</td>
<td>3087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Mary’s School</td>
<td>Greensborough</td>
<td>$1,793,520.00</td>
<td>3088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Thomas’ Primary School</td>
<td>Greensborough</td>
<td>$1,529,580.00</td>
<td>3088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Heart School</td>
<td>Diamond Creek</td>
<td>$1,030,320.00</td>
<td>3089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plenty Valley Montessori School</td>
<td>Diamond Creek</td>
<td>$240,840.00</td>
<td>3089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironbark Christian School</td>
<td>Yarrambat</td>
<td>$169,344.00</td>
<td>3091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$34,329,562.20</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: There are no schools in receipt of establishment grants or distance education funding for these postcodes for 2003.

* 2003 General Recurrent Grants are estimated entitlements based on 2002 Census enrolments.

COMMONWEALTH CAPITAL GRANTS TO GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN 2003

Non-government schools—2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Postcodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$190,000</td>
<td>St Catherine’s Primary School</td>
<td>Lalor West</td>
<td>CONVERSION TO PROVIDE: MULTI-PURPOSE AREA.</td>
<td>3075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>REFURBISHMENT OF: STUDENT AMENITIES.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UPGRADE OF: PLAYING AREA.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$190,000</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Government schools - 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Postcodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$250,000</td>
<td>Diamond Creek East Primary School</td>
<td>Diamond Creek</td>
<td>CONSTRUCTION OF: GENERAL PURPOSE CLASSROOMS.</td>
<td>3089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UPGRADE OF: LIBRARY, CANTEEN AND STAFF ADMINISTRATION.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Immigration: Bishop Hegedus Visit
(Question No. 1412)

Mr Danby asked the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 6 February 2003:

(1) Is he aware of a visit by Bishop Hegedus from Hungary in October 2002.
(2) Can he provide details of Bishop Hegedus’s visa visit to Australia, including (a) when the bishop arrived and departed, (b) when the visa was granted and (c) what visa sub-class the bishop was on.
(3) Are persons on that class of visa allowed to address public meetings or engage in any fundraising or political activities.
(4) When the visa was granted, did his Department consider an anti-semitic article written by the bishop in April 2002; if not, why not; if so, what conclusions did the decision-maker come to about the article.
(5) When the visa was granted, was his Department aware of a pending criminal court case against the bishop about the article; if so, was this matter considered in deciding whether to issue a visa; if not, why not; if the court case was considered, what conclusions did the decision-maker come to about the article.
(6) Is his Department aware that soon after the bishop returned to Hungary, the bishop was convicted of inciting racial hatred and received a sentence of one and a half years imprisonment, suspended for three years.
(7) Given the conviction, would Bishop Hegedus receive another visa if the bishop sought to come to Australia again.

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

(1) Yes.
(2) (a) Bishop Hegedus arrived in Australia on 22 October 2002 and departed on 11 November 2002. (b) The visa was granted on 4 October 2002. (c) Bishop Hegedus was granted a subclass 676 (tourist – short stay) visa.
(3) The subclass 676 (tourist – short stay) visa allows a temporary entrant, whilst in Australia, to address public meetings and fundraise provided the activities do not contravene Australian laws and the person satisfies bone fides requirements.
(4) Bishop Hegedus was required to satisfy Public Interest Criteria 4001, 4002 and 4003. The Department was aware of the article written by Bishop Hegedus and as a consequence he was considered in line with controversial visitor policy. In considering his application the views of other agencies were sought and an assessment made of the impact on community groups who might have been affected by his visit.
Prior to visa grant Bishop Hegedus was counselled by the Head of Mission of the Australian Embassy in Budapest about the multicultural nature of Australian society and advised that a condition for grant of a visa was that the holder must not be involved in activities to vilify or incite discord in a segment of the Australian community. Bishop Hegedus agreed to abide by these conditions.
(5) The Department was aware that the Prosecutor-General’s Office proposed that he faced charges in relation to an article he had written.
(6) Yes.
(7) If Bishop Hegedus applied for a visa, the application would be considered against the legal requirements of the Migration Act 1958 and Migration Regulations 1994, including character provisions.