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SITTING DAYS—2004

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

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FORTIETH PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION—EIGHTH PERIOD

Governor-General  
His Excellency Major-General Michael Jeffery, Companion in the Order of Australia,  
Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Military Cross

House of Representatives Officeholders  
Speaker—The Hon. John Neil Andrew MP  
Deputy Speaker—The Hon. Ian Raymond Causley MP  
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP  
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Mr David Peter Maxwell Hawker, Mr Philip Anthony  
Barresi, Ms Teresa Gambaro, Mr Peter John Lindsay, the Hon. Bruce Craig Scott, the Hon.  
Dick Godfrey Harry Adams, Mr Frank William Mossfield AM, the Hon. Leo Roger Spurway  
Price, Mr Kimberley William Wilkie, Ms Ann Kathleen Corcoran

Leader of the House—The Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP  
Deputy Leader of the House—The Hon. Peter John McGauran MP  
Manager of Opposition Business—Ms Julia Eileen Gillard MP  
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—The Hon. Simon Findlay Crean MP

Party Leaders and Whips  
Liberal Party of Australia  
Leader—The Hon. John Winston Howard MP  
Deputy Leader—The Hon. Peter Howard Costello MP  
Chief Government Whip—Mr James Eric Lloyd MP  
Government Whips—Mrs Joanna Gash MP and Mr Fergus Stewart McArthur MP

The Nationals  
Leader—The Hon. John Duncan Anderson MP  
Deputy Leader—The Hon. Mark Anthony James Vaile MP  
Whip—Mr John Alexander Forrest MP  
Assistant Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Australian Labor Party  
Leader—Mr Mark William Latham MP  
Deputy Leader—Ms Jennifer Louise Macklin MP  
Chief Opposition Whip—The Hon. Janice Ann Crosio MBE MP  
Opposition Whips—Mr Michael Danby MP and Mr Harry Vernon Quick MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
### Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>Truss, Hon. Warren Errol</td>
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<td>Tuckey, Hon. Charles Wilson</td>
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<td>New England, NSW</td>
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<td>Worth, Hon. Patricia Mary</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
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<td>Zahra, Christian John</td>
<td>McMillan, Vic</td>
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**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent; CLP—Country Liberal Party; AG—Australian Greens

**Heads of Parliamentary Departments**

- Clerk of the Senate—H. Evans
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—I.C. Harris
- Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—H. R. Penfold QC
HOWARD MINISTRY

Prime Minister
Minister for Transport and Regional Services and Deputy Prime Minister
Treasurer
Minister for Trade
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Defence and Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Finance and Administration and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Health and Ageing and Leader of the House
Attorney-General
Minister for the Environment and Heritage and Vice-President of the Executive Council
Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Reconciliation
Minister for Education, Science and Training
Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women
Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service

The Hon. John Winston Howard MP
The Hon. John Duncan Anderson MP
The Hon. Peter Howard Costello MP
The Hon. Mark Anthony James Vaile MP
The Hon. Alexander John Gosse Downer MP
Senator the Hon. Robert Murray Hill
Senator the Hon. Nicholas Hugh Minchin
The Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
The Hon. Philip Maxwell Ruddock MP
The Hon. Dr David Alistair Kemp MP
The Hon. Daryl Robert Williams AM, QC, MP
The Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Senator the Hon. Amanda Eloise Vanstone
The Hon. Dr Brendan John Nelson MP
Senator the Hon. Kay Christine Lesley Patterson
The Hon. Ian Elgin Macfarlane MP
The Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP

(The above ministers constitute the cabinet)
HOWARD MINISTRY—continued

Minister for Justice and Customs
Senator the Hon. Christopher Martin Ellison

Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation
Senator the Hon. Ian Douglas Macdonald

Minister for the Arts and Sport
Senator the Hon. Charles Roderick Kemp

Minister for Small Business and Tourism
The Hon. Joseph Benedict Hockey MP

Minister for Science and Deputy Leader of the House
The Hon. Peter John McGauran MP

Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads and Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Senator the Hon. Ian Campbell

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
The Hon. Lawrence James Anthony MP

Minister for Employment Services and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence
The Hon. Malcolm Thomas Brough MP

Special Minister of State
Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz

Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
The Hon. Danna Sue Vale MP

Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer
Senator the Hon. Helen Lloyd Coonan

Minister for Ageing
The Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister
The Hon. Gary Douglas Hardgrave MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister
The Hon. Jacqueline Marie Kelly MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade
The Hon. De-Anne Margaret Kelly MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer
The Hon. Ross Alexander Cameron MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs
The Hon. Christine Ann Gallus MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence
The Hon. Frances Esther Bailey MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage
The Hon. Dr Sharman Nancy Stone MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration
The Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senator the Hon. Judith Mary Troeth

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Family and Community Services
The Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing
The Hon. Patricia Mary Worth MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources
The Hon. Warren George Entsch MP
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Mark William Latham MP

Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Employment, Education and Training
Jennifer Louise Macklin MP

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Minister for Public Administration and Accountability
Senator the Hon. John Philip Faulkner

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Trade, Corporate Governance and Financial Services
Senator Stephen Michael Conroy

Shadow Minister for Employment Services and Training
Anthony Norman Albanese MP

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Shadow Minister for Customs
Senator Thomas Mark Bishop

Shadow Minister for Industry and Innovation and Shadow Minister for Science and Research
Senator Kim John Carr

Shadow Minister for Children and Youth
Senator Jacinta Mary Ann Collins

Shadow Minister for Revenue and Shadow Assistant Treasurer
David Alexander Cox MP

Shadow Treasurer and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business
The Hon. Simon Findlay Crean MP

Shadow Minister for Ageing and Seniors and Shadow Minister for Disabilities
Annette Louise Ellis MP

Shadow Minister for Workplace Relations and Shadow Minister for the Public Service
Craig Anthony Emerson MP

Shadow Minister for Defence
Senator Christopher Vaughan Evans

Shadow Minister for Population, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs
Laurence Donald Thomas Ferguson MP

Shadow Minister for Urban and Regional Development and Shadow Minister for Transport and Infrastructure
Martin John Ferguson MP

Shadow Minister for Mining, Energy and Forestry
Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP

Shadow Minister for Health and Manager of Opposition Business
Julia Eileen Gillard MP

Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs and Assisting the Shadow Minister for Health
Alan Peter Griffin MP

Shadow Minister for Information Technology, Shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation and Shadow Minister for the Arts
Senator Kate Alexandra Lundy

Shadow Minister for Homeland Security
Robert Bruce McClelland MP
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<td>Shadow Minister for Reconciliation and Indigenous Affairs and Shadow Minister for Tourism, Regional Services and Territories</td>
<td>Senator Kerry William Kelso O'Brien</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries</td>
<td>Gavan Michael O'Connor MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Attorney-General and Assisting the Leader on the Status of Women</td>
<td>Nicola Louise Roxon MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Security</td>
<td>Kevin Michael Rudd MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Retirement Incomes and Savings</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Nicholas John Sherry</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Immigration</td>
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<td>Lindsay James Tanner MP</td>
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<td>Kelvin John Thomson MP</td>
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<td>Senator George Campbell</td>
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<td>Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney-General and for Homeland Security; Manager of Business in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Joseph William Ludwig</td>
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<td>John Paul Murphy MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Communications</td>
<td>Michelle Anne O’Byrne MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia and Reconciliation</td>
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The SPEAKER (Mr Neil Andrew) took the chair at 12.30 p.m. and read prayers.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mrs DRAPER (Makin) (12.31 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—If the member for Makin is very brief I will allow her to proceed. It is normally time for private members’ business. Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mrs DRAPER—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mrs DRAPER—I refer to newspaper reports and television promotions regarding my overseas study travel that I undertook in the year 2000. It has been claimed that it did not fall within the rules pertaining to MPs’ travel entitlements. Such claims are false and defamatory. These claims have further been used to make personal attacks on me and my family which are again false and defamatory. I seek leave to table a letter from the Special Minister of State, Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz, dated 13 May 2004, outlining the guidelines.

Leave granted.

COMMITTEES

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee

Interim Report

Mrs ELSON (Forde) (12.32 p.m.)—For the last two years the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry have been conducting an exhaustive inquiry into water supplies in rural Australia. This inquiry is close to completion and I expect to table the final report of the inquiry before the end of this period of sittings. What I am tabling today is an interim report that was presented to you, Mr Speaker, on Monday, 5 April.

During the inquiry, we received much evidence concerning the Living Murray initiative. This initiative seeks to increase flows to the River Murray. In November 2003 the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council agreed to increase river flows by some 500 gigalitres over the next five years. Based on the evidence the committee received, we concluded that this commitment was premature. Indeed the committee were so concerned about this matter that we delayed finalising a full report on the inquiry in order to address this issue, and presented an interim report.

The committee have recommended in the interim report that the commitment of additional river flows be postponed pending further evidence of a scientific nature. Members of the committee have all made it quite clear that we do not oppose flows. We fully recognise the need to have more water flow into the Murray-Darling Basin, but to be perfectly honest the evidence that we heard on how to go about this matter was all over the shop—mostly based on opinion and not on sound physical data. Decisions to reallocate large volumes of water have the potential to create severe economic, social and environmental impacts. Vital industries will be disrupted, rural communities will come under yet more pressure and the effect on the river may be detrimental.

The fact is that we just do not know what the impact of increased river flows will be, for the science underpinning the Living Murray initiative was not sufficiently robust to make a far-reaching decision. The committee believe that the science behind the Living Murray has paid insufficient attention to the natural variability and unpredictability of the Murray-Darling Basin environment. And how do we know without this data that
fluctuations in river conditions and species numbers are not just part of the natural ebb and flow of nature? The committee are aware of the historical evidence of extreme variability of flows in the River Murray. We know, for example, from the journals of Captain Sturt, that the mouth of the Murray was closed in 1830, before dams and before irrigation. The committee have identified a need for more comprehensive data on river flows. Without data on long-term trends, we simply cannot know to what extent the Murray has declined.

The committee also believe that insufficient attention has been paid to the link between river health and catchment health. Evidence shows that too much emphasis has been placed on sending more water down the river and not enough on other actions we can take to improve the river’s health. More research needs to be contributed to solutions that do not involve taking more water from farmers to increase river flows. Evidence taken proves that alternatives exist and should be pursued as the first priority.

The Murray is often portrayed by the media as a dying river. Such hysteria, unsupported by scientific evidence, serves no good purpose. Educating the community as to the true condition of the Murray is a vital first step in any decision to allocate water to increased river flows. The only way to address this problem is through the collection of comprehensive data on the ecological health of the Murray-Darling Basin over a period of time. Despite all the effort that has been put into various scientific reports on the Murray-Darling Basin, much of the evidence is based on expert opinion. This is not a sufficient basis for reaching decisions, and in all decision making we need more facts and fewer opinions.

The committee have recommended that the Australian government ask the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council to postpone plans to commit an additional 500 gigalitres to increase flows to the River Murray until a comprehensive program of data collection and monitoring has been completed; alternatives to increased flows have been thoroughly explored; and a comprehensive audit, based on the new data collected, has been undertaken. The committee believe that the opportunity is there to fund these tasks from the $500 million allocated to the Murray-Darling Basin by the COAG meeting in August 2003. Without such undertakings, the only result that can come from the Living Murray initiative is economic dislocation, social division and environmental failure.

This is too serious an issue to be used as a political football. I am asking all parties involved to work together to find answers and resolve community concerns. Then and only then will we find the right course towards maintaining the health of the Murray-Darling River system. I would like to take the opportunity to sincerely thank our committee secretariat for their enormous professional support during the preparation of this report. (Time expired)

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (12.37 p.m.)—I have been involved with the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry from its beginning. We have been taking evidence in relation to this water report for nearly 18 months, I think, and it has been a very good way of getting that information together. I opposed the interim report that was brought down and I then brought down a dissenting report. For members to wish to postpone the plans to commit an additional 500 gigalitres to increase the river flows was a mistake. Some members said that the science underlying the plans was at fault, but there has been extensive research. Sixty scientists made a contribution to the interim report, yet the House committee, after having a roundtable
with five or six scientists—two of them, whom we had not had evidence from before, took a different view—then wished to change direction and to recommend that the 500 gigalitres not go down the river. I could not accept that as rational or logical and brought down an interim report saying as much.

I do not mind changing the assessment tools that are used, finding new goals for looking at the river or making new assessments—whether that involves looking at how many bugs are in a corner of the river at such and such a time, looking at how many fish are there or looking at the plants that live alongside or in the river. As we have gained more science and more knowledge the scientists seem to be working those up. But to deny that the river would be better with the 500 gigalitres was rather silly—in my opinion. I opposed it, and unfortunately I was on my own in doing so.

A lot has been learned over the last 10 to 15 years. Mr Speaker, I know you would understand this greatly. I think there has been a lot of politics since 1994, when COAG started their work. They thought it would be over in five to seven years. We know that that is not the case. The science we have learned has opened up more questions for us to solve. It has made it harder for us to solve the problem but given us more things to do. When the ministerial council on 14 November 2003 made that decision to put the 500 gigalitres down the river, they said it was an historic first step decision to address the declining health of the River Murray system. I agree with them. It is a first step; it is a way of getting on with it.

But the committee have to get to a stage where we accept that this river system, the Murray-Darling Basin, is stressed in sections. There are stresses within that system. We have to come to grips with and address that. Increasing the flow will make this river healthy. If there is anything that this committee has reached a decision about, it is that we need to draw some pretty solid lines and to work towards some goals. Probably in the future those goals will be to work towards our rivers’ health—not towards pristine or natural rivers, but towards rivers that are healthy. We will look to improve them, make them healthy, keep them healthy and use good science to do that, and not be taken up with one or two people who may want to push their own barrow or not face up to the fact that the system does need some help and that we should get involved and help it.

**The SPEAKER**—The time allocated for statements on this report has expired. Does the member for Forde wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a later occasion?

**Mrs ELSON** (Forde) (12.42 p.m.)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

**The SPEAKER**—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting and the member for Forde will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

**DELEGATION REPORTS**

**Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Republic of Indonesia and Independent State of Papua New Guinea**

**Mr CAUSLEY** (Page) (12.42 p.m.)—The report of the delegation was tabled in the Senate because this House had risen at the time. We could not table the report in the House, so the Senate tabled it. I am speaking here today in support of the report, having been the leader of the delegation to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. I was accompanied
by honourable senators Robert Ray and Ross Lightfoot and Second Deputy Speaker Harry Jenkins, the member for Scullin, so it was a fairly high-profile delegation that went across to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

It was my second visit to Indonesia in the last two years, and it was rather interesting to see the developments in that time. The previous year we were looking at Indonesia’s new constitution and discussing it with the members of the Indonesian parliament. This time, the constitution having been approved, they were heading into a general election. Given the population of Indonesia, this was a bit of an education to us, coming from a country the size of Australia, with 20 million people. I would like to thank the Australian Embassy in Indonesia for their support. I would also like to thank the Australian High Commission in Papua New Guinea, who gave the greatest help they could possibly give to the delegation. I want to pay tribute to Senator Robert Ray: with his experience of Indonesia he was certainly a great help to the committee.

Being so close to Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea are important neighbours, and visits by Australian parliamentary delegations to those countries deliver a very powerful message, I dare say, and it is very helpful to the understandings between us. Indonesia, of course, is heading into uncharted waters as a new democracy setting in place a new constitution and having just held elections for the second time and under a new constitution for the first time. I think we in this country take for granted many of the things that we have come to understand and have inherited over 600 or 700 years, whereas in a country like Indonesia, where they have never known democracy, it is a very new experience.

We met with some very senior people in Indonesia, including the Speaker of the House, Akbar Tandjung, who as a member of the Golkar party was a candidate for the presidency but was defeated. We also met with the Chairman of the People’s Consultative Assembly, Professor Amien Rais. These people gave us a very detailed account of the situation in Indonesia and what they faced in the election. We also spoke to the Vice-President of Indonesia, His Excellency Hamzah Haz, who informed the delegation that in fact, whilst there were 48 registered political parties in 1999 in Indonesia, there are now more than 200. I think that is rather mind-boggling for a country like Australia to come to terms with.

Obviously the issues in Indonesia are very complex, and I think that meetings such as this are very important for us to understand those issues and come to terms with them. Also, issues that are raised in the media in Australia take on a new perspective in Indonesia. During our visit there was a great debate over the missile defence system that Australia was discussing with the United States. That took a very high profile in Indonesia and I think that they did not quite understand exactly what the debate was about. The committee recommended that in future Australia should be sensitive to these issues and should discuss with our Indonesian counterparts exactly what issues are involved so that it does not receive such a high profile in the Indonesian media.

The issue of religion was also raised with us. I think we managed to convince the people we spoke to in Indonesia that Australia is a very open society, that everyone is entitled to practise their religion in this country and that we encourage that. I hope that message did get through. I also think the student arrangements, whereby 17,000 students from Indonesia are studying in this country, are very important so that people understand our laws. (Time expired)
Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (12.47 p.m.)—In the delegation’s report we acknowledge and express our gratitude to quite a list of people, but I would like to iterate my thanks to the Deputy Speaker, the member for Page, for the way in which he carried out his duties as the leader, and to Senator Lightfoot for his contribution. It was an education for me to accompany Senator Lightfoot, somebody who has a different political ideology from mine. I believe, as in the way that delegations should truly function, we were able to at least present a picture of cooperation on the delegation if not a difference of view. I thank Senator Ray, whose experience as a minister in relations with Indonesia was quite invaluable to the delegation’s efforts. I also thank Saxon Patience for the way in which she professionally and diligently carried out her duties as the secretary.

It is a regrettable aspect of modern parliamentary delegations that there is a requirement to have liaison officers from the Australian Federal Police, but I would like to express my gratitude to Megan Curtain in Jakarta, Clarinda Iannucci in Jogjakarta and Michael Bouchier in Papua New Guinea, who carried out their duties in a very professional way and made a contribution by understanding that they were part of our delegation and by the way that they projected to our hosts. Amongst all those people in the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby, I would like to thank Stephanie Werner, the visits liaison officer in Jakarta, and Jo Woodbury, who is the delegation liaison officer in Port Moresby. Jo was in the first intake of the parliamentary assistants program and did an internship in this chamber, and it was pleasing to talk to her about her recollections of working here.

Papua New Guinea and Indonesia are of course very important to Australia as near neighbours. Both countries have developing parliamentary democracies, and I think that we as parliamentarians have to better understand the way those countries are developing. The Deputy Speaker has talked about the way in which misconceptions can occur in our relations and the way the media projects our relations with Indonesia. I think that we have to understand that. We also have to understand that, over the past 20 years or so, in Papua New Guinea there has been a host of changes, some of which we perhaps do not appreciate as we should. The delegation arrived soon after the enhanced assistance package had been announced. This was to assist Papua New Guinea in its capacity building, and it was well received.

In conclusion, I think that the important thing about both Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, as they start developing strong forms of parliamentary democracy, is that there is a host of young politicians coming through the stream who show great potential. They are the type of people that Australia should engage with. We should be strengthening our bilateral relations to ensure that we move forward, not only in assisting them as nations but in the way that we can act together in a bilateral fashion. I encourage colleagues to visit both of those countries. It is a failing of this parliament that we do not visit them as much as we should. Often people look beyond them. As our nearest neighbours they are two important countries to our future and that is what I would like to stress: the challenge for members of these two chambers is to ensure that we develop good relations with those countries. To the extent that the delegation was able to assist its members to do that I think it was a great success, and I appreciate the efforts of all those who assisted us in our endeavours.

The SPEAKER—As Speaker, I thank my deputy speakers, the members for Page and Scullin, for the role they played in that delegation.
Mr PRICE (Chifley) (12.52 p.m.)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, I present the committee’s report entitled Report of the parliamentary delegation to the Solomon Islands. I seek leave to make a short statement in connection with the report.

Leave granted.

Mr PRICE—Firstly, I thank the Minister for Defence and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, because they have continued the policy of sending parliamentarians to visit those places where we send peacekeeping forces. I think it is a very important role of the delegation and, in particular, the committee. If it is good enough to send troops and defence forces to a location, then it is good enough for members of parliament to see the work that they do.

The committee visited the Solomon Islands on 17 and 18 December. I would particularly like to thank the High Commissioner to the Solomon Islands, Patrick Cole; Nick Warner, the coordinator of the RAMSI operation; and deputy commissioner Ben McDevitt, from the AFP, who facilitated our visit. The purpose of RAMSI—the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands—is to provide strength and international assistance to the Solomon Islands government. RAMSI is a comprehensive, international package of assistance. Australia’s initial contribution to RAMSI comprised approximately 1,500 Australian Defence Force personnel, 155 Federal Police and 90 personnel from the Australian Protective Services.

In October 2003 the defence minister announced a reduction in the ADF contribution, which would result in a draw-down to about 500 personnel by December 2003. In fact, there were about 800 personnel when we visited. I acknowledge the role of Senator Alan Ferguson, who led the delegation, and thank, in particular, the Hon. Sir Allan Kemakeza MP, KBE from the Solomon Islands government for meeting with the delegation. We had a good discussion with the majority section of the cabinet of the Solomon Islands. I was particularly pleased to be part of the group that spoke to members of the opposition. Very briefly, two points that came out of the discussions were that we need to get the village level economy going, principally by restoring the copra trade, and for the future, the Solomon Islands has a good future in the marine industries—in particular, getting an international beche-de-mer trade going; the Solomons is blessed with plenty of it.

Last but not least, during discussions with the cabinet, the suggestion was made that one way of firing up the Solomon Islands economy was to allow temporary work visas to Australia, particularly in those industries where we currently have difficulty attracting Australian workers but allow international visitors, particularly from the UK, to work—for example, in your own electorate, Mr Speaker, in fruit picking for the orchard industry. I think it is worth contemplating this idea and examining its feasibility.

One recommendation was that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should provide detailed information about the regional assistance mission in its annual report. In addition, whilst RAMSI remains a critical part of the Solomon Islands recovery, the Minister for Foreign Affairs should make an annual ministerial statement to the House reporting progress on RAMSI. I draw attention to 1.64, which says:

Given the success of the assistance mission, the delegation proposes that the Australian Government evaluate the need for a military presence in
the Solomon Islands beyond the first half of this year.

I commend the report the House, and again thank all those that were responsible for making the trip a success.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (12.57 p.m.)—

by leave—Before the South Pacific nations formed the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, our delegation was told this cameo of how things had transpired in the Solomons; it got to the stage where officials of the Solomon Islands treasury conducted their business and their office at the back of a motor vehicle. The reason was that it was unsafe for officials of the treasury to stay in their offices because they were suffering situations where armed gangs would come and intimidate them to sign cheques to take money out of the treasury. They had to be on the move to avoid that kind of situation—that could not be allowed to continue.

A key component of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands was the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel John Frewin. The 2nd Battalion deployed last year from Townsville as part of a South Pacific Military Force with a mission to restore peace and security to the country. On arrival, the 2nd Battalion found that the Solomons was under the control of armed gangs and that widespread violence and virtual anarchy was the order of the day. When the 2nd Battalion returned to Australia in April this year, they left behind a country where law and order had been restored and the people felt safe.

During my visit to the Solomons, when islanders found that I was an Australian, they told me that they had the greatest respect for the members of the Australian Defence Force because of their professionalism and understanding. Life is now back to normal in the Solomons thanks to the nations of the South Pacific and to the leadership in the parliament of the Solomon Islands for recognising that the situation that existed there had to be addressed, and it has been addressed very effectively, because the faith of Solomon Islanders in their police force and their parliament has been restored, allowing the nation to return its attention to education, health, roads, communications and ports.

I know that Townsville soldiers were happy to be deployed to the Solomons and be part of the wonderful outcome that has been achieved; they know that their work was important. It was particularly gratifying for our soldiers to hear from the islanders themselves when they said, ‘Without your presence we could not be safe in the future.’ The mission to the Solomon Islands was an interesting and diverse task for the 2nd Battalion. Not only were they working with the people of the Solomon Islands; they were also working with the Australian Federal Police and the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, something they would not normally do in operations. Once again we see the men and women of the Australian Defence Force from Townsville playing a very important role in ensuring safety and stability for one of our near neighbours.

Of course, already a matter of record is the fine work that has been done in the last six years in Timor Leste and in the state of Bougainville; Townsville soldiers, men and women, have been to these particular states and helped restore law and order. I am pleased to say that I understand 5 Aviation Regiment, the Black Hawk and Chinook helicopter regiment, will finally have all of its people back from Timor in July of this year, after six years of very hard work.

In the Solomons I very much appreciated the privilege of being able to represent the parliament and my colleagues. It was a wonderful experience to talk to the Solomon Is-
landers and see how happy they were. Long may Australia be part of keeping peace, stability, safety and security in our region.

DELEGATION REPORTS

Australian Parliamentary Observer Delegation to the Parliamentary Elections in Indonesia

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (1.01 p.m.)—I present the report of the Australian Parliamentary Observer Delegation to the Parliamentary Elections in Indonesia on 5 April 2004 and seek leave to make a statement.

Leave granted.

Mrs MAY—I am delighted today to table this report from the Australian Parliamentary Observer Delegation that travelled to Indonesia to observe the process and conduct of the 5 April 2004 parliamentary elections. The terms of reference for the Australian observer team instructed the team to carry out such observation activities as much as possible in partnership with domestic monitoring organisations and to prepare a report on the results of our monitoring for both the Indonesian community and the international community.

I was very privileged to lead the Australian delegation and would like to take this opportunity to thank Senator Ruth Webber, who filled in as leader until my arrival in Jakarta, Senator David Johnston and Senator Natasha Stott Despoja for their hard work and commitment to the objectives of our mission. We also had assisting us a number of officials from the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, and I would like to pass on my personal thanks to Dr Brad Armstrong and his team from the embassy for all their assistance and advice during the visit. Each of the four parliamentarians was deployed to different areas in Indonesia and we were accompanied by DFAT and AusAID personnel or an official from the Australian embassy.

I would personally like to thank my team for their assistance, friendship and advice during my deployment to Semarang: Ms Kirsten Bate from the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and Mr Kirk Coningham from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Australia. Both Kirk and Kirsten spoke fluent Indonesian and, as it had been many years since I had spoken the language, the contribution of their language skills to the knowledge and understanding of the election process was invaluable, particularly in meetings with local political parties and community leaders.

The observer mission was part of Australia’s commitment to the election process and to Indonesian democracy. This was only the second election in Indonesia’s new democratic era. The election in 1999, to which Australia also sent an observer delegation, was hailed as the freest and fairest in that country since 1955. In my view, the election that took place on 5 April 2004 went even further to ensure that the democratic process was free and fair for all Indonesians.

Following briefings in Jakarta, the Australian delegation was deployed to eight locations including Bandung in West Java, Semarang in Central Java, Denpasar in Bali and East Nusa Tenggara. The locations were selected in consultation with the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and ensured that the delegation covered provinces that would be significant to the outcome of the election. The teams were deployed on the Saturday prior to the election, which enabled all personnel to undertake an extensive program of briefings and reconnaissance of the areas in which we were observing. This time spent on the ground was invaluable and certainly enabled each of the team a solid block of time for familiarisation with local communities.

My team was deployed to Semarang and we had nearly two days in which to meet
with the local police and security officials, to meet with other international observer teams and to meet with representatives and in some cases candidates from major political parties; we also met with officials from the East Java Provincial Electoral Commission and the Central Java Election Supervisory Committee. These meetings certainly gave us valuable information on local perceptions of and attitudes to the election and we were able to gauge the state of the preparations for election day. During these meetings we were also briefed about any perceived problems, particularly with regard to voting material being available and indications of any problems likely to occur on election day.

I would like to advise the House on some of the statistics with regard to this election which will give an indication of the enormity of the election process that was undertaken. It should be remembered that, where democratic institutions have not been strongly embedded in a society, normal mechanisms for the protection of the democratic process and the rule of law tend to be less reliable. However, from the mission’s observations overall the process went extremely well.

More than 147 million Indonesians were eligible to vote on 5 April in only the second free election since the fall of Soeharto. There were 24 political parties contesting the election, 585,219 polling stations across 17,000 islands and the election results were transmitted from 5,120 subdistricts. There were 7,765 candidates standing for the DPR—the equivalent of our House of Representatives—and they were competing for 550 seats in 69 electoral districts. There were 940 candidates standing for the DPD—the equivalent of our Senate—and they were competing for 128 seats in 32 electoral districts. The numbers, I am sure you would agree, Mr Deputy Speaker, are quite mind-boggling.

In the lead-up to the election, to ensure that it was free and fair, the People’s Voter Education Network deployed over 140,000 nonpartisan volunteers who provided grassroots voter education and then monitored the process on election day. It was the delegation’s view that the voter education process had worked extremely well. From our observations, the constituents were well informed on what was required of them at the polling station on election day. Overall, the Australian observer team were impressed by the orderly and peaceful conduct of the elections, and that, certainly in our view, reflected Indonesia’s further maturity as a democracy. It was also a significant logistical achievement. Each eligible voter had received a voter registration card. This in itself was an enormous task, with over 147 million cards to be distributed before election day, and from information provided to us both before and after election day most people received their registration card together with an invitation to vote.

Our team in Semarang, Central Java visited 24 polling stations—19 during the voting phase and five during the counting phase. We did not identify any incidents that could be considered to undermine the integrity of the election process or the results. The polling booths were well run and orderly, and there were no signs of voter intimidation or interference. In fact, at many of the polling booths there was an air of community participation. Voters were patient and happy to wait for their turn to vote. Polling centre officials acted very professionally following the law and were welcoming to everyone in their general approach on the day. The officials themselves had a very long day, many starting around six in the morning to set up the polling station and continuing well into the night with the count if they had the power to light up the polling booth.
It was felt overall that election administration at polling stations was effective. All were run well and well coordinated. Even the physical set-up of the polling stations was good and, in the main, largely followed specified procedures. There were some technical violations, but these came about because of adaptation to suit local conditions. There were some reports of inadequate privacy for voters, but the minor deficiencies in these areas could easily be addressed at future elections. Each polling booth processed approximately 300 voters, and in our opinion that appeared to be a significant strength in the conduct of the elections, as it allowed a high degree of scrutiny of who was voting and effectively managed situations where people turned up with only one of the two documents required to vote. Because of the small number of voters, the polling officials in most cases could identify the person seeking to cast their vote.

The teams all observed the count at the polling station level on the afternoon of 5 April. This process was open and transparent, and in many cases the entire community watched the count. Each ballot paper was shown to all present and the vote recorded publicly for all to see. The ballot papers were complex. Voters used a nail to punch a hole in the ballot paper to record their vote. At times it was difficult to see the hole, but that is a small problem that could be overcome in our view at the next election with a larger nail. We were amazed that, despite the complexity of the ballot paper, the number of ballots to be cast and the newness of the election process, the number of invalid votes appeared to be very low.

In conclusion, the Australian parliamentary observer delegation compliments the KPU and the Indonesian government on the execution and success of such a massive and complex logistical undertaking. There is no doubt the elections were a substantial achievement for all involved. The dedication and enthusiasm of millions of ordinary Indonesians who have a commitment to democracy also played a very strong role in ensuring the success of these elections. It was very clear to the delegation that Indonesians wanted to participate actively in a democratic process and make their voices heard. I doubt these elections would have been so successful had it not been for the involvement of the Australian Electoral Commission. Our officials from the AEC worked in close cooperation with other donor countries to ensure the processes were in place for what was a very important day in the lives of so many Indonesians. The delegation is of the view that a further observer group should be sent to Indonesia for the presidential elections in July. These elections will be the first direct presidential and vice-presidential elections ever to be held, and these elections will be a significant event in Indonesia’s development of democracy. Our observer delegation, at the invitation of the Indonesian government, certainly enforced Australia’s commitment to the election process and to Indonesian democracy and will undoubtedly strengthen our ties with our closest northern neighbour. I commend the report to the House.

SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS (ENSURING EQUALITY) BILL 2004 First Reading
Bill presented by Mr Organ.
Mr ORGAN (Cunningham) (1.11 p.m.)—I welcome the opportunity to present a bill for an act to ensure people in same sex relationships receive the same rights as people in heterosexual relationships in all areas of the law.

This simple, though powerful, bill delivers on a longstanding Greens policy—a policy which opposes all discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.
The Same Sex Relationships (Ensuring Equality) Bill 2004 relies upon section 109 of the Constitution to override all laws, both federal and state, that are clearly homophobic or discriminatory.

Specifically, this bill makes it unlawful for a person to do any act involving a distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on a person’s sexuality which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the enjoyment or exercise of the person’s public or private life.

To avoid doubt, this bill makes unlawful any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on a person’s sexuality as it relates to:

Marriage, adoption, superannuation, employment entitlements, access to reproductive or health services, and the lawful age of consent to sexual activity.

There is clearly no place for discrimination based on sexual orientation in our society.

This bill is timely for the public eye is once again upon this place over travel entitlements and the issue of personal relationships.

Hypocrisy and double standards are being exposed to the wider community.

There is no doubt, for example, that it is inequitable that the long-term same sex life partners of federal parliamentarians are denied access to spouse travel.

The rules need to be changed, and above all same sex life partner relationships in our society need to be recognised.

We have the present situation where same sex partners in our armed forces are actively discriminated against in areas such as housing, yet other federal government bodies such as the Australian Federal Police and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade do not discriminate.

I have been informed of lifelong partners being refused access to superannuation entitlements and pensions.

The discrimination is widespread.

Australia is a modern, diverse society.

Relationships are also diverse.

We, as federal parliamentarians, must recognise that diversity and reflect it in this place.

We must ensure that legislation made by this parliament does not discriminate against ordinary Australians.

That is our obligation, our civic duty.

And there is no doubt that present laws are discriminatory.

As a Catholic I abhor discrimination.

I also respect the institution of marriage.

And I see no conflict between my beliefs, the message of love for our fellow human beings which I received from my Catholic upbringing, and the bill before us.

I strongly believe that we should respect the right of individuals to a loving, lifelong relationship—whether they be heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian or transgender—regardless of their sexuality.

A relationship based on love and commitment.

For that is what this bill is all about—removing discrimination against those who may happen to fall in love, make a commitment to each other and decide to live in a relationship which in the past has been legally defined as marriage but which, in Australia in 2004, is much more diverse.

There is no doubt that this is a contentious issue in the community.

However, this bill is a piece of legislation arising out of compassion for our fellow Australians—Australians who are being unfairly discriminated against.
We must remove that discrimination.
It is the right thing to do.
Sure, there are those in the community who do not agree with same sex relationships.
There are also those in the gay, lesbian and transgender community who do not believe in marriage—just as there are in the heterosexual community.
But there are thousands of Australians who are suffering and being discriminated against, as I speak, because of the present outmoded and discriminatory laws.
You do not wait to ask slaves if they want to be free, Mr Deputy Speaker; you free them!
The times are changing, and more and more Australians are questioning the existence of discriminatory laws.
As a recent article in Tertangala, the University of Wollongong student magazine, pointed out:
Take a look at the common laws we follow. It is illegal to murder, steal, rape, commit fraud and so on. Ask yourself why they’re illegal. The answer is simple. It is illegal to take life, steal, and violate other peoples’ body in any way, because someone becomes a victim. We have these laws so that people do not become a victim. Ask yourself this, who is the victim of a gay marriage?
Who, indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker?
As federal parliamentarians we must continue to fight to remove racism, sexism, homophobia and other prejudices from our laws.
This bill goes part of the way to achieving this.
I therefore commend it to the House.
Bill read a first time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—In accordance with standing order 104A, the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
Health: Pharmacies

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (1.16 p.m.)—I move:
That this House:
(1) commends the role of pharmacy as an integral sector of the Australian health system;
(2) recognises the high professional standing of Australian pharmacists as the primary and responsible purveyors of dispensed and restricted medicinal and health aids;
(3) calls on all governments to uphold the independent status of pharmacists and their professional advice to health consumers;
(4) questions whether further deregulation of pharmacy is in the community interest; and
(5) reiterates its view that pharmacy ownership should reside with duly trained and qualified pharmacists.

I rise today to commend Australia’s pharmacy profession, applaud its outstanding contribution to our health system and acknowledge the integral role pharmacies play within our communities. As the Australian population ages, there is no doubt that local chemists are taking on more responsibility and a more diversified role in our cities and towns. Today, there are around 5,000 community pharmacies scattered throughout Australia. We find them everywhere: from city and regional shopping complexes to provincial city and suburban streets and to small country towns. Supermarkets exist to sell groceries and domestic goods to the public, using their sheer size and buying power to do so at the lowest possible price to maintain corporate profit. It is a cutthroat business which relies on rapid turnover, discounted retail prices, store location and areas of market dominance to achieve profit. I have no problem with supermarkets and, in most instances, the range of services they offer to
customers. I acknowledge that Australian supermarkets offer high quality and standards, even at an international level of comparison. However, pharmacies are a place where the frail, aged and chronically ill can find a little peace while trying to get clear advice on their medications. They offer new mothers guidance in maternal welfare and provide a place for everyday people to compare health products and devices. Do we need to have these services available in chain supermarkets? Is there a driving imperative to have a pharmacy in the main street as well as one next door in the supermarket? I think not.

As it stands, there are about 4,100 pharmacies in metropolitan areas, and around 800 in regional, rural and remote communities. In urban areas, the average pharmacy to population ratio is one to 3,716; in rural areas, it is one to 4,562. In my mind, that is a huge ratio of individuals to each pharmacy. Of course, some will look after more people than that, some fewer; but it still amounts to a great number of people relying on a pharmacy for help and advice. However, in the end, these people are consumers, and these figures present a mighty tempting target group for corporations looking to squeeze every last efficiency out of their monolithic shopping meccas. But let me reiterate: pharmacy is a profession. It requires four years of university study and an internship. The professional pharmacist carries with him or her the responsibility to provide independent, professional and confidential advice. That advice should not be compromised by the vagaries of the retail market or by a supermarket group’s buying arrangement with an individual supplier, or, dare I say, an individual drug manufacturer.

If the competition argument is put forward then we should surely recognise that in all but the very smallest communities there is already competition between pharmacies. As I said previously, there are around 5,000 community pharmacies around Australia—to me, that sounds like healthy competition indeed. Let me also say something about their standards. They are not ‘drug stores’ and the level of ownership of each pharmacist is restricted in each state to varying degrees—in most states, it is three to five pharmacies. The provision of professional health advice, filling of prescriptions, cautioning on drug taking and medication, guidance in the use of pharmacy-only medicines, provision of health aids and the selling of complementary health products make this a unique role and one to be guarded jealously in the interests of national standards. It goes beyond the purchase of shampoo and make-up. It goes to one-on-one relationships between pharmacists and their customers, and it goes to privacy and to professional guidance. It should not become the plaything of conglomerate-owned chain pharmacies, as is the UK experience, or groups of supermarkets—each sector of which has its own inherent commercial and shareholder pressures. It is well recognised by our big-time grocery retailers that their industry is extremely competitive and that Australian shoppers are prepared to move their custom quickly between stores in order to make sure they receive the best quality and price. Indeed, supermarkets operate in and depend on that environment.

Research shows that, for 50 per cent of people, a convenient location plays an important part in their decision about where they shop, and price is crucial to another 30 per cent. Woolworths’ half-yearly report, released in January, shows that its supermarket group sales are up by 7.3 per cent. Big W is up by 8.5 per cent and consumer electronics is up by 12 per cent. Harking back to their origins, supermarkets sold groceries. Over time, they have expanded into meat lines, delicatessens, fruit and vegetables, dairy products and bakeries; and they have
chipped away at clothing, garden supplies, florist lines, dry-cleaning, photography and even some limited newsagency products. To cap it off, they are now in the petroleum business.

I have no problem with competition or with businesses making a profit, but we should not confuse consumers’ desire for a convenient location and competitive pricing with the experience of getting professional, one-on-one health advice in the relative privacy of a stand-alone community pharmacy. Pharmacies should not be based between the meat aisle, the fruit and the deli counter—just as pharmacists’ words of wisdom and professional conduct should not be subjected to the rules of turnover. Some argue that deregulation of pharmacies means cheaper prices for customers; but 60 per cent of pharmacy sales are medications listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and those prices are set by the government. Those prices will not fall whichever is the case. Then we have what we call the S2 and S3 lines: pharmacy-only and pharmacist-only lines. These make up 15 per cent of turnover and are restricted to pharmacies. These medications have enough potential danger to warrant them being available only in a pharmacy. It is my belief that they should be sold strictly on their therapeutic merits and not on brand support, which may or may not exist between a drug manufacturer and a supermarket chain.

Another issue is the fact that drug sales require management, as many medicines can be broken down into separate and dangerous ingredients. Equally, we should not encourage an environment where, say, one powerful analgesic attracts more FlyBuys points than another. Beyond the crucial issue of personal safety, I see a more lingering effect if community pharmacies were subjected to deregulation and became more profit-making enterprises than health-giving ones. Knowing the rules of business and doing the maths, it will be only a matter of time before smaller pharmacies—most particularly those in regional and rural Australia—close their doors because they are not profitable enough or a town’s one supermarket, with a pharmacy, closes the one independent pharmacist. That, plus the fact that there are a significant number of independently owned pharmacies throughout Australia, seems to fly in the face of the National Competition Council’s own mission statement. It says, in part:

To improve the well being of all Australians through growth, innovation and rising productivity, by promoting competition that is in the public interest.

I stress the words ‘that is in the public interest’. I simply do not believe there is one iota of public interest in the deregulation of the Australian pharmacy sector, and it should be resisted at all cost.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr QUICK (Franklin) (1.26 p.m.)—I second the motion. I welcome the opportunity to join with other members in the House to sing the praises of our pharmacists in our electorates throughout Australia. It is timely to once again highlight the vital role pharmacists play within our communities, as they come under threat from the big two: Coles and Woolworths. I mentioned this threat in a speech in the House on 8 March this year. I did so at that time because the New South Wales government was being placed in the invidious position of having to choose whether to incur the ire and wrath of the ACCC or to allow the big two, Coles and Woolworths, to place pharmacies within their stores. Fortunately, the Prime Minister intervened and the issue was resolved in New South Wales to the satisfaction of the pharmacists and the general community.
This issue has been bubbling away for a long time and has been raised in this House many times. It is an issue which has solid bipartisan support. Each of us is very aware of the wonderful role pharmacists play in the communities we represent, and those of us who represent small country towns and isolated regions can recount just how pivotal a role they play in keeping a sense of cohesion in these communities. It is good that the member for Hinkler has raised this vitally important issue in the House today. I honestly and truly thank him for it. I note that he also spoke on this issue several years ago, in October 1999. It is still bubbling away, as I said. If one trawls through Hansard, one will see that this issue has been raised by members from all parties, covering all states, and that many petitions, containing many tens of thousands of signatures, have been presented in the House. However, this issue is one that seemingly is raised in this place only when the threat reappears, and we parliamentarians do not readily acknowledge as often as we should the wonderful role of our local pharmacists. In fact, if you look through Hansard you will see that it has been mentioned only 39 times in the last 17 years, so we do not tend to extol the virtues of these wonderful people.

One does wonder why the pursuit of a further deregulation of pharmacies is being considered yet again and whether it is in the community’s interest, as the honourable member for Hinkler has stated. From my way of thinking, this whole issue is being driven by the insatiable demands of Coles and Woolworths to grab a share of yet another market. As I mentioned in my speech in the House on 8 March this year, this duopoly is not satisfied with consuming and eliminating competition from the local butcher shop, the local bottle shop, the local bakery and the local service station; it now wants its share of the local pharmacy trade.

What really gets under my skin is the sneaky way Coles and Woolworths are going about it. They are pressuring the state health ministers to change the regulations around pharmacy ownership so that Woolworths and Coles can take advantage of them—and, in the case of Woolworths, establish its 100 pharmacy plan. We would have a national grocer, with no pharmacist, providing no pharmacy services.

If Coles and Woolworths were allowed to place a pharmacy within their supermarkets, there would be pressure on what products were stocked, how restricted stock could be marketed and what services could be provided. It is a clear warning to each and every one of us in this House, and through us to our communities, that the service and standards the community enjoys with its community pharmacists would change dramatically under the Coles and Woolworths corporate pharmacist regime.

I am convinced that Australians do not want to see yet more Americanisation of our way of life. As the honourable member for Hinkler stated, we have the British model and the American model. Those of us who have been overseas have seen what the current trends are and what might happen here in Australia. I think if we do allow Coles and Woolworths to have pharmacies within their supermarkets we will have a substandard service geared solely for profit to the shareholders of this duopoly.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (1.30 p.m.)—My position is simply this: I am committed to sensible competition reforms within the pharmacy industry that are in the public interest. But the corollary of that is that I am equally committed to opposing reforms that are not in the public interest. Let us clearly say what that is at this stage. It is summed up by a simple phrase: supermarkets and health do not mix. It is as simple as that. The mem-
member for Franklin and the member for Hinkler have articulated some of the reasons why, and I would like to give you some additional information, Mr Deputy Speaker—and, through you, the people of Australia.

First of all, take the myth that at supermarkets you will pay less for PBS medications. That is not true. The PBS provides a government subsidy for Australians to access essential and life-saving drugs. But under the PBS a pharmacist is prevented from discounting that amount, which is fixed by law. Under the PBS pensioners all pay the same price, no matter where they live in Australia. That sort of myth should not be allowed to continue.

Pharmacy standards in Australia are the highest in the world. In each of our local electorates—in Townsville, in Hobart, in Bundaberg, in Cairns and in Launceston—the standards are first class, and they do not vary across the country. Australia has the only community pharmacy sector in the world which has retail and professional standards to an ISO equivalent standard. That is something that we can all be very proud of, and I know that my local pharmacists in Townsville very much defend that particular position. The program responsible for this is called the Quality Care Pharmacy Program. Under the accreditation process, independent assessors go into pharmacies to check that standards have been put in place. There are over 100 standards that have to be implemented. So we can be sure, as consumers, that we get the best service from our community pharmacies that we could possibly have.

I ask this question: have you tried getting trained advice about health products at a supermarket? Supermarkets already sell some health products. The sale of medicines is regulated for very good reasons. Some medicines require a prescription from a doctor, some pharmacist-only medicines have to be handled directly by a pharmacist and certain designated medicines may only be sold in a pharmacy. Some medicines are without classification. If sold in small pack sizes, they may be sold in supermarkets. But this does not mean that they are without risk. You cannot get health advice from a staff member at a supermarket for those items that supermarkets currently sell. At pharmacies you can ask questions about medicines and have them answered.

A very serious matter—and I believe all members of the parliament will support this particular point—relates to personal health data. Community pharmacists continue to be among the professionals most trusted by the Australian people. A survey of consumers found 92 per cent regarded confidentiality and discreet treatment of product purchases as important. The same survey showed confidence in pharmacies at 89 per cent, as against two per cent for supermarkets. A community pharmacist’s relationship with their customer is based on trust and discretion, and the community pharmacist lives by this code. Can supermarkets give you the same level of comfort with respect to your personal health information? I think not.

In closing, I would like to support the Pharmacy Guild throughout Australia, particularly in its current quest to have the pecuniary interest provisions remain to stop supermarkets getting control of pharmacies via sublease arrangements. I support the guild’s position on premises legislation to ensure pharmacy boards can set controls in place that are in the public interest. I also support the guild position on capping the number of pharmacies which a pharmacist or friendly society can own, to ensure competitive markets and not allow the development of regional monopolies.
Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (1.35 p.m.)—I rise to speak in favour of the member for  
Hinkler’s motion because I believe that this is  
just another example of how small business  
eloses out when there is a move on by the big  
chains to fight for yet another sliver of mar-
ket share. Pharmacies should not even be  
considered in the same light as some other  
small shops, because they do have specific  
skills and their customers have special needs.  
This is not a core business to the big boys; it  
is just another way of stripping the city of  
small outlets for highly specialised items of  
business, such as pharmaceuticals.  

Pharmacies play a very important,  
complementary role in overall medical care in  
communities all over Australia, particularly  
in country areas, where sometimes pharma-
cies are the first port of call for medical as-
sistance for minor matters. They are also a  
very big employer. There are 15,000 salaried  
pharmacists and 25,000 pharmacy assistants  
registered with the Pharmacy Guild.  

These people are highly trained to be on  
top of all the medicines and health products  
that are available in Australia today. They  
have to know their doctors and their needs  
because when something is prescribed they  
have to know what else is available on the  
PBS if there is some problem obtaining the  
original. I cannot see anyone walking into a  
supermarket and being able to ask someone  
for advice on what to do for a cough or how  
to get help for a medical complaint if they do  
not have quick access to a medical practitio-
nier. Supermarkets do not have the staff and  
nor do they have the training to be able to  
provide this sort of service, often having  
casual and trainee staff on at many times of  
the day. Many of these specialist shops also  
provide services like bookings for bone den-
sity appointments, preventative health pro-
grams and advice on homeopathy as well as  
such things as health related beauty care.  

These programs can help where it is difficult  
to get services in a country area.  

Recently there was a review of the value  
of professional pharmacist services. It was  
commissioned by the Pharmacy Guild to  
inform ongoing research and strategic plan-
ing, looking within Australia and also interna-
tionally. It was aimed at supporting phar-
macy practice in a community setting and  
also the economic benefits of such services.  
The review was quite extensive and took in  
70 randomised controlled trials, which also  
monitored patient outcomes as the end point  
for the study.  

There was evidence across a number of  
different settings for the effectiveness of  
pharmaceutical services, continuity of care  
services after hospitalisation, education ser-
vice to consumers and pharmacist education  
services to health practitioners for improving  
patient outcomes or medication use. This  
shows that the role of the pharmacy is quite  
clearly part of the health system; it is not just  
another retail outlet. As we look at wellness  
into the future I am sure that pharmacies will  
play an even bigger role.  

There is no need to have such services as  
part of larger chains, even if they employed  
some trained people. Pharmacists are viewed  
in the same way people view their doctors:  
as someone to go to for practical advice and  
al lied medical assistance. I cannot imagine  
someone standing in a supermarket situation  
discussing their piles with some shop assis-
tagant. I do not believe, either, that the medica-
tion will ultimately be cheaper. We had that  
already, with the Woolworths chief accepting  
that the range of non-prescribed pharmaceu-
ticals in their shops was more expensive than  
at the local chemists. They have already been  
put on notice. I support this motion. I am  
glad that the government has made a deci-
sion in one state. I guess that has gone right  
through for the whole of Australia, that they
Ms Burke (Chisholm) (1.40 p.m.)—I want to congratulate the member for Hinkler for moving this motion to allow the House to debate this most topical issue. The issue of community pharmacies has flared up yet again, with the states having to move to legislate changes to avoid national competition policy fines. I join the previous speakers in saying that we have seen something sensible from the government in their intervention to avoid this messy situation having to continue.

Competition policy is and can be a good thing but sometimes it does not see the wood for the trees, and pharmacies and pharmacists are a case in point. I think John Bronger, national president of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, argues his case well when he says:

Deregulation has its place—that is, what a rigorous test of public benefit has been applied and found to be advantageous. To deregulate simply for the sake of deregulation is not only senseless, it can work against the public benefit.

That would certainly be the case in point in respect of community pharmacies.

What is really important in this whole debate is what pharmacies bring to communities. They are centralised services that connect a lot of disenfranchised people with their community at large. They help reduce isolation of the aged and the chronically ill and they are a great support to new mums and to old mums and to those who have nowhere else to turn. As well, pharmacists are fast becoming the most accessible and increasingly well-educated and resourced health professionals in the community. The lack of general practitioners in areas—particularly the bush and regional and rural areas—but increasingly outer metropolitan areas—has seen an increased reliance on pharmacists by the general public for basic health care needs. Couple this with the decline in bulk-billing and pharmacists are for many the only health professional they can access, and certainly in many cases the only health professional they can afford to access.

Sue Dunlevy argues in the Daily Telegraph in a recent article as follows:

Cheaper medicines, consumer convenience and quality service are the issues that should matter in this debate about whether chemists should be allowed in supermarkets. When was the last time your busy suburban chemist got out from behind the counter and counselled you about the medicine you were about to buy? Pharmacists who are arguing their important counselling roles is the reason they should retain a monopoly over supply have a duty to practise what they preach.

I could not disagree with Sue Dunlevy any more. My community pharmacist is an absolute wealth of knowledge. My experience and that of many in my community is at vast odds to what she has described in her article. Indeed, my local pharmacist and I are on first-name terms. This is a bit tragic when you think about it. Because I have a son with a mass of allergies we have got to know each other quite well. I appreciate the service, advice and recommendations I have received from my pharmacist.

I have had the tremendous pleasure of visiting numerous local pharmacies recently when presenting their Quality Care Pharmacy Award, a program run by the Pharmacy Guild to ensure that pharmacists and their staff are receiving continual quality training. We certainly need well-established legislative guidelines, quality assurance and ethical standards by which pharmacists operate to ensure that patients are receiving the best of care from their community pharmacist. The most recent event was at Vincent and Lisa Lee’s pharmacy in the refurbished Box Hill Plaza. This was some event. We had per-
performances and a mass of Chinese food, as well as champagne.

But for me the most startling aspect was the presence of a large number of the Lees’ loyal customers, who were on hand to sing the praises of their local pharmacist. Pharmacists are noted as one of the most respected professions, maybe something politicians could learn from. They are respected by their community. The people at the event knew of the benefits of visiting a professional who can give them advice which in some cases may save their lives. Say a doctor has inadvertently prescribed a drug which will have a contra effect to other medication they are taking. A pharmacist can and often does pick this up.

Michael Dooley, the director of pharmacy at Peter MacCallum, has found in his study of patients from eight Australian hospitals that pharmacists are saving potentially hundreds of lives. I quote:

An analysis of eight Australian hospitals found a total of 15 patients avoided death in one month because of the intervention by pharmacists who second-guessed prescriptions supplied by the patient’s doctor. The changes that the pharmacists made were considered life-saving by an independent clinical panel at each hospital.

I commend the motion before the House.

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Bass Electorate: Mums We Thank You Campaign

Ms O'BYRNE (Bass) (1.45 p.m.)—Earlier this month in Tasmania we saw celebrated the Mums We Thank You campaign, which was funded through Women Tassmania, was auspiced through the Corner Youth Health Service and had a coordinator from the Family, Child and Youth Health Service. The aim of the project was to thank mums from all walks of life for their contribution to society and to acknowledge the diversity of motherhood, as we see more and more grandparents, foster parents and others now taking on this role. The campaign acknowledged the contribution of mums who have lost their children through illness, death or miscarriage or through relinquishing their children. As we know, these parents are often not acknowledged.

It was a really successful program, with some 55 organisations, including the Launceston General Hospital, and around 4,000 people being involved. The program dealt with a lot of different issues. The projects included information, resources and support for mothers surviving postnatal depression. They talked to young mothers about their major issues—stigma and re-sourcing being key issues—and to grandmothers about the fact that we often do not realise that we value the nurturing role they play. They also held a very successful fathers event, where fathers were asked to do seven things at once. There were interesting outcomes for many people.

I congratulate the Family, Child and Youth Service in Tasmania for this initiative, and the Corner Youth Health Service and all 4,000 of the participants, particularly coordinator Rachel Lucas, for bringing to the community’s eye a role we often take for granted but as a community we must learn to recognise.

Cook Electorate: Kurnell Festival of Sails

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.46 p.m.)—I would like to take this opportunity to draw the attention of the House to the Kurnell Festival of Sails, which was recently held in my electorate of Cook. The Festival of Sails incorpo-
rulates three significant events: the Captain Cook Regatta, the Marton Park Community Festival and the Kurnell Festival. The Marton Park Community Festival was a wonderful event, with over 40 arts and crafts stalls, a number of amusement rides, camel and vintage bus tours as well as the Southern Cross Art Society Annual Kurnell Show.

Throughout the two days, the Kurnell Festival incorporated a performance by almost 30 musical groups and culminated with teenage singer-songwriter Candice Alley on Sunday evening. The festival also featured wine-tasting from 12 of Mudgee’s wineries, as well as a range of foods from such diverse regions as the Mediterranean, South America and Africa. The staging of the Captain Cook Regatta this year in the shadow of the replica tall ship the Bounty was a wonderful sight. The regatta included more than 150 entrants on over 80 vessels and was won by the one-man boat of David Preece. I thank the Kurnell Progress Association, particularly Dorothy Exon, for their work in bringing together the local community for the festival.

The timing of the festival this month coincided with the recent announcement on 18 June by my colleague the Minister for the Environment and Heritage of the acceptance of my nomination for the Kurnell Peninsula to be included in the newly formed National Heritage Registry. As early as 1899, one of my predecessors, Sir Joseph Hector Carruthers MP, made reference to the plight of the peninsula when he stated: ‘What Plymouth Rock is to America, so should this memorable but little revered spot be to all Australians.’ (Time expired)

Cunningham Electorate: Health Crisis

Mr ORGAN (Cunningham) (1.48 p.m.)—The health system in the Illawarra is in crisis. A much needed MRI machine is about to be installed at Wollongong Hospital—the largest public hospital in the region—yet the federal government refuses to allocate it a Medicare licence and the state government has not provided funds for its staffing and ongoing operation. The Illawarra Area Health Service has recently denied ambulances access to the emergency department at Bulli Hospital, resulting in queues at Wollongong Hospital, with media reports of up to eight ambulances having to wait in the hospital car park to take their patients into an increasingly overloaded emergency department.

The use of the region’s emergency helicopter rescue service is also causing concern, especially in light of the tragic death of Ron Tabak in an industrial accident at Port Kembla. We have seen in recent times helicopters from Sydney and Canberra brought in, rather than making use of the local service. The South Coast Labor Council is leading calls for a dedicated Illawarra helicopter rescue service, staffed by doctors. There is also a turf war amongst the emergency rescue services, with the ambulance and police services taking the lead in emergency rescue operations when the best resourced and highly trained staff at Wollongong Fire Brigade Centre wait for a call. And I could go on.

Amidst all of this we have the workers—the doctors, nurses, and clinical and ancillary staff—doing wonderful work but working longer hours and under increasing pressure, resulting in low morale. And when members of the community, or politicians such as me, raise these issues, we are accused of scare-mongering by the Illawarra Area Health Service. The spin has to stop. The federal and state government must accept that these problems exist. Both are responsible, along with management, for finding solutions. More money, better use of resources and the abolition of turf wars and interdepartmental bickering will help us all. (Time expired)
Macquarie Electorate: Medical School

Mr BARTLETT (Macquarie) (1.49 p.m.)—Many aspects of the recent budget will be of great benefit to the people of Macquarie—one is the government’s announcement of $18 million to support a medical school at the University of Western Sydney. My Western Sydney colleagues and I, who have been lobbying for this, were understandably very pleased with the announcement. It will bring substantial educational and medical benefits to Western Sydney, including the Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains. Students living in our region who have the ability and desire to study medicine will no longer have to travel to the city to do so. The addition of a medical school will enhance the growing stature of the University of Western Sydney, its vital role in the region and within the higher education sector, and its ability to meet student needs. A medical school in the area will help add to the supply of doctors practising in Western Sydney, particularly as some of the places will be bonded.

The Australian government’s $18 million commitment is a very tangible indication of its support for UWS and for the people of Western Sydney. The challenge now is for the New South Wales government to match this commitment. In recent months we have had Premier Carr making overtures of support. Now is the opportunity for Mr Carr to match the rhetoric with substance. This proposal will bring very real benefits to the people of Western Sydney. The Howard government is leading the way. I call on Premier Carr to match this commitment.

Greenway Electorate: Nagle College

Mr MOSSFIELD (Greenway) (1.51 p.m.)—I would like to report to this parliament on the 40th anniversary celebration of Nagle College, a Catholic girls high school in Greenway. Nagle has more than doubled its student population, to around 700 students, since it opened its doors in Blacktown in 1964. The school facilities have grown to keep pace with an ever-increasing population in the area, through government grants, student fees and the fundraising activities of parents. A highlight of the celebration was a festival of flags, representing the many cultures and traditions of the students—there being some 70 different cultures represented in the student population.

My wife, Jan, and I were honoured to address the student group on our recollections of the time that our five daughters attended Nagle. One such recollection—although it did not involve our daughters personally—was the period of time some of the students were taught in a double-decker bus due to inadequate accommodation. The students were also addressed by Donna Carson, who this year was named Local Hero, Australian of the Year. Ms Carson, of Taree, is a burns and domestic violence victim. Since her tragedy she has worked to assist victims of domestic violence. For the students of Nagle, Donna is a great role model on how to overcome adversity. I congratulate Nagle College on its 40 years of educating the students of Blacktown.

Foreign Affairs: Germany

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (1.52 p.m.)—I notice that reported in several Australian newspapers today is the election, by the German federal parliament, of Mr Horst Koehler as President of Germany. For those who may be unaware, Mr Koehler, an eminent economist, is the former head of the IMF. What members may also not realise is that Mr Koehler was born in February 1943 in the Polish village of Skierbieszow, which is situated on Poland’s eastern border, well away from Germany. The reasons for this are interesting. Mr Koehler’s parents took up land in Skierbieszow village in late 1942 as
part of an ethnic cleansing action that was launched by Heinrich Himmler’s most vicious SS man, Odilo Globocnik, who early in that year had been appointed head of Aktion Reinhardt, the secret program to exterminate European Jewry. Globocnik was personally responsible, under the actions of Aktion Reinhardt, for the murder of nearly two million Jews in three killing centres that he constructed and administered: Treblinka, Sobibor and Belzec.

All of this and the reasons for German farmers being settled in wartime eastern Poland are set out in a just-published biography titled Odilo Globocnik: Hitler’s man in the east, which was released in March by American publishers McFarland Publishing. The biography’s author, however, is a Western Australian journalist, Joseph Poprzeczny, whose mother hailed from Skierbieszow, having been expelled from her home by the Globocnik ethnic cleansing teams so that German farmers like the Koehlers could occupy it and several hundred other villages as part of Hitler’s lebensraum policy and especially Hitler and Himmler’s top-secret Generalplan Ost.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Independence

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (1.54 p.m.)—It is appalling that the Managing Director of the ABC, Mr Russell Balding, has been leaned on by the Howard government to employ Rehame to monitor the public broadcaster for alleged bias, all at great expense to the taxpayer. Mr Balding did not get one extra cent last year for the ABC when he took his well-argued $250 million triennial funding submission to the Howard government. As a consequence, he had no choice but to take the sword to popular ABC programs.

What galls me is that the decent and respected Mr Balding has been made to buckle to a government that is obsessed about alleged bias at the ABC and to hire a snoop to intimidate the ABC broadcasters and, in so doing, compromise the independence of the public broadcaster. Even more galling, while all this is going on the Howard government will pull out all stops next month to curry ultimate favour with Australia’s two most powerful media proprietors and ram the Broadcasting Services Amendment (Media Ownership) Bill 2002 [No. 2] through the Senate. Today I ask voters across Australia, whatever their political persuasion: how can it be in the public interest or good for Australia’s democracy to allow the Howard government to put Mr Balding in a straitjacket while further concentrating commercial media ownership in Australia?

Dunkley Electorate: Monash University Peninsula Campus

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (1.55 p.m.)—The community that I am part of was delighted to host a visit last week by the federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson. One of the range of exciting and interesting things we involved ourselves with was a briefing on Monash University’s Peninsula campus renewal and revitalisation plan, which I have been speaking so much about. Monash University has advised Minister Nelson that its highest priority is securing additional student capacity to support an expanded academic and research focus on health and wellbeing at Monash Peninsula campus. This is very much consistent with the plan to revitalise the campus, which I have been pursuing.

Monash University will receive an extra $43 million in public funding in the first three years of the federal government’s $2.6 billion higher education reform package. Our revitalisation plan involves securing student places to establish new courses in physiotherapy, occupational therapy and social work to boost the range and appeal of under-
graduate programs offered at the Frankston campus. We are seeking a share of the additional 2,500 HECS funded places allocated to Victoria as part of the university reforms.

I am pleased to advise the House that, in addition to pursuing these extra places, Minister Nelson has allocated some funding to re-examine how we might incorporate aquatic facilities and the academic infrastructure needed to support these new programs into a project that may deliver community benefits as well. Facilities needed to support studies in health sciences and research in this field could possibly be co-located with community facilities—(Time expired)

Deakin Electorate: Proposed High-Rise Development

Mr BARRESI (Deakin) (1.57 p.m.)—The Bracks ALP government’s 2030 plan imposes an expectation on the eastern suburbs of Melbourne to create an additional 300,000 new residences, approximately 30,000 of them overlaying the Whitehorse region. While all of us recognise the pressure that a sprawling suburbia is placing on infrastructure and service delivery and the need to move to medium- to low-density living, it is inappropriate when such developments take place against the wishes of the local community and without their consultation.

There is one such development proposed a mere 500 metres from my office, opposite the Mitcham railway station and right next door to the St John’s Catholic primary school. A proposal for a 14-storey high-rise apartment block was put forward and, following community anger, was rejected by council. VCAT was due to hear the matter but at the eleventh hour the developers pulled the planning application and, in its place, submitted a proposal for two towers, one of 10 storeys and one of 16 storeys. The anger in the community over such contempt is mounting, and another public meeting has been organised for tomorrow evening. I am sorry that I will not be able to be present tomorrow to lend my support to the community.

A 16-storey building would dwarf the Doncaster Westfield shopping centre tower and would be not only intrusive on a school community already landlocked by buildings and with no playing fields but also a blight on the landscape of the Mitcham region. This part of the city is not conducive to such developments. The developers should take note of community anger and withdraw the matter from VCAT before its hearing date on 13 July. I wish the community a very successful public meeting tomorrow night. (Time expired)

Moncrieff Electorate: Sanctuary Cove Boat Show

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (1.58 p.m.)—On Thursday last week, I had the opportunity to attend the Sanctuary Cove boat show with the Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism, the Hon. Warren Entsch. This is a premier event that showcases the very best of south-east Queensland’s marine industries. In particular, I am delighted that the member for Fadden, the Hon. David Jull, was also able to attend, because it highlights that this marine showcase is adding to what the Gold Coast and south-east Queensland are doing in the marine industries. Last year this showcase saw sales in excess of $120 million in the marine industry—in particular, boat repairs and boat manufacture. It is anticipated that this year sales will again exceed $120 million. I would like to particularly thank Barry Jenkins, Geoff Grady and the Bank of Queensland for their support of the event. I wish them all the best as they showcase the way in which all Australian marine industries are able to compete on an international scale with the very best boat
repairers and manufacturers. I wish them every success again next year.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2.00 p.m., in accordance with standing order 106A, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Product Safety

Mr LATHAM (2.00 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware of reports today of a number of Australian babies who have died due to unsafe bath cradles, many of which remain on the market and in thousands of Australian homes? Is the Prime Minister also aware that in at least one of these cases the coroner recommended the recall of the cradles as a matter of urgency? What action is the government taking to develop and enforce national safety standards for the testing of these products, improve information for parents and consumers, and have a compulsory national recall of unsafe bath cradles? Will the government now implement Labor’s policy announced in March and introduce uniform product safety legislation into the federal parliament?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the member for Boothby. I note of course that one of the plants of Mitsubishi is located within his electorate, and I know that the member for Boothby, along with many other members on both sides of the House—and I say that very deliberately—takes an interest in this matter. It is a matter of very great regret that the engine plant will close in about 18 months time and that there will, as part of the worldwide recasting of Mitsubishi’s operations, be some voluntary redundancies at the assembly plant in Tonsley Park.

It is, however, important to say to the parliament that as a result of the direct representations of the federal Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources, and the South Australian Treasurer, Mr Foley, and the chief executive of Mitsubishi in Australia, Mr Tom Phillips—who has proved himself to be a redoubtable fighter for the interests of his workers and of his company—the outcome is not as bad as it might have been. I want to record my thanks to my colleague the minister for industry and to the South Australian government. At all stages, I am pleased to say, there has been cooperation between the South Australian Labor government and the federal coalition government. I spoke to the South Australian Premier on two occasions on Friday, and he recommitted himself to working with the federal government. Nothing is to be gained by any political point scoring on this issue.
The engine plant is closing and the redundancies are occurring because of the worldwide financial difficulties of the parent company. It is not due to economic conditions in Australia; it is certainly not due to the lack of effort, skill and professionalism of the Australian work force; and it is certainly not due to free trade agreements. I was rather surprised to see the odd comment from one or two union spokesmen that in some way the blame was to be laid on free trade agreements.

Can I point out, as did the minister for finance on a program yesterday, that the free trade agreement with the United States will have major benefits for the automotive industry in Australia. Holden, for example, will gain enormously from the free trade agreement. There will be an increase in Holden’s export capacity, and it is another reason why the Labor Party should get out of the way and endorse the free trade agreement—the federal Labor Party, that is, because on this issue I am pleased to say state Labor is leading the way inside the Labor Party.

The Premier of South Australia said, ‘The FTA would give us access to 280 million customers.’ The Premier of Queensland has already endorsed the free trade agreement, and I understand similar sentiments have been expressed by the Premier of New South Wales and by the Premier of Victoria. Recent modelling by the CIE shows that the free trade agreement with the United States will add $6.1 billion to our national economy. South Australia will share in this.

Can I say again to the work force in South Australia that is going to be affected by the Mitsubishi decision: we feel for you; we will do everything we can to ensure that you get alternative jobs. The federal government put in place on Friday, as soon as the announcement was made, a $50 million plan of assistance measures. This includes $10 million in labour market assistance to meet the needs of displaced workers and $40 million for a range of industry facilitation measures that will seek to attract new investment and create new job opportunities in South Australia. We will keep in very close contact with the company management, with the work force and with the South Australian government. And, if the spirit of cooperation that has obtained thus far continues, I believe that in the long run alternative employment and alternative industries will be found, and the economic growth that is now occurring in South Australia—the best for a generation—will in fact be reinforced and will continue.

Automotive Industry: Assistance

Mr COX (2.07 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I thank him for the information that he provided in his previous answer. Will the Lonsdale plant workers be able to access the special $10 million labour market assistance program before they are retrenched or, in the case of Tonsley Park assembly line workers, before they accept voluntary redundancy? When can I tell my constituents that that assistance is available?

Will the $40 million in structural adjustment and investment facilitation be specifically directed to Adelaide’s southern suburbs, which have lost not only the engine plant but also recently the Port Stanvac oil refinery?

Mr HOWARD—In answer to the member for Kingston, let me say that I see no reason why the answer to the first question should not be an emphatic ‘yes’. The whole purpose of this adjustment is really to provide customised assistance, and that is why the amount involved, given the number of workers involved, is quite large. It is designed to provide customised assistance. As far as the locational specificity of the industry assistance is concerned, I do not want at this stage to commit it to a particular group of suburbs. I think that might at this stage be
a little premature, but I do want to say that the purpose will be to attract new industry to South Australia. I mentioned this plan to the South Australian Premier, and I gather he has announced a $5 million program in relation to attracting new investment into South Australia.

I think the most sensible, intelligent thing to occur is for Invest Australia, which is the Commonwealth body, and the South Australian government to work together to attract new industry. My aim is to see all of those workers re-employed. Bear in mind that in relation to the engine plant it is 18 months before the plant will close, although I think it is fair to say that there will be some build-up as far as retrenchments are concerned in the period leading up to that. That is my understanding, although that is a matter ultimately for the company to decide.

The Tonsley Park plant will be involved in voluntary redundancies. I should stress that there is absolutely no suggestion that any of the workers will lose their full entitlements. They will get their full redundancies. They will get them in full. There is no suggestion that the company will not meet those obligations, and we have received assurances. The whole idea of this labour market assistance program is to get beside the workers as soon as possible and to help them—to help them in a customised, individual way, which I think is appropriate in all of the circumstances. I would be very grateful if the member for Kingston were to feel free to keep in regular contact with my office and the office of the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources. If he has any problems, will he please let me know, and I will be very happy to help.

**Budget 2004-05**

**Mr CIOBO** (2.10 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Would the Treasurer detail the way Australian families are assisted by the budget? Are there any threats to this assistance?

**Mr COSTELLO**—I thank the honourable member for Moncrieff for his question. I can inform the House that Australian families are assisted in many ways by the budget, which was released Tuesday week ago. Not only have the government changed income tests and taper rates but we have also changed the entitlement to family tax benefit B for a mother who is returning to the work force. She will be able to keep her entitlement—that is, income from employment will not count against entitlement in the year that she returns to work. In addition to that I want to re-emphasise that the government are increasing the benefit under family tax payment A by $600 per annum, starting off with a payment before 30 June. The old maximum payment of $3,401 per annum goes to $4,001 per annum and the old minimum payment of $1,095 per annum goes to $1,695 per annum. That is $600 additional for each family.

It is worth reminding people about this because I saw an article in the *Financial Review* on Tuesday or Wednesday last week interviewing somebody from the electorate of the honourable member for Deakin. This person was saying, ‘I’m not going to have another baby; therefore, I won’t get any benefit under the budget,’ and that person was holding two children in their arms. In respect of each of those children there is an extra $600, and within the next 12 months, provided they do their reconciliation in June 2004, they will actually receive two payments of $600 in respect of each of those children. The entitlement has increased per child by $600 per annum.

The member for Moncrieff asked me if there are any threats to these payments. Unfortunately, there are some threats to these payments, because, although the Australian Labor Party has said that it will be voting
these changes through the Senate, the Australian Labor Party refuses to guarantee that, if it is elected, people will keep their entitlements. People cannot be sure that they will keep either their tax entitlements or their family payment entitlements should the Australian Labor Party be elected. I go first to exhibit A: the member for Kingston. In the Australian of last Monday, the member for Kingston spoke about the tax cuts and the family payments. Listen to this carefully. He said:

It is possible to look at the structure of the family tax benefits and the tax changes. It’s not like all that money is quarantined ...
It is not as if it is quarantined for the people who have received those family tax benefits or received those income tax cuts. It is not as if it is quarantined for them because, as he rightly points out, a Labor government could legislate to take it away from them. His statement could not have meant anything else. That night the press went to the Leader of the Opposition, and the Leader of the Opposition was asked a question. I ask the House to listen carefully to the answer. The question was:
... is there any chance of Labor, if it won the election, dropping the second round of tax cuts?
Mr Latham replied:
We don’t plan to do that.
Then, when asked if that was a guarantee that Australians will get the tax cuts under a Labor government, Mr Latham replied:
... I’ve answered the question by saying that we don’t plan to touch them.
He was then asked:
Is that a guarantee that you won’t?
He answered:
I’ve answered the question by saying that we don’t plan to touch them.
As we all know, plans can change, and the Australian Labor Party most definitely are holding open the prospect of changing their plans and taking back the second round of tax cuts and the family tax benefit—the biggest hoist since the l-a-w cuts were abolished after the 1993 election. What I call on the Australian Labor Party to do is to say quite unequivocally that the family tax benefit increase of $600 per annum per child will stay, that nobody will lose any entitlement and that the income tax cuts, first and second round, will stay and nobody will have a tax rise.

We have heard from the shadow Assistant Treasurer and we have heard the weak denials from the Leader of the Opposition, but even better was the Australian Financial Review on Friday, which finished the week by saying: ‘ALP in a muddle over family payment’. Who did it quote in this but the shadow finance spokesman, the member for Fraser, Mr McMuddle himself, who apparently on his way out of a press conference at the National Press Club was asked by journalists whether Labor was planning to honour the family tax payments up until 2004 or afterwards—listen to this—and he said:

“We commit to the family tax benefit until 2004-05,”
That is the next year. He went on to state:
“They will get the two $600 payments—that is, the one before 30 January and the one next year—but after that they will have a choice of our alternative package.”
I think it is quite clear: the Labor Party will not guarantee these family tax payments; the Labor Party is holding out the right to take them away if it is elected. The Labor Party will not guarantee these tax changes; the Australian Labor Party reserves the right to take away those tax cuts and to increase taxes if it is elected at the next election. The family benefits and the tax cuts in this election can be guaranteed only if the coalition is
re-elected, and the families of Australia need to know that.

**Family Services: Family Payments**

Mr SWAN (2.17 p.m.)—My question without notice is directed to the minister representing the Minister for Family and Community Services and it concerns his failure yesterday on the *Sunday* program to guarantee that family payment measures in the budget will not be clawed back. Can the minister confirm that families with a family tax benefit or child care benefit debt will have these amounts subtracted from the proposed $600 annual payment outlined in the budget? Can the minister advise the House how many families will not receive the full $600 per child payment because of his clawback clause? Does the minister agree that it would be better to fix the system so that families do not get hit with unavoidable debts rather than to use the end of year payments as a bandaid to cover it up?

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for the opportunity to again answer about the government’s $600 per annum per child increase in the family tax benefit. I have already gone through the increases in the amounts: the maximum amount increases from $3,401 to $4,001 and the minimum from $1,095 to $1,695. These benefits are income tested and, if I could inform the House where the income tests actually cut in, you are entitled to get the minimum payment with one child up to $87,702 per annum, you are entitled to get the minimum payment with two children up to $96,637 and you are entitled to get the minimum payment with three children up to $105,572. That is a very generous income threshold.

If, upon reconciliation, a family for whatever reason has been overpaid its entitlements, that money is returned to the government, just as was the case under the Australian Labor Party. Under the Australian Labor Party, if you were overpaid your family benefit, on reconciliation you had to repay it. But we have introduced one change, and it is this: if upon reconciliation you have been underpaid, the government actually tops up the difference—a situation which did not prevail under the Australian Labor Party. So the Australian Labor Party only had reconciliation one way: if there was an overpayment you had to give it back, but if there was an underpayment you did not get a top-up.

That situation has been in place for a very long period of time and, as far as the taxpayers of Australia are concerned, and in my view and in the view of the government, if somebody is overpaid by the government then in the interests of all taxpayers the overpayment should be recovered, and it is recovered interest free.

Ms King interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Ballarat is warned!

Mr COSTELLO—In addition to that, as the member for Ballarat would know, with the government having increased the amounts by $600, if people have an overpayment then they have an additional $600 to cover the overpayment. If they are underpaid, they get the top-up to their entitlement plus the $600. That is, everybody is entitled to an additional $600. You do not have to believe my word on it, because I will table the *Financial Review*—

Mr Crean interjecting—

Mr COSTELLO—The member for Hotham says that we do not. Perhaps he will believe the word of the member for Fraser, because I will table the article in the *Financial Review* of Friday, 21 May 2004 headed ‘ALP in a muddle over family payment’ that quotes the member for Fraser saying that families will get the two $600 payments. They did not seem to be running the line last
Friday that families were not entitled to an additional $600 because the member for Fraser said, 'They will get the two $600 payments'.

I table that cutting. The point I make is this: it is a change of tactics. Last Friday the Australian Labor Party were out there guaranteeing the two payments; by Monday the Australian Labor Party have changed their tactics to try to pretend that there are no payments. The amounts have gone up by $600, the scheme gives every family an additional entitlement and the income thresholds have been lifted and the tapers have been lifted. The only way you can guarantee to keep those family tax benefits is with the return of a coalition government.

Military Detention: Australian Citizens

Mrs MOYLAN (2.23 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister inform the House of efforts by the government to ensure that the two Australians detained in Guantanamo Bay are being treated humanely by the United States?

Mr DOWNER—I thank the member for Pearce for the question. For all the professed concern through interjections coming from the Labor Party, it has never been worth your while asking a question about it, apparently. Members will recall that two Australians, David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib, have been detained in Guantanamo Bay as a result of their involvement with al-Qaeda. As the House knows, both men trained with al-Qaeda, the world’s most evil terrorist organisation—

Ms Roxon interjecting—

The SPEAKER—If the member for Gellibrand wishes, I will deal with her as the standing orders provide, or she will exercise the courtesy expected.

Mr DOWNER—It is an organisation which trains people to kill innocent civilians. Despite the known terrorist background of these two people, the government has taken all possible steps to ensure their welfare in response to allegations that have been made by their lawyers. Ambassador Thawley has sought and received assurances, including from the Deputy Defence Secretary, the Deputy Secretary of State and the National Security Adviser, that Hicks and Habib have been treated humanely in Guantanamo Bay. Ambassador Thawley has also written to the American government seeking an official investigation into the treatment of Hicks and Habib throughout their time in United States custody. That, of course, includes the period before they were in Guantanamo Bay.

Our consul-general in Washington visited Hicks and Habib 10 days ago. He also spoke to the camp commander to ensure that they are being treated humanely. Officials have now visited Hicks on nine occasions and Habib on eight occasions to check on their welfare. In both cases, they have access to medical facilities and their health is assessed regularly. I add that the secretary of my department, Ashton Calvert, also raised these issues with authorities in Washington when he was there with the Minister for Trade at the time of the signing of the free trade agreement with the United States.

I appreciate that—if not in the parliament—in the media the opposition, as well as Senator Brown, are now concerning themselves with the welfare of these two Australians, who are detained because of their involvement with al-Qaeda. But I must say that it is curious that they show a greater interest in these two than the other 214 Australians who are in prison for one reason or another overseas. They are in prison from El Salvador to Kazakhstan to Nigeria—apparently they are of no interest to the Australian La-
bor Party at all. The only ones who are of interest are Hicks and Habib.

Ms Roxon interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The minister will resume his seat. I warn the member for Gellibrand. The minister has the call.

Mr DOWNER—As I was saying, they seem to be unconcerned about the 214 other Australians detained for any manner of reasons but, as you would expect from a party which has become deeply anti-American, they are concerned about two Australians who are detained by the Americans. I do not think the Labor Party has any interest in the other 214 Australians imprisoned.

Let me conclude by saying that the government believes that both Hicks and Habib should be brought to justice through a military commission process. That is the best way to do it in the circumstances, given the state of Australian law at the time they were training with al-Qaeda. As members may or may not know, the plea bargaining process for Hicks is under way. Apparently, the opposition leader, according to interviews he has been doing recently, believes that both Hicks and Habib should be returned to Australia where, as we have explained on a number of occasions, they would be unable to face charges and would simply be released into the community.

Mr Bevis interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Brisbane is warned.

Mr DOWNER—The Leader of the Opposition, thinking that might be a bit of a political problem for him, has come up with another idea: to introduce retrospective criminal legislation. That is pretty unusual in this country—retrospective legislation in relation to the criminal offence of participating with a terrorist organisation. That, apparently, is the position of the opposition. The position of the government is that these people will go before military commissions as a result of their participation or training with al-Qaeda. We hope that they can be expedited and the matter can be dealt with through that process.

Family Services: Family Payments

Mr SWAN (2.30 p.m.)—My question is directed to the minister responsible for the family payments system and it concerns comments on the Sunday program made by the minister regarding his direct ministerial responsibilities. Now that the Treasurer has confirmed clawback, can the minister advise the House how many families will not receive the full $600-per-child payment because of the clawback clause?

Mr COSTELLO—I—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will resume his seat. I would remind the member for Grayndler that, if I were to deal with him as the standing orders provide, given that it would be the second time he had been named in this session he would be out for some time.

Ms Gillard—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order relating to standing order 142, which deals with the ability to put to a minister questions relating to public affairs with which the minister is officially connected. The minister is being asked about a statement he made on a Sunday television show in his capacity as minister. It is inconceivable that there is any other minister in the place who is connected with that matter apart from the minister who has been asked the question.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, on that point of order there are two points to be made. Firstly, when the member asked the question, he did not even name the minister to whom he thought he was directing the
question; it was only done by description. Secondly, the content of the question related entirely to the portfolio of the Treasurer, within the meaning of standing order 142.

The SPEAKER—I do not know that the decision of the chair is greatly assisted by the points raised by the member for Mackellar, because I have to make the point that the question asked about family payments and of course it is entirely a matter over which the Treasurer has jurisdiction. Furthermore there is, as has always been the case, the opportunity for questions to be directed to whoever is the appropriate minister. I call the Treasurer.

Mr COSTELLO—Mr Speaker, I thank you for that ruling. I point out that family tax benefits are administered both by the Department of Family and Community Services and by the Australian Taxation Office, depending on whether or not you claim them through the tax system or you take them as a fortnightly payment. The answer is that every family receives an additional $600 per child per annum, subject to the income test which, as I have already outlined to the House, for three children is over $100,000. This does not change the situation— as has always been the case under the Australian Labor Party—that, where somebody has been overpaid, the government seeks the return of that overpayment.

This announcement has been entirely clear from the outset. I refer to both the budget speech and to budget measures page 9, where the government says this: The lump sum will be paid to families as part of the reconciliation of FTB entitlement that normally takes place after families lodge their tax returns.

Government members interjecting—

Mr COSTELLO—No, it was actually in the budget speech and it is the first measure in the document that was brought down as budget measures. You do have to actually get to page 9 of the budget to find it. It says:

If required, any family assistance overpayments received by the family will be offset against the lump-sum payment, with the remainder payable to the family. Around 2 million families eligible ... under the current arrangements will receive the full lump sum. In addition, a small number of new families at the top end of the income limit will be eligible for a lump sum.

That has been the position, as explained in the budget, all the way through. If I could take an analogy in relation to income tax cuts, we cut income tax rates on budget night as well. Every person who comes within those thresholds will be entitled to an income tax cut. If somebody has not had the correct income tax withholding taken out of their salaries, notwithstanding the income tax cut, upon reconciliation they will still have to make it up. It does not mean that they did not receive an income tax cut. They received the income tax cut but upon reconciliation, as is the case in relation to all government entitlements, if the withholding payments have not been great enough, you have to have a make-up. If the withholding payments have been too great in relation to an employee’s tax entitlement, then you get a refund. But, whichever way, you get the benefit of the income tax cut.

It is the same in the administration of family tax benefits: that people who have been underpaid get the underpayment and the entitlement to the additional $600; those who have overpayments have the entitlement to the additional $600 but have to settle up in relation to those overpayments. I also point out that this is interest free. It is the same situation as applied under the Australian Labor Party with one exception: the Australian Labor Party never made up for underpayments; they only recovered in relation to overpayments.
Budget 2004-5

Mr FARMER (2.36 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Would the Treasurer please detail how the government’s budget maintains the coalition’s solid economic management record? Are there any alternatives that would put the budget outcomes at risk?

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr COSTELLO—It is a great relief to finally get the call, if I may say so. I thank the honourable member for Macarthur for his question. The government’s budget which was brought down last Tuesday week maintains the budget in surplus for a seventh time under the coalition government, contrasting with Labor’s five budget deficits before it was thrown out of office and the famous $10.3 billion deficit in the last year of the Keating government. In addition to that, this government has now in net terms repaid $70 billion of Labor’s $96 billion debt. It continues the strong economic management which has been put in place in recent times. As a result of strong economic management, our government is now paying $6 billion less in interest payments—a built-in saving to the budget which can be used to deliver better services and lower taxes.

I have been interested recently, however, to see that under its policy the Australian Labor Party is apparently promising tax cuts to everybody. The Leader of the Opposition has been saying that he does not think these tax cuts are enough and that there should be tax cuts for everybody. We all waited with bated breath for his budget reply to hear the thresholds and the amounts—how much it would cost and where he would get the money from. I must say it was a rather disappointing budget reply. It promised so much but delivered so little. Since that time, he has been consistently telling the press that he can fund his income tax cuts for everybody with savings. For example, he was asked at a press conference on 13 May 2004 this question:

How can you offer low-income workers a reasonable tax cut without either sending the budget into deficit or heavily eating into existing Government programs?

Answer:

By continuing down the path on which we have been embarked since the last federal election ... eliminating Government waste and mismanagement. We have identified over $8 billion worth of savings ...

This is the mantra: we have got $8 billion worth of savings for our tax cuts, so the Leader of the Opposition says. Getting hold of this savings list is harder than finding a sighting of the member for Hotham. It is very hard to sight the member for Hotham. It is even harder to get hold of this savings list, including the ridiculous situation where the Leader of the Opposition went on the Alan Jones program and when he was asked he said, ‘I have the list in front of me but I am not giving it out.’ He said, ‘I have this $8 billion of savings right in front of me.’

We owe something to the Sunday Age, which on Sunday managed to get hold of this list. As it turns out, this list does not have $8 billion worth of savings—it has $7 billion worth of savings. A billion here or a billion there never worried the Labor Party in the past. But the interesting thing about this $7 billion of so-called savings is that every last dollar of it and more has already been spent. The savings, for example, are opposing the government’s MedicarePlus program and redirecting the funding to Labor’s health policy. Labor is opposing the government’s higher education package and redirecting the funds to what it says it will invest in higher education. It includes an increase in the diesel fuel rebate and a new payroll tax, but it does not include any net available savings which can fund tax cuts. Whether the Leader...
of the Opposition understands this point or not, the member for Fraser most certainly does, because here is what he is quoted as saying in the *Sunday Age*:

Mr McMullan said none of the $7 billion would be available to pay for Labor’s yet to be announced tax and family benefit changes. “We have to find other savings, essentially to cover it,” he said. “We have been working on a list of savings to cover that contingency.

Do you notice how Labor’s tax cuts have now been relegated to the issue of a contingency? There were going to be tax cuts on Thursday. Now we are talking about a contingency—a contingency for which Labor has not identified a single dollar. The next time the Leader of the Opposition gets into a press conference and says he has $8 billion of savings, the comments of the member for Fraser ought to come right back at him. You have $7 billion, and you have already spent $9 billion. You do not have a single dollar of tax cuts.

*Mr McMullan interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Treasurer will address his remarks through the chair.

**Mr COSTELLO**—The member for Fraser just interjected by saying, ‘That’s not true.’

**The SPEAKER**—Treasurer, do not respond to interjections.

**Mr COSTELLO**—I will quote the *Sunday Age*. It quotes Mr McMullan:

“We have to find other savings, essentially to cover it,” he said. “We have been working on a list of savings to cover that contingency.

As the *Sunday Age* said, none of the $7 billion would be available to pay for Labor’s tax or family benefits. I will rely on the *Sunday Age* and the statement from the member for Fraser.

The reality is this: the Leader of the Opposition is trumpeting $8 billion of savings. They do not exist because he has spent them and more so. The Australian Labor Party is promising tax cuts to everybody, but it does not have a single dollar to pay for them. If Labor could find a single dollar, it would be used to pay for additional spending promises not for tax reductions. The Leader of the Opposition has been trying to skate through, promising everything to everybody. The time has come for scrutiny in relation to his claims. His claims do not add up, and we saw this extraordinary statement from the Australian Labor Party on the weekend that it is not going to list its savings because the government might pinch them. Let me say why the Labor Party is not going to list its savings: they do not exist. Labor has been running around promising tax cuts to everybody without the wherewithal to announce them because it cannot fund them. It does not have the savings. It is an empty promise. It is a waffle. It is a Leader of the Opposition who deserves some scrutiny.

Parliamentarians’ Entitlements: Travel

**Mr Latham** (Monday, 24 May 2004, House of Representatives, 2.44 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I draw his attention to comments made this morning by the member for Fairfax, when he said that the Auditor-General should review the travel entitlements of members of parliament. Will the government now adopt Labor’s policy of establishing an independent auditor of parliamentary entitlements so that in the future, when allegations are made in this area, politicians are not passing judgment on other politicians—that is, so that an independent process is in place to audit and review the entitlements and as much as possible restore public trust in the political process?

**Mr Howard**—This question arises from an indication the government gave yesterday that it would tighten the rules in relation to the entitlements of people to accompany members of parliament on study trips.
overseas. We all know that has arisen from the publicity given to the trip that was carried out by the member for Makin, completely in accordance with the rules. Can I say that in the time that I have been in the parliament I have met a lot of members of parliament on both sides who have worked very hard for their electorates. I have not met anybody who has worked harder for her electorate than does the current member for Makin. This particular issue has been attended with the usual sorts of declarations from the Labor Party, ‘We’re not going to talk about this,’ but we have the Leader of the Opposition kicking the issue along. We have said that we are going to tighten the rules, and when we have finished that consideration we will announce the result. Can I just say this to the Leader of the Opposition: perhaps he might encourage any members of his party whose circumstances were analogous to those of the member for Makin to do what she has done and offer to repay the money.

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr WAKELIN (2.46 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Trade. Would the minister inform the House of the benefits that will flow to South Australia from the United States free trade agreement? What is the major obstacle for these benefits flowing to South Australia?

Mr VAILE—I would like to thank the member for Grey for his question. Of course, the member for Grey is well aware of many of his constituents who will receive and have accrued to them many benefits from the free trade agreement, which I signed on behalf of Australia last week in Washington. After we concluded the negotiations earlier in the year, I visited the electorate of Grey with the member and we went to the Port Lincoln tuna processing plant there. The manager of that plant was very supportive of the outcome of the deal, given that their product can enter the United States tariff free from 1 January 2005. I would just like to quote from a press release that the General Manager of Port Lincoln Tuna Processors, Mr Lindsay Guillot, put out at the time. He said:

We now employ 250 people, but that number looks to increase by 70 in the first year and then the sky’s the limit. Regional South Australia can’t afford for the agreement to become a political football. It puts at risk jobs, families and the future of an industry trying to improve its global competitiveness.

There is one industry in South Australia that is just sitting and waiting for the implementation of the free trade agreement and the benefits that will accrue next year. South Australia and, I might add, all the states and the Labor state governments across Australia have indicated their support to me for the free trade agreement. We had a meeting of ministers in Tasmania a few weeks ago and they are all quite enthusiastic about 1 January arriving next year, when their industries can take advantage of the access to the United States market. South Australia is right at the front of the queue. South Australia’s No. 1 export destination just happens to be the United States of America. South Australia exported $1.4 billion worth of exports to the United States in 2003—17 per cent of their exports. South Australia’s two major exports are wine and passenger motor vehicles. What are two of the sectors that are going to benefit the most from the free trade agreement? They are wine and the passenger motor vehicle industry. Under the US FTA, tariffs on wine will be reduced to zero. Under the US FTA, tariffs on autos will be reduced to zero. The automotive sector and the wine sector can add a lot of value to what has already been achieved under the leadership of our government. We know that since 1996 the Australian automotive industry has gone from negligible exports of fully built-
up motor cars to $5 billion worth of motor cars. That industry has done extremely well over the last eight years, and that message should not be lost on some of the commentators from the Labor movement who rail against the government and some of our policies in the industrial manufacturing sector in Australia. The FTA is a perfect case of engaging and opening up markets across the world and giving them the opportunity to participate.

As I have said, the South Australian government is one of a number of Labor state governments across Australia who are supporting this agreement, supporting our government, in pursuit of the implementation of this. In fact, the South Australian state government wrote to me recently, commending the agreement. The letter says: ‘I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate you and your officials on your effort; I have no doubt the task was immense.’ The task was immense, and we still have an immense task in front of us convincing the naysayers opposite—those who are opposed to this agreement for opposition’s sake, who will not see the benefits of this agreement to Australian producers and manufacturers and exporters, who want to stand in the way of more jobs and more opportunities in South Australia—and that is the Australian Labor Party. Latham Labor is still saying that it might block the agreement. We would ask it to be cognisant of what its state Labor government colleagues have said, what industries in South Australia have said—the auto industry, the wine industry and the Port Lincoln tuna processing industry: do not make this a political football; get in and support it.

**Superannuation: Parliamentary Scheme**

Mr LATHAM (2.51 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Now that the government is reviewing parliamentary entitlements, will it also adopt Labor’s policy of capping the superannuation entitlements of senior office-bearers in the parliament? Will the Prime Minister join with me in capping his own superannuation entitlements at a level closer to a decent community standard? Why shouldn’t the party leaders who reform the superannuation entitlements of future MPs make a superannuation sacrifice themselves?

Mr HOWARD—I have indicated the position of both the government and me in relation to this matter before, and I do not have any change to make or anything to add.

**Roads: Tugun Bypass**

Mrs MAY (2.52 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Would the Deputy Prime Minister advise the House on recent developments on the resolution of the future of the Tugun bypass?

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honourable member for McPherson for her question. I note her very real interest in this and, along with the members for Richmond and Moncrieff, her real efforts to try to find a resolution to a problem that should never have arisen. This was an instance of the very great generosity of the Australian government. We stepped in to help the people of south-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales with a real problem with roads congestion.

Mr Ripoll interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—They are quite clearly state roads. The Tugun bypass is really the responsibility of the Queensland government. But, recognising the difficulties that the people in that area face—

Mr Ripoll interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister will resume his seat! The member for Oxley has some entitlement denied all
other members, I can only presume. He will exercise the courtesy expected of a member of the parliament.

Mr ANDERSON—Recognising the difficulties faced by people in those parts of the world, we said that we would contribute around half—a capped amount of $120 million—to resolve the problem. This was gratefully accepted some 12 months or so ago, by the then Queensland minister for roads, with the clear understanding that there would be no further call on the Commonwealth. The only problem was that the bypass effectively involved a little bit of road building on the New South Wales side of the border. As only the New South Wales minister for roads can do, he said, ‘Oh, no; the $120 million really came out of New South Wales’ allocation, so we will not approve it.’ When we said, ‘No, it does not come out of that,’ and convinced him of that, he said, ‘Oh, but there are environmental problems.’

On the face of this, on the last day or two of the Queensland state election campaign, Mr Beattie—without any consultation with us—decided that he would build a completely new road building on the New South Wales side of the border. As only the New South Wales minister for roads can do, he said, ‘Oh, no; the $120 million really came out of New South Wales’ allocation, so we will not approve it.’ When we said, ‘No, that would not work,’ and the local residents said that it would not work, do you know what Mr Beattie proposed? He proposed that the Commonwealth, with some imaginary powers, should annex a part of New South Wales and add it to Queensland. When we said, ‘No, we will not do that,’ he said that we were contemptible for not resolving their roads problem. I ask, rhetorically: had it been proposed the other way around, by New South Wales, that we annex a bit of the Gold Coast and add it to New South Wales, how would Mr Beattie have reacted?

Senator Ian Campbell and I had the ‘temerity’ to suggest that we were very interested in the next stage of the Pacific Highway upgrade. We have had a 10-year program and we have put $600 million into upgrading the Pacific Highway. We have gone from nine per cent dual carriageway to 33 per cent—and do you know that that effort was described today by the New South Wales roads minister as a ‘paltry and piddly amount’? Can you believe that? Why would he have done that? He did it because it was suggested that his backflip—in agreeing at one o’clock today to build the very bypass that the people up there need—was driven by wanting to secure some more money from the Commonwealth for the next stage of the Pacific Highway upgrade. He said that was contemptible. I do not think it is contemptible at all; I think it is reality.

It was plainly the case that the Australian government could not justify further expenditure on that road while there was a bottleneck—presided over disgracefully by two state premiers who could not get on the phone and resolve what was a state problem. They plainly saw the light. I can say one thing about these two hard-headed ministers: when I banged their heads together hard enough, they actually came up with a solution.

Government members interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—Yes, it was a loud noise. They said, ‘Yes, we want the money. Yes, we need the Commonwealth involved. We’ll roll over and do what we should have done from day one,’ and that is to build the Tugun with a very generous contribution from the Australian government for a state road, to the great advantage of the constituents of the members for Moncrieff, McPherson and Richmond.

Howard Government: Leadership

Mr McMULLAN (2.57 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. The Deputy Prime Minister has said, when asked whether he would stay on as Deputy Prime Minister
for the full term of the parliament in a re-elected Howard government:

If I’m in a position to offer myself after the next term, i.e. we’ve won and I’m still the Member for Gwydir, and those sorts of things, yes.

Will the Prime Minister follow the Deputy Prime Minister’s lead and confirm to the Australian people that he too will serve a full term if his government is returned at the next election?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the member for Fraser for his question. I think the member for Fraser knows what my answer will be, but let me just repeat it in case he does not. I will be privileged to remain the leader of the Liberal Party of the Australia, which I have had the immense pleasure of leading since January 1995 and, previous to that, over a perhaps more chequered period in the party’s history. I will continue to lead the party for as long as the party wishes me to and it is in the party’s best interests that I should do so. I thank the member for Fraser for giving me the opportunity.

But while I am on my feet, I cannot resist the temptation—and for this I have to blame, or thank, depending on your point of view, the member for Fraser—to think a little about the sort of choice that is faced by the Australian people in the months ahead. It could be months with a capital ‘m’, months with a small ‘m’ or perhaps months with a middle-sized ‘m’; you could take whatever interpretation you like. I point out to the member for Fraser that the next election, amongst other things, will be a choice that the Australian people will make between a coalition led by me, ably deputy led by the member for Gwydir, in charge of the economic management of this country, along with the member for Higgins as Treasurer.

Arrayed against us will be the member for Werriwa as Leader of the Opposition and, of course, Mr Magic Pudding himself, the member for Hotham, as Treasurer. So it is a Howard-Costello economic management team versus a Latham-Crean economic management team. I come to the reason I call him Mr Magic Pudding. The Magic Pudding is a book that all of us who have read to our children are very familiar with. I listened to this man. I kid you not; I sat down in front of my television set when he was addressing the National Press Club.

Mr Costello—Oh, you did not!

Mr HOWARD—I did. When he was addressing the National Press Club, I was glued to the set. I was captivated. The first thing he said was, ‘Labor will have bigger surpluses.’ I thought, ‘Does he belong to the same Australian Labor Party that left us with a debt of $96 billion, which it has taken us years of struggle to get rid of?’ He went on and said, ‘We’ll give bigger tax cuts than the coalition.’ Then to cap it all off he said, ‘I’ve got something for you that you didn’t think of. We’re going to have some kind of intergenerational retirement fund.’ How do you fund that? Through what kind of taxation?

Here you have the man who, along with the Leader of the Opposition, puts himself forward as an alternative manager of the Australian economy. With all of the record that the Australian public is aware of, the member for Hotham is saying that under Labor you will have bigger tax cuts, more spending, larger surpluses and an intergenerational fund. On top of that, we are going to maintain the same volume of economic growth. I do not think the Australian public, the more it hears about that, is going to believe it. Let me say to the member for Fraser that we will be delighted to deal with these issues on a very regular basis. We will be delighted to parade the virtues of the former mayor of Liverpool and Mr Magic Pudding.
before the Australian public month after month.

**Health: Convalescent and Rehabilitation Facilities**

Mr TICEHURST (3.02 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Would the minister inform the House how the government is helping people who are recovering after being in hospital but who are too sick to go home? How is the government working with the states to provide better health care for sick Australians?

Mr Abbott—I thank the member for Dobell for his question. I know how hard he works to try to ensure that the people of Dobell have access to the best quality health care system. There is quite a bit of a blame game that goes on sometimes. There is a fair bit of argy-bargy between federal and state governments on health issues. But behind the scenes there is also a great deal of practical cooperation to solve the real problems that people face.

This is a problem for our public hospitals. They often have people who are not well enough to go home but who are not really sick enough to justify taking up an acute bed at the cost of some $500 a day. Last year the government allocated some $250 million to help the states to build new and upgraded convalescent and rehabilitation facilities for people leaving hospital but not ready to go home. Yesterday I announced, along with the New South Wales health minister, $86 million in federal money to help New South Wales provide new and upgraded facilities for rehabilitation and convalescence.

This money includes a new rehabilitation therapy centre at the Mount Druitt Hospital. It includes a new convalescent centre at Westmead. It includes a significant number of new step-down beds at hospitals around New South Wales, including Nepean, Woy Woy in the electorate of Dobell, Concord, Liverpool, Royal North Shore, Prince of Wales, Balmain, Hornsby, Ryde, Bankstown, Berri, Cowra, Lithgow, Parkes and Forbes. All of these hospitals will benefit from the Pathways Home program of the federal government, announced yesterday in conjunction with New South Wales.

Yesterday’s announcement follows more than $100 million earlier allocated to Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, as well as the territories. What it demonstrates is the Howard government’s ability to work cooperatively and constructively with the states for a good cause, and that good cause is the delivery of better health care to Australians in need.

**Howard Government: Leadership**

Mr McMULLAN (3.05 p.m.)—My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the Prime Minister has just asserted that in a re-elected Liberal government economic management will be in your hands.

The Speaker—Order! I am not being pedantic but, as the member for Fraser is better aware than most, it would have been appropriate to have said ‘the Treasurer’s hands’, not ‘your hands’, and address the remark through the chair.

Mr McMULLAN—The Prime Minister actually said that it would be in the hands of the member for Higgins. Treasurer, will you guarantee to remain in the job beyond Christmas?

Mr Costello—Let me re-echo the words the Prime Minister has said. Whilst my colleagues want me and whilst it is in the interests of the party, I would be very happy to continue. But I am rather amused by the Australian Labor Party asking us to guarantee we will stay on and run again. We used to be in opposition and when we were we would ask questions of the then Labor Party. We would not ask them to guarantee that they would stay on; we would ask them to
guarantee that they would go. We would say to the then Labor Prime Minister, ‘Will you guarantee you will go?’ and to the then Treasurer Keating, ‘Will you guarantee you will go?’ We are rather flattered by all of this interest that the Labor Party shows in our careers. There are times when I think to myself, ‘Can one do more as Treasurer?’ You know what always comes home to me? What comes home to me is this: that I stand between the Treasurership and the member for Hotham. Whenever I need incentive, boy, that gets me going!

Budget 2004-05

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (3.07 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry—

Mr Tanner interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Maranoa will resume his seat. I had during the last answer reminded the member for Melbourne of his responsibilities. He will abide by the standing orders or I will deal with him.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT—My question is addressed to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Would the minister advise the House how the budget will impact on the rural sector? Has there been any reaction to budget announcements? Further, are there any alternative policies?

Mr TRUSS—I thank the honourable member for Maranoa for the question. He is aware that the Australian government is really delivering for farmers. In this budget there was another significant commitment of resources to the rural sector. The National Farmers Federation and other industry organisations have welcomed the budget and the contribution that it will make to the farm sector.

There is more money for Farm Help, for FarmBis and for the rural financial counsel-

ors and record expenditure for the NHT and the national action plan. There is a four-year commitment to Land Care, more money for the Murray-Darling Basin and nearly $90 million to patrol the southern waters for illegal fishing. There is more money for the Great Artesian Basin and money to prepare for biosecurity threats and to improve the livestock export trade and there is more money for border protection at our airports. And of course there are significant tax cuts for wine producers. There is also the sugar package and drought assistance and the like. It is a budget that provides a very significant commitment to the rural sector.

But I can understand why the member for Maranoa asked whether there were any alternative policies and whether there is any alternative vision. In 4,050 words in his budget reply speech the Leader of the Opposition did not mention farmers or drought or rural issues once. Not a single mention was made of drought, even though it is obviously a key factor in assessing our nation’s economic capacity. There was no reference to farmers and the enormous contribution they make to their nation. In addition, he did not even take the opportunity to retract his venomous anti-farmer statements that have been so notorious over the years—his writings in the Sydney Daily Telegraph and other newspapers. In fact, there was nothing from the Leader of the Opposition in relation to what he might do for the rural sector.

The Treasurer referred earlier to the fact that the list of cuts has been hidden. It is no longer available. But the Melbourne Age, it seems, have managed to produce their own list and have a series of things on their list of cuts. We have already had the member for Fraser and the member for Corio confirm that the Bureau of Rural Resources is on the Labor Party’s hit list and also that they are going to slash funding for ABARE. These are key bodies which provide advice and
assistance and which assess applications in relation to drought matters. It is a matter of serious concern that the Leader of the Opposition is going to slash the support that is necessary to deal with these key drought policy issues.

Indeed, he actually has thrown a question mark over the whole continuation of drought policy and drought assistance altogether, because on 30 April 2004 on the ABC in south-east New South Wales he questioned the provision of drought assistance during the recovery phase after a drought. He must be the only one around—being a city-centric Western Suburbs leader—who does not appreciate how important it is to provide support for farmers during that recovery year when they need support to plant their crops and to restock. He has ruled out assistance during that period. This seems to be exactly the same theme that Labor have adopted in each of the states. As soon as they are elected, the drought is over and that is the end of the assistance.

Now we have a Leader of the Opposition who not only cannot bring himself to refer to farmers in his response statement but who also leaves the axe hanging over some of these vital programs. The opposition leader has promised to cut 13 government programs if he is elected. How many of those are in the rural sector? We already know BRS is going. ABARE is going to be cut. Drought assistance is now threatened. And he has given a big long list of other things that he does not like, like the Diesel Fuel Rebate Scheme, FarmBis, land care expenses, tax concessions, zone tax rebate, income tax averaging and the like. The reality is that this is the government that delivers for the rural sector. Labor will cut programs in agriculture and farmers will once again have to endure the wrath of Labor in government.

### Science: Cooperative Research Centres

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON** (3.13 p.m.)—
My question is to the Minister for Science. I refer to the minister’s description in the parliament last sitting week of my support for the cooperative research centres into the Great Barrier Reef and the wet tropics rainforests as ‘improper’, ‘politics at its worst’ and ‘assistance to fortunate, privileged CRCs’. Are media reports that the government now intends to fund these CRCs correct and does the minister still describe these CRCs as fortunate and privileged and support for them as improper and politics at its worst? Will the minister now adopt Labor’s policy to rewrite the CRC grant guidelines—putting public interest research back in—and then recommence the selection process and reconsider all the applications which have been refused?

**Mr McGAURAN**—I thank the honourable member for his question. There were 52 applicants for this round of CRC funding. At stage 1, 19 were unsuccessful and 33 have proceeded. Of the 19, four were existing CRCs, not all 19. The other 15 were applicants only. So the four existing CRCs that have not proceeded still have two years funding to remain, on average about $6 million each. From the start I have said that I will assist them. They will look at other sources of funding. They may look to the CRC program for reprofiling to put them in a position to compete for the 2006 round. For the environmental CRCs there is an opportunity to go to state or federal departments and other programs under BAA.

Under the CRC program and under the guidelines that this government has adopted it is final. We will not intervene under the CRC program. We will champion any of those unsuccessful applicants in other forums and under other programs, and that is what the honourable members for Herbert and
Leichhardt are doing—unlike the Labor Party, who want to junk the probity lawyers, want to junk all of the certainty associated with this round of CRCs, and help their mates. They have named four CRCs that they will fund. Under the CRC program, they will fund four unsuccessful applicants—or thereabouts. What about those who miss out? Of those 52 applicants, what do you say to the approximately 40 who will eventually not receive funding? Who are you going to take the money off? We have probity lawyers all the way through. You are entitled to have a public debate.

The SPEAKER—Minister!

Mr McGAUPLAN—The member and the Labor Party are entitled to have a public debate and engage us on the criteria. But the idea that you would favour certain applicants over others is, I believe, utterly improper.

Defence: Training Facilities

Mr BAIRD (3.16 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment Services representing the Minister for Defence. Would the minister inform the House how the government is improving facilities for Australia’s special forces in Sydney?

Mr BROUGH—I thank the member for Cook for his question. I am happy to inform the member for Cook and the House that the federal government has just announced an $80 million investment in Australia’s security through the training facilities for Australia’s special forces, which are to be completed in Holsworthy in 2006.

These new facilities, which will be located in the west of Sydney in Holsworthy, will include indoor and outdoor multilevel electronic and live firing ranges as well as a variety of training and targeting environments for the Tactical Assault Group, East. These new ranges will depict both an urban environment, which is a likely scenario for these troops to be committed to, and also an aircraft, which is another likely scenario. For the first time, our troops will be able in the east of this country to have live firing exercises, where they can fire in a 360 degree arc of fire, which of course is the most realistic sort of training that they could undertake.

This is why our troops acquit themselves so well when they are engaged in operations, because this government commits the resources that are required to doctrine, to training and to equipment. In addition to training facilities, the coalition is providing new assault rifles, machine guns, antitank weapons, mortars, grenade launchers, vehicles, optical equipment such as binoculars, thermal imaging equipment and night vision goggles as well as new communications and radio equipment. This builds on the $1.3 billion that the federal government has committed since 11 September 2001 to making Australia a more secure environment for this generation and the generations to come.

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

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (3.18 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr PRICE—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr PRICE—In a media release by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, dated 18 May 2004 and headed ‘St Marys Centrelink services will not diminish’, Mr Anthony said:

In true Labor Party style, Member for Chifley, Roger Price ...

and he names others—

are deliberately misleading locals and their claims—

that is, of diminished services—
should be taken with a grain of salt. I have a public notice which is displayed at the St Marys Centrelink signed by J. Cooke, the manager, entitled ‘Changes to our service delivery from Monday, 31 May 2004’. It says:

If you are a student or a job seeker and wish to lodge a claim, we’ll make an appointment for you at the Mount Druitt office. If you lodge any of the following claims, we’ll make an appointment for you at the Penrith office—

The SPEAKER—I am presuming the member for Chifley is quoting.

Mr PRICE—I am reading from the notice.

The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Chifley for that clarification.

Mr PRICE—It says:

If you lodge any of the following claims, we’ll make an appointment for you at Penrith office—

The SPEAKER—The member for Chifley will come to the point of his misrepresentation. As he is aware, I have given him a fair bit of licence.

Mr PRICE—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just demonstrate that the notice, by the minister’s own staffer, suggests that there will be a diminution of services.

The SPEAKER—I understand.

Mr McMULLAN (Fraser) (3.20 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr McMULLAN—Indeed I do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr McMULLAN—The Treasurer, in answer to a question today, said that I had said that the government had $7 billion of savings and $9 billion of expenditure commitments. That is absolutely untrue. It is true that I said we have $7 billion of savings. I have never said they are matched by $9 billion of expenditure—for the simple reason that it is not true.

The SPEAKER—It is not the chair’s role to offer this facility. I think the member for Fraser—for the sake of the Hansard record—may admit that the opposition had the $7 billion.

Ms Gillard—Yes.

The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Lalor for clarifying that point.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Questions on Notice

Mr MURPHY (3.21 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek your assistance under standing order 150. On 22 March 2004, question No. 3330 to the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts first appeared on the Notice Paper in my name, and on 23 March 2004, question No. 3355 to the Attorney-General first appeared on the Notice Paper in my name. I would be grateful if you would write to those ministers and seek reasons for the delay in replying to my questions.

The SPEAKER—I will follow up the matters raised by the member for Lowe as standing order 150 provides.

Questions on Notice

Ms O’BYRNE (3.21 p.m.)—Under the same standing order, standing order 150, Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to: 10 February, question No. 2976 to the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and question No. 2981 to the Minister for Education, Science and Training; and 22 March, question No. 3326 to the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and question No.
3327 to the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

The SPEAKER—I will follow up the matters raised by the member for Bass as standing order 150 provides.

PETITIONS

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

Human Rights: Falun Dafa

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

The petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House that:

(a) Falun Gong (also known as Falun Dafa), is a practice of meditation and exercises with teachings based on the universal principle of “Truthfulness-Compassion-Tolerance”, practiced in over 50 countries world-wide and has roots in traditional Chinese culture - has been subject to a systematic campaign of eradication in China since July 1999;

The Falun Dafa Information Center has verified details of 890 deaths (as at 25/2/2004) since the persecution of Falun Gong in China began in 1999. In October 2001, however, Government officials inside China reported that the actual death toll was well over 1,600. Expert sources now estimate that figure to be much higher. Hundreds of thousands have been detained, with more than 100,000 being sentenced to forced labour camps, typically without trial;

The implementation of this policy of eradication violates the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which China has signed, the Convention Against Torture and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, both of which China has signed and ratified; and

Australia is the elected Chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights for 2004 and the Commission will convene on 15 March 2004.

Your petitioners therefore request the house to initiate a resolution to condemn China’s persecution of Falun Gong at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and request China to:

Unconditionally release all Falun Gong practitioners imprisoned for their spiritual beliefs, including those family members of Australian citizens and residents currently detained;

Allow unrestricted access into China to the United Nations rapporteur on torture, to carry out independent, third-party investigations on the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.

by Mr Andrews (from 69 citizens)
by Mr Bevis (from 106 citizens)
by Mr Causley (from 136 citizens)
by Mr Ciobo (from 82 citizens)
by Dr Emerson (from 41 citizens)
by Mr Martin Ferguson (from 60 citizens)
by Ms George (from 29 citizens)
by Mr Georgiou (from 28 citizens)
by Mr Hardgrave (from 179 citizens)
by Mrs De-Anne Kelly (from 285 citizens)
by Mrs May (from 163 citizens)
by Mr McClelland (from 2,000 citizens)
by Mr McMullan (from 559 citizens)
by Dr Nelson (from 646 citizens)
by Mr Pearce (from 42 citizens)
by Ms Plibersek (from 503 citizens)
by Ms Roxon (from 62 citizens)
by Mr Ruddock (from 1,358 citizens)
by Mr Sercombe (from 136 citizens)
by Mr Tanner (from 80 citizens)
by Mr Kelvin Thomson (from 265 citizens)
by Mr Tuckey (from 81 citizens)
by Mr Vaile (from 244 citizens)

Human Rights: Falun Dafa

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

The petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House that:

- China’s policy of eradicating Falun Gong violates the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Against Torture and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and
- Australia is the elected Chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights for 2004 and
- The Commission will convene on 15 March 2004

Your petitioners therefore request the House to initiate a resolution to condemn China’s persecution of Falun Dafa at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and request China to:

I. Unconditionally release all Falun Gong practitioners imprisoned for their beliefs, including those family members of Australian citizens and residents;

II. Allow unrestricted access into China the United Nations rapporteur on torture to carry out independent investigations on the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners

by Mr Albanese (from 15 citizens)
by Mr Anthony (from 115 citizens)
by Mr Baldwin (from 148 citizens)
by Mr Fitzgibbon (from 92 citizens)
by Mr Hartsuyker (from 114 citizens)
by Ms Hoare (from 80 citizens)
by Mrs Hull (from 205 citizens)
by Mr King (from 683 citizens)
by Mr McClelland (from 312 citizens)
by Mr Price (from 83 citizens)

by Ms Plibersek (from 145 citizens)
and the fundamental rights to assembly and free expression. Since then, over 100 million Falun Dafa practitioners (including more than 130 who has been persecuted to death), peacefully endure the unfair treatment for the sake of the principles “Truthfulness, Compassion, Forbearance”.

Your petitioners therefore pray the House to act immediately on behalf of the petitioners to address China’s leadership “in order to resolve the present crises that is taking place in China”, to urge China’s leadership:

1) To stop the persecution of Falun Dafa immediately.
2) To withdraw the warrant of arrest of Mr. Li Hongzhi immediately.
3) To stop torture and release all jailed Falun Dafa practitioners immediately.
4) To clarify all false propaganda used to defame Falun Dafa immediately.

by Ms Plibersek (from 330 citizens)

Australian Defence Forces: Medal

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

The Petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:

That a citizen who serves to defend the country does so with the highest patriotic motives in mind. They know they could be called to serve in war and lay down their life. After that commitment they may leave the service without any tangible recognition being given to them. Unless a member receives a medal for overseas service their first chance of gaining a medal is for long service after 15 years service, if the member serves that long.

The medal sought is not for service in the sense of long service but more for the individual who makes a commitment to serve the Nation.

Your Petitioners pray that the House will institute a medal for two years full-time or part-time service in the Australian Defence Force from 1 January 1946 to the present and future servicemen and women who serve and protect our Nation.

by Mr Charles (from 100 citizens)
by Mrs Hull (from 60 citizens)
by Mr Mossfield (from 93 citizens)
by Dr Nelson (from 83 citizens)
by Mr Neville (from 29 citizens)
by Ms Panopoulos (from 20 citizens)
by Mr Pearce (from 42 citizens)
by Ms Roxon (from 26 citizens)
by Mr Somlyay (from 436 citizens)

Health and Ageing: Aged Care

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

The petition of the undersigned shows:

- concerned Australian citizens point out to the House of Representatives:
  
  Due to the increasing shortfall between the income available to deliver aged and community services and the rising costs of delivering those services, Australia is facing the imminent collapse of the aged and community care system as we know it.

Your Petitioners therefore ask the House of Representatives to:

- Replace the current system of indexing pricing in the aged and community care sector with a system which reflects the true increases in the costs of running aged and community care services.
- Immediately inject $10 per day, per bed to restore the existing viability of residential care services.
- Provide a 10 per cent increase in the prices paid for community care to ensure viability of these important services, which help keep our elderly and disabled in their own homes.

by Ms Burke (from 221 citizens)
by Mr Martin Ferguson (from 24 citizens)
by Mr Georgiou (from 237 citizens)
by Mr Griffin (from 184 citizens)
by Mr Hawker (from 35 citizens)
by Mr Hunt (from 189 citizens)
by Dr Southcott (from 32 citizens)
by Mr Kelvin Thomson (from 1,776 citizens)

Health: Pneumococcal Vaccine
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia points out to the House that the Federal Government recently rejected the recommendation of the National Health and Medical Research Council that the pneumococcal vaccine should be made available at no cost to all Australian children as a 3-dose series at 2, 4 and 6 months.
This recommendation was made to prevent young Australian children dying or developing brain damage from pneumococcal disease.
We therefore pray that the House call on the Federal Government to urgently act upon the recommendations of the National Health and Medical Research Council to provide pneumococcal vaccine free to all Australian children.

by Ms Burke (from 268 citizens)
by Mr Byrne (from 375 citizens)
by Mrs Crosio (from 218 citizens)

Health: Pneumococcal Vaccine
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament:
The undersigned petitioners wish to draw to the attention of the House that the innocent babies of Australia need the vaccine for Pneumococcal Bacteria to protect them from the devastating effects of this virus. These include disablement, vision impairment, hearing impairment, developmental delays and loss of fingers and toes through Septicaemia and or death. The vaccine costs $144.45 per shot and babies need 3 shots to immunise them against this virus.
We therefore pray that the House takes steps to ensure that the Government will change its mind and fund this immunisation.

by Dr Emerson (from 2,109 citizens)

Immigration: Asylum Seekers
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled:
Whereas the 1998 Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne carried without dissent the following motion:
‘That this Synod regrets the Government’s adoption of procedures for certain people seeking political asylum in Australia which exclude them from all public income support while withholding permission to work, thereby creating a group of beggars dependent on the Churches and charities for food and the necessities of life;
and calls upon the Federal government to review such procedures immediately and remove all practices which are manifestly inhumane and in some cases in contravention of our national obligations as a signatory of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.’
We, therefore, the individual, undersigned attendees at All Saints Anglican Church, Northcote Vic 3070, petition the House of Representatives in support of the above mentioned Motion.
AND we, as in duty bound will ever pray.

by Ms Corcoran (from 7 citizens)
by Mr Martin Ferguson (from 20 citizens)
by Mr Pearce (from 21 citizens)

Medicare: Bulk-Billing
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:
• That under proposed changes to Medicare, families earning more than $32,300 a year will miss out on bulk billing, and doctors will increase their fees for visits that are no longer bulk billed;
• That the rate of bulk billing by GPs has plummeted by 11% under John Howard;
• That more than 10 million fewer GP visits were bulk billed this year compared to when John Howard came to office;
• That the average out-of-pocket cost to see a GP who does not bulk bill has gone up by 55% since 1996 to $12.78 today;
• That public hospitals are now under greater pressure because people are finding it harder to see bulk billing doctors.

We therefore pray that the House takes urgent steps to restore bulk billing by general practitioners and reject John Howard’s plan to end universal bulk billing so all Australians have access to the health care they need and deserve.

by Mr Martin Ferguson (from 1,594 citizens)
by Ms King (from 1,377 citizens)

Human Rights: Treatment of Prisoners

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the following issues to the attention of the House:

• That political prisoners in Lebanon who stand for democracy, have wrongly been convicted and sentenced to indefinite periods of solitary imprisonment in barbarous conditions.

• Amnesty International has monitored this situation and has strongly campaigned for the release of all political prisoners and have also criticised the occurrence of torture and incarceration as a result of Syrian occupation in Lebanon.

• With Syria’s intervention and menacing presence there is the absence of self-government and ability to engage in democratic discussions that existed freely prior the civil war.

• Lebanon is a government that has no independent thinking but is only a puppet of Syrian dictatorship.

We therefore pray that the House joins the Australian Lebanese and Amnesty International in taking urgent steps in opposing the imprisonment of political prisoners and to oppose the involvement of the Syrian regime in Lebanon so that all Lebanese can enjoy democratic freedom.

by Mr Martin Ferguson (from 907 citizens)
by Mr Tanner (from 298 citizens)

Howard Government: Antiviolence Campaign

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia, condemns the Howard Government for refusing to run the anti-violence campaign, “No Respect, No Relationship” that was designed to educate young people that violence in relationships is wrong and must be stopped.

Your petitioners ask the House to ensure that the Government releases the campaign material that was developed over the last 2 years, at a cost of millions of dollars to taxpayers so that it can be used by others in the community to send a strong message to young people.

Public money paid for the development and production of this campaign and we urge the House to demand its release for public use

by Ms Hall (from 16 citizens)
by Ms Roxon (from 2,133 citizens)

Education: Funding

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

The Petition of certain citizens of Australia undersigned draws to the attention of the House:

A well funded Public Education system is vital to the maintenance of a fair and democratic Australian society.

We need our public schools to be well resourced. This requires the Federal Government to provide a fairer model for funding Australian schools.

Your petitioners therefore ask the House to:

Ensure that the funding policies of the Commonwealth Government are reformed to provide increased and fairer funding for public schools.

by Mr Pyne (from 17 citizens)
by Mr Wakelin (from 307 citizens)
Medicare: Bulk-Billing
To the Honourable Speaker and the Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of the undersigned rejects the Howard Government’s proposed changes to Medicare. We request the House takes urgent steps to restore bulk billing and rejects John Howard’s plan to end universal bulk billing
by Ms Corcoran (from 4 citizens)

Environment: Plastic Bag Levy
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
We the undersigned citizens of Australia, call on the Parliament of Australia to:
• Recognise the severe environment damage caused by the 6.4 billion plastic bags used in Australia annually;
• Appreciate the success of the new plastic bag levy in reducing the usage of plastic bags, introduced in Ireland in 2002.
We, the undersigned petitioners, therefore request the House to introduce a similar plastic bags levy in Australia, in order to reduce plastic bag usage and create a recurrent fund for environmental projects.
by Mr Danby (from 26 citizens)

Superannuation: Same Sex Couples
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
We, the undersigned, draw the attention of the House to the discrimination experienced by same sex couples in the provision of many government benefits, including superannuation and veterans’ entitlements.
We also draw the attention of the House to the recent decision of the United Nations Human Rights Committee that Australia is in breach of international law and its human rights obligations. Your petitioners therefore ask the House to urgently rectify the situation, by recognising same-sex couples, and eliminating government discrimination on the basis of sexual preference.
And your petitioners, as is duty bound, will ever pray.
by Mr Martin Ferguson (from 54 citizens)

Health and Ageing: Aged Care
To the honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of residents, relatives, workers and friends of Arlington Private Nursing Home in the electorate of Batman, in the State of Victoria, draws to the attention of the House the certain closure of Arlington Private Nursing Home due to inadequate funding.
If funding is not increased by $10 per day per resident, the Management of Arlington Nursing Home has no choice but to close the facility by December 2004. This is causing undue stress to all concerned.
Residents are concerned that funding to our aged care services is inadequate when we are repeatedly told by the Government that there is a $6 billion surplus. Furthermore, residents are angered that having spent $7.2 million of taxpayers money on the Hogan Review, the Government refuses to release the report of that review.
Your petitions therefore:
Pray that the Government will increase funding to all nursing homes so that residents may continue to reside at their chosen place and immediately release the Hogan Report, in its entirety.
by Mr Martin Ferguson (from 632 citizens)

Trade: Live Animal Exports
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the economic impact of the year round live sheep trade and growing live cattle trade (especially dairy heifers to China and Mexico) from the ports of Portland and Adelaide.
Your petitioners therefore ask the House to fully support this essential year round trade which is vital for farmers, local employment and the
To the honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain by the electors of the electorate of Riverina draws to the attention of the House the little to near non-existence mobile telephone service in the town and surrounding area of Whitton. This current service is a problem to local businesses and those other businesses that come to the town. The local NSW Rural Fire Service will be loosing its current paging service and call outs will be directed by SMS messages via the mobile phone service.

Our petitioners therefore pray that the House can take action to improve the mobile telephone service to the area.

by Mrs Hull (from 310 citizens)

Eureka Flag

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia asks that the House of Representatives

- recognises that the battle at the Eureka Stockade represents a turning point in Australia’s development as a nation, especially in the right of people to have a say in how we are governed;
- notes that it is 148 years since this important battle took place;
- recognises that the Eureka Flag remains an important symbol of the development of democratic government in Australia; and

We therefore pray that the Government take steps to have the Eureka Flag proclaimed as an official flag of Australia under the provisions of the Flags Act 1953.

by Ms King (from 2,405 citizens)

Social Welfare: Pensions

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in parliament.

The petition of certain general pension, superannuation, part government pension, citizens of Australia, draws the attention of the House that in view of the difficult circumstances that such citizens are experiencing with their reducing quality of life due to a burgeoning cost of living created by the GST, there exists an urgent need to upgrade the pension.

Notwithstanding periodic increases to the pension and other once only, much qualified gratuities, we strongly contend that the basic formula for the pension is a source of hardship in that it has been set too low even for normal circumstances and in economies of Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

by Mr Hawker (from 97 citizens)

Telecommunications: Mobile Phone Services

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

The petition of certain by the electors of the electorate of Riverina draws to the attention of the House the little to near non-existence mobile telephone service in the town and surrounding area of Whitton. This current service is a problem to local businesses and those other businesses that come to the town. The local NSW Rural Fire Service will be loosing its current paging service and call outs will be directed by SMS messages via the mobile phone service.

Our petitioners therefore pray that the House can take action to improve the mobile telephone service to the area.

by Mrs De-Anne Kelly (from 32 citizens)
comparison to many European pensions, let alone in the current climate of increased prices, fees and premiums in Australia.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House act to increase the Base Formula of the Pension to equal 35% of the Adult Male Average Weekly Earnings (AMAWE).

by **Ms King** (from 16 citizens)

**Political Parties: Donations**

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

This Petition of certain citizens of Australia states that:

Each year, an estimated 19,000 Australians die from smoking-related illnesses. In dollar terms the annual health cost of smoking is put at $21 billion (Source: Counting the cost: Estimates of the social cost of drug abuse in Australia 1998-99). A Private Members Bill, presented in Parliament by Denison MHR, Duncan Kerr and seconded by the Liberal Member for Moore, Dr Mal Washer proposes it be made a condition of eligibility to receive public funding under the Electoral Act that a political party refuse donations from the tobacco industry. This Bill presents an opportunity to end the embarrassment and awkwardness associated with taking tobacco money, while administering anti-tobacco advertising laws and health budgets which allocate taxpayer dollars to dealing with the consequences of tobacco-related illness.

Your petitioners pray that the House will pass the Bill, thereby making a condition of eligibility to receive public funding under the Electoral Act that a political party does not accept donations from the tobacco industry.

by **Ms Jann McFarlane** (from 109 citizens)

**Shipping: Nuclear Armed and Powered Vessels**

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

We, the undersigned residents of Australia ask that the House of Representatives consider the health and welfare of the present and future residents of this country and the environmental impacts of possible negative impacts relating to the visits of nuclear powered and armed vessels into Australian ports.

Nuclear navies are not welcome here whatever the colour of their flags.

The recent spate of accidents involving nuclear-powered submarines should be enough to convince all governments that the risk to the environment of these floating Chernobyls is a risk we don’t have to take.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that the Parliament legislate to prevent all visits of nuclear armed/powered vessels to Australian ports and waters.

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

by **Ms Jann McFarlane** (from 39 citizens)

**Health: MRI Machines**

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

The petition of certain residents of the State of New South Wales draws to the attention of the House the refusal by the Federal Government to license a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) facility at the Concord Repatriation and General Hospital denies equitable access to vital health services for cancer, heart, orthopaedic, burns and MS patients.

Despite a commitment by the NSW Government to purchase a MRI machine, Concord Hospital remains the only teaching hospital in Sydney not approved to provide MRI diagnostic services via the Medicare system.

This means Concord’s frailest patients are unable to locally access vital diagnostic services.

Your petitioners request the House to protect the public’s interest and provide equitable access to the Medicare system for inner western Sydney residents by licensing MRI diagnostic services at the Concord Repatriation and General Hospital.

by **Mr Murphy** (from 501 citizens)
Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Funding

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

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

• The Government’s rejection of the ABC’s 2003 funding bid has caused the cancellation of ABC Kids and Fly TV and caused ABC management to cut schools production, reduce news and current affairs coverage and cancel the school aged television news program Behind the News;
• We the undersigned condemn the Government for attacking the integrity of the ABC and continuing to stack the ABC Board with political appointments;

We therefore pray that the House support the independence of the ABC and immediately restore an adequate level of funding to the ABC.

by Mr Murphy (from 10 citizens)

Medicare: Bulk-Billing

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

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

The need to keep bulk billing for the young families and communities of West Sydney.

We therefore pray that the House opposes the introduction of an upfront fee for GP visits.

by Mr Murphy (from 183 citizens)

Telecommunications: Mobile Phone Towers

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the threat to the public interest and health from the failure of the Telecommunications Code of Practice 1997 to include a requirement for all telecommunications carriers to co-locate their facilities away from schools and residential property.

We believe the extension proposed for the tower at 315 Concord Road, Concord west is inappropriate as the location of the existing base tower is unsuitable for the following reasons:

1. Radiation and proximity of tower to local pre-schools and people’s homes, and
2. Visual impact from local residential properties on the vista of the adjoining open space. We believe the Government should protect residential areas across Australia from exposure to electromagnetic radiation (EMR) generated by mobile phone towers.

We also request that the City of Canada Bay Council should consider ‘protection of a view’ as part of their general responsibilities under section 79C, especially since the Drummoyne Comprehensive DCP, under the same council jurisdiction, makes specific provision for this. We do not want the extension of the tower to be approved until the existing tower is relocated to a mutually acceptable location.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House protect the public interest and public health by amending the Telecommunications Act (1997) and the Telecommunications Code of Practice 1997 to include a "requirement for all telecommunications carriers to ensure these facilities, including those previously erected without community notification, are co-located with existing facilities away from schools and residential property.

by Mr Murphy (from 168 citizens)

Roads: Funding

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House: The urgent need to upgrade the Ipswich Motorway. We therefore pray that the House will urgently provide the necessary funding to have the upgrade implemented.

by Mr Ripoll (from 357 citizens)

Family Services: Child Care

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

This petition of citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to our serious concerns about the current child care system, particularly the low status and standing of workers in the child care field and their appalling wages and conditions. This is despite numerous reports about this issue that the Federal Government has ignored. Qualified child care workers are needed to run quality child care services for our children - our country’s most precious resource - and urgent action is required in order to recruit and retain staff in this industry.

Your petitioners therefore request that the House turns its urgent attention to addressing the chronic shortage of qualified workers in the industry and ensuring they are given adequate recognition and reward for their important role in caring for our children.

by Ms Roxon (from 129 citizens)

Immigration: Asylum Seekers

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

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

• There are still nearly 200 kids held in immigration detention in Australia and Nauru. Most have been there for over two years. A detention centre is no place for children to grow up.
• We therefore pray that the House asks the Minister for Immigration to exercise her power to immediately release these children and their families from behind the razor wire.

by Ms Roxon (from 97 citizens)

Petitions received.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

International Day of Reflection for Rwanda

Mr Danby (Melbourne Ports) (3.28 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) this year is the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide in 1994;

(b) around 800,000 Rwandans were killed in 100 days in April, May and June 1994 after President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane was shot down over Kigali;
(c) the United Nations has designated 7 April 2004 as International Day of Reflection for Rwanda and in 2004 hosted a conference on the prevention of genocide and a week of memorial services; and

(d) Rwandan officials asked all countries to hold a minute’s silence on 7 April to mark the anniversary; and

(2) calls on the Government to officially recognise 7 April as International Day of Reflection for Rwanda.

The SPEAKER—The member for Melbourne Ports has the call. I will seek a seconder of the resolution at the conclusion of his remarks, if that meets with his approval.

Mr DANBY—Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Ntarama Church outside the Rwandan capital, Kigali, is a stark reminder of the Rwandan genocide that took place 10 years ago. Allow me to quote from the diary of my friend the former opposition candidate Andrew McLeod, who was there:

The militias fired machine guns and threw hand grenades into the church until all were dead. They then forced more people in and killed them, then forced more, and still more, until body lay upon body.

When I visited—
said McLeod in his diary—
a considerable time later, the stench of decay remained evident in every breath I took.

Inside the church was a horrific scene of corpse upon corpse. Their empty eye sockets stared directly at the window I looked through, and penetrated my soul with just one question: Why? Why did we let this happen again?

Between 500,000 and one million people were killed. The world could have stopped it, for we had advance notice of this killing. General Romeo Dallaire, the UN commander, faxed the UN undersecretary-general, pleading for an extra 2,500 soldiers to stop the butchery that he knew was being planned. The world and the United Nations, Australia included, did nothing. We as part of the international community and as signatories to the genocide convention, we who have taken on responsibility through that convention to punish and prevent genocide, we who sit here as legislators: why is it that we failed to respond?

After the Holocaust we said, ‘Never again.’ Yet when given advance warning, when given a test of our resolve, we, the world, failed to act. Perpetrators of genocide intend to kill all people of a particular group, not only to destroy their culture and to force them to flee elsewhere but also to kill them and all like them—to let them and their kind exist nowhere. This is why, learning from the tragic experiences of the Jewish people, the international community rightly called this act the ‘crime of all crimes’ and required all nations to punish and prevent its occurrence.

We should do more than just mark and commemorate this 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide; we should commemorate the failings of our forebears and learn from their mistakes. In 1945 we said, ‘Never again.’ In 1994 we turned in shame from our failings in Rwanda and said nothing. Now, in 2004, we make this commemoration. The words ‘never again’ may sound hollow, but today—especially with the developing mass murder in Darfur by agents of the Sudanese government—we must mean it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Is the motion seconded?

Ms Vamvakinou—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mrs ELSON (Forde) (3.32 p.m.)—I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion moved by the member for Melbourne Ports. Those 100 days from 7 April to 17 July 1994 are a very dark chapter in the history of mankind. It is incomprehensible that in this modern day and age the world appeared to stand still while Hutu extremists
murdered at least 800,000 men, women and children—mostly Tutsis but also moderate Hutus. The acts of violence carried out on the civilian population, including the systematic rape of women, left thousands of children orphaned and a country torn apart. Around 10 per cent of the Rwandan population perished in those 100 days. Hundreds of thousands more fled their homeland and met with the danger and disease of life in refugee camps along the border. It is a sad indictment of the United Nations and the civilised world that intervention did not take place in a timely and more effective way.

However, I think it is also important that anger and blame be directed where it is most deserved: those Rwandan Hutu military leaders that drove the massacre. It is difficult for a nation such as ours to even begin to comprehend that these men could incite their soldiers to commit such horrific crimes against their fellow countrymen. I do not pretend to know the ethnic and tribal tensions that led to or fuelled this horrible violence; I only know that the actions that took place against civilians—many of them women and children—were so horrific that no amount of history, hatred or anger can begin to attempt to justify them.

Today I want to urge the Rwandan government to continue their determined work with the International Criminal Tribunal to bring to justice those responsible for the genocide. Only then can they hope to bring home the many thousands of displaced Rwandans that still fear returning to their homeland. It is ironic that, 10 years on, the world is so united in its belief that not enough was done to stop the genocide. It is clear that the United Nations, which withdrew most of the peacekeeping forces it had in Rwanda at the time, did not act decisively or responsibly. These are complex issues and I do not want to make comparisons with current world events, but the United Nations in action has since been the spark for unilateral action in Bosnia and, I believe, in Iraq. If one lesson was learnt from Rwanda it was that evil prevails when good people do nothing. I think that simple truth speaks volumes more than all the analysis and political game playing.

I did want to take the opportunity in the short time I have left to recognise the efforts of an exceptional Australian who went over to Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide to help Care Australia with their valuable work. Former Queensland senator and government minister, John Herron, who is also a talented doctor, spent six weeks in a refugee camp just north of Goma, in Zaire, next to the Rwandan border. John Herron is a very special man who was deeply touched by the human suffering that he encountered in that time. Having spent six weeks working long hours, administering vital health care, he was distraught by the scope of the situation, and I saw personally how upset he was when he had to return home while there was still much to be done. The fact is he did a great deal and he directly touched the lives of many people so hopelessly affected by the violence. I know John would want me to thank and recognise the many Australians who helped and gave their time to assist Care Australia’s efforts in Rwanda.

I join with members on both sides of the House in recognising the horrible human toll of those dreadful 100 days in 1994. I pass our thoughts and condolences to the families of those directly affected and our sincere hope that the nation and people of Rwanda will find a lasting peace through political stability and the rule of law. I thank the member for Melbourne Ports for moving this very important motion which gave me and others in this House the opportunity to speak here today.
Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (3.36 p.m.)—I endorse the motion. It covers the events that followed the assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana and only concluded with the victory of the Rwanda Patriotic Front on 4 July 1994. The member for Forde attempted to take a bit of a shot at the United Nations and to justify, in a sense, pre-emptive attacks as the only way one can solve these problems. Certainly, the United Nations has been a bit more forthcoming about its failures in Rwanda than some individual countries. Amongst those that have particularly been slated for their performance on the ground are the United States, France and Belgium.

It is interesting to note that, as I said, the United Nations has been very much in the forefront, saying, ‘Yes, there were failures there—very real failures.’ But much of the history of this matter goes back to the Belgian colonial presence—the divisive manner in which they handled the Hutu and Tutsi populations. It led to the murder of between 800,000 to one million people. In its statement of 7 April, the United Nations—the force that has put this day of remembrance on the agenda—stated:

Neither the United Nations—
nor others—
paid enough attention to the gathering signs of disaster. Still less did we take timely action.

It said that as a result of this there was a need to have a reaction to these matters in future. It stressed the need to prevent armed conflict, protect civilians and end impunity. Those were the landmark verdicts of the International Criminal Tribunal on these matters. Addressing the issues of rape as a facet of genocide, the guilt of journalists and the charging of a head of state is a first. This has been actioned by the UN—initiated by that body as a reaction to its and the international community’s failure. It also spoke recently of the need for early and clear warning. It mentioned its own work with the commission, special rapporteurs and the need for civil groups to be consulted, and it talked about the UN’s own lack of analysis and facilities for that. It also spoke of swift and decisive action.

The member for Melbourne Ports referred to the current situation in Darfur in Sudan. In recent years, the Sudanese regime has managed to ingratiate itself a bit more with Western nations by its repudiation of its previous connections with international terrorism. It is interesting to note that that and the availability of oil in that country have put it now very much in the international good books. But clearly at the moment, because of its concern about the escalation of civil conflict in part of Sudan, it is going about a process which has been described by many commentators, in the United States particularly, as similar to genocide. It is necessary that the UN and the international community, as the member for Melbourne Ports said, highlight what is going on there at the moment.

The situation in Rwanda meant that very few could walk away without blame. We must recognise the efforts of a minority of Hutu moderates to stem the genocidal attacks upon their Tutsi compatriots. Many moderate Hutus were slaughtered. Their families were killed because of their refusal to participate in this genocide. Amongst those that have gained particular international coverage is the Catholic Church in that country. There were a number of instances where leading members of the church—priests, nuns et cetera—participated in these outrages. People who sought protection inside church grounds were burned alive. Many of these church members are now facing charges.

Equally, journalists on national radio were very much in the forefront of whipping up hysteria. It is clear that, whilst there are some
murky details around the murder of the president and his Burundi equivalent, much planning went into this. For many months in advance, Hutu extremists were obviously in operation preparing to slaughter people in their villages, people they had been friends of and people with whom their families intermarried. Many politicians in the country were part of this process. I salute the United Nations and I salute the member for Melbourne Ports in making sure that this genocide is remembered and that the international community at least attempts to avoid a recurrence of it.

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (3.41 p.m.)—I want to join my colleagues in the parliament here today and pay tribute to the motion moved by the member for Melbourne Ports. I thank him for his concern on this very important issue. He brings to the attention of the House and of the people of Australia the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The member for Melbourne Ports is a man of great compassion and integrity. I also wish to echo the sentiments of my colleague the member for Forde. She spoke of former Queensland senator John Herron, who visited Rwanda and saw for himself the consequences of the terrible deeds that were done in Rwanda. He is one amongst few Australians who have been to that part of the world to see the tragedy and the terror. I want to acknowledge him in this parliament.

This year, 2004, marks the 10th anniversary of one of the darkest episodes in modern history. This is the year that we remember one of the most shocking of recent events—the Rwandan genocides of 1994. It is estimated that between half a million to one million Rwandans were killed in the most brutal and inhumane circumstances during the months of April, May and June. The Economist magazine recently referred to it as ‘the purest genocide since 1945, and perhaps the single greatest act of evil since Pol Pot turned Cambodia into a killing field’.

The member for Melbourne Ports talked about the great war of 1914-18, which was supposed to be the war that would end all wars. But history tells us that we had the Second World War, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, the killing fields of Cambodia, the Bosnian war and, more recently, the Iraq war. These are examples of man’s inability to get along, to accept differences and to live together. The genocide of 1994 in Rwanda stands as a beacon not of all things good about humanity but of all things dark.

We have all heard the horrific tales of men, women and children hacked to death with machetes and burnt to death in churches and women raped, tortured and brutalised as if they were animals. This systemic state-sponsored and organised genocide saw people bring terrible violence upon their own neighbours, their own relatives and their own families. There was no escape for the victims—not from their leaders, churches, heads of religion, the police and armed forces that were supposed to protect them, teachers or public servants. People of all walks of life were perpetrators and they were victims. Once the violence was quashed by rebel forces that later formed the government that rules Rwanda today, a small sense of stability was brought to that part of the world. But it was too late for those who were killed, those who were tortured and those who will have scars on their bodies and their minds until the day they die.

I want to echo the sentiments of this parliament and this country that it is important for good people to act. It is important for all of us not to just stand in the parliament or in the community and accept the good things in life—the positives that we are so privileged to have. Let us all come together; let us all make an effort. If we are a single person in
the community, let us reach out to help our neighbour. If we are in this parliament, let us all reach out not only to work for our constituency and our country but also to play a part as a nation in the international community. We cannot stand alone. We are one country in the region; we are one country in the world. It is important for all of us to make a contribution to the world in which we live because, but for the grace of God, Rwanda could be our country.

It is so easy to take for granted our peace and stability and our political system and democracy. I encourage all those who have the capacity through their minds and bodies to make that difference to their local community and to the world around us. Again I want to echo the sentiments of all colleagues in the parliament that it is important for Australia to play its part as a middle-ranking power in world affairs and to make a contribution that will carry our world forward in peace and stability and to guarantee lives of some prosperity for future generations.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (3.46 p.m.)—In a recent interparliamentary assessment of the number of female parliamentarians across the world, Rwanda topped the list with the highest number of women members of parliament—some 49 per cent of its total parliament. In normal circumstances this would be a significant achievement; however, the high number of women in the Rwandan parliament is also the inadvertent result of a profound tragedy.

At the recent IPU conference in Mexico, I had the opportunity to meet with members of the Rwandan parliament. In fact, over a women’s dinner one night, I congratulated my Rwandan colleague on her country’s topping the list of female representation in national parliaments around the world. Her response was one of mixed feelings. She indicated to me that the genocide that took place 10 years ago killed off a large number of men, women and children but especially men. As a woman in the parliament she felt that the women in particular are responsible for helping to rebuild their shattered country but, in particular, to take care of the many young children who were left without families and are effectively orphans, needing the care of their country and other people around them.

My sadness for the people of Rwanda is shared by many of my colleagues in this House, and I thank the member for Melbourne Ports for giving us the opportunity to speak out about Rwanda. He, by virtue of his birth, has inherited the legacy of another human tragedy of catastrophic proportions—one that we must never forget. Ten years ago I, like the rest of the world community, watched in horror as the genocide unravelled before us on our television sets each night, because that is literally how it was conveyed to us. We heard that in 100 days 800,000 to one million people were slaughtered in an act of genocide by the Hutus against the Tutsis. It was a heart-wrenching experience, with heart-wrenching images and stories of orphaned children wandering alone.

In particular I remember the story of an infant found lying by its dead mother’s side. That struck a deep chord with me because at the time I was nursing my young son. I remember my anger and frustration watching the inaction of the world’s leaders as the slaughter continued and was allowed to continue. What could I possibly have said to my colleague from Rwanda who sat across from me at dinner some 10 years later? I offered her my sympathy and solidarity and suggested that maybe our two countries should work closer to see how we can provide better assistance for her people today.

The United Nations International Day of Reflection for Rwanda is an important step
in the right direction. It is critical that we reflect upon the horror and tragedy of genocide. While the Rwandans who organised and executed the genocide must bear full responsibility for the carnage, we must understand that genocide anywhere implicates everyone. As Kofi Annan recently acknowledged, by our apathy we indirectly contributed to the slaughter. However, actions speak louder than words, and more than reflection is needed to ensure that such a tragedy never recurs.

Our world is full of contradictions, but in remembering the Rwandan holocaust I would like to make a few points that I think are relevant as we contemplate what happened and why the world allowed the genocide in Rwanda to take place. It is my view and that of many in the international community that, unlike Kosovo or Kuwait for example, Rwanda did not have any financial or political incentive to encourage intervention from the international political leadership.

Of course, we can cite many examples of such international contradictions, but if we are to learn from the tragedy of Rwanda we need to be bold and honest enough to recognise and accept our failings. Yes, we have all resolved not to repeat the shameful passivity of 1994, but this resolve must be backed by action and commitment to action. In particular, powerful nations such as the United States and those in Europe should deal or at least be seen to deal a fair and even hand when responding to world crisis and conflict. The people of Africa are no less deserving of international protection than other people in other parts of the world.

Returning to my colleague from Rwanda, following that dinner I resolved to stay in touch with her. I thought that at least at this level I could make some small contribution. As small as that contribution is, I would like to convey to this House that her hopes for the future of her country and the hopes of the thousands of orphans depend on her efforts and, indeed, our efforts to help them find some place in the world. Personally I hope that we can find better ways to reach out and to compensate her people for our failure to act at the precise time when our actions could have saved so many lives. (Time expired)

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (3.51 p.m.)—In December 1995 I travelled through parts of Rwanda with Andre Le Sage—a friend of mine who was with Medecins Sans Frontieres. He was helping Rwanda to rebuild by providing aid and the basic standards of life and medical care to people who had just passed through a genocide—800,000 Rwandans were murdered, their lives extinguished, and a country ripped apart. More significant to me than those numbers was the fact that the very house in which we stayed had seen all of its family members exterminated. Mother and father and a host of children were taken onto the lawns and hacked to pieces—their bones were scattered throughout the compound. That was a story that was repeated throughout Rwanda.

What happened in that house in the city of Kigali in Rwanda was seen in advance. It was not a surprise to the world; it was known in advance that the risk was there. It was understood as it continued but it was condemned in hindsight. To a certain extent, the lesson has been learned—we have a tribunal for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. We had the ability to act but, at the highest level, we chose not to act. What occurred in Rwanda was a catastrophic failure of collective will, with 800,000 individual tragedies as a result.

In 1993 I worked with the United Nations in Geneva helping to chronicle the abuses as they came out of Bosnia. At the time, the
European Union said that it was their responsibility and nothing happened; 250,000 souls were extinguished as the European partners debated whose responsibility it was. In 1998 I was part of Australia’s electoral monitoring mission to Cambodia and I visited the killing fields in a country that saw up to two million people exterminated. Again, we sat silent, we were passive, we observed and we did nothing.

I come to the House and the work that I do with a very clear belief that there are cases where humanitarian intervention is justified. As unseemly, unfortunate and as much against what we would hope to do, intervention is nevertheless necessary. The principles for intervention are that, firstly, there has to be a case of overwhelming atrocity; secondly, there must be the exhaustion of all measures; and thirdly, there must be an achievability of outcome. These principles are not unique to this House or to me; they are principles that I learned and adopted from the events of 1993, 1994 and my own experiences in Cambodia in 1998. They say that sovereignty is not inviolable where the very essence of humanity is being destroyed and ripped away. We failed in those three examples, yet throughout much of the last decade we have had an ongoing genocide of the Marsh Arabs, the Kurds and sections of the Shiite populations in Iraq. We have been faced with another choice as to whether we would stand passively by or whether we would act—albeit far too late, because I wish the actions were taken earlier.

Against that background of continued genocide and human rights atrocities, I am proud of the fact that we have taken action and not allowed the tragedies of Rwanda, Cambodia and Bosnia to occur again. There is much more to be done. It will never be easy and there will always be matters for judgment, but my pledge when I left Rwanda was not to sit idly by as these things occurred. There are other areas where these principles must be put into action, but the lessons from these countries is that, if we are passive and silent, human abuses of the highest levels will occur. We cannot idly stand by again.

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

The Economy

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (3.57 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) commends the Government and the Treasurer on the strong performance of the Australian economy, in particular:

(a) the strong rate of growth of the Australian economy which is currently running at 4%;

(b) the low rate of inflation, currently just 2.4%; and

(c) the low unemployment rate, currently just 5.7%; and

(2) recognises that the Government has, through careful economic management, given the Australian economy the strength to withstand:

(a) the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997-1998; and

(b) the slowing of the world economy and the recession in the United States of America in 2001-2002; and

(3) understands that the Government has, through effective government policies:

(a) overseen the creation of more than 1.3 million jobs since this government came to office;

(b) achieved a massive reduction of mortgage interest rates, which were 17.1% under Labor and are currently just 6.5% under this government; and

(c) has achieved the repayment of more than $67 billion of Labor’s debt.
It is in the area of economic management that the contrast between Labor and the coalition is at its starkest. The economic policies of the Latham-Crean opposition are unknown, untested and unresolved. What we do know is that they do not have high priorities in the opposition. Reading books to your children and soft options are the province of the Leader of the Opposition, but it is in the tough area of economic management that the Australian community looks to the federal government to ensure that employment is kept high and inflation and interest rates are kept low, and to ensure that we do not accumulate excessive government debt.

We have been fortunate in this country to have the Howard-Costello team to manage the economy—to make the tough decisions, to implement the GST, to ensure that we repaid the $70 billion of debt that the previous Labor government incurred and to ensure that the growth rate of this country is amongst the highest of the OECD countries. To return to the days of Whitlam—a particular hero of the Leader of the Opposition—when government debt ballooned, when fundamentals of strong economic management disappeared out the window and inflation rates leapt alarmingly, would be a tragedy for this country.

These things do not happen by chance. Despite the challenge of the economic downturn in Asia, September 11, October 12 and SARS, Australia’s economy remains amongst the best performing in the world. Currently, the national rate of economic growth for this financial year stands strong at 3.75 per cent, despite the worldwide economic downturn. If we look at some of the key indicators, the success of the Treasurer and the contrast with Labor becomes significant. During the eight years of coalition government, growth has never gone below 1.4 per cent. However, under the Labor government of the early nineties, we saw rates at three per cent. In terms of the OECD growth rates for the December quarter 2003, we rank No. 3 amongst OECD members and are only surpassed by Korea and Japan.

Our inflation rates have remained low and are currently running at two per cent. We are now seeing the slowest rise in the cost of living in four years. This is a good indicator of a strong economy, which is right within the Treasurer’s target range. Inflation is expected to remain low in the medium term, with the government target being between two and three per cent. During Labor’s time in government, inflation peaked at 11.1 per cent and averaged 5.2 per cent. Under the Howard government, unemployment dropped to 5.6 per cent—the lowest it had been in 23 years. Our current 5.7 per cent unemployment rate is a great example of good management and job creation. The Labor government in 1992 saw these figures peak at 10.9 per cent, with there being almost one million Australians out of work.

Our response to the Asian crisis has left our nation in the best possible shape, when considering other nations in the region. Japan, one of the fastest growing economies in the region before the crisis, has been left decimated with just over 0.2 per cent economic growth for last year. Australia reported over 3.5 per cent growth for the 2003 calendar year, placing us amongst the fastest growing nations in the Pacific Rim. Despite a clear and obvious downturn in the world economy, Australia has managed to weather the storm very well.

Job creation has been a top priority for this government. In six months, the government has managed to create more jobs—in fact, twice as many jobs as Labor managed to create in its last six years in government. Through the creation of more than 1.3 million new jobs since 1996, the unemployment rate has been reduced from 8.2 per cent to
5.7 per cent. By contrast, the Labor government in 1992 saw unemployment rates peak at 10.9 per cent, with there being almost one million Australians out of work. In the last 12 months 260,000 new jobs have been created, 85 per cent of which are full time. This takes the current employment rate down to 5.6 per cent, which is the lowest unemployment rate in 23 years.

When the coalition came to government mortgage interest rates were at 10.5 per cent; currently they are at 7.05 per cent. This results in an interest saving of $545 each month on the average new mortgage. Since coming to power, the coalition has managed to keep mortgage interest rates to an average of 7.15 per cent. Under Labor control, we saw this figure average at 12.75 per cent and peak at 17 per cent. The coalition’s assistance to first home buyers by way of a $7,000 grant cannot go unmentioned. Then of course there is the question of Labor’s debt: $96 billion. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Bartlett—I second the motion.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Burke) (4.03 p.m.)—I hope the member for Macquarie understands why I could not second this motion on the economy which has been moved by the member for Cook. But it is an important motion to speak to because it contains some significant matters. The first thing to note about it is the lack of any acknowledgement of the great work delivered by the Hawke-Keating economic and social reforms of the eighties and nineties. Perhaps even more interesting is the lack of any acknowledgment of the Prime Minister’s role in the so-called achievements of this government—this mean and tricky government. So there is in this motion a very interesting lack of reference to the Prime Minister, the member for Bennelong.

Let me first turn to this serious omission, this ungenerous capacity of government members to fail to recognise the causal link between Labor’s economic reforms and subsequent concrete benefits for the nation. The fact is that Labor built the modern economy, and it was built during the Hawke-Keating period. Every independent observer and commentator has admitted that point. It is axiomatic that fundamental change occurred in our economy not when the member for Bennelong, the now Prime Minister, was the Treasurer in the Fraser years—it never occurred in that period—but in the period of 1983 with the election of the Hawke government. After seven years of inertia, when Malcolm Fraser and John Howard presided over the nation, the Hawke-Keating era changed Australia for the better. It opened up the economy. By that I mean that governments in turn floated the dollar, deregulated the finance industry, introduced compulsory universal superannuation—that was the greatest contribution to national savings—more than doubled the retention of students to year 12 and above, introduced enterprise bargaining but with proper safeguards, and indeed provided proper funding for research and innovation. During that period there was a proper industry policy—that is, a capacity for government to intervene when there was a need to intervene. However it is axiomatic, as I say, that those things occurred after the current Prime Minister, the member for Bennelong, was Treasurer for I think five years. It took a Labor government to bring those things to bear.

While I am referring to the Fraser years, I must say that it galled me today to see the Prime Minister wanting to get up and talk about deficits—because he presided over a huge budget deficit before the advent of the Hawke period. He seems to have a statute of limitations on fiscal crimes. Clearly when he was Treasurer he had a budget deficit, and he
did not acknowledge that fact today in question time. But it is on the record that Howard, when Treasurer, presided over budget deficits.

I think it is fair to say that there is good news in the motion. Indeed, unemployment has been low, although long-term unemployment is still a problem, and I think it is important to concede that interest rates have remained relatively low. I recognise these are the good things. But the Treasurer and the Prime Minister, instead of being consumed with leadership tensions, should be concentrating on problems confronting our economy. That is, they should be confronting the problem of the housing bubble and falling house affordability; they should be tackling the problems of low national savings, which is a critical issue. The current account deficit has blown out under this government and, indeed, as I have said, there has been a decline in national savings.

So there are some significant problems yet to be properly solved by this government, and I think one of the reasons for that is the great divide that is occurring between the Treasurer and the Prime Minister. Therefore, it is quite interesting to note that the Prime Minister was not referred to once in this motion moved by government members. This motion is another reminder of the divide within the coalition—some members being supporters of the Prime Minister, others being fans of the Treasurer. Until both the Prime Minister and the Treasurer come clean and tell the Australian public the truth about their intentions, I do not think those economic problems will ever be solved by this government. The fact is that the Treasurer has not the courage to challenge the PM. Everyone knows he is a Kmart Keating. He did not deliver the fundamental changes that were made to this economy. He has imposed a tax. He made small business people tax collectors in their own country. That is his greatest indictment—he made small business people tax collectors in their own country. That is the one legacy he has left for small business, and he has presided over the benefits that are the result of the fundamental changes that occurred in the Hawke-Keating period. (Time expired)

Mr BARTLETT (Macquarie) (4.08 p.m.)—It is interesting to hear the speaker opposite scratching around for something to say and at any cost trying to avoid the substance of the topic. Let me remind him and others opposite of the facts again with a simple comparison of the performance of the Howard government in delivering strong economic conditions with the performance of the last Labor government. On almost any economic indicator, Australians are now far better off than they were under the former government. Unemployment is now 5.6 per cent. Over 13 years of Labor it averaged 8.5 per cent. Inflation is now two per cent. For a full 13 years under Labor it averaged 5.2 per cent. Mortgage interest rates are now 7.05 per cent. For 13 years of hard Labor, mortgage interest rates averaged 12.75 per cent and reached almost 18 per cent. Government debt left by Labor in 1996 was $96 billion. It is now down to less than $25 billion because of the effort of this government in paying back more than $70 billion worth of that debt run up by Labor. The strong economic growth this year is at 3.75 per cent and is predicted to run at 3½ per cent next year. We have had strong economic growth for 8½ years, despite the Asian financial crisis; despite the stagnation of the Japanese economy, one of our major trading partners; despite the US recession; despite stagnation in many other world economies; and despite the drought. We have had strong economic growth in Australia that has backed up and supported strong employment growth.

I want to make three simple points about this strong economic management and these
strong figures that are obvious to anyone who wants to look at it even half objectively. The first point is that this is not an accident. This strong performance has come about because of the performance of a government that has the courage to make the tough decisions, that is not beholden to the trade union movement and that is willing to do what is in the long-term interests of the Australian people. One of the clear hallmarks of the coalition government has been its strong economic management. The contrast with Labor could not be clearer. We have been reminded by the member for Cook of the financial and economic debacle that was the Whitlam government—legendary in its financial incompetence. We have seen the mismanagement of the other Labor government that followed—the Hawke-Keating government. In the last five years of the last Labor government, they averaged deficits of $14 billion a year. They ran up $70 billion worth of debt in five years. If a government today were to run a deficit of $2 billion or $3 billion, there would be an outcry. They averaged deficits of $14 billion a year for five consecutive years and left us with a massive debt. What about the recession that we supposedly had to have—the recession that callously put one million people in the unemployment queues? What about the crippling high interest rates that sent many businesses broke and caused many Australian families to lose their own homes? The contrast could not be clearer.

The second point I want to make is that this is not just economic theory; this does affect the quality of people’s lives. People now have jobs. Over 1.3 million jobs have been created under this government. Our kids have a chance when they leave school of getting a secure job. We now have almost treble the number of apprenticeships that we had when Labor was in office. Real minimum wages have actually risen by nearly 11 per cent under this government, whereas they fell under the Labor government. Our families now have a chance to pay off their home loans. On a home loan of $200,000 they are now saving $575 a month on what they would have been repaying under Labor.

The third and final point I make here is that all of these gains would be seriously under threat if Labor were to be elected. It would be like letting a kindergarten class loose in a lolly shop. With their economic profligacy and mismanagement we would immediately have pressure for rising taxes. We have already had a commitment from the Labor Party to impose a national payroll tax, we have already had a commitment to add an extra $500 million worth of taxes to one of Australia’s major export industries—the mining industry—and we have had a refusal to rule out a raft of other taxes. The accomplishments and achievements of the coalition government would be seriously threatened by a Labor government. The risks of Labor’s economic mismanagement do not bear contemplation. For the security of our families and the future of our young people, it is unthinkable to consider a return to Labor’s mismanagement. (Time expired)

Ms HOARE (Charlton) (4.13 p.m.)—When the member for Cook raised this private members’ business earlier this month, I could only imagine at that time that it was because he believed that the Howard government should be congratulated for Australia’s current economic situation. What has the Howard government got to be proud of? The coalition members can use figures that show the economy running at four per cent, a rate of inflation of 2.4 per cent and a current unemployment rate of 5.7 per cent. Why shouldn’t Australia’s economy be producing these kinds of figures? They are in line with current world trends. It is not because of the Howard government’s excellent management, as they would lead people to believe. It is only to be expected. Australians have the
right to expect their economy to keep in line with the rest of the world. But, in reality, these are just figures. They do not mean anything if the average Australian is finding it harder and harder to afford to live. The truth is that Australian families are paying more tax, paying more for services and getting less. They work hard and they deserve a financial reward, but they are not getting it from this government.

This motion also raises the issue of how the government and the Treasurer have repaid $67 billion of debt. The bulk of the reduction in Commonwealth government debt has been achieved through the sale of assets, rather than through running sizeable underlying cash surpluses.

**Government members interjecting—**

**Mr Zahra**—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order, going to the conduct of the House. Opposition members have been courteous to government members during this debate, and they should extend the same courtesy.

**Mr Hardgrave interjecting—**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Jenkins)—The member will resume his seat. The minister will stop interjecting. The member for Charlton has the call.

**Ms HOARE**—While the sale of assets has significantly reduced net debt, it has had a minimal impact on the Commonwealth’s net worth. While the government’s fiscal framework, which followed on from the Keating Labor government, contributed to good economic policy in its initial years, the Howard and Costello team has done nothing to improve economic policies since. The focus on net debt rather than net worth has been widely criticised, especially for distorting the incentives for determining whether assets should be sold. The shift from ‘net debt’ to the ‘net asset’ position in the secondary objectives in recent budgets recognises the limitations of the use of net debt.

The surplus that the Prime Minister likes to boast about would have been better spent on providing much-needed government services. The provision of government services would have encouraged strong economic growth rather than building up the finances to fund the government’s $57 billion worth of election sweeteners, as recently announced in the budget. The Prime Minister and his government have abused their positions by holding these funds back from those in need. These funds could have been used to reduce poverty and financial disadvantage in our society. Poverty is a significant and growing problem in Australia. A whole-of-community approach is needed to tackle poverty. The $57 billion could have been used to develop a comprehensive set of poverty reduction targets across all areas of government. Issues that could have been addressed include: Indigenous disadvantage; living standards, income poverty and income inequality; unemployment, long-term unemployment and employment security; skill and educational participation, attainment and competence; health status and access to health services; access to affordable housing; and available and affordable child care, aged care and disability services.

How can the Prime Minister ignore all taxpayers earning less than $52,000 a year? Four out of five taxpayers earn less than $52,000 and will miss out on the Prime Minister’s generous tax cuts. I have constituents who work hard to make a living—examples of these are shop assistants and child-care workers, who have demanding jobs—yet, because they earn less than $52,000, the government says they are not entitled to tax cuts. Hardworking families need tax relief as well. Australian families are doing it tough. They are constantly under financial stress. Families are saving less and spending more
than they earn, just to make ends meet. The more families try to overcome their grim financial situation, the more the Howard government gives them to be concerned about. Families are now being asked to pay even more to see a GP and to educate their children.

If the member for Cook and his colleagues would like to congratulate a government for effective financial policies, it should be the Labor governments of the 1980s and the early 1990s. It was Labor who formulated the policies to lead Australia into the 21st century and modernise the economy. However, more needs to be done. Australian families need more money in their pockets. This could be achieved by better services and much-needed tax relief. By doing this, Australia is certain of a bright future. To be certain of a bright future, Australians need to elect a Latham Labor government.

**Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (4.18 p.m.)**—Remember the days when Australia used to lag at the bottom of the OECD tables, often behind Turkey, on labour productivity, unemployment and inflation? We now have a unique trifecta whereby economic growth is greater than three per cent, inflation is under three per cent and unemployment is below six per cent. You would have to go back to the late 1960s or early 1970s to find a situation when the Australian economy has had that conjunction of very important economic statistics. Also, it has been something that has been achieved, as the member for Cook highlighted in this very important motion, in a very uncertain world climate. In this period that the Howard government has been in office, there has been the Asian economic and financial crisis; there has been a downturn in the United States economy. Yet the Australian economy has continued to grow. It has been the longest period of growth, going at least as far back as the 1950s or 1960s, and it is expected to continue.

The forecasts in the budget expect economic growth to be 3½ per cent over 2004-05. It is also expected that it will be more balanced as exports recover. Inflation, which is two per cent now for the year ending in the March quarter, is expected to be less than two per cent—1½ per cent—by the end of the year, and 2½ per cent by the end of 2005. Government debt, which was $96 billion when the Labor Party left office, or 18.2 per cent of GDP, is now just under $25 billion under this government, or 2.9 percent of GDP. That is important because it means a significantly reduced interest bill in the federal budget. It has allowed this government to spend more—specifically in areas like health, family and community services, and child care—because we are paying so much less on interest payments on our government debt. Unemployment, at 5.6 per cent, is the lowest since 1981.

This government—and the Treasurer, especially—has presided over nine budgets. We inherited, initially, a $10 billion budget deficit. We now have a $2.4 billion budget surplus. Of those nine budgets, seven have been budgets in surplus. If the Labor Party wins the next election, we will have as Treasurer the member for Hotham. The member for Hotham was a cabinet minister during the Hawke and Keating governments. In the six budgets during which he was a cabinet minister, there was only one with a wafer-thin surplus of 0.1 per cent of GDP. The rest of those budgets were $11½ billion in deficit, $17 billion in deficit, $17 billion in deficit, $13 billion in deficit and $10 billion in deficit. Remember, these are the dollars of the early 1990s so it would be so much more now.

If you look at international comparisons, you see that the Europeans are running
budget deficits of 2½ per cent of GDP. The OECD average is 3.7 per cent of GDP. The United States is running at five per cent of GDP, and in Japan it is seven per cent of GDP. These are budget deficits. Australia is running a budget surplus. If you look at government debt, you see that Australia’s government debt is 2.9 per cent of GDP. Compare that with Japan, where it is about 90 per cent of GDP. Germany, the European Union, the OECD average and the United States are all at about 50 per cent of GDP and rising. We have seen government debt decrease from $5,200 per person to $1,200 per person over the time of this government.

The important thing about economic management is that it is not—as the previous speaker suggested—something where we are just following international trends. That is rubbish. We took hard decisions to get the budget back into surplus. Many of those decisions were opposed by the Labor Party, and most of these economic outcomes are put at risk by the advent of a Labor government. Economic management is not something that is easy; it is something that is hard. It is not something you can take for granted. We have a proven track record under Prime Minister Howard and under Treasurer Costello, and it is important—so that people are able to get jobs, people are able to get on with their lives—that this continue.

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (4.23 p.m.)—I am glad to speak in this debate on the private member’s motion moved by the member for Cook. Bless their little hearts, you have got to love the people on the other side, haven’t you? The member for Cook was not in this House during the 13 years of the last Labor government, when a fundamental, major set of circumstances faced the then government in economic terms: the collapse in the terms of trade in 1985-86, the world recession of 1987—

Mr Bartlett—The recession we had to have?

Mr HATTON—and the Howard recession of 1982-83. In the whole history of this Commonwealth, the first government in the first 90 years of the history of the Commonwealth to bring in a surplus was a Labor government. It was in the period of the Hawke-Keating government. There were four surplus budgets. No coalition government—from 1901 on, until Labor put in a surplus budget—achieved a surplus budget. Labor was the first, and it was done four times.

When Labor came to power in March 1983, Labor inherited a situation very directly from the then Treasurer, the member for Bennelong, who did not tell the truth about the budgetary situation. He argued, just prior to the election in March 1983, that we were looking at a deficit of only $4 billion. It was in fact $9.6 billion. A week before the election he conceded that it might be $6 billion. In 1998 dollars, $9.6 billion in 1983 terms is $26 billion. Put another eight years onto it and we are looking at $30 billion to $35 billion. Of the debt that has been repaid by this government, a third to half of it is the debt—in one simple year, in one budget—that was there because of the member for Bennelong.

We were first in surpluses. Secondly, we had to deal with the major and fundamental problem of the debt that we had to recover from the recession that John Howard gave us in 1982-83. That was compounded by what happened in 1985-86. Everyone who was associated with it—and I was, because from the start of 1985 I worked for the then Treasurer—knows what happened in 1985-86. I know that our collapse in the terms of trade, at half a per cent a year to one per cent a year, year on year for 25 to 30 years through most of the coalition government, into the
Whitlam government and then into ours, came in one month and was a 25 per cent reduction in what we were earning from overseas. That is not a simple thing to get over. It demanded a response and it got a response from the then Treasurer, the then member for Blaxland. The Asian financial crisis is but a hiccup compared with what happened in 1987. The collapse of the world financial markets, in one day, is unprecedented except for the Depression. Luckily, things did not go the way they went in 1929; but the Asian problem compared with 1987 and how to grapple with that were major factors that any government had to come to grips with.

During the recession in Labor’s last years, we reached a point where we had 17.5 per cent interest rates. By 30 July 1993 the cash rate—which is the basis for interest rates—in Australia was 4.75 per cent. On 5 June 2002, it was 4.75 per cent. What the member for Cook has chosen to do, in using one simple example, is not to take the average throughout those years, not to take year on year and look at the period from 1983 through 1985 and the impact of John Howard’s—the member for Bennelong’s—recession. He chose not to take a look at the fundamental economic circumstances facing a Labor government but to selectively say, ‘We’re terrific because our current set of circumstances are such.’

The former member for Blaxland was, a month or so ago, very correct: what this government is doing is following the Labor government franchise, set up when he was Treasurer and Bob Hawke was Prime Minister. The economy was recast onto a sound, broad and diversified footing—by Labor. Running it has been easy. An independent assessment of this is very simple: ask Ken Henry, the Secretary of the Treasury, whether it was easier when he was an adviser for the then Treasurer and later Prime Minister.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Order! The time allotted for private members’ business has expired. The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 104A. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed:
That grievances be noted.

Education and Training

Mr SCIACCA (Bowman) (4.29 p.m.)—Today I would like to take some time to speak about a group of Australians who really got a pretty raw deal when the Treasurer was handing out pre-election sweeteners during the budget, a group of Australians whose interests seem to have slipped right to the bottom of the Howard-Costello government’s priorities. Very few young Australian adults will receive any benefit from the tax cuts announced earlier this month, but they will certainly feel the impact of a budget that has failed to deliver one extra cent of assistance to young students and job seekers. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 20.6 per cent of 15- to 19-year-olds are out of work and looking for full-time work. That is 66,000 young Australians struggling to find work and in need of assistance to allow them to find stable employment with a decent wage so that they can build a life for themselves and contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of their communities.

Labor wants all young Australians to be climbing the ladder of opportunity. We want all young Australians to have access to the training and job search support that they need to get a foothold in the workplace. Representatives from the Moreton TAFE, which has campuses at Alexandra Hills, Mount...
Gravatt and Wynnum, came to see me about this very issue only a few weeks ago. Like me, and like everyone on this side of the House, they are concerned that in far too many cases the thing that is holding our youth back and stopping them from accessing the training they need to make them job ready is not a lack of drive or enthusiasm but a lack of funds.

TAFE is facing a funding crisis. The lack of investment by the Commonwealth is putting upward pressure on fees, which in turn means a reduction in the opportunities for school leavers and others seeking to upgrade their skills. The Australian Education Union estimates that since the Howard-Costello government was elected some $377 million in growth funding for TAFE has been lost. Despite a 16.3 per cent increase in enrolments in vocational education and training programs over the last seven years, Commonwealth funding is just two per cent more than VET funding in 1997. Yet the budget had no new money for the Australian National Training Authority. That was in spite of the persistently high youth unemployment rate and in spite of the bipartisan recommendations of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training in its Learning to work report, recently tabled in this parliament.

Faced with this funding crisis, TAFE has had to take some hard decisions. Lack of Commonwealth investment has led to reductions in the availability of TAFE courses, bigger class sizes, reduced student services, increased workloads for teachers and a hike in course costs. Terry Olm, a teacher at the Moreton Institute of TAFE at Mount Gravatt, explained the very real impact of this funding crisis on local students in the following terms:

In November of 2003 I visited State High Schools, private schools and colleges on the southside of Brisbane. These schools were from Wynnum to Mansfield to the Redlands. The reason for my visit was to present to students a course in pre-apprenticeship Fitting and Machining specialising in Computer Numerical Control (CNC).

I understand that this specialisation is in high demand. While it is a challenging area and the hours can be long, it is very rewarding. I understand that tradespeople working in this field in one Brisbane company last year earned in excess of $100,000. Terry went on to say:

After talking with the schools there were forty two students interested in the pre-apprenticeship course. Unfortunately only four eventually enrolled in my course... Many students were quite clearly forced to look elsewhere due to the $1400 cost of the course ... it is a lot of money to a low-earning single income family, especially directly after Christmas.

He went on to say:

If TAFE were not starved of funds then we would be able to lower the costs of courses such as this. This would give an opportunity for students from low socio-economic backgrounds to gain apprenticeships.

Terry makes the point that an investment in TAFE not just assists individual students but also has flow-on effects for the local community. He also makes the important point:

We must remember that when these students earn money they are paying taxes.

This is of course a much better option for our youth and our community than to have young people at home being supported by benefits and their parents. Terry’s course at Moreton TAFE has a proven record of opening doors for students. All the students currently enrolled in the course were offered apprenticeships before they were even halfway through their studies. Employers have made contact with Moreton TAFE, looking for more apprentices to meet their demand for skilled labour. Terry says:
Employers across all trades are looking for apprentices. In a recent Saturday edition of the Courier-Mail, Group Training Australia advertised for 180 students who wished to gain an apprenticeship. Unfortunately we have not been training our youth and now there is a skill shortage.

This is the sorry state of affairs in Terry’s field of engineering, and the same thing is happening in other crucial industries. For example, there is an urgent need for qualified health and community care staff, but when workers are only being paid $14 an hour it is difficult to find the money to cover the course fee. Child-care workers are being asked to pay up to $4,000 to get their certificate III qualifications, a cost that is prohibitive for these dedicated people who, sadly, are amongst the lowest paid workers in the country. Imagine that: child-care workers, looking after children, are in fact amongst the lowest paid workers in this country. Imagine that: child-care workers, looking after children, are in fact amongst the lowest paid workers in the country. Hairdressing is currently on the Migration Occupations in Demand List. People who have hairdressing qualifications can get to this country more easily. And yet young Australians are being discouraged from pursuing a career in hairdressing by the cost of the TAFE course, which I understand can be as high as $10,000.

For the young people I represent in the southern suburbs of Brisbane, and indeed for youth across Australia who are looking for opportunities to gain the skills they need to find secure employment, the outlook under this government continues to be very gloomy. But, while the Howard-Costello government had no good news for young job seekers in their budget, I am pleased that Labor has risen to the challenge with its youth guarantee, namely a $700 million commitment announced by the Leader of the Opposition in his budget reply. A Latham Labor government will introduce a range of initiatives to ensure that our young people are either earning or learning, working towards secure employment and a more secure future for themselves and their communities. The initiatives include abolishing TAFE fees for secondary school students, creating an additional 7,500 TAFE places and 7,500 extra apprenticeships for 15- to 18-year-olds each year, and establishing a jobs gateway targeted at finding employment and specialist training.

This has been welcomed by TAFE Directors Australia in a press statement circulated on 14 May. My friend and colleague the honourable member for Grayndler agrees. He is very interested in these issues, of course, as a result of his shadow portfolio responsibilities. In response to Labor’s announcement, Gillian Shadwick, the Chair of TAFE Directors Australia, said:

It is very encouraging to see the recognition of the value of TAFE in developing the nation’s skill base and providing Australians, and especially our young people, with employability skills.

She noted that this commitment to ending TAFE fees for secondary school students would help ensure that fees are no longer a barrier for those wishing to access TAFE facilities and skilled teaching staff.

But why should young Australians have to wait? The Howard-Costello government has started a precedent this year of adopting Labor policy as its own. This is a wonderful opportunity for the government to follow our lead and to make a genuine commitment to helping young people to help themselves. An investment in our children is an investment in our future as a nation, and this is just as true of young adults as it is of preschoolers or the grade 3 students the government has haphazardly targeted with its reading tuition package. I urge the government not to make our youth wait until a Latham Labor government is elected later this year. Instead, it should act now to inject urgently needed
growth funding into TAFE and create better opportunities for young Australians.

I very much appreciate the visit that I had very recently from the people associated with TAFE in my electorate. Mr Terry Olm was the one who comes specifically from my electorate but there were others. They made me aware of a problem that I had not realised was as bad as it is. With a small, effective investment of funds, these young people can get into jobs and can get the courses that they want and, instead of having to rely on government assistance, they can be out there paying taxes.

Environment: Water Management

Dr STONE (Murray—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage) (4.39 p.m.)—Some argue that Australia has a somewhat simple set of water management issues when compared with countries that have rivers or catchments that cross international borders. In Australia, however, we have the problems created by the folly of the Federation decision which left jurisdictional responsibility for water management to the states and territories despite river basins and catchments stretching well beyond state borders.

So news headlines like those of today, 24 May 2004, are becoming very familiar. In the Financial Review an article is headed, ‘NSW thirsts for Qld catchment water.’ New South Wales minister for natural resources Craig Knowles has informed Queensland, in response to their water management proposal, that:

It is the NSW view that the [water] resource has been over-allocated in Queensland and that significant clawback is required to avert ecological collapse.

The battle is on two fronts: for the environment and for farmer water access. Some Queensland cotton growers have plundered the drought-breaking overland flows, storing them for irrigation in the coming years in giant storage areas that they call in that part of the world ‘ring tanks’. Cubby Station, for example, has built the largest dam in Australia to divert a volume equal to Sydney Harbour. It is also, ironically, that volume—500 gigalitres—which is roughly equivalent to the entire Commonwealth and state commitment to additional flows to the Murray River. The Queensland government border water plan proposal is that those down basin who used to share the flow 50-50 should now be satisfied with 10 per cent.

The need to address the overallocation of water is now at a critical stage. World recognised wetlands are at risk, ecosystems are being left in drought despite drought-breaking floods upstream and rural communities dependent on a fair share of the water are left waiting desperately for resolution that only interstate agreements will deliver.

In an attempt to provide national leadership the Commonwealth has brokered in the COAG a draft National Water Initiative. This seeks to introduce a set of principles which will guide more efficient and sustainable water use in the future.

At the same time, a second intergovernmental agreement between the Commonwealth and Murray-Darling Basin states and territories is being prepared. It sets out arrangements for investing $500 million over five years to address water overallocation and the need for sustainable environmental flows in the Murray River system. The Murray-Darling Basin Council has also committed 500 gigalitres of water to the Murray River, water which is to be found over the next five years. I repeat: this volume is comparable to that which Cubby Station has recently harvested for its future cotton growing use.

The Commonwealth, New South Wales and Victorian governments have also agreed
that the Snowy joint government enterprise will recover an extra 70 gigalitres for the Murray River and 212 gigalitres for the Snowy River. There is an additional $375 million on the table to find this water, which was originally expected to come from system savings. So there is on the table right now a series of intergovernmental commitments that requires the finding of 782 gigalitres of water from what is currently available to Victorian and New South Wales irrigators and stock and domestic users or lost through water storage and delivery systems that are mismanaged or that seep, leak or evaporate.

It is acknowledged by a number of scientific commentators that it is not just extra volume that will recover the species and ecosystems which are now in drought or water-logged, or salinised through land use practice, water use or isolation from the natural river flooding regime. We have to manage the system better and we are starting to do that. The better management of water, not just volume, is required. This is an extraordinary time in Australian history. Rural communities and their regions in the Murray-Darling Basin will either thrive or decline depending on whether the states embrace the National Water Initiative and the outcomes of the Living Murray driven search for better environmental flows.

The worst drought since European settlement has demonstrated the dependency on water of not only ecosystems but also private wealth generation and the health of individuals and the future of agriculture based economies. The right outcome from this environmental water clawback could sustain the water quality and environment at the same time as it improves the local economies. It would do this by stimulating improved water use efficiency. The wrong outcomes based on poor or inadequate science or inadequate consultation, or state politics in which states see advantage in transferring wealth from regions to city constituencies, or take advantage of the current debt pressures in drought impoverished communities, will see the further pulling apart of life chances for rural and metropolitan Australians. Poor farmers cannot invest in environmentally sustainable practices, nor can they always simply sell up and go. You need economically viable rural communities, ones which have sufficient return on their capital, to re-invest back into natural resources in the landscape—which in turn provide environmental services for us all.

As I have said, the states are expected to find the additional environmental flows in a way that is consistent with the principles or framework proposed in the draft National Water Initiative. So how are they doing? The New South Wales government has embarked on what promises to be a turbulent and lengthy process, trying to break down the interregional barriers to water trading regulated by their state water trusts and corporations. The New South Wales government has reached for the National Competition Policy to see if the current regime complies. Other works going on within regions are identifying water delivery systems and on-farm water savings—in places with the cooperation of major private sector sponsorship.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the slow but steady pace of New South Wales, in Victoria the Bracks government is hurtling forward with an exercise called ‘Securing our water future’. A green paper was launched several months ago by the Bracks government, with a white paper to replace it with policy in June 2004. While not spelt out in the green paper, an initiative has been promoted in discussions between those in regional Victoria who owe their positions to state ministerial appointments, the chairmen of the water services committees of Goulburn-Murray Water and a select group in the VFF. This proposal takes 20 per cent of the Victorian
pool of Goulburn and Murray system water, currently allocated on a one-for-one basis for each megalitre of the water right owned by irrigators. This water, known as the ‘sales pool’, is available only when there is water in the storages above the water right entitlements.

The vast majority of farms in the Murray and Goulburn system have been developed in the expectation of this annual sales pool delivery. The recent drought has shown the terrible consequences of significantly reduced water access for agriculture. It has seen farm costs soar, as a shortage of home-grown feed was replaced by fodder having to be bought at hugely inflated prices. I do not need to describe here the impacts of drought, because all the people on the coalition side understand the impacts only too well.

The loss or reduction of water entitlement through clawing back the sales pool, or sales down river, also raises the issue of system viability. The Goulburn-Murray Water Authority is wondering out loud if a levy of $400 on each megalitre sold is the answer to funding the buy-out of remaining irrigators on a stranded asset or to pipe a supply to those remaining. It has yet to develop a strategy to relieve the problem of fewer water users in a huge, old and run-down system, designed to be paid for by many, many more. Despite the move to full cost recovery some years ago, each year the Goulburn-Murray water authority goes deeper into debt. Price hikes to irrigators at 20 per cent and 30 per cent each year over the last few years are simply taking the water beyond the ability of current users to pay—users who have been assessed as some of the lowest cost, highest value producers, particularly in dairy, in Australia.

It is within this complex, multifaceted context that the Victorian government has proposed to a selected few that they claw back 20 per cent of the Goulburn and Murray system irrigators’ access to the sales pool in exchange for $30 million state investment in rehabilitating and making safe their own major state owned irrigation storages. It seems to me that a deal which claws back 20 per cent of your water in return for the owner of the asset agreeing to put a little—too little—towards repairing the asset is not a great deal. The irrigation infrastructure was built generations ago and full cost recovery has been levied against irrigators for a very long time, and still the users cannot generate sufficient funds to replace the assets. One wonders why the Victorian government has concentrated on those in the Murray and Goulburn system for this claw-back of water and why the same does not apply to water users in Mildura or beyond Swan Hill. Why is there this concentrated focus on Goulburn and Murray system irrigators?

Another concerning feature of the Victorian green paper is the proposal to allow the stock and domestic water component of a landowner’s entitlement to also be traded off the property. At current prices, this water would be worth around $10,000 per farmer on the market. We all know that when the banks are pressuring you to liquidate anything you can, this stock and domestic water would quickly find its way onto the market. This would help the state owned water authority to further justify the shutdown of the stranded assets in the system, with those remaining forced to pay more or face a buy-out. The draft National Water Initiative says: ... there is an expectation that all significant consumptive water use should be regulated within a water access entitlements framework. However, there will be some minor water uses, such as domestic use, where a tradeable entitlement is not appropriate or necessary.

The Victorian government has also failed to give assurances that it will not enter the market for the water that is put up for sale if the
sales pool is turned into a tradeable asset. That would simply mean that those forced by the banks to sell would be delivering even more water into the state’s hands—which would have the largest chequebook to pay. That is not a solution for the long-term sustainability of irrigation in northern Victoria—irrigation which has made the state rich and which gives future generations a life worth living. (Time expired)

Social Welfare: Pre-Retirement Seminars

Mr Murphy (Lowe) (4.49 p.m.)—Australia has an ageing population. In 2001 there were 2.4 million Australians aged over 65 years, which is 12.4 per cent of the population. We know that the number and proportion of older Australians are growing and that by 2031 there will be five million Australians aged over 65 years, which will be 21.3 per cent of the population.

Labor recognises the vital contribution of senior Australians to our community and will encourage and support them to live full, active and independent lives. We recognise that most older Australians remain healthy and continue to lead full, active and independent lives well into their seventies and eighties. Senior Australians make a crucial contribution to the Australian community. The growing number and proportion of senior Australians requires more than a comprehensive retirement incomes policy which ensures a guaranteed decent minimum retirement income for Australians. We reject any suggestions that senior Australians are a burden on our society and we also reject the Treasurer’s assumption that Australians should work until they drop.

It is against this background in this evening’s grievance debate that I raise for the benefit of the House the plight of those people who have left the work force without having had the benefit of adequate and appropriate counselling—particularly that relating to the lifestyles of retirees. In this regard, I am indebted to my constituent Dr Paul d’Arbon—a longstanding, respected and eminent medical specialist in geriatric and rehabilitation medicine. Dr d’Arbon came to see me last Friday and he acquainted me with the lack of appropriate pre-retirement seminars available for those contemplating retirement.

I make the point to honourable members tonight that Dr d’Arbon has had 50 years clinical experience in geriatric care and, since the early 1960s, was a member of the Old People’s Welfare Council of New South Wales—later to become the New South Wales Council on the Ageing. Dr d’Arbon certainly knows his stuff, and I can now fully appreciate his concern that the state and federal governments are not doing enough to ensure that proper pre-retirement preparation seminars are available for those who need this important assistance.

On 24 February this year, Dr d’Arbon wrote to the Chief Executive of State Super in New South Wales about his long experience in conducting pre-retirement seminars and highlighted his conviction that those people who had attended pre-retirement seminars had been influenced to plan more appropriately for their lifestyle in retirement. Dr d’Arbon pointed out that these seminars were based on the experience of the Glasgow Retirement Council, as reported at page 1743 in the British Medical Journal of 29 December 1962. A copy of this report was attached to Dr d’Arbon’s letter sent to State Super in New South Wales.

Tonight, for the benefit of honourable members, I wish to quote, inter alia, from the report, as it provides some of the important history and background of the council. Moreover, there is no doubt in Dr d’Arbon’s mind that the so-called Glasgow experience
The Glasgow Retirement Council was formed in 1958 as the result of a conference held under the auspices of the then Lord Provost of Glasgow. The purpose of the Council was to bring together interested people in commerce and industry, education, health, and welfare in an endeavour to prevent the unhappiness of men and women in retirement. The aims and activities of the council were designed to complement those of the Glasgow Old People’s Welfare Committee and others whose work with the elderly had revealed the prevalence of loneliness, frustration, discontent, and feelings of rejection among those who had retired.

Objectives

The Council has three main objectives: (a) to study the problems of the older worker in industry; (b) to seek ways and means by which men and women can be prepared not only for the incident of retirement but also for a new way of life in retirement; and (c) to promote, for retired persons, crafts, hobbies, and the best use of leisure time.

In order to advance these purposes the Council has two main subcommittees: one on education for retirement, whose members include not only representatives of educational bodies—for example, the university, local authority, Workers’ Educational Association—but also personnel officers and doctors in industry and having particular interest in the elderly; the other, on the promotion of centres for crafts and hobbies for retired persons, has as its members directors of engineering firms, works managers, trade unionists, and others with industrial experience.

Day Release Courses

In October, 1959, after consultation with a number of industrial and commercial firms, the first experiment in a series of day release courses on preparation for retirement was launched by the Council in Langside College of Further Education.

It is the purpose of the courses to persuade men and women, while still at work, to think about and plan for their years of retirement; to provide information and guidance which will enable them better to adjust themselves successfully to life in retirement and to point the way to interests and opportunities for social contact and service which will enable them to find personal satisfaction, contentment, and fulfilment in their years of enforced leisure.

Crafts and Hobbies Centres

In 1960 the Council opened its first experimental Centre for Crafts and Hobbies for Retired Persons in a wing of a redundant primary school at Linburn Road, Penilee, on the edge of the Hillington Industrial Estate and in a new housing area.

The activities of the centre are recreational. While no payment is offered the members for work done, all activities have been given a sense of purpose, in that, apart from making household articles for their own use, the members are making aids for disabled persons. These are supplied to the Red Cross Society and to hospitals. An important link has been established between the centre and the geriatric units in Glasgow. Many specialized items of equipment are made by the older people for the use of the patients in these wards. The centre also supplies toys and special service equipment for children in hospital and in schools for handicapped children in Glasgow and Paisley. The members have found great satisfaction in the realization that their efforts bring pleasure to others less fortunate than themselves. They are helped by the knowledge that what they do is appreciated and by the companionship they find at the centre.

Future Trends

The Council is encouraged in the belief that its experiments to-day may help to weave a pattern of life in retirement to which men and women will look forward not with anxiety but with confidence and anticipation.

Sadly for those people nearing retirement or those whose lifestyle in retirement could be significantly enhanced, on 2 March Dr d’Arbon received a reply from State Super which clearly demonstrates that we need to
shake up those people working in the pre-retirement and retirement industries as well as both state and federal governments. The reply from State Super reads, inter alia:

Dear Dr d’Arbon

Over the years, the format for the seminars has changed significantly. My understanding is that initially the seminars were run over two days and included a ‘lifestyle in retirement’ segment, in which you were involved. Subsequently, the seminars were reduced to one day, with a shortened ‘lifestyle’ segment.

However, in recent years, the seminars have been reduced to a half-day with the focus being on the rules of the particular superannuation fund and a brief overview of some aspects of financial planning in retirement. There is no longer a ‘lifestyle’ segment although mention is made that this is an issue which members need to consider and on which they may wish to seek further advice. This shortened format has enabled us to access the maximum number of members approaching retirement.

I think that is appalling—Dr d’Arbon did not say that, but that is what I feel. While I can accept that those planning for retirement need sound financial advice, it is abundantly clear that we all need to be doing more to reintroduce national pre-retirement seminars that have a sharp emphasis on lifestyle for retirees. Retirees are living much longer and have much to contribute to modern society, so I ask: why aren’t governments doing more to assist people in their retirement decision making, particularly in the area dealing with quality of life issues, instead of focusing on the financial planning aspects associated with retirement?

I applaud the work of Dr Paul d’Arbon and I call on all governments to seriously review how they are preparing retirees for a fulfilling, enjoyable and productive retirement. Governments of all colours could do no better than to call on Dr d’Arbon’s experience and wisdom and contribute to the launching of national programs of pre-retirement and retirement seminars like those which owe their origins to the Glasgow experience and the Old People’s Welfare Council of New South Wales. Well done, Dr Paul d’Arbon.

Environment: Sustainable Development

Mr BARRESI (Deakin) (4.59 p.m.)—I grieve today for those many thousands of well-intentioned and environmentally concerned constituents who have been susceptible to the Greens party propaganda that it is only they who care and can deliver on issues affecting our environment. I also grieve for those inventive and proactive industry leaders who are at the forefront of products and processes aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and energy conservation. Those industry leaders have to face the gauntlet of both a hostile green movement, which has abandoned them, and more traditional industries, trying to squeeze them out through competitive market pressure.

Old forest clearing and greenhouse gas abatement are important issues that deserve extensive debate and support, but let us not make them the signature issues by which all others are judged. Let us also support and recognise the work of our dedicated local environment groups and industry leaders who are paving the way for a sustainable environment. I am proud of the many good projects and industry initiatives that are up and running in Deakin. Behind these initiatives are people committed to improving our area and working on longer term plans to ensure our native bushland and significant cultural centres are preserved and protected.

These local organisations are working hard to revegetate areas like the Blackburn Lake Sanctuary—a sanctuary to various species of fauna; an ecological sanctuary which, like so many others, relies entirely on local volunteers. Similarly, areas like the Mullum
Mullum Valley, Dandenong Creek, Loughie’s Bushland, Cootmundara Walk and Wurrundjeri Wetlands, just to name a few, are locally significant areas which the community plays an important role in protecting and enhancing. There is also a concerted effort to push for a master plan to redress the concerns with the waterways flowing from Dandenong and Mullum Mullum creeks.

These are big picture projects generated by people who have a broader view of environmental policy, but the Greens seem to dismiss these projects and any active support for them as insignificant, preferring instead to judge all behaviour and all environmental credentials against the big national issues of Kyoto and native forest clearing. Furthermore, the local green movement has been silent in not lending their support to promote energy efficiency and greenhouse gas abatement by home-grown forward thinkers. Two such local organisations, HyChill, which has developed a HC refrigerant gas, and Powerpax, are right in my electoral backyard. They are leaders in their field, with growing domestic and export sales. I will speak a little more on HyChill later on.

I was recently introduced to Mr Gavin Blackwood at Powerpax. His team, who are Turbocor compressor inventors, has revolutionised the chiller industry worldwide and it is located right in my backyard. Powerpax manufactures chillers using the Turbocor compressor. Powerpax chillers have been installed in the AXA building in the city, Macquarie University, Newcastle University, the Coles-Myer headquarters in Burwood, Myers in the Chadstone complex and many other major sites. Energy savings of up to 40 per cent are not unusual. On big buildings this represents a very large contribution to reduction in energy usage and, consequently, a substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

While at the moment Powerpax chillers do not use HC refrigerants, the management of Powerpax, in conjunction with the University of New South Wales, are planning to hold some trials using HC refrigerant to further increase the energy efficiency of centrifugal chillers. The Powerpax laboratory at Bayswater North is ideal for this purpose. The company HyChill, which I have referred to, has contributed funds to the research project. I believe the project has also attracted federal funding.

At present, the major established chiller companies are drastically cutting the prices of their systems in an urgent damage control move to limit the loss of their traditional markets for their chillers. Powerpax products are not cheaper, being up to 25 per cent more expensive than the older systems, but the energy savings and the expected long life of the chiller compressors are very attractive to major clients. Price cutting by competitors is obviously intended to reduce that perceived advantage substantially. This makes it obvious that Powerpax is an important new player in the industry.

I now come to another issue that I would like to talk about. Late last year, this House debated two ozone protection bills. Those bills were principally designed to control the handling of harmful substances, namely hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, and ensure appropriate safety measures were in place. That debate afforded many of us the opportunity to explain the need to take the bill even further. As many honourable members would be aware, CFCs have been phased out because of their devastating ozone depleting effect, with their replacement HFCs noted as the preferred refrigerant. In that debate I pushed for the need for us to recognise that hydrocarbons, or HCs, are the only natural refrigerant that we export.
This brings me to raise the undue pressure, once again, that has been placed on HyChill and also on me for raising this issue in parliament. I note that it is only through my support and my raising it that organisations like Powerpax and HyChill are able to gain any form of recognition and support, yet the support does not seem to be forthcoming from the green movement. As I noted in the debate:

The key comparative—

between HFCs and HCs—

is global warming potential. Three thousand tonnes of HFCs yields a global warming potential of 3.9 million tonnes. Yet, for the same output, you can use 1,000 tonnes of hydrocarbons, which have a global warming potential of 3 million tonnes—so a third of the weight and a third of the global warming harm. In addition, I am told that there is a 20 per cent increase in efficiency when hydrocarbons are used, as compared with other refrigerants.

One of the largest companies that has a vested interest in the HFC industry is global giant DuPont. Their interest is principally driven by financial concerns. It is worth noting the influence and dominance that DuPont has over the HFC industry in the US and around the world.

Following my contribution to the debate last year, I received a copy of a letter from Mr John McCormack, Business Manager, Fluoroproducts, DuPont Australia, to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, the Hon. Dr David Kemp. In that letter Mr McCormack claimed that my contribution was ‘misleading for public safety’. Mr McCormack accused me of not doing my homework. In preparation for this grievance debate I asked the Energy Resources Group to provide me with an official response to the claims. I intend to read some of the assertions and the expert’s response to them. The response, provided by the chairman of Energy Resources Group, Mr Peter Belousoff, clearly sets the record straight about HCFCs and HFCs versus hydrocarbons. It also exposes that Mr McCormack’s own company, through its own publications, has contradicted his assertions. I wonder if the DuPont management are even aware of the letter that Mr McCormack has written to the minister, making these accusations about my contribution.

The Greenpeace web site states:

The use of ammonia and hydrocarbon refrigerants is increasing by substantial amounts in supermarkets, air-conditioning, and refrigerated transport. DuPont’s Mr McCormack has also asserted that coupling hydrocarbon refrigerants with ammonia, water, and air as natural refrigerants is misleading. It is recognised worldwide that five natural refrigerants are air, water, carbon dioxide, hydrocarbons and ammonia, and these have been accepted by industry, responsible environment groups and authorities for many years.

The following is a quote from DuPont’s own material safety data sheet for HFC R134a:

Gross overexposure may cause: Central nervous system depression with dizziness, confusion, incoordination, drowsiness or unconsciousness. Irregular heart beat with a strange sensation in the chest, ‘heart thumping’, apprehension, light-headedness, feeling of fainting, weakness, sometimes progressing to loss of consciousness and death.

Other warnings like that appear for HFC R152a. I would therefore encourage Mr McCormack to look in his own backyard before casting aspersions on his competitors and on those industries that are doing their bit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, particularly from this country.

Mr Belousoff goes on to counter the claim by DuPont’s Mr McCormack that HFCs and HCFCs have no impact—or any impact on the ozone layer—yet they have positive characteristics like the CFCs they replace. There is much in the letter from Mr Belousoff in response to the DuPont letter, and I
intend to write back to the minister with a response, which I am sure will then be provided to the DuPont organisation.

I wish to state that I reject wholeheartedly the claims of Mr McCormack and instead emphasise my belief that the protection of one’s market share should not sway views on this matter. I have worked and will continue to work with local groups and organisations for the betterment of our local environmental assets. They include our lakes, sanctuaries, reservations, planning schemes and preservation of open space. As for the local Greens, I encourage them to join with me to work with those who are working to make a difference to our community. No amount of heavy-handedness, whether it be from governments or big business, should dissuade us from supporting these people. (Time expired)

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (5.09 p.m.)—I would like to use today’s grievance debate to talk about something that is very important to Australia and particularly to the people of my electorate, and that is the decline of our regions. Rather than taking their place as vibrant, productive areas of this nation, many of our nation’s provincial towns, regions and rural communities are, in reality, stagnating. There is a growing risk that they will forever be left behind by the capital cities. Such an outcome would be a disastrous waste of potential for the thousands of Australians living and working in regional areas and a threat to our country’s prosperity as a whole. This is a problem that even the Deputy Prime Minister has acknowledged. Mr Anderson stated in a speech back in 1999 that he feared that Australia would become two separate and distinct nations: a nation of wealth and opportunity in metropolitan areas, and a nation of economic decline and woe in regional areas.

This scenario is becoming more real with each passing day. It is the regional areas of this great nation that Australia has to thank for its current prosperity, and we are in danger of leaving them behind. Regional Australia has entered a new and unwelcome era—one where the successes and certainties of the past are fading while the future appears ever more marginal and insecure. These regions are becoming a separate economic zone of little to no growth, while places like Sydney and Melbourne enjoy high growth at their expense. The constant stream of media stories telling of booming house prices, high consumer confidence and a buoyant labour market seem to come from another world when you walk the streets of my electorate, past empty shops, and hear of yet another family leaving town for better services and opportunities elsewhere.

And it is little wonder after years of this government’s practice of focusing on the delivery of services to metropolitan areas, therefore assisting their growth, and hoping for a trickle-down effect into the regions. It is clear that this strategy is failing. The government needs to take immediate action to revive regional areas. We need to create incentives for people to move to the regions. This involves investment in infrastructure and the creation of partnerships between community leaders, business and government to undertake long-term, strategically based planning.

My electorate of Capricornia is a large regional area which is feeling the pinch of the decline of government interest in the regions. Capricornia is a farming and mining electorate which is an enormous contributor to the Australian economy. Yet this government continues its policies of short-term, quick fix political tricks, rather than the long-term, hard slog commitment that is required of government to understand a region’s
strengths, the barriers that might be holding it back and the opportunities that exist for it.

We need a federal government that will work with us, on our terms, in a partnership with local communities that is given proper time to develop and that takes a strategic view of our region’s needs and its potential. Regional assistance from the federal government can then take the form of investment in our future, rather than pork-barrelling for the government’s future.

The regions are the lifeblood of this country and contribute billions of dollars to our economy. Not only are the regions an economic powerhouse for this nation, but they are also where important aspects of Australia’s image and cultural development have occurred. Australia’s regions are still continuing to rely on their natural resources and on primary production to support themselves and to underpin much of our nation’s economic growth, but we cannot afford to take the current demand for those commodities for granted. We have to build on today’s success to guarantee our future by embracing a multidimensional view of the capability of our regions.

Today’s world demands knowledge. The knowledge economy has become the cornerstone of economic production, and countries which cannot or do not keep up will be left behind. To this end, Australia must embrace knowledge for all it is worth. This is a recipe for national prosperity and regional reinvigoration. Education and training are the backbone of a knowledge economy, but sadly this is yet another area which this government is intent on destroying, with a disproportionate impact on people in regional Australia. By investing in education and training, and by offering people the knowledge and skills to be able to perform at world-class levels, we can create a nation of intellectual wealth. Our regional areas offer so much for this country. Why then should we not offer them something in return by investing properly in the educational opportunities available to people living outside our capital cities?

The government and businesses are pulling their services out of regional Australia in an attempt to save money and create higher profits. The Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, again supplied some fodder for this argument when he mentioned—in that same speech in 1999—that individuals in regional areas each spend $300 per year less when the banks leave town. That is something that we have seen all too often in my electorate. That adds up to a lot of money and obviously has a large impact on regional businesses.

The government can do something about this and the government must do something about this. We cannot afford to sit back and watch this decline, when at the same time we are providing for projects and business ventures in metropolitan areas. The regions provide this country with so much economically, socially and culturally that we cannot afford to lose. With today’s modern technology systems, it is not necessary to centralise government or business services in major centres. Communications today are far superior to what they ever were and we should be taking advantage of this. The government needs to invest in regional Australia and assist it to develop greater business strategy skills, in order to attract businesses to our areas.

The government know all this. They have commissioned numerous reports on reinvigorating the regions, yet they seem to take little or no notice of the recommendations. The government continue to play politics with those Australians living outside of metropolitan areas. They say, ‘Yes, we know there’s a problem and we’ve commissioned a study into it’. Then, time after time, they receive a
study and do nothing. I implore this government to take some proactive steps and take note of the contents of these studies that they have been provided with over the years. Regional Australia cannot afford to have the government standing idly by, allowing our potential to slowly dwindle away.

Our regional areas offer a lifestyle second to none, with affordable accommodation and the famous community spirit, which is harder and harder to find in large cities, no matter how hard they try to achieve it. Our regions demand our respect for the contribution they have made to the development of this nation. They need our assistance now, more than at any time in the past. This government must come to the aid of these areas and offer new, viable efforts for restoring greatness to regional Australia. Revitalising Australia’s regional areas should be a national priority—one which should be embraced across the political spectrum, as well as by our business leaders.

The development of our regional areas is a priority for Labor, and I suggest that this government cease its underinvestment in infrastructure, education and training, and health. This underinvestment stifles social capital and economic growth and hinders the work of groups in regional areas which are doing something to enhance our regions. A strong, vibrant regional economy is good for the entire nation, not just for those of us living in regional Australia. With the immense economic, cultural and historical significance that regional areas have for Australia, it is time to get out there and invest in our regions. Labor have clearly spelled out their commitment to regional Australia. Our policies are a positive and proactive step towards ensuring the survival of regional Australia. We will stand up for an inclusive Australia and not allow for the existence of a divided nation in which your prospects in life are determined by where you live.

Boothby Electorate: Automotive Industry

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (5.17 p.m.)—Part of the history of economic development in South Australia is that it started as a rural based economy, principally relying on agriculture. It was part of the vision of a former South Australian Premier that South Australia needed to industrialise. During the long period of his premiership, he encouraged numerous companies from all over the world to come and manufacture in Adelaide. So it has been a part of the landscape of Adelaide that we have had a heavy manufacturing presence.

In my electorate of Boothby, by far the most important and largest manufacturer has been the automotive plant at Tonsley Park. When I was there last Friday, I saw a plaque—it was pointed out to me by the state Treasurer, Kevin Foley—which showed that the plant, which was originally the Chrysler automotive plant, was opened by Sir Robert Menzies in October 1964. It used to be a common part of school education that children would make a visit to the automotive plant at Tonsley Park. I remember, on one such visit about 25 years ago, having a look at this plant.

Chrysler did not continue their investment, and this plant became Mitsubishi in 1980. One of the frustrations certainly of recent times has been a vicious cycle of negative reporting and speculation about their future, which I think has had some impact on sales, which leads to a continuing cycle of, again, negative reporting and speculation. I was able to attend the announcement at Mitsubishi last Friday. The announcement was made by Tom Phillips, the chief executive officer of Mitsubishi Motors Australia, and also subsequent comments were made by the Premier, Mike Rann, and the Minister for Finance and Administration, Senator Nick Minchin. It was
announced then that Mitsubishi will continue to make a locally produced model at Tonsley Park from October 2005. Their parent company, Mitsubishi Motors Co. in Tokyo, has announced that there will be a $600 million investment in this plant. Unfortunately, it was also announced that the engine plant at Lonsdale will discontinue production in October 2005. That is very bad news for the 700 workers who work at that plant. There will also be some voluntary redundancies at Tonsley Park.

Senator Minchin and the Prime Minister through a press release were able to announce that the federal government will make $50 million available. Firstly, $10 million will be available for labour market program assistance. This will be available for the workers who are either involved in the voluntary redundancies or who are workers at Lonsdale. It involves intensive customised support. It also involves immediate assistance eligibility for all displaced workers, and that point was confirmed by the Prime Minister in response to a question from the member for Kingston. Workers will have access to an individual consultant. There will also be $40 million in investment facilitation and structural adjustment measures to boost investment in South Australia.

There are three different components to this. First of all, Invest Australia will be looking for a new investor for the Lonsdale site. It is a cast-iron foundry, and Invest Australia will be looking for some new use and an investor for that site. They will also be looking for new investment opportunities for South Australia. Importantly, they will establish a South Australian structural adjustment fund for sustainable private sector employment opportunities, and 50 per cent of it will be coming from the Australian government. This will be similar to the BHP Newcastle structural adjustment fund which was introduced after the closing of the steelworks in Newcastle. The South Australian government will be offering some support as well.

Two years ago, when Mitsubishi announced they were proceeding with their new model, we announced that $35 million would be available for an R&D centre in Australia. That money is still on the table and still available if that is an option that Mitsubishi want to take up. As a federal member, it is important for me to emphasise the critical role that this company plays in the local regional economy of southern Adelaide. There have been a number of studies—the South Australian government has done studies—of what the impact would be of a complete closure of Mitsubishi. Apart from the impact on the 3½ thousand workers, it would have a lot of add-on effects with component suppliers, small businesses and so on. My role principally, as the local federal member, has been to make sure that the Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources and the Minister for Finance and Administration are aware of the critical role that this company plays in our regional economy.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, it is part of our legacy—the Playford legacy, if you like—that we rely a lot on manufacturing. I see an opportunity here to perhaps have more diversified investment in southern Adelaide. Mitsubishi is the largest employer, with 3,300 workers, and it has links right throughout the community. The local Rotary Club of Blackwood hold a music fest at Mitsubishi, which about 1,000 people attend. It is held in the Mitsubishi cafeteria, which is probably the biggest venue in my electorate. Virtually every high school in my electorate has an apprenticeship scheme with Mitsubishi as well—they all have links with Mitsubishi. I have many other important companies involved in manufacturing, including Monroe Australia, Bridgestone and Hender-
I will mention a little about my involvement in the automotive industry. As a candidate in 1995 I opposed and argued against the measure in the 1995 budget to increase the wholesale sales tax on cars from 10 per cent to 22 per cent. This was a measure which was bad for my electorate, which has a heavy reliance on manufacturing and automotive industry. In 1995, as a candidate, I was also able to get the shadow minister for workplace relations to visit the factory. We were able to sit down with the shop stewards and have a very friendly discussion about coalition workplace relations policy and so on. In 1997 I made a submission to the Productivity Commission and went before them. I argued for a reduced rate of tariff reductions for passenger motor vehicles. In the end, the government response was much better than what I had hoped for, which was a freeze and a reduction from 15 per cent to 10 per cent from 1 January 2005.

In 1998 to 2000, like all members of the government, I supported the new tax system, especially because it was very significant for manufacturing and the automotive industry. Cars faced a 22 per cent wholesale sales tax. Under the GST they have 10 per cent, and that has generally been good for the automotive industry. The member for Hindmarsh, the former member for Kingston and I had a visit from the Prime Minister during that election campaign. That was a great visit and it was very well received by the workers down at Mitsubishi. In 2001 I argued for Commonwealth government support for Mitsubishi proceeding with their new model. In 2002 I had Mr Macfarlane, Mr Abbott and Senator Minchin visit the plant. It was then that we announced that the new model would be going ahead. I would like to really praise the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources, Mr Macfarlane; the Prime Minister’s office, including his chief of staff, Arthur Sinodinos; Kevin Foley, the Labor Treasurer in South Australia; Nick Minchin; and the Australian Ambassador to Japan, Mr John McCarthy, for all the work they have put into this over the last month. (Time expired)

Ramsey, Mr Alan

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (5.27 p.m.)—The expressive Yiddish word ‘chutzpah’ has gained increasing currency in Australia in recent years through the steady Americanisation of our language. Chutzpah is what Australians might traditionally have called ‘a bloody cheek’. Until now it has been defined by the story of the young man who murdered both his parents, and then had the chutzpah to throw himself on the mercy of the court on the grounds that he was an orphan. But now Australians will have a new byword for chutzpah, thanks to a figure well known to members of this House, the Sydney Morning Herald political columnist Alan Ramsey.

Honourable members will not need to be reminded of the high moral tone Mr Ramsey takes when writing about those who do not live up to his ethical standards. Every week he pours out bile on all those who displease him. On 24 April, however, Mr Ramsey outdid himself, with a piece which gave new meaning not only to chutzpah but to hypocrisy. In this article Mr Ramsey accused both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition of being thieves. The article was called ‘A tale of two thieves, in their own words’. In it Mr Ramsey attacked the Leader of the Opposition for using words about education allegedly taken from Bill Clinton’s 1997 State of the Union address. He also attacked the Prime Minister for allegedly plagiarising Ken Pollack’s book, The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq. Throughout the article Mr Ramsey deployed
his usual vitriolic style, berating both leaders for stealing other people’s work. Words such as ‘cheat’, ‘plagiarism’ and ‘humbug’ were liberally scattered through the piece, as they are in most of his columns. The words that Martin Luther King called ‘the words of interposition and vilification’ are often in his columns.

Such strong language might be bearable if it came from almost any other journalist or columnist but Mr Ramsey. The record, however, shows that no other journalist—if that is what he still is—has been a greater thief of other people’s work than Mr Ramsey. For the past three years, Mr Ramsey’s weekly column in the Sydney Morning Herald has seen him indulge in the theft not just of an occasional phrase, sentence or paragraph but of huge chunks of other writers’ words. This is not an occasional lapse on a slow week. Rather, it has been journalistic theft raised to a lifestyle. Week after week, up to 85 per cent—let me repeat that: up to 85 per cent—of Mr Ramsey’s columns consists of excerpts from a book, a transcript, *Hansard*, an article or some other such source.

Let me give the House some examples. On 8 February 2003, Mr Ramsey filled up most of his column with extracts from *Hansard* quoting the honourable members for Barton and Brand, which at least shows he has good taste in whose words he steals. On 15 February, in somewhat less good taste, he gave us a very long quote from the new darling of European film-makers, Mike Moore. On 22 February, three-quarters of the column consisted of quotes from the Leader of the Opposition. On 24 May, we had extensive quotes from ANU economist Julie Smith taking up at least half his article. On 31 May, half of Mr Ramsey’s article consisted of an editorial from the *Times* of London. These examples come from just a couple of months last year. I could go on with such examples at great length.

I have forced myself to read all of Mr Ramsey’s columns since 2001. I am a much better-informed politician as a result, although little credit for that goes to Mr Ramsey. My survey shows that the great majority of his columns are heavily larded with quotations and extracts from works written by other people and speeches given by other people. These quotations are in fact the best things to be found in Mr Ramsey’s columns. They are usually topped and tailed with a couple of paragraphs from Mr Ramsey’s own pen, and these are marked by his usual bitterness and bile against all the people he has accumulated grievances against over his career. Extracts from *Hansard* or ancient editorials from the *Times* of London are great pearls of wisdom compared to Mr Ramsey’s prose.

Mr Ramsey of course covers himself against the charge of plagiarism by making sure he acknowledges the source of his quotes. What we see in Mr Ramsey’s columns is not, strictly speaking, plagiarism; it is grand larceny. What we see here is a great moral guardian of Australian politics and journalism—who rails as no other journalist does about the inadequacies of those who govern us and of the opposition—committing the greatest journalistic fraud in Australian media history and not only getting away with it but being mightily well paid for it.

How does Mr Ramsey get away with this? Why do his employers at the Fairfax press tolerate such lazy journalism, such padding of what is supposed to be a serious contribution to the national debate in a quality newspaper? Why do they put up with such blatant theft of other people’s work? Why is Mr Ramsey paid a six-figure sum to do what amounts to a cut-and-paste job every week? And where is that other paragon of virtue, David Marr, who berates other journalists for failing to cross the t’s or dot the i’s, when he
ignores Mr Ramsey’s outrageous purloining of other people’s work after week?

For the past three years, while Alan ‘Scissorshands’ Ramsey has cut and pasted his way into media infamy, his colleagues and the rest of us have watched bemused by this gigantic fraud. Until very recently, it appeared that he would be able to go on doing this indefinitely. Fortunately, one person recently showed that he was not scared of Mr Ramsey, and it was one of his stablemates from the Sydney Morning Herald, Dr Gerard Henderson. In March this year, Dr Henderson gave Mr Ramsey a serve in his media column in the Sydney Institute Quarterly. In his article, Dr Henderson pointed out that Mr Ramsey’s Google-driven journalism not only is lazy but also leads him into serious errors, which is what tends to happen when people use large slabs of other people’s work without checking whether it is still true. In December 2003, for example, Mr Ramsey’s quote of the week was from an article on Zimbabwe by Simon Hoggart from the London Guardian of 9 February 1980—24 years prior to the column.

But being exposed by a leading columnist on his own newspaper has not deterred Mr Ramsey. Only last Saturday, his column consisted almost entirely of a verbatim transcript of an interview with the pollster Rod Cameron. Mr Deputy Speaker, I have marked on this so-called column Mr Cameron’s words and, as you can see, it takes up nearly 85 per cent of the column as I suggested. It is good to see that Mr Ramsey has supplemented his scissors and paste with a tape recorder, but this does not alter the substance of the charge against him—that his journalism is lazy and dishonest. These are charges he makes week after week against parliamentarians, but no-one seems to hold him up to the same standards that he seeks to apply to us.

Since I have had to endure three years of reading Mr Ramsey’s cut-and-paste journalism, I think it is only fair that others should have the opportunity to do the same. I therefore seek leave to table this file of Mr Ramsey’s columns over the last four years so that people can judge how much of Mr Ramsey’s output is in fact an exercise in recycling.

Leave granted.

Mr DANBY—In closing, I have a challenge for Mr Ramsey. I challenge him to write his next column—or perhaps his next five columns—in the Sydney Morning Herald entirely from his own pen, without any quotes or transcripts or extracts from Hansard. He may find this hard work, having been out of practice for so long, but I suggest it would be good for him and certainly for Australian journalism. Mr Ramsey will undoubtedly use his thousands of words of privileged access to an elite publication to seek revenge and retribution on me for raising these issues. I believe it is for the betterment of Australian society. Let him do his worst and I will do my best.

Riverina Electorate: Wine Industry

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (5.36 p.m.)—Just a few weeks ago I had the great opportunity and the great pleasure to attend a dinner in Griffith that was celebrating 70 years of the Wine Grapes Marketing Board in the Riverina-MIA-Griffith area. One of the guest speakers at the dinner was Mr Gino Vitucci. Gino gave a fascinating history of the industry that I have much pleasure in representing in my electorate. Gino described how the board was established in 1933 under the primary producers act and held its first meeting on 3 February of that year. The board’s area includes the Griffith, Leeton, Carrathool and Murrumbidgee shires. At the time the board was established, the designated functions of the board were to negotiate grape prices and terms of payment with winemakers, to repre-
I think that Gino Vitucci made an incredible statement that evening in saying it should be noted that the wine industry in the MIA was founded by Mr J.J. McWilliam in 1912-1913. Doug McWilliam and family were in the audience that evening, still representing the McWilliam family dynasty in wines and wineries in the Riverina. Mr Vitucci talked about when Mr J.J. McWilliam transported his vine cuttings by horse and dray across the Murray River and how one dray sank and the cuttings were under the water for a very long time before he went back to retrieve them. He also stated that there was some question as to whether there was approval from the appropriate state government departments in regard to the regulations of the day. It just proves how far we have come since we have begun marketing this great industry.

He talked about the humble beginnings of the wine industry in the MIA and just how those humble beginnings have grown into such an amazing industry. It began with about 13,000 tonnes of grapes that were harvested in the 1930s. There was a gradual increase in production up to the 1960s. Grape tonnages trebled to 100,000 tonnes in the 1980s and have now exploded to over 250,000 tonnes in today’s market. Mr Vitucci described a recent survey commissioned by the board which showed that winemakers would have a preferred tonnage as high as 294,000 tonnes by the year 2008. It seems now that that will be exceeded in the Riverina. Gino also described the changes that have come from the growth of the industry: changing consumer preferences for wines; transition from fortified wines to table wines; mechanical harvesting, pruning and drip irrigation methods that have seen different crops being grown and an amazing change in the way in which water is delivered and used in the MIA area; and the growing export market. These changes took place in the late sixties and the seventies. At that time, the Wine Grapes Marketing Board saw the need and took the initiative to set up a permanent office and a full-time secretary. Until that time, the board moved from place to place for meetings and operated on a very tight shoestring budget.

We have seen the differences in grower contributions over time. In the early days of the board, they were only 5c per tonne. They increased to 20c, then to 50c and they have continued to increase to today’s levy of $3.90 per tonne. Gino Vitucci firmly believes that the industry, its winemakers and its grape growers are dependent on one another. Gino indicated that no one sector can, and nor should it, dictate to the other. He said there should be unity and trust in working together. If you have that unity and trust, the industry will have the resources to deal with the many challenges that it faces in the future.

I think what I learnt from Gino’s address on the beginnings of the wine industry is that, even though I am a very proud representative of the wine industry in the Riverina and I sing its praises loudly, I have never realised just how the growth of the industry has influenced the development of the Riverina as an entire region, and how the economic viability from that growth has been transferred to communities right across my electorate. At a recent address, one of the most respected local winemakers and wine judges in Australia said that the Riverina has the potential to be the greatest grape-growing area in Australia. It has the expertise to produce quality wines, starting from the vineyards; it has the soils, the water and the climate to suit. I think that is an enormous vision and something that we already aspire to,
and perhaps many of us already believe that we are the greatest winegrowing electorate in Australia.

We have 50 per cent of the New South Wales wine market. We have 60 per cent of the New South Wales wine crush, and we have 15 per cent of the national crush, grown in just a very small area of holdings. Of the export market, we have 60 per cent—a true feat indeed. When you look at all of the heralded and marketed winegrowing areas, you will see that the Riverina alone provides 60 per cent of the export market. One of those wineries that has grown dramatically over the last few years and has received many awards in the agribusiness area in export awards is Australia’s fastest-growing winery, Casella Wines. In the Riverina, we have 16,000 hectares of grapes in production. We have 500 grape-growing properties and the largest family-owned vineyards in Australia. These large family-owned vineyards—of the Casellas, the McWilliams, the De Bortolis—are household names in the wine industry.

The largest domestic winery of course is De Bortoli’s winery. Recently, we saw the very sad and sudden death of Dene De Bortoli. He contributed not only to the Australian wine industry but most significantly to the development and enhancement of the Riverina wine industry over a number of years. Dene De Bortoli was one of the most respected wine producers in Australia. Dene is now ably represented by his son Darren, who is a major contributor to the community, continually providing value and donating to community projects. He donated extensively to the Pollie Pedal when it came through the Riverina and spent five days there with the minister, Tony Abbott. Darren De Bortoli also donated $10,000 to the Millennium Foundation for children’s cancer research.

In the Riverina we also have the largest international winery—that is, Casella Wines—and more than $100 million worth of raw grape value lies in the Riverina. There was a quarter of a million tonnes of grapes crushed in the Riverina this year, a record crop, and the value of the wine in the Riverina is between $300 million and $400 million. As a great conclusion to this story, De Bortoli’s Noble One was on the menu for Prince Frederik and Princess Mary’s wedding. I congratulate the wineries in the Riverina on their dedication to the growth and value of the industry and to how it can provide economic sustainability for the future of all people in the Riverina.

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

That grievances be noted.

Question agreed to.

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1)** 2004-2005

Cognate bills:

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2)** 2004-2005

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS) BILL (No. 1) 2004-2005**

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 5)** 2003-2004

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 6)** 2003-2004

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 13 May, on motion by Mr Costello:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (5.46 p.m.)—**

Tonight, in speaking on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and cognate bills, I would like to raise an idea that I have for Australia’s largest tropical city, which is not
Cairns and not Darwin; it is Townsville. Townsville is a city that is considerably larger than Cairns and has a very diverse economy. I raise this in concert with Townsville Enterprise Ltd, the peak development, marketing and promotional body for the Townsville-Thuringowa region and in fact for part of North Queensland.

What I raise now is a unique opportunity to develop a multimedia project for that area, a project that will address ground-level IT online and visitor information centre infrastructure needs. It will create fresh and exciting imaging for the region. It will generate awareness and re-imaging of the region in key southern markets. It will result in increased tourism and flow-on visitation through the events markets. It will instil pride and a sense of ownership into the local communities of Townsville and Thuringowa. It will create long-term effects in both awareness and destination perception, and economic flow-on benefits.

I am suggesting to the parliament tonight that this project could incorporate a number of components. The first one is the IT online environment. The first component of this project could involve a complete web site redevelopment for Townsville Online, including integration with key industry bodies and online projects, such as the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse through the Australian Tourist Commission, and the Regional Tourism Net through Tourism Queensland. A full upgrade and redevelopment of the site will allow the site to be used to its full potential as a call to action point for tourism retail campaigns. It will also serve to maximise our region’s presence on the australia.com web site, through an increase in registrations with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse.

The second component of the project would be the visitor information centres and touch-screen technology. This part of the project would involve facilitating, for the Townsville visitor information centres, IT hardware to support calls to action for tourism retail campaigns and would allow our tourism operators greater exposure to visitors through the web site for our information centres. The information centres, incidentally, are manned by a terrific band of volunteers, both the one on the southern highway approach to Townsville and the visitor information centre in the city mall. I know that the volunteers, who do such a great job, enjoy their work. They enjoy not only looking after the visitors who come to our city, many of whom are from overseas, but also their own company and the ‘famils’ that are regularly undertaken.

These visitor information centres currently service around 100,000 visitors each year. At present we are not using these centres as effective call to action points, due to the unavailability of IT hardware and the lack of an appropriate online presence. There is also the option of relocating the Flinders Mall Visitor Information Centre to a larger and more flexible city location, and—something that I am very keen on—there is the potential to establish a third visitor information centre either at the northern beaches or Magnetic Island. To further facilitate visitors’ experiences of our region, the establishment of touch screens at key city points—for example, in the mall, at the airport, at the Nelly Bay ferry terminal and down on the Strand—would provide a professional, coordinated and integrated approach to our delivery of visitor information. This technology is ideal for meeting the growing need to supply information at the various points within the city where the establishment of actual centres is not possible.

The third component of the campaign I am suggesting tonight relates to the media and the repositioning of Townsville in the market. This would allow the creation of new
imaging vision which was fresh and modern, would strike a chord with the local community and would create brand recognition in the market. The imaging would be used in a campaign across all media and would have the objective of repositioning our destination and generating increased tourism and meetings event traffic. The campaign could also incorporate other national media opportunities, such as Channel 9’s Today Show and Channel 7’s Sunrise. The campaign would have a dedicated retail component and a call to action on the web site. The new imaging vision would have a tie-in with the new Australia branding recently launched by the Australian Tourism Commission.

The object of suggesting this tonight is to create awareness and to reposition the destination in the domestic market. It is to create local pride in ownership through the media campaign. It is to generate increased traffic to the web site, which will pave the way for commercialisation of the site and encourage the tourism industry to increase their uptake of the ATDW. It will result in increased visitation to counteract the downturns we have seen in visitor numbers and expenditure in the last three years, and it will help Townsville Enterprise raise additional revenue through the corporate sector. There are significant benefits from this project that I am suggesting tonight. Those long-term benefits, through the awareness destination profile, local community pride in ownership, economic flow-on effects and so on, will be very valuable indeed to our community.

I now want to turn to some very significant issues to do with the Queensland state government and relate those issues to my home cities of Townsville and Thuringowa—for example, roads. Roads are a very significant issue in the local electorate and many of us, as members of parliament, understand the importance of properly funding the road network. The federal government, through the budget, has provided $5.6 billion in road funding. In addition to that there will be an extra $3.1 billion going into the new Aus-Link program. We are playing our part in relation to funding the road system, particularly through the local government roads program. That has been very popularly received by local authorities.

But the Queensland government is ducking its responsibility regarding roads. In 1998 road funding made up 23 per cent of overall capital works in the Queensland budget. In 2003 it dropped to 14 per cent, indicating the priority that the Queensland government places on road funding. I think that is unfortunate in a state as large and decentralised as Queensland, and it indicates the lack of priority that the Beattie government places on road funding.

In relation to housing, again it is not an encouraging picture. The Beattie government has presided over the biggest public housing sell-off in Queensland’s history, and I do not say that lightly. The minister for housing has told the Queensland parliament that Queensland has sold off more than 2,400 public housing dwellings since 2000. Now there are far fewer public housing properties available for battlers because the Beattie government has not replaced this stock and kept up with growing demand.

In the last four years, sales of public housing have outpaced the rate of new commencements, while the number of homeless people on the streets increases. I find that puzzling because Queensland is set to receive a record $7.1 billion in GST revenue in the next financial year, courtesy of the federal government, as well as a $1 billion windfall in the stamp duty from the property boom. It is only fair that the Beattie government has a heart for the battlers of this great state and uses some of that windfall to make sure that they are looked out for.
In another area, I am sorry to have to report to the parliament that the ambulance tax that we all faced on our electricity accounts, put on by the state government, has also been a failure in relation to providing for proper ambulance services in the twin cities in the north. I reckon that residents of Townsville and Thuringowa will be pretty angry when they know the result of the $88 ambulance tax that everybody has to pay on electricity accounts. Even if you have a single electricity meter on an advertising sign you pay an $88 ambulance levy. Of course, residents in Queensland are particularly concerned at the double-dipping of the Queensland government—not only do you have to pay the compulsory ambulance levy, you also have to pay an emergency services fee on your car registration. It is grab, grab, grab. The problem is that the services do not improve.

Let us have a look at the response time for code 1 emergencies—the most important emergencies that the ambulance service should have to respond to. The standard that the government stipulates is a 10-minute response for a code 1 emergency, but unfortunately the number of times that the Queensland Ambulance Service meets this standard is falling. In March only 43.75 per cent of emergency call-outs on Magnetic Island and 67.54 per cent of call-outs in Townsville were dealt with in the required 10 minutes. So less than half of the calls on Magnetic Island and only two-thirds of the calls on the mainland were dealt with in 10 minutes. This has to be highly concerning because it represents a very significant drop in the level of performance. Taxpayers are paying the money. The state government is not only funding the ambulance service through its budget but also funding the ambulance service through the ambulance levy, yet we get a poorer service. How could that be? Certainly we need to address that.

Turning to education and the performance of the Queensland government, in the last week there has been quite a community debate about the $700 tutorial credit for parents whose children at year 3 are not reading as well as they should. Some state governments, Mr Deputy Speaker Hawker, including your own in Victoria, already report to parents the year 3 benchmarks in reading. Parents are able to know if their children are matching, exceeding or, in fact, failing national benchmarks in relation to literacy. But the Queensland government and some other governments are not reporting this information to parents.

So the federal government cannot provide its $700 tutorial credit to Queensland parents because Queensland parents are kept in the dark by the Queensland state government. They do not know, and for some reason the state government seem to believe that they are not entitled to know, how well their children are doing in reading at the year 3 level. We all know as parents that it is very important; if children are falling behind, schools should do something about it and we should help them do something about it. The federal government stands ready to provide these tutorial credits to parents whose children are having difficulty with reading. We stand ready to provide those credits but our hands are tied. I call on the Queensland state government to recognise that they have a duty to parents and students to keep parents informed about the progress of their children.

Regarding the Australian Defence Force in Townsville, I want to pay tribute to the men and women of 5 Aviation Regiment, which has been the busiest unit in the Army component of the Australian Defence Force. Based in Townsville, 5 Aviation Regiment runs and flies Australia’s Black Hawk helicopters and the Boeing CH47 Chinook heavy-lift helicopters. Recently I asked 5 Aviation Regiment if it was possible for
them to come to the aid of the civil community because we had a very difficult water supply problem on Magnetic Island. One of the balance tanks that feed Horseshoe Bay was leaking very badly and needed to be replaced, but it was situated in the national park on Magnetic Island and there was simply no road there. Because it was urgent to get the tank replaced, the only way that we could see fit to do that was to fly in a new water tank.

I appreciate the assistance that I had from the Minister for Defence, Robert Hill, and his staff in clearing the way for 5 Aviation to undertake this task. It readily responded because it provided some excellent training for 5 Aviation Regiment and at the same time provided some help back to the garrison city. I pay tribute to Lieutenant Colonel Brett Greenland, the CO who flew the helicopter, his copilot, Captain Conway Bown, and the staff who assisted. It took four flights to Magnetic Island to get the job done. There had to be a recce flight first and then a second flight to transport a shipping container to carry the remnants of the old tank. There was then a third flight to take the new tank over and settle it in its final position, and a fourth flight to recover the shipping container and bring it back to the mainland so that the old tank could be disposed of. Our community thanks the men and women of 5 Aviation Regiment for their fantastic work in coming to the aid of our community and doing the job in the professional way that the ADF always performs.

From time to time there are some difficult issues in the ADF, and we certainly had one in Townsville recently when some soldiers from 10 FSB committed a dreadful act upon some animals. Those people just let down the good men and women of the Australian Defence Force. I know how angry our men and women of the ADF felt when that issue came to light.

To finish, I would like to indicate that very shortly 5 Aviation Regiment will finally come home. There is still a small component of crew and equipment in East Timor—now called Timor Leste. In September 1999, 5 Aviation Regiment first went to Timor with INTERFET, and they are finally coming home. They have done a fantastic job in East Timor—they have done a fantastic job in all of their other deployments—and I hope that they will be in line for an appropriate award for and recognition of the wonderful service that they have given to their country and other countries where they have participated.

Mr CREAN (Hotham) (6.06 p.m.)—Never has a government taken so much from so many and given to so few, as it has in this budget. With a $52 billion spend—a record spend for any budget—it has not given one cent in tax relief to average earners on less than $52,000. That is four out of five taxpayers, and it is just not fair. The budget fails to give back bracket creep and, in the end, the government remains the highest taxing in our history. There is no long-term plan for the nation’s future in this budget; it has no real reform that builds incentive to get back into work into the system; it is just a crass plan for the government’s re-election.

There is also huge cynicism embodied in this budget—in fact the extent of it is breathtaking. This government are planning to spend $6 billion in the next six weeks, and they want to lecture us about fiscal rectitude. They are also giving themselves an advertising budget, at public expense, of more than $100 million between now and the next election. It is against this background that I will move, on behalf of the opposition, that the House condemns the government for its cynical, election driven spending spree which, whilst spending a record $52 billion, fails to deliver crucial services to Australians, including funding the new pneumococcal vaccine for children, funding VET in
schools so young Australians can either learn or earn, ensuring access to higher education without excessive fees or increasing student debt levels, ensuring all Australians can access bulk-billing services and ensuring adequate measures to respond to Australia’s skills shortage. The opposition also condemns the government for failing to present a strategy to adequately address the long-term fiscal challenges facing the nation.

Labor’s approach could not have been more different from what the government did the other night. Firstly, Labor has announced an agenda for improved services to put money back into people’s pockets. That agenda invests for the long term in social programs that will also yield huge economic benefits. We will produce a broader and fairer tax package than that of the government. It is possible to do all of these things if you are fiscally strong, through the imposition of tough budget discipline. On the night that the budget came down, we said that this was a budget that ensured that there was a huge number of forgotten people. We said on the night that four in five taxpayers will not get a cent in tax cuts. We also said that three in five families and singles will not get anything by way of tax cuts or family benefits. The four-in-five figure has been confirmed by the tax statistics, and the three-in-five figure has been confirmed by NATSEM. They have confirmed that three in five families and singles are the forgotten people in the budget. I will have more to say about the tax side of the equation when those bills come up for debate later this week.

The government has wasted an opportunity to reform the family payments as well. Not only has the focus of the family payments targeted a comparatively small number of people but it is also a wasted opportunity to reform the family payment system. The budget offers compensation for the debts that families have incurred in recent years, but it has not fixed the system. One in three families still has a family tax debt, and the government has not done anything in the budget to make the system simpler and fairer to understand. Many families will not see a cent of the second $600 family tax payment. Minister Anthony has admitted that the second $600 family payment will be wiped out for many families. They simply will never see it. It will be clawed back. It is such a problem that the Treasurer would not even let the minister answer questions on it in the House today.

The government has also wasted an opportunity to seriously reduce the massive problem of effective marginal tax rates, the disincentive for people going from welfare to work because of the interaction of the tax system, the tax scales and the family tax benefit system. It is still creating massive disincentive traps. To be fair to the government, there has been a reduction in the taper rates in this budget in both family tax benefit part A and part B from 30 per cent to 20 per cent. There is also a slight increase in the free area for family tax benefit part B, but an expert in the field, Peter Dawkins of the Melbourne Institute, has failed the budget on the score of addressing high effective marginal tax rates. He says, ‘Unfortunately, the budget has done nothing about this problem for low-income families.’ Labor believes the tax system should work for you, not against you. It should give incentive to get back into work and reward hard work. If you are prepared to have a go, the tax system should not stand in your way. This budget fails to address fundamentally that problem.

Labor, unlike the government, recognises that many Australians and Australian families are under extreme financial stress. Even after the tax cuts, they still live with the burden of the highest taxing government in our history. But these are people not just being taxed more; they are being charged more. All
of our families are being asked to pay more every time they go to see a GP. They are being asked to pay more to educate their kids and more for basic things, such as to use a telephone line from home. This, of course, is the price of neglect when a government runs down services, but now families have to fork out even more at the petrol bowser. According to Westpac, petrol prices are likely to be up about 15 per cent from late last year. This will increase the cost of filling up by around $5 a week. It is more cost and more charge on Australian families—more financial pressure that they are put under. So with the combination of rising oil prices, uncertainties arising from the war in Iraq and the stresses of the housing bubble, families have never been more vulnerable than they are today, and it is all because of the debt treadmill that the government has helped create and perpetuate.

In the light of this, you would think that the government would have tried to restore the level of basic services that most Australians historically have taken for granted. These are services which have been systematically downgraded over the life of this government. This budget has done nothing to end that decline. We have come to expect this government to take with one hand while trying to give with the other. In this case, it still takes by charging more but fails to give a tax cut to four out of five taxpayers.

In contrast, Labor has heard and understood the problems that Australian families are facing. Through our policies we have taken steps to restore much needed services in health, education, early childhood development and the environment, and to renew our infrastructure and invest for the future. Two years ago we embarked on a strategy to outline our commitments on major social investments. Underpinning this was a strategy of responsible budget management—essentially, to fully cost and fund our investments. Why? To take the pressure off interest rates.

We have announced major investments in education, health and children—policies to give our families and communities a break and to reduce their financial stress. We have produced a plan to restore bulk-billing and to save Medicare. We have also produced a plan for a baby care package that will provide key support to mothers and their newborn babies when they most need it. We will introduce the pneumococcal vaccination scheme; the government, for all its $52 billion spend, could not find some $300 million for it. We will expand services throughout the whole of a child’s and student’s life.

There is the universal read aloud program for our under-fives. There is the learn or earn program for our youth, which seeks seriously to address the problem of school-age youth unemployment. We have a national mentoring foundation and a male mentoring program for our schools. We will create another 20,000 TAFE places and another 20,000 university places, without putting additional financial pressure on students and their parents. We have also announced a national dental scheme, particularly for older Australians.

These and many other measures constitute a broad based attempt to develop and strengthen the social infrastructure of our nation. They are targeted at not only supporting families but also creating a climate that empowers persons to achieve their potential. Labor funds expansion of services by maintaining the tightest fiscal rigour. It stands in stark contrast to the tax and spend approach of the government. The gall of Peter Costello to stand up in this parliament and berate Labor on savings, when you look at his performance: the starting point of his 2004-05 budget was a $10 billion surplus; that has been whittled away to just $2.4 billion. Peter
Costello’s answer to spending more was just to run down the surplus and increase taxes.

Let me clear up some of the government’s confusion on Labor’s savings. Labor’s principles are these: we fully cost and fund our spending measures, and our savings come from redirecting government spending on its policies to Labor’s better priorities and from cutting waste and mismanagement. The fact is that we have met this test. Indeed, since we started the exercise we have identified over $10 billion in savings. The Howard government has picked up some of these. We have taken that into account by continually finding more. In picking up some of Labor’s savings, all the government has done is prove that those savings are real and they have boosted the bottom line. In addition to catching up on Labor’s savings, the government has been embarrassed into backing down on measures such as its terrible plan to offer big tax cuts to foreign executives. Peter Costello has never really analysed the figures—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hawker)—The honourable member should refer to the Treasurer by title.

Mr CREAN—The Treasurer has never really analysed the figures; he has just relied on those published in the media—and we saw that today when he relied on figures published in yesterday’s Sunday Age. The problem with the figures in that article was that they failed to include Labor’s baby care payment and its associated funding. Whenever you look at it, as the Sunday Age article also argued, Labor’s investments are fully costed and funded by its savings. It is that simple. This means that our spending does not draw at all on the surplus—and that is a claim that the Treasurer cannot make of his figures. The Treasurer has become lazy. He has gone soft on savings, and why wouldn’t he? He has never seen a tax that he has not fallen in love with and he has become accustomed to just drawing down the surplus.

Labor has set different tests. We pay for our investments in services by funding them with savings. The task goes on and there are more savings to come. It is possible to both provide tax relief and restore services. You can do this by operating under the tightest of fiscal disciplines, and that is what we are demonstrating in our budget pledge. It has three main elements. Over the next parliament Labor will deliver budget surpluses in each of those three years and will reduce net debt. Labor will reduce Commonwealth tax to GDP and it will also reduce Commonwealth spending as a proportion of GDP. This is a stricter budget discipline than any opposition in the modern era has imposed on itself. Indeed, to date, Labor has already promised to deliver tax cuts and cuts to expenditures—not increases in expenditures, I should note, but expenditures paid for by savings, by turning bad policy into good policy. In implementing these measures we will retain surpluses in every year of the forward estimates; we have shown that it can be done.

It was interesting today that the Prime Minister was carrying on and saying, ‘How can you claim to do these things? There must be some magic pudding.’ It was very interesting. I have a copy of the Higgins News, produced by the Treasurer after the last budget. This Higgins News claimed that last year’s budget delivered:

... a budget surplus, tax cuts and increased spending on defence, security, education and health.

I ask those following to ask the Treasurer: how does his magic pudding taste to him?

The test for our fiscal responsibility is quite clear, and we will meet it. But in this budget Labor also want to bring a long-term perspective on savings and investment to the
budget. We have argued this, and the government has criticised us for it, but the agenda that we wish to follow really seeks to address the intergenerational challenge—not just to produce a report about it but to come up with some solutions. It is built around a number of important pillars. One is a pro-growth strategy, created by investing in the drivers of economic growth to lift productivity. This does mean investing in the education skills and training needs of our people to boost our human capital. If the Prime Minister and the Treasurer do not understand this, they should talk to Alan Greenspan, who argues very strongly that this is the sort of investment that should take place. It also means investing in strong competition. If the Prime Minister is opposed to what we are doing, he should explain why he will not support our plans to boost competition by reforming the Trade Practices Act and giving small businesses a fair go. It also means investing in infrastructure to lower business costs and build the growth platforms for the future—and again in attacking Labor on this the Prime Minister is effectively rejecting the need to invest in infrastructure. It also means building a culture of innovation and research to build the industries and jobs of the future. In opposing us on this, is the Prime Minister saying he is opposed to that too?

Labor are also about bringing a longer-term dynamic perspective to budget decision making. That is why Labor’s policies on early intervention not only boost services to Australian families but also make economic sense. It is better to invest in them now than to fail to do so and have further costly expenses at some later stage. Our approach to this is also about ensuring that the budget structure itself reflects the long-term savings and investment needs of the nation—essentially putting aside savings today so that you have enough when you need to address problems tomorrow and making the investments today that reduce the fiscal pressure tomorrow. That is what Labor are arguing. That is what the response in terms of the intergenerational problem demands, but we see nothing of it in this budget. Just as Labor introduced compulsory superannuation for Australian workers—a savings fund which can only be drawn upon to meet defined future needs of our people—budgets too should reflect this principle; in other words, superannuation for the nation. This is an approach that has been endorsed by the OECD and the IMF. Budgets have to reflect both the short-term and the long-term needs of savings and investment. Budgets are about choices. They are about the future. Labor offer a vision for a brighter future and a hope for Australian families and their children. It will be delivered through sound economic policies and responsible budget management. I formally move the amendment that I referred to earlier:

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

(1) Condemns the government for its cynical election driven spending spree which—while spending a record $52 billion over the forward estimates—failed to deliver crucial services to Australians, including:

(a) funding the pneumococcal vaccine for children

(b) funding VET in schools so young Australians can either Earn or Learn

(c) ensuring access to Higher Education without excessive fees or increasing student debt levels

(d) ensuring all Australians can access bulkbilling services; and

(e) ensuring adequate measures to respond to Australia’s skill shortage; and

(2) also condemns the Government for failing to present a strategy to adequately address the
long term fiscal challenges facing the na-
tion".

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hawker)—Is the amendment seconded?

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

Ms PANOPOULOS (Indi) (6.27 p.m.)—I rise to support the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and to oppose the amendment moved by the member for Hotham. I once again congratulate the Treasurer for presenting a budget that delivers social dividends to the Australian people. In his address, the member for Hotham said, ‘It is very simple, we are going to fund our spending by sav-
ing.’ The member for Hotham may excuse me as a member of that generation they call generation X, who lived through and suffered the recession we had to have, where we saw a whole generation of young people lose the ability to dream, to plan for their lives and to enjoy the beginning of adulthood that many generations before them had benefited from, but while it is very easy for the member for Hotham to say it is that simple, perhaps many in the Australian electorate would say, ‘Simon, perhaps it is not that simple.’

Good economic management does not just happen. It does not permeate the Australian atmosphere like a magical mist. The reason this budget has delivered for Australians is that difficult economic decisions have been made over the last eight or so years by this government. Without the vision and fortitude to make decisions within which the Australian economy can grow and flourish, there can be no investment in our future, no strengthening of the safety net for those who need it and no tax cuts to give taxpayers back more of the money they have earned. People’s jobs, livelihoods and mortgages hang in the balance when a government delivers a budget. It is not an exercise in economic experiment. An $800 billion market econ-
omy with something like $200 billion in ex-
penditures cannot be entrusted to a team that takes its policy cues from the day’s headlines in the tabloid papers. They say that you cannot teach an old dog new tricks, and I imme-
diately think of the member for Hotham. He has been around politics long enough and for all his past failures has been rewarded with the plum job of shadow Treasurer. Austra-
lions deserve a Treasurer who can drive eco-

omics decisions for the good of the nation. They say that you cannot teach an old dog new tricks, and I immediately think of the member for Hotham. He has been around politics long enough and for all his past failures has been rewarded with the plum job of shadow Treasurer. Australians deserve a Treasurer who can drive eco-

onic decisions for the good of the nation. We do not deserve nor can we afford a Treasurer like the member for Hotham, whose response to the latest budget was meaningless waffle that contained virtually no policy and no vision.

The brave new Latham world, with the member for Hotham as Treasurer, is apparently going to deliver bigger surpluses, bigger tax cuts, whilst providing for increased government spending. The member for Hotham may, in time, come to be known as the Mr Big of Australian politics. It will not be for bigger budget surpluses; it will be for bigger debts, like the $96 billion debt that was the legacy of the last Labor government, in which he served for a time as Assistant Treasurer. He will be known for bigger inter-
est rates, like the 17 per cent rates that crip-
pled families under the last Labor govern-
ment, and the double-digit unemployment figures.

In the Age last week, Tim Colebatch did what few other commentators had done and seriously questioned Labor’s economic credentials. After Labor’s empty promises of simultaneously committing to budget sur-

pluses, a reduction in Commonwealth expendi-
ture and Commonwealth taxation as a propor-
tion of GDP, he pleaded with the shadow Treasurer when he wrote: ‘OK, Mr Magician, show us how.’ Labor’s Treasury spokesman cannot show us how. Few countries in the world can claim
the current economic strength of Australia. Budget surpluses throughout the world are rare. In the next year there are going to be some difficult external challenges, and we cannot afford to be complacent.

But the budget process is a continuum. It outlines priorities and responsibilities for the forward estimates period. The visionary budget delivered the other week lays the foundations for a sustained period of economic prosperity in Australia. Without a strong economy we cannot afford to provide the significant increases in expenditure that have been recently announced or the investments in health and education. This budget is good news for young and old, for our carers, for families, for the aged care sector, for education, and particularly for rural health, and for Australian workers wanting to put in a bit extra without being penalised by a punitive income tax system which stifes incentive. This last measure has been referred to as the unfinished business of the tax reform of 2000. Only with the introduction of legislation to ensure that 80 per cent of Australian workers do not have to pay more than 30c in the dollar in income tax has the Labor Party decided that maybe they will keep these changes.

The strength of the Australian economy and the ability to provide record funding increases and tax cuts, as has been synonymous with the Treasurer’s last two budgets, does not occur simply through blind chance or good luck. The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer would have us think otherwise and claim that they will not run budget deficits. But how can we possibly believe them? Their own finance spokesman said only last year that there are times when deficits may be needed. When are they? When are those times that the Labor Party—the alternative government of this nation—believes that budget deficits may be necessary?

There are many external threats to our economy and to the strength of it, but the greatest threat to the economic future of this nation and Australian families would be the election of a Latham government. I am proud of the businesses and individuals in my electorate who have grasped the opportunities of a stable and thriving economy. Their enterprise and hard work has meant that we have a thriving, vibrant local economy with an unemployment rate of 3.8 per cent—the lowest in rural and regional Australia and lower than the vast majority of metropolitan electorates.

Rural and regional Australia is the very core of our nation. It defines our identity and epitomises the ideal of the Australian way of life. Yet it is this very Australian way of life that is under threat from a Latham Labor government. Do not look to this leader for any compassion for our agricultural sector that was brought to its knees in the recent budget. Do not look to the Labor leader for any understanding of the daily sacrifices that farming families and other small businesses make. He has got no plan for drought assistance. He has got no plan for rural and regional Australia. ‘Rural and regional Australia’ must be dirty words to the Labor Party, just as the phrase ‘mainstream Australia’ is to many of those opposite. So far in north-east Victoria we have had 587 exceptional circumstances relief payment approvals and 98 exceptional circumstances interest rate subsidy recipients—that is a total of $6.8 million that has been allocated to my electorate in the north-east of Victoria through exceptional circumstances funding.

The Leader of the Opposition does not know that we have one of the most innovative and self-reliant agricultural sectors in the world. Why else would he make comments like:
… if agriculture in this country is so efficient then why does it need such a high level of business welfare?

And, further:

Agriculture is very good at socialising its losses and privatising its profits.

This is all a bit rich from a man who has lived off the public purse and others for most of his life. I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition actually visit rural and regional Australia and see how hard some of these families are doing it and the actual sacrifices they make, not just in their daily life but in planning for their family's future. I hope that the people of my electorate will not have to suffer a Labor government and its policies—or, a lack of policies, as the case may be—for country Australians.

Through the measures contained in this budget, the people of my electorate will continue to benefit from this government's foresight and investment in our future. Strengthening families and family life has been one of the hallmark themes of the Howard government. The maternity payment announced in this budget continues the great success of the family tax benefit and the child-care benefit in providing significant financial assistance to families to help them with the costs of raising children. The greatest investment we can make for a better future is to invest in stronger families. The importance of the family unit to social stability and the unmistakable benefits that flow to Australian society through strong and united families are very much key themes of this current budget.

The quality of education is a primary concern for many parents, and it is a very important priority for this government. The budget has outlined record funding increases to Australian schools and universities, with $2.6 billion allocated to government schools—an increase of 5.4 per cent over the last year.

The 79 state primary schools and 21 state senior schools in my electorate of Indi will certainly benefit from an increase of $136 million in education funding on last year's figures.

Unlike the Labor Party, the Howard government believes in choices for parents when deciding where to send their children to school. That is why this government remains a significant contributor to state schools—even though under the Australian Constitution state schools are the primary responsibility of state and territory governments—and to non-government schools. This March, the Howard government announced a record $31.3 billion in funding for Australian schools over the next four years. There was much commendation—particularly from some sections of the media—handed to the Victorian government when they delivered their budget last month. Surprisingly, there was little more than a cursory glance at the fact that had the Victorian government increased spending on their state school sector at the same rate as the Commonwealth did Victorian schools would have been $180 million better off.

For my part, I am certainly pleased that the Catholic Education Office in Australia has decided to become part of the Howard government's immensely successful socio-economic status funding formula. Cardinal Pell said:

The socio-economic funding model fits in well with the Church's concern to make education available to all Catholics and especially to families on low incomes who make up the bulk of our schools' clientele. The additional funding this package provides will help ensure access for all Catholic families.

Low-fee Catholic and independent schools such as F.C.J. College in Benalla, Cathedral College in Wangaratta and Catholic College in Wodonga—where all the growth in enrolments in the non-government sector has oc-
occurred in the past few years—are not the pre-
serve of the rich, as many in the Labor Party
would have us believe. The Leader of the
Opposition has previously said, ‘Not every
school should be entitled to public funding.’
Perhaps when we finally hear a decent
speech in response to the budget from the
Leader of the Opposition, he might explain
to the people of my electorate which schools
in my electorate he believes should have
their funding cut.

The lack of detail from the opposition
does not end with education policy and
budget cuts. We also do not have details
about their aged care policy. The manner in
which we treat our aged in today’s society is
a true measure of our compassion. At a time
when many people are considered to be too
old and frail, to be people who should be
hidden away from view and to be a nuisance
by those who lack compassion, it is our re-
sponsibility to ensure that they have the sup-
port and the services to age with dignity. I
am very proud that this government has dou-
bled funding for aged care in eight years—
from $3 billion in 1995-96 to more than $6
billion this year—and has introduced na-
tional legislated care standards in aged care
facilities.

The 2004-05 budget provides even greater
assistance to aged care facilities, for both
high and low care, and significantly boosts
capital funding—particularly for aged care
facilities in rural areas. This was a key con-
cern raised with Minister Bishop during her
visit to Indi last month, when she met with
more than 30 local aged care providers. The
one-off payment of $3,500 per resident be-
fore 30 June is particularly welcomed in my
electorate. Even the shadow Treasurer, in his
address to the National Press Club, com-
mented that the additional funding for aged
care is a good thing. People should not be
fooled into thinking the Labor Party has a
plan for the aged care sector. They have had
eight years and still have not released a sub-
stantive policy.

Another area of particular concern in my
electorate is health. I am very pleased that no
other government has invested more in rural
health than this government has. The gov-
ernment’s MedicarePlus package, worth
$2.85 billion, maintains, strengthens and pro-
tects Medicare now and for future genera-
tions. MedicarePlus provides a $7.50 incen-
tive to GPs for each bulk-billed consultation
for children under the age of 16 and for con-
cession card holders; brings in a brand new
MedicarePlus safety net which cushions all
Australians against out-of-pocket, out-of-
hospital medical expenses; drastically in-
creases the number of doctors and specialists
in areas of current work force shortage; and
allows for easier access for claiming the
Medicare rebate. The Labor Party is promis-
ing only $1.9 billion in its Medicare package,
while this government has committed $2.85
billion for our health care system.

Many of the initiatives in the Medicare-
Plus package are already paying dividends in
my electorate of Indi—such as the success of
the Bogong Regional Training Network,
where 43 doctors are this year completing
their training in the wider region, compared
with fewer than 10 before the establishment
of Bogong. Similarly, the establishment of
the Wodonga Regional Health Service’s
bulk-billing clinic is a clear indication that
the Howard government’s MedicarePlus in-
centives are already beginning to make a
difference in country Australia.

The specific measures contained in the
2004-05 budget for rural health initiatives
will be welcomed by the medical commu-

nity. These include a continuation worth
$830.2 million for the Rural Health Strategy
to boost GP and specialist numbers in areas
of work force shortage in Indi and an in-
crease in the number of medical scholarships
for rural medical training. In all the discussions I have had with local GPs and the medical work force agencies, the single greatest health care issue facing the Victoria-New South Wales border region and the north-east Victorian region is the GP work force shortage. The biggest single driver of affordable health care is the supply of doctors. More practicing doctors means more affordable health services and more bulk-billing.

The medical work force in Indi well knows that the recruitment and, more importantly, the retention of GPs in our area is the key issue. The new general practitioner registrars program and the work force support for rural general practitioner program are part of the government’s rural health strategy to assist in bringing medical professionals to the places where they are needed most. This government will continue to fund the Divisions of General Practice Network, which will be welcomed by both the border and north-east divisions in my electorate of Indi.

On 7 July 2003, the member for Lalor said, ‘The private health insurance rebate will be reviewed by me in the coming months.’ Ten months later, 46,000 people in Indi who benefit from access to private health cover are still waiting to hear if Labor will keep the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate, which saves them some $750 each year. The House has heard the Leader of the Opposition previously call the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate a ‘first-rate absurdity’, an ‘appalling piece of public policy’ and ‘the maddest piece of public policy that one will ever see out of the Commonwealth parliament’.

I hope that the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Lalor can explain to the 46,000 people in Indi who are currently saving $750 on their private health insurance premiums each year under this government how the Labor Party are going to make things easier for them. There was certainly no mention of the private health insurance rebate in the opposition leader’s speech, during the budget debate so it is time for the Labor Party to end their indecision and come clean with their intentions. Will you keep the rebate or will you scrap it? There are 46,000 people in my electorate of Indi waiting for you to declare your hand.

Another budget announcement that was particularly welcomed in my electorate was the $290,000 rebate of the wine equalisation tax. Having worked together with other members of the government and with local winemakers in my electorate on this, I am pleased that the government has acted to reduce the tax burden on wineries in the north-east. The measure contained in this budget certainly surpasses the Labor Party’s plan for wine tax relief released in 2001, which would have made a WET exemption only for wineries with a production of 50,000 litres or less. The Labor Party support the WET being applied to the majority of wineries in the north-east through their proposals and will maintain the WET in government.

I am proud to be part of a government that has made the hard economic decisions to deliver for the Australian people. I do not want to revisit an era in which a generation of young people were robbed of their freedom to dream, to earn a living and to create a future for themselves, an era in which hard-working small business people saw their life’s efforts evaporate because they were paying interest rates above 20 per cent and had to endure ‘the recession we had to have’. The towns and hamlets of Indi—be they Mansfield, which is undergoing a construction boom, or Wodonga, which is the fastest-growing inland regional city in the country—are benefiting from the golden trifecta of low interest rates, low unemployment and low inflation which is necessary for any society’s
success. These outcomes do not come by fluke. I commend the Treasurer for the recent budget and I commend the appropriation bills to the House.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (6.46 p.m.)—
This budget is all about gearing up for an election and has nothing about investing in the long-term future of Australia. It is just a cynical grab bag of short-term election promises designed, from the government’s point of view, to distract voters in the hope that the public will not notice that the budget is entirely empty of long-term measures for investing in our country’s future. It is a razzle-dazzle budget, a bread and circus budget, filled with hocus-pocus, beads and feathers, flim-flam flummox. Like the song says: ‘Give ’em the old razzle-dazzle. How can they spot you got no talents? Razzl-dazzle ’em, and they’ll never catch wise!’ Fortunately, Australians are not so gullible. They are not so easily ‘razzle-dazzled’, and they can spot a government that has got no talents. Australians will catch wise to a government that is so desperate that its Treasurer has become the Billy Flynn of Australian politics and delivered a budget that is just about show and has nothing about the issues. Quite simply, the budget is about cash handouts just in the lead-up to the election. There is absolutely no long-term vision and no thought about investing in the services that are so vital to Australia’s future.

Education and training are all but forgotten in this budget. The few education measures that can be found in the budget will benefit only a smattering of carefully selected marginal seats. This is just more evidence that the budget is not about investing in Australia’s future but about just a few election sweeteners. For the majority of schools and all of our universities and TAFEs there is nothing new. The budget continues the Howard government’s unfair schools funding system which has given massive increases to the wealthiest schools in the country, which need them the least. Other schools with far greater need just have to make do. There is no real funding increase for the majority of government, Catholic and independent schools; I make that very plain. The budget locks in a system that treats schools very differently, depending on whether they are government or nongovernment.

Take the exclusive King’s School in Sydney, for example. It already has vast playing fields, a rifle range, a boathed, a museum with a full-time archivist and a multimillion dollar Centre for Leadership and Learning, amongst a host of other top-of-the-line resources. This school simply does not need the 190 per cent increase in funding it has received between 2001 and 2004 from the Howard government. Contrast that to Trinity Catholic College and Fairvale High School, both pretty close to the King’s School. They received respectively just 25 per cent and 20 per cent increases, mostly just indexation. Yet it is Trinity and Fairvale, and not King’s, that are in desperate need of more resources.

In contrast to the Howard government, Labor will restore balance and fairness to the schools funding system and make sure that schools in greatest need get the biggest funding increases. Labor are interested in the circumstances of schools, not sectors. Our schools policy will tailor support to each school so that every child gets a high-quality education. Labor will set a resource standard and all schools will be funded to meet that standard. Our national resource standard will drive needs based funding so that schools get the resources they need to provide a great education to all of our children. A national priority for Labor will be to increase funding available to government schools so that they are funded up to the national standard expected. We have also announced that a Labor government will not reduce total funding for
non-government schools; instead, we will change the way in which the funding is distributed between those schools. We will reduce funding for the very wealthy schools and increase funding for needy non-government schools. Labor’s national resource standard means that schools will be assessed and given the support that they need.

Not surprisingly, there is nothing in this budget to tackle the staggering levels of youth unemployment in Australia. The fact that unemployment amongst young Australians is over 20 per cent is nothing less than a national tragedy, yet there is no action from this government in this budget. Each year, nearly 45,000 young people leave school early and do not go on to full-time work or study. That is a tragic waste of opportunity and a massive drain on the economy, especially when business is crying out for more skilled workers.

That is why Labor in government will introduce a youth guarantee to make sure every young Australian will get guaranteed backing to learn or earn. There will be no third option of doing nothing. Under Labor, all 15- to 18-year-olds will get the support either to study at school, at TAFE or at university or to be in a job or apprenticeship. There will be new strategies to keep young people at school completing year 12, including more funds to go to those schools with high drop-out rates and new resources to help students benefit from good discipline. A Latham Labor government will pay the fees for secondary school students who want to study TAFE courses. This means any student can undertake a TAFE course while they are at school and their parents or school will save hundreds of dollars in fees.

Labor will also employ over 1,000 training mentors whose job will be to make sure young people do not join the unemployment queue. Every year we will make sure there are 7,500 new TAFE places and 7,500 new apprenticeship places for 15- to 18-year-olds. There will be training mentors in schools, TAFEs and workplaces. We will create a new jobs gateway to give 10,000 early school leavers a wage subsidised job and up to two years worth of training. There will be a new link-up transition program to help the young unemployed.

Contrast these commitments with the hands-off approach of the government. Just imagine that this can be true. It is. The education minister of this country says that young people do not finish year 12 because they are not ‘biologically or socially equipped’. He says that retention targets should be dropped. Such talk is madness when we know that young people who leave school early are more than twice as likely to become unemployed than those who finish year 12. The Prime Minister says unemployed people should just do work for the dole. Labor wants to make sure that young Australians do not collect the dole in the first place. We want to make sure they stay at school, that they are in training, that they are in a job, and we will support them.

We also know that Australian parents who want their children to have a fair chance of going to university or TAFE have been completely ignored in this budget. So have university students—and their families—struggling to cope with the Howard government’s massive fee hikes. Already we have seen 18 universities announce HECS fee increases. That means that from next year students will be paying as much as $20,000 for a science degree, $40,000 for a law degree and nearly $15,000 for an arts degree. Young Australians will be graduating with massive levels of debt, making it so much harder to buy a home, start a family and get ahead.
What is more, as the government knows, around 20,000 qualified applicants missed out on a university place this year only because the Howard government refuses to fund enough places. There is no other reason we have so many disappointed young Australians. The Howard government says that people who miss out on a HECS place should pay full fees—full fees as high as $150,000. International students pay full fees, and rightly so, but Australians should not have to do so. Australian students and their families pay taxes and contribute to the Australian economy. When students graduate they will make a very big contribution to our country.

Labor believes that Australian students deserve a fully funded HECS place at university, not $150,000 of debt. The budget fine print also reveals that the government will drive university students a further $90 million deeper into debt by slugging them with 20 per cent penalties when they take out a loan to pay full fees. As well, in this budget there is not one extra cent for new TAFE places—despite around 15,000 young people missing out on a TAFE place and many industries facing very serious skill shortages. By contrast once again to the government, Labor will create an additional 20,000 new university places and 20,000 new TAFE places each year. We will also abolish full fee degrees. We do not want to see Australians paying $100,000 or $150,000 for a university degree.

Labor will also reverse the Howard government’s HECS fee hikes. We do not believe in pricing Australians out of a university education. Labor has already announced our $2.34 billion package for universities and TAFEs. It commits to no HECS fee hikes, no full fees and significantly increased public support for universities.

One of the few positive aspects of this budget is the government’s decision to finally catch up to Labor on work and family issues and follow our lead by giving new mothers Labor’s baby care payment. But let us not kid ourselves: it has taken the Howard government eight long years to act on this issue—an issue described by the Prime Minister, as we have heard so many times, as ‘a barbecue stopper’. If that is the case, the sausages have been well and truly burnt to a crisp.

About two million babies have been born in these eight years. But we only get action from the Howard government when Labor puts forward a policy. Eight years it has taken the government to come forward with this policy, and all they do is play catch-up with Labor. The Howard government has been sitting on this issue for eight long years, all the while knowing that Australian families were suffering. It wanted to hold fire until the election before finally delivering on desperately needed support for families. The government has had to admit that it has certainly botched its baby bonus scheme. That has been what you would have to call a policy disaster. It failed to deliver even one cent to one in three new mothers. One in three new mothers got nothing. The vast majority of mothers got less than $500.

I am happy to say that the Howard government has almost entirely copied Labor’s baby care payment. Of course, we do welcome the fact that the government is adopting one of our great policy ideas; however, there are some small but crucial differences between the government’s and Labor’s policy. These differences show that the government’s work and family backflip has everything to do with the upcoming election and nothing to do with genuinely targeting support to Australian families in need. For example, the fact that the government’s policy is not means-tested means that wealthy new
mothers will receive the payment, despite the fact that they have absolutely no financial need for it. So women with incomes as high as $150,000 and $200,000 or even higher will get the full baby care payment from this Howard government. I guess it is just the Liberal way. Women who do not work but whose partners earn what you would have to call ‘gold-collar’ salaries will also receive the payment. It is just not fair—and I would have to say that, in these times, it is also economically reckless. It just goes to show how little this budget has to do with sound policy.

Also under the government’s policy, new mothers can receive their payment as a lump sum $3,000 payment. Handing out $3,000 lump sum payments is a policy time bomb waiting to explode. In the difficult area of teenage pregnancies, for example, where young girls already have so much difficulty managing their finances, lump sum payments to new mothers is just irresponsible. By contrast, Labor’s baby care payment is a responsible policy. Our payment is means-tested so that support goes to those new mothers in genuine need. It also must be taken fortnightly over a minimum 14-week period. Under Labor there will be no lump sum payment. These are serious flaws in the government’s policy and are once again evidence that this budget was designed for base political electioneering, without caring for the economic or the social effect.

There are so many other examples that we could draw attention to that demonstrate that this is a cynical and self-interested budget. This budget ignores the needs and circumstances of so many Australians. There is nothing but empty rhetoric for many, many people—for example, all those people who earn under $52,000 a year and who have been working hard and paying record taxes under this government. In fact, it is their toil and taxes that are funding the Howard government’s pre-election razzle-dazzle; yet they get nothing from this government.

They are the forgotten Australians. They are the forgotten Australians who were hoping that, after eight years, this government had heard their concerns: about their need for more resources at their local school; about the cost of going to university—a cost which has almost doubled already under this government, without the extra 25 per cent that students are going to face from next year; about the need for more university and TAFE places; and about the desperate need for help for those young Australians who are at risk of unemployment or the many young Australians who are unemployed because this government continues to ignore their concerns. This budget is all about ignoring the concerns of all of these people. This is a government that has decided to opt for base electioneering instead of investing in Australia’s future.

Mr HARDGRAVE (Moreton—Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister) (7.04 p.m.)—As the member for Moreton, I am delighted to be here to take part in the debate on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005, although I am disturbed that the alternate Deputy Prime Minister of this country has just made a somewhat misleading grab bag of promises. But we are getting very used to hearing that from the Australian Labor Party, the would-be government of Australia, whose leader has no understanding of detail and does not want to know about it. The member for Hotham will be in charge of economic policy. And we have just heard from the only other person in the trifecta, the member for Jagajaga.

Despite the unfortunate contribution that was just made, I am delighted that strong economic management in this country—and you cannot take a chance on economic man-

CHAMBER
agement—which has come about from the certainty, strength and deliberate policy positioning of this government over the last eight years with John Howard at the helm, means that in my local area there have been some strong winners from this year’s federal budget. But a budget is not the only absolute thing produced by a government. Over a series of government budgets and all the work in between, there has been a range of benefits that have come the way of people in my electorate, and it is worth going back over them.

This budget, for instance, delivers the seventh surplus of this government—an underlying cash surplus of $2.4 billion. That means that after paying all of our costs, our incoming and outgoing balance is at the point where there is $2.4 billion extra—and there will also be surpluses over the next three years. That means that we can deal with matters like repaying an irresponsible level of debt—$70 billion so far repaid since 1996. That is the sort of certainty and strength that this government has delivered through the deliberate process of economic management. Labor left us with $96 billion of debt, and $70 billion of that has been repaid.

Those opposite offer no detail. In fact, the member for Jagajaga again seemed to be running out of cash. They are making promises knowing that they are never going to happen. There are promises aplenty but no detail—and that is the problem. By contrast, under this government, there is more help for families, including a $19 billion package over five years—paid for—which is going to boost family payments and help families raise their children and balance work and family responsibilities. This is the largest package of assistance ever.

There is a lump sum payment to all families eligible for family tax benefit part A in the 2003-04 financial year. Those eligible families will receive a payment before 30 June this year of $600 for each child. Of course, families will also receive the payment for each dependent child under 18 in respect of whom they have received youth allowance in 2003-04. This is about returning a dividend to the people who are part of our society. This is about saying that Australians should share in strong economic management. There is an extra $600 per child after 30 June 2004 once tax returns have been lodged.

In my own area, I know that people at Mount Gravatt State School are delighted that an extra 40,000 outside school hours child-care places—some 30,000 places in Queensland alone—have been allocated in this budget. Mount Gravatt State School have come to see me. They want to provide some of that community after school care that is funded by the Australian government. And there are an extra 4,000 family day care places—1,500 in Queensland alone. I know that the Julia Cumming centre at Graceville were delighted by the call I made to them the other day to let them know that there is some funding to assist them to continue to provide quality child care. It is going to be used to install airconditioning. They tell me that last summer in Brisbane was so hot that kids were violently ill because of the heat. The Australian government is putting some $22,500 into the Julia Cumming centre to make a difference, and is doing likewise for the C&K centre at Mount Gravatt West—and I am pleased for Marilyn Beale and her hardworking team there.

Likewise, I am pleased for the Southside Education Centre, a fantastic organisation at Sunnybank that provides a second chance for young ladies who, more often than not through no fault of their own, find themselves expelled from the state school system and need to pick themselves up and come
back into the educational opportunities that can be provided at this place, repair their lives and get on with it. About a quarter of the girls at this school of 60 or 70 girls have young children—babies—of their own. The government is of course looking at ways to further facilitate that second chance. Under this government, the Southside Education Centre has received the highest funding increase of all non-government schools around Australia.

The maternity payment of $3,000, which increases to $4,000 in July 2006 and to $5,000 in July 2008, is available to all families. Labor are currently saying they are going to exclude some people from this maternity payment which is meant to assist people in meeting costs in the early days following their child’s arrival. We accept that people of all shapes, sizes and financial circumstances are having children. We encourage them to do that, and we are pleased to make this payment available. Again, on the issue of teenage pregnancy, this opposition is quite happy to shrink away from detail every time. In the United States teen pregnancy is running at five per cent, and in the UK it is running at three per cent. In Australia, teenagers—that is, people aged 13 to 19—account for only two per cent of pregnancies. Australia has a low teenage pregnancy rate. So the sorts of comments that the member for Jagajaga has made show that detail frightens the Australian Labor Party. Therefore, the people of Australia should be very frightened by the Australian Labor Party.

When it comes to cutting income tax, the thresholds have been increased to allow more taxpayers the opportunity to work hard for themselves and to keep more of that money—it is about incentive, a word that is completely lost on the opposition benches; there is no doubt about that—before they start paying the top marginal rate. For example, the income tax threshold for the 42c tax rate will be raised from $52,001 to $58,001 in July 2004 and to $63,001 in July 2005. This is about saying to average, everyday workers—many of them earning the second wage in the household—that there is an opportunity for them to keep more of their money and not pay it in tax.

The Labor Party say that they are going to pass this. But they are cherry-picking through this budget. They need to pass every aspect of this budget because what we are delivering through strong economic management is over 80 per cent of taxpayers facing a top marginal tax bracket of no more than 30c in the dollar, for the next four years—and that includes those on average earnings. People earning $50,000 per annum or less are paying substantially less tax now, as a percentage of their income, than they were before the new tax system came in in 2000. The government dealt with the lower income tax stream people—the lower income brackets—earlier, and now we are simply fulfilling our obligation to middle income people. Unfortunately, more and more average wage earners are paying more and more tax and not getting to keep more and more of the money they earn, particularly through overtime. So we are dealing with that this year.

Look at someone on $20,000 per annum: they are now paying $625 per year—or $12 per week—less in tax. That is a 23 per cent tax cut. Someone on $30,000 per annum is now paying $1,250 per year—or $20 per week—less in tax. That is a 17 per cent tax cut. Someone on $50,000 per year is now paying $2,930 per year—or $56 per week—less in tax. That is a 21 per cent tax cut. Yet the Australian Labor Party, completely uninterested in dealing with the detail and looking below the surface—if it is not in the veneer they do not see it—simply do not want to confess that the government has already delivered tax cuts to lower income taxpayers.
around this country, and that it is a good thing that we did them first.

Then there is education—investing more in our state schools and non-government schools for the benefit of the next generation. On the weekend, I was at my old primary school, Runcorn State School. It is their 103rd year. They are a fantastic school. They were running their school fete, which they do every two years. I was also talking to the principal of Runcorn Heights State School. Their ambition is to promote their school as a fine school, a school that welcomes kids from all backgrounds and makes them feel at home. I know that state schools are great schools. I know that schools of different shapes and sizes create a culture of caring and learning, which we should all be proud of. That is why the government is pleased to assist with the national values framework and the national benchmarks. It might help St Brendan’s School at Moorooka, which this year are celebrating their 75th anniversary; they were started by the St Josephite nuns all those years ago. Or it might be Wellers Hill State School, where John Webster and his team work very hard to build strong community links through the Tarragindi-Wellers Hill RSL club. The way they run their Anzac Day ceremony is worth celebrating; it is a magnificent event. These sorts of values and the way these schools operate now can only be enhanced further by the proposals for this framework.

Through this budget, the government will invest a record $32 billion over the next four years in mainstream and Indigenous schooling. This is an increase of $8.2 billion over the previous four years. So this Australian government is all about funding education, and funding it more for the next generation. I think funding for citizenship education in local schools is really important. Warrigal Road State School has already run their own local citizenship ceremony and is seeking out the parents of students who are not Australia citizens and showing the kids of the school the process of becoming a citizen. I think that is a credit to them.

In Queensland, federal funding for state government schools and students in 2004-05 will total some $526.8 million, an estimated $23 million or 4.5 per cent increase over the past year—or an estimated $237 million or 81.7 per cent increase since the Australian Labor Party lost office in 1996. This is a government that has backed its rhetoric with results and action. We do not have to worry about the lack of detail in the Australian Labor Party’s plan, because if the people of Australia, as I understand them, see through this lack of detail they will not support the Labor Party when an election comes.

The provision of an extra $2.2 billion over five years to the aged care sector means an extra 4,350 places in Queensland aged care facilities over the next three years. We have already seen new places in operation: the White House facility in Warrigal Road at Eight Mile Plains and the Regis facility in Salisbury, on Lillian Avenue, are absolutely fantastic facilities that were not there before. Aged care funding has doubled over the past eight years under this government. We are meeting the challenges of an ageing population.

We are also looking at the way retirement savings can be boosted, and it is worth $2.7 billion over four years. We are enhancing the government’s super co-contribution scheme as well as working to reduce the superannuation surcharge for those who are paying it. The government’s co-contribution of $1.50 for each dollar for those on low incomes makes an enormous difference. We are also increasing flexibility. We are also increasing choice. This government believe that people have the right to make their own decisions.
Looking at the stronger health system, I think particularly of the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Hospital in my electorate; the Queensland government continues to offer no guarantees that it will stay open. Twelve years ago, with the local auxiliary, I started a campaign to save the QEII hospital. It was not until a coalition state government came along in 1995 that the then health minister Mike Horan delivered some certainty. But since the Labor Party got back into office in Queensland there has been a continuation of the uncertainty associated with QEII, a fantastic place that needs to be given the dignity of being certain of staying open.

By the end of 2004-05, in the federal area we will have doubled funding for health and aged care since coming to office. The government plan to spend more than $41 billion on health and aged care services in the next 12 months alone. The new Medicare safety net means that the government rebate now pays 80 per cent of non-hospital costs, about $300 for families eligible for family tax benefits A and concession card holders; 80 per cent of all other individuals and families are paid above $700 a year. We are looking at new measures to help people control diabetes and new measures—$8 million over four years—to eliminate the current waiting list for profoundly deaf children who can be assisted by cochlear implant speech processors. This sort of investment in those people is very important. An additional $461 million over five years to support carers means that organisations like Blue Nurses and Flexicare in my electorate, who provide podiatry services and other interaction points with older people, will be able to continue to do that—and with more resources.

I know that when it comes to small business the South West Brisbane Chamber of Commerce, the Southside Chamber of Commerce and the Archerfield Airport Chamber of Commerce continue to share with me their concerns over red tape. The changes in this budget mean that we are lifting the red tape burden for almost three-quarters of a million small businesses and 30,000 non-profit organisations. Substantial business reporting changes means that they will be able to significantly pare back their reporting requirements under the A New Tax System. So all up this is good, and provided the states cooperate there will be less red tape for local small businesses.

I mention very briefly local environmental groups such as the Oxley Creek Catchment Association. The work that Anne Clark and her team do in raising awareness of this marvellous resource, which flows into the Brisbane River and out into Moreton Bay, means that people such as those at Sheep Station Gully through Parkinson are going to be encouraged to get involved and local residents will get a better understanding of how their impact on the local environment can be dealt with. The way the Stable Swamp Creek group, under Greg Sullivan, has worked so well to rehabilitate the area around Les Atkinson Park at Sunnybank is a credit to them. Money has been provided under National Heritage Trust funding which would never have been available under the previous government. In addition, I have spoken in this place many times about the fine work done by the Bulimba Creek Catchment Coordinating Committee.

The A New Tax System was introduced four years ago. This year Queensland will receive $665.6 million more than it has in the past. I know that many opposite are not happy about that, because all this money goes to Queensland. It makes you wonder why it is that the Queensland government cannot get onto some of the things we expect them to do with that money, like keeping the QEII hospital open or dealing with some of the local truck traffic issues I have. Against that background, I am shocked to report to
the Australian parliament tonight the way in which the Australian Labor Party leader—the would-be Prime Minister, the man who does not want detail to get in the way of a good story or an easy headline—has now committed federal Labor to putting more trucks and more traffic into the federal electorate of Moreton.

The Leader of the Opposition said last week that he wants to provide funding for a six-lane development of the Ipswich Motorway. Again, he does not understand the plans. The Queensland government have said very clearly that their plan involves working from Granard Road west to the Logan Motorway intersection. That means that they want to entrench forever the business case for more trucks—more traffic—in my area. This is again a danger for my local community. When you couple that with the work of Labor state member Karen Struthers, who called for a six-lane development of the Brisbane urban corridor, which means more trucks going past letterboxes, and the official policy of the Australian Labor Party at the local government level in Queensland to six-lane the entire length of Mt Gravatt Capalaba Road and hook it up with Kessels Road, you realise that the Australian Labor Party are all about driving more trucks through my electorate and are not concerned about the better or alternative routes that we want to talk to them about.

It is very simple: there is a missing link between the Logan Motorway and the Warrego and Cunningham highways. That is the missing link that has to be breached. Currently all those trucks are competing with the local traffic coming out of Ipswich and going to Brisbane each day. But Labor says that is okay; it is okay for 18-wheel trucks to be competing for space along the Ipswich Motorway with people trying to take their children to school. This side of politics say it is not okay, and we are working now to force the Queensland government into understanding very clearly, once and for all, that there is a better way to do this.

But Mr Latham has locked Labor into putting more trucks, more heavy vehicles and more traffic into my area. He will drive traffic up Oxley Road during the construction stage, which means people in Sherwood, Graceville and Chelmer are going to be subjected to massive trucks trying to get around the construction. Even people in Tennyson are going to find that trucks will find their way along Graceville Avenue and along King Arthur Terrace as they make their way to Fairfield Road. Venner Road will see more trucks than it has ever seen before if Mark Latham gets his way on the Ipswich Motorway. The people of my electorate have a very clear choice to make in that regard, because Mark Latham—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. L.R.S. Price)—Order! The minister will refer to members by their titles.

Mr HARDGRAVE—The Leader of the Opposition, with his complete lack of interest in detail, is consigning the people of my local area to more trucks and more traffic from now on, and I will not stand for that as the local federal member—or will I allow the state members in the area to get away with their duplicity on this. The state member for Mansfield does not understand this issue either. A press release that was offered by five state Labor members in my area just the other week emphasised very clearly, without any doubt, their interest in putting more trucks along the Brisbane urban corridor.

When you couple the fact that there have been broken promises from the state member for Algester, Karen Struthers, over the need for an Elizabeth Street overpass to take away the problems along Beaudesert Road so that people from Parkinson, Calamvale, Algester...
and Drewvale can use that road without having to wait for trains to pass, you realise that Labor are so safe at the state level across these areas that they have lost interest in even trying. That is the problem. We now have safe Labor seats dotted right across the south side of Brisbane at the state level. We have state Labor members who are lazy and uninterested and we have a federal Labor leader who is going along for the ride and is unable to argue about the detail because he is never interested in it. The people of Australia should be concerned because an alternative prime minister should know more detail. He should not allow himself to get locked into a plan that will not work and that will drive more trucks and more traffic into the electorate of Moreton. *(Time expired)*

Mr COX *(Kingston)* *(7.24 p.m.)*—I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005. Fifty-two billion dollars in new spending and no tax cuts if you earn less than $52,000 per annum, $52 billion in new spending and no reform—this is Peter Costello’s and John Howard’s 2004 budget. It is a budget of forgotten people and lost opportunities. This budget has failed many tests. It does nothing to build a stronger society or a stronger economy and it leaves the Howard government’s assertion of good financial management in tatters. This budget focuses solely on securing a fourth Howard-Costello term in government and not on the future of Australia. Australians deserve more from their government than a short-sighted attempt to buy the votes of a select group of voters it has targeted. They deserve a government that governs for their future and not just for its own survival in office.

Australians have seen through this government. This is the third cargo cult election budget. In 1998 it spent more than $20.6 billion to buy a yes vote for the GST. That record new policy spend was exceptionally high but it seemed to be related to the introduction of the GST. However, in 2001 it was exceeded, with more than $25.6 billion in new spending for special interest groups and without a dollar of tax cuts. Now in 2004 we have the mother of all pork barrels, with $51.9 billion in new spending but no reform of the tax or family payment system and with little attempt to address the deficit in services that this government has created. Over the last eight years new policy commitments by the Howard government in election years have averaged $32.7 billion. By contrast, the Prime Minister’s new policy commitments in non-election years have averaged only $3.9 billion. It is not a coincidence that an election year triggers an almost tenfold increase in new policy commitments.

What are Australians saying? Yes, they need tax relief, but they also want a government that is committed to a universal health care system; access to higher education based on merit, not ability to pay; support for schools, public and private, on a needs basis; giving priority to policies that assist in achieving a balance between work and family; and stopping unemployment being an option for our youth. They want a government that provides opportunities for all. This budget shows that what they have is a government that cannot even find the money for basic public health programs to inoculate babies against deadly diseases. Australians deserve better than a government that cares more about itself than it does about them.

Peter Costello and John Howard would like the Australian people to believe that they can deliver all these pre-election bribes because of their good economic management. What a government this is. It takes a record level of tax out of your pocket, makes you pay more for essential services and then expects gratitude and adulation for giving a few Australians something back in election bribes.
The Australian people know that it is not the Treasurer’s hard work but their own that has funded this largesse. The 2003-04 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook showed an underlying cash surplus of $20.8 billion for the remainder of the 2003-04 financial year and the three forward estimates years. Parameter variations—largely increases in tax revenue—before the effective new policy decisions increased the surplus over that period by $29 billion in time for the 2004-05 budget. The government did not spend this budget bonanza on anything as dull as Australia’s future or the health of its children. It has carefully calculated its election spending spree of $52 billion in a cynical attempt to get itself out of an electoral hole.

The Howard government has been a classic adherent of the political business cycle—do nothing in non-election years and then spend up big just before you head back to the polls. This has two objectives: to get re-elected or, if that fails, to leave the cupboard bare for a new Latham Labor government. These are signs of a government that is acting in its own self-interest, not in the interests of the people it represents. This budget is pure poll driven spending and Australia knows it. It is old-style politics—manipulative and self-interested. It lacks vision and it is a symptom of a tired government that long ago ceased to direct its attention to the real needs of Australians or to govern in the national interest.

The only political vision that the Treasurer has is that he is handed the keys to the Lodge. It is a case of the government’s spending priorities being determined by the Liberal Party’s private polling and directed at the single criterion of buying votes. This is government by Mark Textor—the Liberal Party’s pollster. Families get well-deserved, albeit poorly designed, relief in the budget. Why? Because the polling shows that they are extremely disgruntled with the government. In fact, any connection between where this government directs its new spending and what is good policy or fair is purely coincidental. I seek leave to incorporate in Hansard a table showing the net impact of policy decisions on the bottom line for each calendar year from 1996 to 2004.

Leave granted.

The table read as follows—

NET IMPACT OF POLICY DECISIONS

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<td>2004</td>
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Source: Budget papers and MYEFO 1996 to 2004

Mr Cox—I thank the parliamentary secretary. The much-hyped tax cuts failed to deliver any relief for four out of five taxpayers from Australia’s highest taxing government. People earning below $52,000 per year are justifiably asking, ‘Why was I left out?’ At the last census, 94.9 per cent of adults in Adelaide’s southern suburbs reported having incomes lower than that. These are the people Mr Howard forgot—hardworking Australians paying a record level of tax to fund this government’s pre-election bribes but apparently not important enough to get any tax relief from this government.

While the tax cuts for those earning above $52,000 fit the government’s target demographic for the election, they do not return the value of bracket creep. Access Economics’ budget monitor shows that the value of bracket creep is $2.5 billion in 2004-05, whereas the tax cuts are worth only $1.925 billion. Bracket creep in 2005-06 is $3.9 billion—again more than the value of the tax
cuts of $3.8 billion. In 2006-07, bracket creep will top $5.3 billion—almost $1 billion more than the value of the tax cuts of $4.25 billion. Access Economics have supplied me with an estimate of the bracket creep for 2007-08 of $6.7 billion—almost $2 billion more than the value of the tax cuts in that year of $4.75 billion.

Over the forward estimates period the tax cuts fall almost $4 billion short of what Australians expected would be the minimum benchmark for the value of tax cuts in this budget, giving back bracket creep over the period to adjust the tax scales to their inflation-adjusted equivalent of when the GST was brought in. I seek leave to incorporate in Hansard a table showing bracket creep and the value of tax cuts over the forward estimates period.

Leave granted.

The table read as follows—

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Mr COX—These tax cuts fail to cover bracket creep since the GST was introduced. They are therefore less than the bare minimum that Australian taxpayers could reasonably have thought they had a right to expect. One can only assume that after the poor reception for the milkshake and sandwich tax cuts last year, the government thought that giving nothing in tax cuts was a better political bet for four out of five families and singles. Eighty per cent get no return of bracket creep. The Treasurer and the Prime Minister have been quick to remind them that they got the milkshake and sandwich tax cut last year. Those tax cuts were not sufficient then to cover bracket creep since the introduction of the GST, so it would be more accurate to say that they have now missed out twice.

The special payments to families before the end of this financial year and early next year are a cover-up. They are not about giving families relief from higher taxes, greater out-of-pocket medical expenses or higher charges for education. These one-off payments are an electoral fix for the debts created by the bad design of the family tax benefit system. Families need relief from week to week and cannot afford to wait until their tax return to receive additional assistance. This government is out of touch with the financial pressures and needs of families. The government has had all this term to fix the problem of family tax benefit debts, but all it has done for the last two financial years is ignore it. There was one year when it took the problem very seriously—providing a $1,000 debt waiver. That was 2001, which, of course, was an election year. It did absolutely nothing in 2002 and 2003 to alleviate the debt problem.

Many families will never see either of the $600 lump sums because they will be eaten up by debts that are the product of a system that simply does not work. There was more than enough money in this budget to fix the disaster that is our family tax benefit system and implement real reform for our future. The Howard government simply chose not to. What the government refuses to concede is that the family benefit system is fundamentally flawed. It punishes women who choose to return to work. The focus in this budget should have been on fixing the debt crisis and enhancing rewards from work.

We hear a lot from this government about increasing work force participation to deal with the ageing of the population—of making people near retirement work till they drop. But the focus should be on removing the impediments for women to return to the
work force after they have children rather than on forcing older Australians to work to the grave. Women returning to work can be financially worse off due to this government’s family tax benefit policy that fails to support their choice to work by reassessing their eligibility for the family payments they received when their income was lower and they needed to rely on that assistance. Women are sick of being punished when they choose to go back to work. When a woman returns to work the family faces losing around 40c for every dollar earned in reduced family payments. Add to that the woman’s marginal tax rate and the cost of child care and it is easy to see why women feel punished.

This was the budget of lost opportunities. After almost 13 years of continuous growth—of Australians working hard to get ahead and giving the Treasurer growth figures to crow about—Australians deserved better than this. They deserved a budget for their future, a budget of real reform. What they have received is a huge disappointment. In the coming weeks, Labor will unveil its plan for fairer and broader tax relief to the Australian people and reforms to the family tax benefit system to reward effort and fix the family debt crisis. The government may like us to announce our plans yesterday, but in the words of John Howard in his 1995 budget reply as Leader of the Opposition:

I know the Prime Minister would love that to happen. He would love that to happen for two reasons. The first reason is that it would divert attention from a failed budget. The second reason—and a reason that the great bulk of the Australian people are well aware of—is that I know and they know that, if we put our policies on the table tonight, that bloke over there would pinch them all.

**Mr FARMER (Macarthur) (7.38 p.m.)—** I rise in the House tonight to speak on the 2004-05 budget which was released on 11 May. The Howard government have delivered seven surplus budgets since coming to government in 1996. As many Australians are aware, the government inherited a $96 billion debt from the Labor government’s mismanagement of the economy. As of the 2004-05 budget, the federal coalition government has paid back $70 billion of this debt and maintained a surplus through good economic management. This saves the Australian government between $6 billion and $7 billion in interest each year. That is $6 billion to $7 billion that we can now afford to spend on initiating new programs to support the many families of Australia.

My electorate of Macarthur is made up of many mixes of people—from the elderly in Camden and the young families in Campbelltown, to the first home owners in Narellan, as well as the many people who aspire to personal wealth through property investment and employment. As the Treasurer stated when he announced the budget, ‘This budget is designed to keep our economy strong’ and to put tax cuts back into the hands of Australian workers. For home owners in my electorate of Macarthur it means that they can manage their mortgage, due to a period of low interest rates—some of the lowest for the past 30 years.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate this country has seen in 23 years. There is a strong contrast between the way the Howard coalition government and a Labor government would run the economy. A clear example of this is in New South Wales, where the state Labor government recently had to organise a mini-budget so they could impose more taxes on the hard workers of our community to stave off sending the state broke through their mismanagement. They have run the health system into the ground in New South Wales. We are forever hearing in the media about the mismanagement in our hospitals due to staff shortages. The transport
The system is in chaos—you only have to travel on any of the state roads to appreciate this mess. It is also difficult for many people in Campbelltown to find a train that is in service. When they do run, they are often late or cancelled at the last moment. The shortage of teachers in the public sector, the state’s inability to pay them what they are worth and the difficulty supporting the New South Wales police pay rises, again highlight the stark contrast between Labor and Liberal governments and how they run their finances. I take this opportunity to mention that the state Labor government in New South Wales receives more money than it ever has before and I ask what on earth it does with the money, especially the dollars received through the GST revenue.

The 2004-05 federal budget supports families. It does this by creating a change in the income test for single income family benefits. This will allow more mothers to access this payment while they are working part time. A new maternity payment of $3,000 per child will support families and their need to care for newborn infants. In addition to the announcements made last December, the government will add 30,000 outside school hours places to bring the total new places to 40,000 as of 1 July. Low- and middle-income earners in Australia now have a voluntary co-contribution scheme which provides $1.50 from the Howard government for every $1 that they contribute, up to $1,500 a year, to assist with their superannuation savings and later retirement.

This budget commits $2.2 billion over the next five years to expanding the number of aged care places, as well as improving the quality of the care and the facilities for our ageing population. The federal government has increased its health funding from $17 billion in 1996 to $35 billion in 2004. The Labor Party has said that this budget does not consider low-income earners. Obviously, they have not read the budget papers. Like all budgets, including a family budget, you cannot have everything at once. Last year low-income earners received a tax break; this year the federal government have focused their tax breaks on other parts of the community. There are benefits in one way or another for most families in Australia.

Many people in my electorate of Macarthur have said to me that they need incentives to take on a second job or to do overtime. This will help employers and employees to continue to be more productive. In this budget the Howard government has shown that it listens to what the people are saying by increasing the higher income tax thresholds. It means that people can earn more without moving into a higher income tax bracket. The greatest thing this government has done for many people throughout Australia is deliver a budget which will help keep interest rates low, support company productivity and allow our economy to excel.

The people of Australia need good economic management. But this does not happen by chance; it takes a lot of hard work and dedication to achieve it. It takes the 30 years of parliamentary experience that the Prime Minister has to offer as well as the skills, the diligence and the vision of the Treasurer, Peter Costello, to predict the world economic situation and adjust our economy accordingly. The federal budget delivers that and, in doing so, provides more jobs, lower interest rates and a better quality of life for all Australians. The 2004-05 federal budget shows there is a stark contrast between the economic management of a Liberal government and a Labor government. For this reason I am proud to say that I am part of the Liberal government that through this budget once again has ensured that it is protecting, securing and building Australia’s future.
Ms GILLARD (Lalor) (7.47 p.m.)—I rise to make a contribution to the debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and to talk particularly about the story for health in this year’s budget. The story for health in this year’s budget is more about what was not in it than what was in it. Labor supports the very modest initiatives in the budget that relate to cochlear implant upgrades, consumables for those who use diabetics pumps and measures to assist those with Fabry’s disease. But while these measures are to be supported, looking at the rest of the budget’s health measures, all major health areas are left unaddressed. There was not one extra dollar to encourage bulk-billing; there was no new substantial support for public hospitals; there was no major investment in dental health; and, starkest of all, there was no funding for childhood vaccines, particularly the vaccine against the deadly pneumococcal disease. That is where I want to start tonight.

There is no better example of what is wrong with this supposedly family friendly budget than the absence of funding for the pneumococcal vaccine. The failure of the Howard government to fund this vaccine—which has been recommended by all the experts that advise government on these matters: the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation and the National Health and Medical Research Council—puts Australia for the first time ever in a situation where the recommended suite of vaccines for children and what is funded by government are two different things. Both the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation and the National Health and Medical Research Council recommended that all Australian babies be entitled to receive, free of charge, the pneumococcal vaccine, the vaccine against chicken pox and a new form of the polio vaccine. Most significant of all is the vaccine against pneumococcal disease, which kills up to 50 Australian children a year.

We have to be crystal clear about what has happened in the budget processes. This was no oversight; this was no decision to defer. The Howard government in formulating its budget specifically considered, and deliberately decided not to fund, these vaccines; it specifically considered and deliberately decided not to fund the vaccine against the deadly pneumococcal disease. This decision was taken despite expert recommendations. This decision was taken despite the fact that the Howard government was advised that, the sooner it authorised a universal vaccination program for pneumococcal disease, the sooner supply of the vaccine could be guaranteed. Starkest of all, this decision was taken despite the fact that around 50 Australian children die every year of this disease—which is preventable.

This decision comes from a government that says it supports families; it comes from a government that tried to style its budget as a family friendly budget. But this budget has left families to make the cruellest decision of all. The Howard government is asking families to take the biggest gamble with their children’s lives. Parents must ask themselves this one question: do we take the risk that our children will not catch the deadly pneumococcal disease and use the money that we do not have much of to pay the mortgage or to buy food or even to buy some books to help our children learn to read?

We do not know exactly what was said in its meetings when the Howard government deliberately and knowingly decided not to fund these vaccines. It has been speculated in the media that universal provision of vaccines was viewed by the Howard government as middle-class welfare. If this is true, then it shows clearly that the Howard government is opposed in its bones to the provi-
sion of universal health care—so much so that a health care policy that can only be truly effective if it is universal falls victim to this government’s blinkered belief in a two-tiered American style health system which has private provision at its centre.

Unlike the Howard government, Labor believe in our bones in a universal health system. We built Australia’s universal health system, Medicare. In line with our beliefs, Mark Latham and I announced on the Thursday of budget week that Labor would fund each of these childhood vaccines for all Australian children: the pneumococcal vaccine, the chicken pox vaccine and the new form of polio vaccine. Minister Abbott and Prime Minister Howard have not matched Labor’s commitment but, because of Labor’s announcement, they are trying to pretend they have some form of commitment to, in particular, the pneumococcal vaccine.

But let us be clear: it is a pretence. These vaccines were not funded in the budget. The budget is a government’s annual statement of priorities, and money was not allocated in the budget to fund these vaccines. The Howard government has pretended that there is some issue about supply. But, even if that were right, we all know that hundreds of programs in every budget are funded without having 1 July as their start date. So, even if the start date were to be 1 October because of supply issues, a government committed to funding these vaccines would still need to put the funding in the budget.

Most recently, Minister Abbott has been wandering around pretending that he has some difficulty agreeing price with the vaccine manufacturers. This is an enormous mystery to the opposition. As shadow minister for health—an opposition member with a very limited number of staff assisting me with portfolio matters—I have agreed price with the vaccine manufacturers, yet Minister Abbott would have the community believe that, assisted by tens of thousands of public servants, he is unable to do so. What would explain incompetence on such a grand scale? Of course, it is not incompetence. It is a deliberate decision not to fund these vaccines and it is a pretence to try and cover up the cruelty involved in making that decision.

You know that you have hurt the Howard government on an issue when they send out one of the spear carriers to take the message to the community and to try to put the Howard government’s view. My attention was drawn to an article by Piers Akerman in the Daily Telegraph on Tuesday, 18 May where he talked about the vaccination issue. I would have thought it was more likely to see Mr Akerman holding forth on the government’s tough on drugs strategy or a matter like that but, no, there he was in the Daily Telegraph dealing with the vaccination issue and, very wrongly, criticising the parents who brought their baby to make a statement in support of the pneumococcal vaccine at the time that Labor launched its commitment to fund that vaccine.

Mr Akerman has taken it into his head to criticise parents who watched their baby in intensive care for 11 days struggling for life against an illness she need not have had, because it is preventable by vaccination. He is doubting the commitment of such parents to campaign for a solution for all Australian children on this preventable disease. Jennifer, Matthew and their baby, Isabella, came and supported Labor’s announcement because they believed in it. They would happily have stood next to anybody making the same announcement, because they believed in it. It might be that Piers Akerman cannot understand a mother’s and father’s motivation to try and stop children suffering, but I can tell you that other Australian parents do. Other Australian parents watched in admiration as they saw Jennifer, Matthew and Isabella
standing up for something they believed in, and Australian parents are appalled that the Howard government, knowing the death rates and all of the information about these vaccines, deliberately decided not to fund these vaccines.

The amazing thing about this budget, apart from the lack of funding for vaccines, is what else it does not do. The pretence does not stop with the commitment to the vaccines. Of course the pretence continues as the government tries to pretend that it is committed to Medicare. Indeed, as we can all see on our TV screens, it is in the process of wasting more than $20 million pretending that it is committed to Medicare. It is wasting an amount of money that could have paid for something like 800,000 bulk-billed consultations. That is what is being wasted on Australian TV screens at the moment. But no amount of advertising will cover up the simple truth that, under the Howard government, Medicare is dying and continues to die. I have a simple display here that I brought in to show my colleague the member for Griffith about the state of Medicare under the Howard government. It makes it perfectly clear that, as bulk-billing rates have continued to plummet, the out-of-pocket costs to see a doctor have skyrocketed, and the gap between those two things is the gap in the affordability of health care for Australian families. If you cannot find a doctor who bulk-bills, then under this government you have ended up paying more and more—and we know that many Australians cannot afford those fees.

Government members do not actually believe the advertising themselves, because they move around their communities and they know that people are hurting because they cannot get access to bulk-billing, which is the only way many Australians can get access to health care. But these government members have had no answer as they have stood by and done nothing when their electorates have suffered 10 per cent, 20 per cent and, in some cases, 30 per cent declines in bulk-billing rates. These government members also have no answers as to why out-of-pocket costs are skyrocketing out of control. Government members who like to mouth the rhetoric that they support Medicare really need to be doing something about genuinely supporting Medicare, and the only thing that will stop this decline in Medicare is an investment into Medicare’s heart—an investment in its universality; an investment, as advocated by Labor, of $1.9 billion to get doctors bulk-billing all Australians again. With all of the heat and light that the minister for health has tried to generate around the health debate to try and cover up the death of Medicare, the truth remains that this government has not invested in universal Medicare to ensure bulk-billing for all Australians.

The pretence from this budget continues. Let us look at the area of dental care. The Howard government was of course forced into a backflip on dental care as part of the price for getting their sham safety net through the Senate. The Howard government had maintained year after year that dental care was nothing to do with them and that they were uninterested in the fact that half a million Australians were on dental waiting lists, but as part of the price for getting the sham safety net through the Senate they agreed to backflip on that. They have created a tiny dental program—one that will assist 23,000 chronically ill people at a maximum cost of $5 million a year. That means that 23,000 chronically ill people will get access to $220 to assist them with their dental needs. But if you are going to invest in dental care you cannot simply help 23,000 people and spend $5 million. You have to accept the challenge of doing something about the half a million Australians who are on dental waiting lists—many of them for two, three or
four years. You need to make an investment that will rectify that.

Labor have committed to such an investment through our plan to put $120 million into dental care—60 times bigger than that agreed to as part of the deal to get the so-called MedicarePlus package through the Senate. That is the kind of program that is needed to address the real needs in the community. Let us make no mistake about this: this problem is one of the Howard government’s causing. It arises because the Howard government abolished the Commonwealth dental program. State Labor governments have tried to invest, and all around the country have invested, more in dental care. However, despite that, because the Howard government ripped $100 million out of the provision of dental care, we have got the crisis that we are facing today, and it is only a Latham Labor government that is committed to getting those half a million Australians off dental waiting lists and into dentist chairs.

Another thing that was agreed to as part of the deal in the Senate to get the so-called sham safety net through was some assistance for allied health. I would like to say this: it is abundantly clear that the government is flailing around. It agreed to this program but never knew how it was going to roll it out. We know that the negotiations with allied health professionals have stalled, and it seems highly unlikely that the government will meet the start date of 1 July. In any event, because the program is built on the Enhanced Primary Care program, which only reaches 17 per cent of the eligible population—that is, 17 per cent of chronically ill people—it will be a very minor program even when rolled out; but we do not believe it will meet the roll-out date.

There is more pretence. The government pretends that it supports public hospitals. However, given an opportunity to actually support public hospitals in this budget, what the government has done is committed less than $7 million over four years to spend on 10 co-located GP clinics around Australia—four of which have already been allocated to WA. We need these clinics, because the Howard government has driven Medicare into crisis. People cannot find bulk-billing doctors so they flood to the only place they know they are going to get care, which is the emergency department of their local public hospital. That is a problem right round Australia, and the only thing the Howard government is promising is a token effort—about 10 clinics, four of which are already allocated. This stands in stark contrast to Labor’s commitment to provide 100 Medicare teams around Australia—teams of doctors and nurses who will take the pressure off hospital emergency departments by going there and assisting those who have gone to the emergency department but who have a GP-style complaint.

The pretence continues. As well as pretending that they are committed to Medicare, the Howard government are pretending they are committed to health reform. Last week Minister Abbott made the following comment about the health system:

There’s this mish-mash of responsibilities—nobody can decide whose job it is to oversee it ... the sooner the states are not involved in the health field the better, and if we can move towards a withering away of the states in that area ... that’s what we hope to overcome.

Minister Abbott might find it interesting to muse about health reform whenever he feels in need of a headline in the newspaper, but the truth is that, in respect of this very proposal, the Prime Minister has already said ‘we’re not going down this path’. To simply muse about health reform and to do nothing about it—which is all Minister Abbott is doing—is to let down all of the doctors, all of the nurses, all of the patient groups, all of the
hospital staff, all of the hospital administrators, all of the people who provide community care and all of the people who provide palliative care. Right round this nation, all of these people have told me—and will tell anybody who is prepared to listen—that the system needs major reform. It is only Labor that have committed to that major reform, through our commitment to a national health reform process guided by a national health reform commission.

We know that Minister Abbott was put in to health to get a political fix, to get something that the Howard government could advertise on TV, and having done that he thinks his job is done. He thinks that you can turn a blind eye to the parents who cannot afford the pneumococcal vaccine. He thinks you can turn a blind eye to the people who cannot afford to go to the doctor if they cannot find a doctor who bulk-bills. He thinks you can turn a blind eye to the people queued in emergency departments, looking for care. And he thinks that you can turn a blind eye to the half a million Australians waiting for years on dental waiting lists. Labor do not believe that you can turn a blind eye to those needs. We have outlined policies to address each of those needs, and they are the policies which are really—no pretence, but really—about supporting and building a Medicare for the 21st century.

Mr CAUSLEY (Page) (8.05 p.m.)—It is interesting that I should follow the member for Lalor in this debate on the appropriation bills, because having been a member of the state government for 12 years in New South Wales I can put to rest some of the issues that she has raised. Let me start by saying that the member for Lalor is an apologist for Labor state governments. There is no doubt about that, because there are two issues that the member for Lalor raised in the last part of her contribution. First of all, might I address the dental scheme. Having been a member of the state government and a member of cabinet, I am very well aware that, in fact, the dental scheme was a state scheme, administered by the state. In 1993, Paul Keating, who thought he was going to be defeated at that particular election, came out with a program through which he said he would give millions of dollars for a certain amount of procedures over a period of time to increase the availability of a dental scheme in that period. What has been put up at the present time is a repeat of the Keating proposal. The Labor Party are not proposing to take over the dental scheme; they are proposing to put up the same scheme that was put up by Paul Keating in 1993. The member for Lalor tries to come into this parliament and say that the Labor Party has a new scheme. It is nothing new; it is the Paul Keating scheme that has been put up again to try and bail out the Labor governments in all the states at the present time.

The member for Lalor also talks about the public hospital system. The public hospital system is run by the state governments. If you look closely at the series of budgets that this government has brought down, you will see that funding for medicine in the federal budget has doubled over the period of this government; and yet the state governments are not increasing their funding. As I said, having been a member of the cabinet in New South Wales, I recall very clearly that in 1995, which was the last budget we brought into the house in that period, we had $25 billion to spend. In the last budget, the Carr government had $36 billion to spend—thanks to the increase in stamp duties, thanks to the GST, and thanks to all the increases in taxes that have come in in New South Wales—and yet they cannot fund the public system in New South Wales. They cannot fund education and they cannot fund the basic infrastructure of New South Wales.
I say to you, Madam Deputy Speaker: if you want to look at the management of Labor in government, have a very close look at the government in New South Wales, because it will show you exactly what happens with Labor in government. Labor cannot manage the economy and they cannot fund the basic infrastructure of the state, and their only excuse is to come back to the federal government and say, ‘You’re not spending enough in your budget to help out the state government.’ I have to say that Labor in government are a total disaster, and it has been proven time and time again.

I believe that this budget is probably the best budget I have seen in 20 years in politics. Maybe I would go back to the first Howard budget, when we had to change the whole philosophy in government. We had to buy back, if you like, the spending of the former Labor government, which left a deficit of $96 billion. The member for Brand said that we did not have a deficit, and we had a $10 billion deficit. Maybe that budget was the hardest budget that a government could deliver. But all of a sudden we have a budget where, because of good economic management, we can start to do something for the people of Australia. A former Labor candidate in my electorate of Page came out recently with a letter in the paper, criticising this budget—

Mr Rudd—You are getting a bit worried, are you?

Mr CAUSLEY—I am talking about Terry Flanagan, if the member for Griffith wants to know.

Mr Rudd—Is he running against you again?

Mr CAUSLEY—No, Terry Flanagan is not a candidate against me, but he is one of those people to whom the Carr government has given a political position—a very highly paid political position. If he were a genuine public servant he would not have it, but because he is a friend of the Labor Party he has this position. That is the type of politics we have in Australia, where the Labor Party give these types of positions to Labor Party candidates. He is not a candidate against me. He came out and he was criticising. He said, ‘All of a sudden this government has $9 billion to spend.’ You bet we have. Why? Because we paid off $70 billion of Labor debt—that is why we have got money to spend. We do not have to spend it on interest; we can give it back to the Australian people.

When I look opposite and see the schemes that are being proposed—and the member for Lalor introduced some of those schemes about ‘spend, spend, spend’—I see that we are going to go back to the same old story of high interest rates, high inflation and high debt. That is how Labor run their economic affairs. Look at the state governments. The Carr government has spent all the profits. Everything is gone. He had this bonanza of stamp duties and GST—and all of a sudden he has not got any money, because it has all been spent. And nothing has been done with the basic infrastructure of health, education, roads and rail—those very vital state issues. We want to look very closely at that, because it gives us an indication of what Labor are all about.

I believe that this particular budget is important because it addresses basic issues. Over the previous budgets we have addressed different issues. For instance, we have addressed the superannuants, who we believe were disadvantaged compared with pensioners. They were given benefits because we believed that they needed to be given those benefits. We have addressed low-income workers. The Labor Party talk about no benefits for those on incomes under $52,000, and I will address that; but first of all they forget that, in previous budgets, there have been two tax reliefs addressing those
issues. When the Labor Party say that there is nothing in this budget for those earning under $52,000, they seem to assume that those people have no families. I have to tell the Labor Party that in fact, in my electorate—which is a very low income electorate—there are many people earning under $52,000 who have children. This government, with family tax benefit A and, in some cases, family tax benefit B, has been trying to help those people with families.

I would have thought that, given the fact that this country is facing a declining population base in the future, we would be trying to encourage families. I believe that this government is certainly doing that. Yet the Labor Party go out there and try to sell the story that people earning under $52,000 are not getting any benefit. In fact, the Labor Party candidate in the previous state election, Mr Terry Flanagan, whom I quoted, says—

Mr Rudd—You’re obsessed!

Mr CAUSLEY—I am obsessed all right, because these people tell lies. Terry Flanagan says that we are the government for the top end of town. I would like someone from the Labor Party to explain to me how this budget favours anyone in the top end of town. Even the Leader of the Opposition did not realise that he might get a small tax benefit. He denied on television that he was going to get a tax benefit. This budget is not angled to the big end of town. It is angled to the aged and it is angled to the families, and I do not apologise for that. Those are the areas that we need to concentrate on, because in this country, where we talk so much about a baby bulge coming through the community in the next few years, we have to look very carefully at aged care. I still bemoan the fact that the member for Jagajaga went out and had a crusade against the government’s policy to try to overcome the problems in the aged care area, which obviously all sides of parliament will have to address in the next few years. Obviously this is an area that is of great concern to anyone who thinks about aged care.

Families are very important. Obviously we need younger people coming along in the community. We need to encourage families. We need to support families. And if you look at this budget you will see that that is exactly what it is doing. It is saying: ‘We will increase the support that comes from the taxpayer for family benefit. We will pay an extra amount of money to families for the family tax benefit. We will combine the areas of support for having children, and we will make sure that families get support in this particular area.’ This is because there is no doubt that the future of Australia is in the hands of those who come along behind us. At my age, I have to accept that it is my grandchildren and those of that particular era who are going to be the mainstays of Australia. They are the areas that we need to support.

Mr Rudd interjecting—

Mr CAUSLEY—I notice the member for Griffith is having a bit of a chuckle about this, but there is no doubt that this is the truth. The Labor Party might smile about it but it is the truth: we need to support these particular areas of our society.

Mr Rudd interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Gambaro)—The member for Page has the call. The member for Griffith!

Mr CAUSLEY—I would also like to address the area of security in this country. There is no doubt that this government has proved over the last few years that it is prepared to stand very strong on security in this country. There is no doubt that the war that we have at the present time—and people may not see it as a war, but there is no doubt in my mind that a war has been declared on the Western countries of this world and on...
terrorism—is something that we need to address very closely, because it is a very difficult situation. And this government has never, ever flinched about the support that is needed for the war on terrorism.

I have grave doubts about whether the Labor Party have the same resolve. We heard them today in question time questioning again about two prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. Let us get this very clear: these people may have been Australian citizens, but they were prepared to train with the Taliban and they were prepared to kill Australian soldiers. Yet the Labor Party are out there saying that the government should be supportive of this. As they are Australian citizens, we will support them as much as we possibly can. But at the end of the day we have to judge what these people were about. Given that these Australian citizens went and trained with the Taliban and were prepared to kill Australian soldiers, I suppose we have to say that the Labor Party support that, because that is the position they have taken.

Mr Rudd interjecting—

Mr CAUSLEY—The member for Griffith can protest as much as he likes—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Member for Griffith! The member for Page has the call.

Mr CAUSLEY—but that is the position he is in. He is supporting these people who are prepared to kill Australian soldiers.

Mr Rudd—Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I find that remark offensive. The honourable member for Page has said that I am supporting these two individuals and, as he describes them, their acts against Australian soldiers. That is a monumentally offensive remark. It is inaccurate in every respect.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Member for Page, I ask you to withdraw that comment.

Mr CAUSLEY—if the Deputy Speaker asks me to withdraw it, I will. But I would say again that the Labor Party are supporting these particular people. We can draw our own conclusions from that, and there is no doubt in my mind what those conclusions are. Madam Deputy Speaker, I put it to you that on the area of security we have the member for Fremantle and the Labor president of the upper house in New South Wales saying, ‘We don’t care what the Labor Party conference says in New South Wales; our policy is an open door policy. Our policy is that anyone that wants to come to this country can come here,’ and that is what the Labor Party in government will do.

This country has had the situation where we have had boats coming to our shores. We have had the situation where illegal immigrants—and there are millions of them that want to come to this country—have been coming to our shores. And the Labor Party have not got a coherent policy on this. The member for Fremantle and the president of the upper house in New South Wales have made it very clear that as far as they are concerned they will deal with this after the Labor Party conference, and one can only read into that the fact that they have an open door policy. Their policy is that they will allow these people into the country regardless of who they are, regardless of whether they are refugees. They will allow these people to come.

I believe this budget gives great support to the rural areas of New South Wales. If you look very closely at the rural areas of Australia, you will see that the government still supports the programs that are important to farmers and important to the regional areas and towns of Australia. I also say to you that the greatest delight I have here—and I claim it as a National Party coup—is that we have a huge investment in this budget in the infrastructure of Australia. It is very clear.
I know that it was started by the program of Roads to Recovery, which were rural roads very important not just to rural communities but in getting to the markets the commodities that we sell to the world. This government introduced Roads to Recovery, but we have now committed ourselves to an $11 billion program, a program which invests in road and rail. The studies that have been done in Australia show that freight in Australia is going to grow. Freight in Australia is going to double in the next 10 to 15 years. If we do not do something about this—if we do not improve the railway system in Australia—then semitrailers are going to increase by about sixfold on the highways of this country. In an electorate such as mine—where we have a greatly improved Pacific Highway, I might say, after a $600 million injection of federal government funds—we still have a huge increase in the number of semitrailers and B-doubles that are travelling on that highway. And we do not need a sixfold increase in that.

The program that has been put out in this budget shows that we are going to invest. I have to congratulate the Leader of the National Party—the Minister for Transport and Regional Services—for negotiating with the state governments to take over the railway system in Australia. For the first time in Australia’s history we have a single agreement on rail in Australia. For God’s sake, we even have the same gauge across Australia, which is something we have fought for since Federation. We have a single agreement on rail in Australia. Therefore, the federal government is going to spend substantial amounts of money. And thankfully—and I am very grateful for this—in the area of the member for Page on the North Coast of New South Wales. Most of the money that is going to be spent in New South Wales is going to be spent on the rail line in the northern areas of New South Wales into Brisbane. That will allow the freight to increase in that particular area on rail, which is a huge step in the right direction.

Not only that: we also have a commitment to the Pacific Highway. In my electorate a bypass of Ballina is one of the first things that we need. The state government have reneged on this. They have backed away from it. They are saying they will not fund it, even though they know that there needs to be a bypass of Ballina. It is a huge bottleneck. It is an absolute menace to the township of Ballina. I believe that this will give us a chance to get the Ballina bypass, which will give us huge relief on the North Coast in the congestion in that particular area. Not only that: if you look at the upgrades to the Pacific Highway—they are at Baulkeland or from Chinderah down to Billinudgel—those are federal government funded programs. They have increased dramatically in the area of the Pacific Highway.

(Time expired)

Mr MOSSFELD (Greenway) (8.25 p.m.)—In supporting the Labor Party’s position in this debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005, I say that this budget could have been so much more than it is. It is a budget of missed opportunities. It is a budget that truly could have set the foundation for the future of our nation. Instead, it is a short-sighted political document presented with one myopic eye set on the election. Those who framed it have cynically underestimated the great generosity of the Australian spirit. The Australian public will not be bought by the cheap pre-election handouts that are contained in this budget.

Every election year we see the same thing: the government spending money like a shopaholic in a post Christmas sale. In the three pre-election budgets handed down by this government they have spent some $98.1 billion, an average of $32.7 billion. In contrast
to that, for the six budgets in between elections the government has spent only $23.4 billion in total. Two-thirds of the budgets handed down by this Treasurer accounted for less than 20 per cent of the money spent. Over 80 per cent of the government expenditure in the last nine years has been announced in just three pre-election budgets.

It is no wonder that the Australian public have not been duped by this latest one. People want services. They want ongoing support of public schools and general education, as well as public hospitals. They do not want pre-election splurges with droughts in between. That is why the budget has not provided the bounce in the opinion polls that the government were expecting. They have underestimated both the intelligence and the generosity of ordinary Australian families.

I wish to discuss two main planks of this budget, the two planks upon which the government will base its $100 million taxpayer funded advertising: the tax cuts and the family tax benefit payments. Firstly, the tax cuts: the adjustment of the rates at which the top two tiers cut in. The changes in this budget will adjust the rate of tax for those who earn above $52,000 each year. Currently in Greenway there are roughly 11,200 such individuals over the age of 15. This might sound like a good figure: 11,000 people will benefit from this budget. And it is a good number in its own way. However, it must be remembered that there are over 84,000 individuals in Greenway who do not earn this amount. That is 88.3 per cent of Greenway residents who do not get a tax cut. That is a far more significant figure. The vast majority of Greenway electors will not benefit from the biggest measure in this budget. With last year’s tax cuts at least everybody got a milkshake and sandwich. No such luck this year.

There is no disputing that this is the highest taxing government in our nation’s history. The average taxpayer is now paying some $5,500 more income tax than they did in 1996 when this government was elected. Add to that the GST, which is reaping billions from Australian families. Even after the tax cuts contained in this budget—which the majority of people in the Greenway electorate will not see—there will be more income tax in government coffers next year than there is this year. You only have to look at the government’s own forward projections to see this. For each of the next four years income tax revenue is expected to rise. That is more people paying more taxes.

It is all very well to talk about tax cuts but, if the government were honest with the Australian people, it would also talk about tax revenues. This government has introduced some 144 new or increased taxes, including the GST, since being elected in 1996. Yes, the government has cut some income taxes—mainly at the high end—but that does not change the fact that all tax revenue has risen by over $9,000 per year for every taxpayer in Australia. Over the forward estimates it is projected that taxpayers will be paying in Commonwealth taxes to the government over $12,000 per annum more than they were paying in 1996.

The second major plank is the one-off $600 payment made to those who receive family tax benefit A. This measure of course does nothing for more than 17,500 households in my electorate without dependent children. In Greenway just over 14,500 families will get this payment. For some, however—about 4,000—this payment will be used to partly offset their debt to the Commonwealth. For these families, the government will be giving with one hand and very quickly taking it away with the other. There are major problems with the family tax benefit system, and this payment will not address the underlying flaws in the system. The reporting procedures and the interpretation of
the rules associated with family tax benefit part A and part B resulted in hundreds of thousands of Australian families incurring a debt to the Commonwealth, often through no fault of their own. If someone gets a couple of hours of overtime or an extra day’s casual work and they notify Centrelink immediately of the change in circumstances, they may still incur a debt. If constituents do the right thing and tell Centrelink straight away, it counts for nothing.

Many of my constituents have told me that, when their circumstances changed and they told Centrelink, they in fact overcompensated for the change, sometimes by tripling their estimation, and this still did not help—they still incurred a debt. I would like to refer to a press release that I issued in September last year which was headed ‘Government system: a debt trap’. The press release read:

Almost three quarters of a million families have been caught in a Government designed Debt Trap called the Family Tax Benefit ... Senate Estimates figures put the number of Families with Centrelink debts at 728,458. Over 230,000 of these families have had their tax returns stripped to pay for the debt in direct violation of the Government’s own pre-election commitment.

In Greenway it is estimated that as many as 4,000 families have accrued debts at an average of $850, and around 1,000 have had all or part of their tax cheque stripped as a result. This is a fundamentally flawed system that expects casual workers to estimate their income 12 months in advance which is simply impossible. Even if families continually notify Centrelink of their changing circumstances they will still rack up debt at an alarming rate.

I then go on to talk about the minister at the time, Minister Vanstone, and say:

Minister Vanstone’s solution is to strip tax returns and get other people to pay for their debt on their credit card at 17% interest rates. The Minister has also suggested that pensioners should sell their house to pay for Centrelink debt.

Over a period of time I have raised in this House the concerns that my constituents have with the debt. I will not repeat those examples, but I have two more recent cases.

One case refers to a husband and wife who were both on a disability support pension and were receiving the family tax benefits. They were quite distressed to learn that they had incurred a debt of $133 due to an underestimation. The lady concerned felt that, because she was receiving payments from Centrelink, the error should have been picked up before the debt was incurred. This case was referred to Centrelink and Centrelink looked at the matter again and then made a reconciliation. They reduced the debt from $133 to $115—not a very significant amount. In the final letter to my office, Centrelink said:

In future, customers need to advise Centrelink of their estimated income at the commencement of a new financial year to avoid any overpayment.

The significant point about that statement is that the people concerned were actually receiving Centrelink payments—so it should have been well known what their income was.

Another matter of some concern has been raised with me. This concerns a family which was receiving the family tax benefit but whose child entered the work force sometime during the middle of the financial year. I will read some extracts from the letter that was sent to me by my constituent. It says:

I was aware of the fact that once a dependent child starts work and is likely to earn more than $8613 in this financial year (June 2003-June 2004) that anything I was paid for him
from June 2003 until Monday 16th February 2004 (the day I phoned) was an overpayment and would have to be paid back.

I cannot understand how they can justify this, given that my son was a dependant up until then and I was legally entitled to any monies I received from Centrelink.

Surely there must be "grey" areas within the system—It is unfair and unjust to assume that because a child earns $8613 or more in a single financial year that he was not a dependant child for some part of that year.

The letter concludes:

Please, right this wrong, for all the parents that have been or will be unjustly treated by this grossly unfair system.

The point to be made is that, by the time these administrative difficulties arise, the federal election will be over and members of the federal parliament—all 150 of them—will be safely in their seats, while the poor constituents will be left to try to sort out their entitlements. If the federal government were fair dinkum, it would have introduced these benefits 12 months prior to the election so as to allow people the opportunity to access the full benefits of the changes.

For many people, this one-off $600 payment might go some way towards paying off that debt, but what happens next year or the year after? The government will continue to strip tax returns to recover the debt, and families will still be forced to struggle to repay outstanding amounts. There is no doubt that the money will help many people, but it is bad policy in the long term and does nothing to fix a fatally flawed system in which over 600,000 Australian families owe a debt to the government. When this number of overpayments is made, there is something wrong with the fundamentals. Have the government made any moves to address the problem? The answer, of course, is no. Instead, they have handed out a fistful of dollars, and then a few dollars more.

Another issue is the way that this payment is made, which makes one question the motives behind the decision. It is a one-off lump sum cash payment scheduled to be made just before the federal election. It is easy to see why so many commentators have called it nothing more than a bribe. Six hundred dollars will certainly help those who receive it, but how long will it last? If the government were serious about helping families, surely they would do so over a longer period. But, you see, $23 per fortnight does not look as good in an advertising campaign. However, for families the bills do not come once a year. The necessities of life have to be bought on a regular basis, and $23 per fortnight is far more useful, over the long haul, to a family trying to make ends meet.

One of the major issues in the Greenway electorate is child care. Blacktown has the highest unmet need of any local government area in Australia. There is a desperate shortage of places for young families. It is therefore vitally important that Blacktown gets its fair share of the extra 30,000 outside school hours places announced in the budget. However, there is also a major problem with long day care places for 0- to 5-year-olds. This was highlighted in a leaked pre-budget document which specifically named Blacktown and Penrith as the two areas of greatest need in New South Wales. The minister was asking for an extra $30.6 million to address the problem. How much did he get? Not a cent. The families of Greenway who will still be on long waiting lists for long day care places, or those that have one child at one centre and a brother or sister at another centre, have every right to feel let down by this budget.

After years of neglect, the injection of funds into the aged care sector is most welcome. However, as with everything this government does, you must read the fine print, because there is always a catch. Most of the
funding in this area is for one-off capital expenditure. Again, this will look good in a taxpayer funded advertising campaign, and it will help over the very short term, but it will do nothing to address the ongoing long-term needs of this sector. The issue of the day-to-day running costs of nursing homes is still to be resolved, and the issue of accommodation bonds will be deferred until after the election. The government has already increased the daily accommodation charge for non-concessional residents in high care from $13.91 to $16.25—a 17 per cent increase.

There is also the ongoing problem of having enough trained nurses and aged-care workers to cope with the growing number of elderly people. There are skill shortages in this area now and, unless addressed quickly, the problem will simply spiral out of control. A capital injection of funds is welcome; there is no denying that. But, once again, short-term political expediency has won out over the long-term needs of aged people. Two years ago, at budget time, the Treasurer released with great fanfare the Intergenerational Report. It was a major statement by the government and a recognition that one of the greatest problems that Australia will face in the years ahead is that of our ageing population. What is in this budget to address this growing concern? Next to nothing. The government would have you believe that, a generation from now, given the projected growth in the aged demographic, we will be unable to sustain our age pension system. They want people to work longer and longer, both in terms of hours per week and years, yet there is next to nothing in this budget for mature age workers.

The world is changing before our eyes: new technologies are appearing almost daily. A flexible work force that is able to adapt to changes will be a fundamental requirement if our country is to prosper. This will require a great deal of effort on behalf of the government. Appropriate and affordable on-the-job-training and retraining will be necessary. What money was there in the budget to fund these vitally necessary training programs? There was a few hundred dollars to access limited training opportunities and more workshops to discuss the problem. This group of Australians do not need more workshops: they need work opportunities and support structures. This budget provides nothing in this respect. One wonders what the Treasurer is using his Intergenerational Report for this year. Perhaps it is propping up a wonky table leg in his office. Certainly it was not read before this budget was formed.

Mission Australia issued a snapshot discussion paper earlier this year which highlighted unemployment among older workers. I want to refer to a letter published in the local press which was written by Norman Webster, a mature age worker who has been retrenched from a company. He is from Richmond, which I think is in the electorate of Macquarie. He said:

I support the Mature Age Workers Program. I was employed by Tassel Operations for 15 months and took four weeks holidays. While on holidays I was informed that I and other workers had been retrenched. I still had one week's holiday left. This put me in a very stressful situation as I am 58 and the idea of finding employment was a great concern.

I registered with Centrelink and was told payments would not be made for about three months.

I registered with an unemployment agency funded by the Commonwealth and the Mature Age Workers Program and was interviewed by both agencies.

I am still waiting for the Commonwealth-funded agency to phone me.

The positive attitude of the Mature Age Workers Program and the assurance they would do
everything possible to find me employment gave me confidence this would happen.

In fact, employment was found for this mature age worker who had been put out of work. He praised the work of the Mature Age Workers Program, which was funded by the state government and run by the Salvation Army. I was distressed when the state government cut funding for the Mature Age Workers Program. I implore the federal government to take up this program because, over a long period of time, I thought it was of value to mature age workers looking for employment. The issues of mature age employment and skills shortages in vital industries are growing ones, yet this budget fails to even remotely address the situation.

Before winding up, I want to say that I have been asked by constituents in my electorate to protest most strongly against the comments by the Prime Minister about the so-called lack of values being taught in public schools. I have given a commitment to bring that protest and concern to this parliament, and I am doing so on this occasion.

Finally, Labor intends to put the money where it is needed most: in our public hospital systems, in our public schools, in developing comprehensive vaccination programs, in increasing access to dental care and in restoring bulk-billing. That is what the Australian people want—not just a cheap bribe but better services. Labor will do what this budget should have done—that is, lay the foundation for our nation’s future and prosperity. For the government to announce $52 million of expenditure and find no money whatsoever for our public hospitals and schools or Medicare is a disgrace. (Time expired).

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (8.46 p.m.)—It is my pleasure to rise tonight and speak in this debate on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and cognate bills, because there is no doubt that this was a magnificent budget, which in my electorate was very well received. Certainly, it shows the true credentials of this government in economic management. ‘Economic management’—which appears to be paid only lip-service by the opposition—are words that did not appear in the Leader of the Opposition’s response to the budget. He talked about the soft options of reading books to your children, but not about the hard decisions involved in managing the economy, what taxes he is going to cut, where he is going to cut expenditure or where he is going to increase it. Rather, he went for the general wide sweep without the hard details.

There is no doubt that this was a great budget. It was the ninth budget brought down by this Treasurer, who has done an outstanding job. Seven of those budgets have been in surplus. It is quite interesting that Peter Hartcher, in the Sydney Morning Herald, has said of Mr Costello: On his central responsibilities as Treasurer, Costello has been a resounding success. The Australian economy under the Howard-Costello condominium has been the best-performing in the developed world. It has grown strongly and consistently. Inflation has been well in check and unemployment has inched down to equal its lowest in a quarter of a century.

Of course, these decisions do not come easily. The results that we have, the economic indicators, are because of these hard decisions. Growth rates which in the last financial year equalled 3.75 per cent are expected to be 3.5 per cent this year. Inflation is under three per cent and is expected to be two per cent this year. Unemployment is now at 5.6 per cent. As for jobs growth, we have created 1.3 million jobs in the country—260,000 jobs in the last 12 months, 85 per cent of which are full time. That is, twice as many full-time jobs have been created in the last 12 months as the ALP government cre-
ated in its last six years. These are the criteria by which we judge this budget. The economic achievements of this government continue. Mortgage interest rates were 10.05 per cent in 1996 and are now 7.05 per cent. Interest rates have averaged 7.15 per cent since the coalition were elected; under Labor the average was 12.75 per cent and the rate peaked at 17 per cent.

We also need to speak about debt, because the last five Labor budgets racked up an average deficit of $14 billion per budget. Government debt under the ALP totalled $96 billion, 19 per cent of GDP. An average debt of $5,200 per person was accumulated. This government have now repaid some $70 billion of that debt. With a total debt now of $25 billion, the drop has been from $5,200 to $1,200 per person, which means $5 billion in savings on interest payments that we can place in hospitals, schools, roads and other vitally needed infrastructure, or in social security payments, pension payments and supporting mothers’ payments. The benefits of this budget can be seen in the hard work that went on before.

The response to the budget from the other side has been fairly predictable. The editorial in the Daily Telegraph on Thursday, 13 May, just after the budget was brought down, said:

Labor is running the risk of denigrating one of the most important groups of taxpayers in our economy in its challenge to the Budget. Party Leader Mark Latham says Labor will back the Budget’s tax cuts and its boost to family benefits.

The editorial also said:

One of the finest features of Tuesday’s economic statement was the way in which it gave an overdue reward to workers on $52,000 to $79,000 a year.

The tax threshold changes over the coming two years will give them back a significant amount each week and justify the hard work they do.

These are the people—said the Telegraph—who have been paying the highest and second-highest rates of tax and every year when they get their group certificates they are stunned by the amount they have contributed.

They are the people who over the years collectively have paid for many of the facilities and services our communities enjoy and which they don’t necessarily use themselves.

They aren’t wealthy. They, too, have to save and put in extra effort to raise families. And at the same time they help ensure there is funding for public projects.

The snide comment that comes from those opposite, that we are only looking after those earning over $50,000, ignores a number of factors. The first was the need to change the tax scales so that they better reflected the realities of 2004. The shifting of the tax scales has been significant, especially for the those paying the 42 per cent rate and the highest rate. It was essential that these were moved upwards. The 42 per cent rate is being moved from $52,000 to $58,000 in July 2004 and to $63,000 in July 2005. The 47 per cent rate will move from $62,500 to $70,000 in July 2004 and $80,000 in July 2005. This means tax relief for 80 per cent of taxpayers. These are the people who work hard—as the Telegraph said—day in, day out and are caught in this trap of high tax scales.

No relief was suggested by the other side of the House. It took this government to make the changes that were necessary through the hard decisions made in previous years and in the lead-up to this budget. These have been to the nation’s good and have meant that we are able to pass on savings to those most in need. The $17 billion in tax cuts have been most significant. We see them as the No. 1 benefit that we provide, and they are of benefit to all Australians. Those who are not directly in that tax bracket have the benefit of the substantial family tax bene-
fits—$600 per family this year and a further $600 increase in the future, lifting the maximum rate under which this benefit can be received.

Those receiving family tax benefit B will benefit from a reduction in income tax. Women returning to work will be big winners. A new maternity payment of $3,000 will help parents to cope with the immediate costs following the birth of a child. This will increase to $4,000 in 2006 and $5,000 in 2008. It is a real incentive and certainly an encouragement for young families as they face the economic difficulties of having a child. Not only are the tax scales shifted significantly upwards so that we do not have an increasing number of people going to the highest tax scales but also we have the family benefits, which are increased and improved for a vast number of families.

Incentives to save for retirement include the $2.7 billion superannuation co-contribution scheme to help lower income earners. National security gets a $3.1 billion bolster in this budget. There is a further $1.5 billion to boost defence, bringing the total spent on defence since 1996 to $40 billion. For older Australians, $2.2 billion will be spent over five years to expand the number and quality of aged care places in Australia. That is in response to the Hogan report. The changes to the Medicare safety net were announced by the minister for health earlier.

In my own electorate there will be significant changes—$1.5 million to fund new aged care places in the shire. We have been the direct beneficiaries. In my electorate, unemployment is now at just 2.8 per cent. That is down from 3.8 per cent one year ago as a result of the government’s economic policies, changes and incentives. The Australian newspaper’s response to and summary of the budget says:

PETER Costello’s ninth budget is an astute political document that challenges Mark Latham on his own turf—aspirational families—and leaves the Labor leader with precious little room to manoeuvre.

Thanks to the Australian economic miracle of the past decade—steady growth, low inflation, rising company profits and falling unemployment—Treasury’s coffers have reaped a windfall throughout the term of the Howard Government.

These changes have been brought about by tough economic management and by making the changes that were necessary, in many cases not supported by those on the other side. The Australian editorial says:

The biggest winner out of yesterday’s budget comes direct from Australia’s aspirational heartland. A dual-income family with three young children earning $55,000 will end up $104 better off each week.

Isn’t that what we should be about in this place—concern for families, concern for those with young children who are battling it out day in and day out in the factories or in the offices trying to make their finances work out? These incentives—the $17 billion in tax cuts, the major amount going into family allowances and the benefits being paid to those who have recently had children—are benefits that we are proud of on this side of the House. They follow other changes that have been made in previous years. In 2000 there were tax cuts of $12 billion and in 2003 there were tax cuts of $10 billion over four years. This government is committed to substantial tax cuts, giving Australians a fair go, providing real incentives, assisting young families and putting money into Australia’s security and defence.
I am very pleased to see the Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence in the chamber. He knows the benefits in the budget that we have received in defence spending, which is important to our security. The budget contains $1.5 billion for defence, bringing to $40 billion the total spent on defence since 1996. He has also, as the Minister for Employment Services, been involved in the amazing achievement of 1.3 million additional jobs being created under this government through incentives for young people to go out and find jobs and of employment providers being funded to assist them in their task of finding jobs. These incentives for working people—the expenditure in the areas of health and education, the provision of places at universities for our young people and the provision of assistance in our Medicare system—have paid off in this budget. I am proud to be identified with this budget, which is one that all Australians should be proud of. It provides real incentives to the workers, the young people and the older people in this great nation, Australia.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being approximately 9.00 p.m., I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Health and Ageing: Aged Care

Mr KERR (Denison) (8.59 p.m.)—Tonight I want to raise with the House the pressure that is on aged care funding in southern Tasmania. In doing so, I note that at the 2001 census there were 22,135 people aged 65 years or older in Hobart. That is 14.4 per cent of the population. Of all the Australian capital cities, Hobart had the second highest proportion of this older population after Adelaide. The proportion of this age group has continued to increase since 1991, when it represented 12.4 per cent of population, and 1996, when 13.5 per cent of Hobart was aged 65 or older.

Tasmania’s population is expected to age most rapidly, overtaking South Australia as the oldest state by 2021. The proportion of Tasmanians aged 65 and over is projected to almost double from that of 30 June 1999, according to figures released by the ABS. The median age of Tasmanians is projected to increase from 36 years at 30 June 1999 to 44 to 45 years by 30 June 2021—a rate substantially faster than Australia’s population as a whole. According to Dr Natalie Jackson, Tasmania and South Australia will be dealing with the impacts of an ageing population in 2016 that the ACT, for example, will not have to deal with until 2050.

This is presenting an immediate strain in relation to pressure for aged care, but certainly it is going to present a much more significant one for the future. The reason I address it tonight is that there has been significant difficulty in persuading the Commonwealth government that this pressure of changing demographics requires a review of the way in which aged care in Tasmania is funded. Already we are behind the average of the other states in terms of waiting periods. In the most recent Aged Care Assessment Team report on waiting times, there was a mean waiting time of 124 days for a community aged care package, 124 days for a high-care aged placement in a residential care facility and 204 days for low care. That has to be examined with some care because it is possible that some of those persons included in that assessment have actually refused care, but nonetheless, if you compare the 2004 report on government services, around 78 per cent of Tasmanians seeking entry into residential care in high-care beds could be admitted within three months of assessment compared with 81.5 per cent nationally. The problem is only going to get worse and the way in which aged...
care places are funded on a national basis really has to change to reflect the increasing demographic pressure that is coming on in Tasmania.

I recently attended a meeting of service providers and community representatives brought together by the Glenorchy City Council. There were a number of specific issues that I have written to the minister responsible about. One in particular relates to ethnic communities in Tasmania. Unlike other states, those of different ethnic backgrounds tend to be much more widely spread in the community. They are older populations, much more settled and much more geographically diverse. As at 15 May this year there were 22 Polish residents in 11 facilities. The problem this presents is that those people do not get an effective range of same-language services that might be available in mainland communities where there is a greater density of ethnic populations.

One of the issues that I have suggested be looked at is greater flexibility under the HACC guidelines to enable organisations such as the Polish Welfare Office, which provides a considerable number of volunteers, to provide specifically focused work for members of the Polish community, for whom they can provide not only routine HACC services but also companionship and contact in their own language. Of course, as people from different language backgrounds age, they often lose their English skills first. At the moment the HACC program does not permit a group of providers to be disaggregated to provide these specialist services, but there ought to be no reason, in my view, why volunteers in a HACC program with Polish skills, for example, or other language skills cannot give priority to a client base with an ethnic background. (Time expired)

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (9.04 p.m.)—Thirty-four years ago Spencer Silver, in an attempt to invent a stronger adhesive, invented instead a very weak one. Undeterred, he decided to keep the recipe. Several weeks later Arthur Fry, who kept losing his place in a song book, remembered Mr Silver’s weak adhesive and wondered if it would stick his notes to his book without damaging the pages. Of course, the rest is history: the two 3M employees teamed up and invented Post-it notes—a product which has made its way into almost every office in the world.

These types of stories are not as rare as one would imagine. In fact, the Innovation Showcase on the Gold Coast is full of this type of story. The Gold Coast Innovation Showcase, like many innovative ideas, was conceived on the back of a paper napkin here in Canberra—in fact, right here in the Parliament House members and guests dining room a few years ago. My staff and I were having dinner with Lionel Barden. I asked Lionel to develop an idea to showcase Gold Coast innovation, and from those humble beginnings the Innovation Showcase has grown to a place where up to 300 businesses can now showcase their innovative products.

I am proud to be patron of this wonderful facility, and just recently the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, the Hon. Joe Hockey, accepted my invitation to officially open what is known on the Gold Coast as the Innovation Showcase. This great concept is housed in the old international terminal at Gold Coast Airport—a facility that was purpose-built some years ago but was no longer needed with the current refurbishment and upgrade of Gold Coast Airport. In fact, the old international terminal has developed a whole new life. The evolution has developed over the last six months with displays on
show from more than 60 businesses. The capacity and goal for the future is around 300 businesses. The static displays at the entry to the Gold Coast will become a powerful tool for marketing our innovative industries to the world.

The business community has supported the concept and many of them have become anchor tenants in this bold and visionary concept. Telstra Countrywide, Gold Coast TAFE and Bond University are featured. The Gold Coast City Council has come on board and so have many of our tourism related businesses. There is a range of emerging industries. One that particularly stands out is the display from our surfboard cluster—a cluster supported with funding from the federal government area consultative committee. The display highlights the strength of our region’s surf industry. Many other Gold Coast cluster groups are assembling displays for the showcase—clusters from sport, construction, health, advanced manufacturing, technology, education and the marine sector. The showcase will allow industry on the Gold Coast to promote itself internationally through trade shows.

The showcase also incorporates The Meeting Place which is a conference facility. Who would ever have thought that the old departure lounge of the international airport would find a new life as a conference facility? This has come about because of the vision and passion of Lionel Barden. I am sure Minister Hockey would agree that it was a first-class facility. He was certainly impressed with the concept and has indicated his support for the ongoing success of the project.

Innovation is very important in every sector of the economy. In every small business and in every city and town, Australians are coming up with new ideas and implementing them successfully. As John Ketteringham once said, ‘Our lives are often changed by the vision and persistence of individuals willing to pursue new ideas.’ Lionel Barden and the people exhibiting in his Innovation Showcase are such people. Whether it is planning an innovative business on the back of a napkin or realising that weak glue will keep your notes in place, these people have taken a chance and been persistent and lives have been changed by their determination. I congratulate Lionel and his team at the Innovation Showcase for showing us the dreams of our innovators and wish him every success for the future.

**The Economy**

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (9.08 p.m.)—Earlier today I participated in a debate on a motion put forward by the member for Cook in regard to this government’s record as far as economic matters were concerned. I put forward a series of arguments in relation to the former Labor government’s achievements and argued that in fact they provided the foundation for what has happened in the economy in the last eight years that this government has been in power.

As is the nature of debate—and as you would be very much aware, Mr Speaker—you often leave a few things out, so I thought I would take this opportunity to add a few more elements and facts to the arguments I put forward. The prime argument that I will use now is that in 1982-83 when the then Treasurer, the member for Bennelong, was in power—and I think members need to be reminded of this—the recession had a grave influence on the Australian economy, and it took the incoming Labor government considerable time to bring the economy to full growth after the job losses of that recession.

It is often forgotten today, as the current Treasurer tries day after day to put this government’s stamp on economic matters, that the member for Bennelong is the one person in this parliament who has the distinction of
having the economic trifecta: double-digit inflation, double-digit unemployment and double-digit interest rates. For this government to argue that, because it has come on the back of 13 years of Labor government hard work, it has done all the work in remaking this economy is fundamentally false. We know that the challenges of 1985-86 and the collapse in terms of trade faced by the government and the—

Mr Brough—Did Paul write this for you?
Mr Hatton—No, I wrote it all myself.

The fundamental decisions in relation to this were critical turning points. They were critical turning points because, prior to that, Australia had an entirely different economic model. The model that we have now—a diversified economy that has been able to withstand not just the recent problems in Asia but the full impact of the 1987 collapse in the share market worldwide and the expectation from virtually every country around the world that there would be greater economic damage as a result—needs to be borne in mind when we look at the past 20 years or so.

Nothing in this life is sui generis. Nothing is so unique and of its own nature and character that there is not something that precedes it. In 1900 this country was one of the pre-eminent economic powers in the world and one of the world’s richest countries. We are lucky that, after a period of relative economic sloth, this country’s economy has been reformed, reshaped, renewed and reinvigorated. It was done under the impress of the extraordinary circumstances of the mid-eighties through to the mid-nineties. That fundamental restructuring and reshaping cannot be wished away by a government that seeks to ride on top of those shoulders.

One last point on the issue of government debt. For the last eight years, day after day, week after week, in parliamentary sessions, we have been lectured about debt and the government repaying debt. Mr Speaker, as you would well know, in the week before the 1983 election, the member for Bennelong said that he did not know what the deficit would be exactly, but it was about $4 billion. Two days prior to the election, he had to admit that it was about $6 billion, and it turned out to be $9.6 billion deficit for one year. In 1998 dollars, that is $26 billion. Add another eight years and we are well over mid-$30 billion. Almost half of the debt that this government has repaid is effectively debt from one year when the current Prime Minister was Treasurer—the last year, thankfully, of his treasurership.

So when it comes to getting the economic record straight, there is not one side to the story, but two. The fundamentals of Australia’s modern economy were laid by the Australian Labor Party with the former member for Blaxland as the Treasurer and Prime Minister. What has been achieved over the last eight years, as he has correctly argued previously, is a continuum of the foundations that were laid then, in circumstances much harder than anyone has had to face in the last eight years. (Time expired)

Dunkley Electorate: Frankston
Information Centre

Mr Billson (Dunkley) (9.14 p.m.)—I rise on a bright, optimistic and forward-looking note, after that rewriting of history by the member for Blaxland. It is evident that, at a time when we are talking about our nation’s future, all the Labor Party can give us is vacuous, glib statements that lack substance, imagination and content. When there is an economic debate on, we have a back-to-the-future contribution from the member for Blaxland. I think that must be about his 17th contribution in the time that he has been here. At least he is consistent and that is a great credit to him.
But some good news tonight, Mr Speaker: a half-million-dollar visitor information centre will be built on the Frankston foreshore, following an announcement today that the Australian government will provide $264,000 toward that project. What a great announcement; even more reason to be optimistic and positive about the future of the community that I am a part of and am very proud to represent. Funding from the Regional Partnerships Program will go towards the cost of constructing the Frankston information centre and marketing suite, which will help re-establish Frankston as a regional tourism hub. Funding for the visitor information centre adds to previous funding provided by the Howard government to prepare not only a tourism strategy but also a new annual events program, which helped kick off the Sea Harvest Festival. Today’s funding announcement makes it the federal Frankston tourism triple: three lots of outstanding funding commitments by the Australian government to support the revitalisation of tourism within Frankston and the greater region.

Mr Lloyd interjecting—

Mr BILLSON—I thank the Chief Government Whip. Yes, I am passionate about the tourism prospects of the community that I represent and I have been very persistent in pursuing these tools. In my view, the key is that our community has all that it takes to be remarkably successful as a leisure destination where 3½ million Melburnians can renew themselves after toiling in their careers and their lives; they can just duck down to the Mornington Peninsula and recharge their batteries to continue to contribute to the great City of Melbourne and the Victorian economy.

This centre will provide a focal point for the local and visiting community as well as be a key element of our strategy to redevelop our tourism industry and revitalise our city’s image. The multifunctional centre will incorporate visitor information and booking services, Mr Speaker, which I am sure you will appreciate when visiting our community. It will also have a retail outlet, which is something I am also passionate about. I have talked about ‘provincial peninsula’. We have wonderful primary producers in our part of the world who produce first-class product. If we can showcase that more effectively, it will underpin the vitality and viability of that primary production. It will also protect the landscape values that people love about the Mornington Peninsula. Seventy per cent of that region is rural and people love that landscape, but the key is to make sure that it is viable as a land use and to keep that country lifestyle and the wind in the hair feeling you have when you come to the peninsula. So part of this project will be a retail outlet offering local produce for sale. There will also be a community meeting room, display areas for major projects and some of the transit initiatives that the city is involved in with the state government, educational displays about Port Phillip Bay and its surrounding environment, Internet access and a place for local tourism operators to present their wares, their promotions and their displays.

Our community has talked long about the need for this centre, and it is now a real deal through the commitment of the Australian government through the Regional Partnerships Program. It will be built as part of the current works on the pier forecourt adjacent to the new Sophia’s restaurant, which is currently under construction. I was delighted to host a recent visit by De-Anne Kelly, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services to show—with the regional tourism leaders and the Frankston City Council—where this project will go and what it aims to achieve. I think she thought Mackay is lovely but Frankston is pretty special as well, and she went away...
from visiting our community with a big smile on her face.

That pier forecourt area has about 300,000 visitors a year, which is about a quarter of the number that visit the peninsula in general. It is ideally located and this will be the only level 2 visitor information centre between the CBD of Melbourne and Dromana. That is about 75 kilometres, and the two million people living in that area presently do not have access to a level 2 visitor information centre.

This is great news, a great shot in the arm and a great opportunity to re-energise Frankston Tourism Association. That association will be able to offer access to this visitor information centre as one of its key attractions—one of its selling points to the large number of visitor industry participants in our region. We have the tools now to make our region very attractive as a place to play, stay and spend a few days. Mr Speaker, I commend anybody listening to this broadcast and your good self and your family to come and visit the Mornington Peninsular.

Howard Government: Advertising

Mr Quick (Franklin) (9.18 p.m.)—Watching television is something that most of us, with our crazy schedules, find hard to do. Yet when I do manage to get the opportunity to watch free-to-air, I am amazed at the ad blitz that this government is undertaking. I can only imagine just how many tens of millions of dollars are going into the coffers of the Australian networks. Then there are the generic full-page advertisements in the daily newspapers throughout Tasmania. Then there are the generic full-page advertisements in the daily newspapers throughout Tasmania. One advertisement states: ‘$1.867 billion government funding to the people of Tasmania.’ Those opposite quite rightly retort, ‘You blokes did the same thing when you were in government, so we are just reciprocating in this election year.’ But, realistically, is this statement a justification to continue spending money that many in my electorate—and I am sure in all electorates across Australia—see as a waste and that could be better spent in extending services or even providing new services?

One wonders at these generic ads. One would have thought that specific ads targeted towards each state would have been appropriately placed in our various newspapers and on our televisions. It is really interesting to witness the full-page ad appearing in the Sunday Tasmanian of 16 May 2000 and the response it elicited from one of my observant constituents. They wrote:

Dear Mr Quick,

Could you please ask your colleagues of the opposite side when the first passenger trains arrive in Tasmania? As a rail enthusiast, I am looking forward to their surprise return. Also that fire appliance looks suspiciously like the New South Wales one—I was a volunteer New South Wales firefighter when I lived there. And the number plate on the truck is impossible to read, but what’s the betting it’s nowhere near Tasmania? As for the rest, who knows? Tasmania often seems to come off second best compared with the mainland states, despite the best efforts of our hard working MPs. But second-hand propaganda ads from Canberra? Come off it.

It is interesting to note that Tasmania has not had passenger trains for close on 40 years, yet they appear as one of the six frames highlighted in the newspaper. I mentioned at the outset of my speech that with this money many programs might have been better funded or even funded to start with—programs that have missed out because the government, in its wisdom, saw fit to waste valuable moneys trying to inform people of expanded or new initiatives.

One case in point is the $21 million Medicare ad campaign highlighting the government’s revamp of the scheme when, it is interesting to note, consumers are already automatically advised by Medicare of their
eligibility for the safety net. That is $21 million—I would strongly argue for this money to be better spent on raising the bulk-billing consultations in my electorate, which currently stand at an appallingly low rate of 51½ per cent, one of the worst rates in this country.

Perhaps some of this $21 million could be better spent on providing pneumococcal vaccinations for the children in my electorate of Franklin and in the other electorates in Tasmania. Why not continue funding the many excellent Good Beginnings programs operating in Tasmania—programs that we are told will cease to operate after 30 June this year? I raise this program, Good Beginnings, because I know that the Prime Minister has extolled the virtues of this excellent program in this place. I also raise it because I received a letter from another of my constituents, and I would like to quote from her letter. She wrote:

I am writing to you in relation to the Good Beginnings prison program, support for people in prisons and their families ... I understand that budgetary concerns are often the basis of funding decisions, but I am requesting that you see the human cost to such funding cuts ... there is no other support for the families of prisoners, my children and I deserve the chance to have a relationship with their father and my husband. This program gives prisoners the opportunity to return home to a family that knows them, once they have served their sentence.

Does this government really care, or does the money it constantly feeds to the media giants take precedence over the people, who deserve better?

Robertson Electorate: Tourism

Mr LLOYD (Robertson) (9.23 p.m.)—I rise this evening in support of a project that is important to my electorate of Robertson and to the Central Coast. It is the Central Coast Artificial Reef Project, in which a hardworking band of volunteers has been endeavouring for some time to secure a vessel to sink off the Central Coast as a dive wreck. In fact, it was way back in 2001 that this committee was competing with the government of Queensland for the ex-HMAS Brisbane, which it wanted to sink off the coast of New South Wales. We lobbied hard as a committee and a community to secure this vessel from the federal government, but in the end the hardworking member Mr Slipper helped secure the vessel for the Queensland government—and fair enough. We were hoping, and we still hope, to gain the next vessel that becomes available, but what has frustrated our community and this committee is the fact that the ex-HMAS Brisbane has been sitting in Sydney since that time, rusting away. The Queensland government seems to have put a series of obstacles in the way of accepting this gift from the federal government and, despite negotiations with the federal government over a long period of time, to my knowledge agreement has not been reached to take the ex-HMAS Brisbane.

So frustrated were the community of the Central Coast that the committee organised a rally last Thursday, 20 May, at Terrigal on the Central Coast of New South Wales. Around 50 people attended at 7.30 in the morning to show their support for the provision of a dive wreck off the Terrigal coast. If this artificial reef were to be created, it is estimated that it would bring approximately $17.5 million to the Central Coast economy in tourism and associated industries. In addition, it would create 136 jobs directly supported by tourism and 205 indirect jobs. You can see that diving on sunken vessels is a great tourist attraction. It is something that people are prepared to pay for. Divers are prepared to travel not only from interstate but also from overseas to have the opportunity to dive on a large vessel that has been specially set up for them. It is important to note that the committee is also very con-
scions of the wishes and memory of the men and women who have served on vessels such as the HMAS Brisbane, and it certainly does not want to see it sitting in Sydney Harbour rusting away, not being put to any good use. We certainly believe that it could have a wonderful and very useful home off the coast of New South Wales, off the Central Coast of Australia.

I have with me a petition. It is not in accordance with the parliamentary rules, but I do want to note for the parliament that the petition, which was presented to me by the committee last Thursday, has 364 signatures on it noting that the federal government gifted the HMAS Brisbane to the state of Queensland, but since then, after repeated approaches, the Queensland government has refused to formally accept the gift of this once-proud ship and it has remained in Sydney Harbour rusting away for over 2½ years. The petition says:

We, the members of the community of the Central Coast of New South Wales, formally request that you—

meaning the federal government—

rescind your decision to gift the Brisbane to Queensland and instead gift her to the state of New South Wales so that we can sink her as an artificial reef off the Central Coast of New South Wales and thereby honour her past glory.

Importantly, this petition was also signed by each and every one of the councillors of Gosford City Council, showing their support for this. I am aware that it is very likely that the ex-HMAS Brisbane will end up going to the Queensland government, but I certainly call on the minister and the federal government to provide the next vessel that becomes available from the Navy to be used as a dive wreck off the Central Coast of New South Wales to bring to our economy that $17.5 million and the more than 300 jobs that will directly and indirectly be associated with the creation of the artificial reef project off the

Central Coast of New South Wales. It is an important project to our community. It will bring prosperity, it will bring jobs and it will be an important tourism asset for our community. (Time expired)

Taxation: Avoidance Schemes

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (9.28 p.m.)—I am pleased that the Attorney-General has referred draft legislation to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs for that committee, of which I am a member, to scrutinise and inquire into with a view to stamping out the tax rorting that has occurred through the employment of bankruptcy and family law over the past few years. As you would be aware, Mr Speaker, I have campaigned very hard on this issue and asked numerous questions, particularly of the Treasurer, the Attorney-General and the Assistant Treasurer, which you have followed up for me. The tax avoidance industry concerns all Australians, and it is particularly relevant at the moment, when the big end of town is getting a significant tax cut and people who are earning less than $52,000 a year are not receiving a single cent. People have had a gutful of people using bankruptcy and family law as so-called legitimate tools to avoid paying their fair share of tax, and I have no doubt that all those people who have rorted the taxation system over the last few years walk around this country with a Medicare card, bludging on their fellow taxpayers. So I applaud the government for doing something about it, and I hope that it can make changes to stamp out tax avoidance.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 9.30 p.m., the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 9.30 p.m.

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Wilkie to move:
That this House:

(1) recognises the importance of the parliamentary education program for Australian school students which encourages young people to come to Canberra and participate in and learn about our federal democracy and culture;

(2) supports and encourages utilisation of the educational resources available that complement parliamentary and democracy education;

(3) provides for the provision of realistic and flexible financial assistance to schools and students planning parliamentary educational programs; and

(4) calls on the Parliament to make rebate schemes more reflective and considerate of travel distances to the National Capital in order to allow equality of access to the parliamentary education program for all students and that such rebates reflect market pricing for those reliant on air travel.

Ms O’Byrne to move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges:

(a) the current plight of the dairy industry; and

(b) the uncertain future viability of the dairy industry, particularly in relation to milk prices, supermarket power, water entitlements and security, and the barriers to attracting younger people into the agriculture industry; and

(2) urges the Government to urgently undertake a comprehensive response to address these issues.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

**Immigration: Visas**

(Question No. 2015)

Ms Plibersek asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 16 June 2003:

1. How many temporary protection visa holders are there in (a) Australia, and (b) in each federal electorate.
2. Which countries do they come from.
3. How many (a) men, and (b) women are from each country.
4. How many are aged (a) 0-11, (b) 12-18, (c) 19-25, (d) 26-50, and (e) over 50 Years.
5. How many temporary protection visas will expire (a) by 30 June 2003, (b) by 31 December 2003, (c) during 2004, and (d) during 2005.

Mr Hardgrave—The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

1. (a) As at 24 October 2003, 8862 people were granted Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) since the introduction of the system in October 1999 (including children born to TPV holders in Australia). Of those:
   - 8 held a bridging visa (they lodged a further protection visa application (FPV) after their TPV had ceased);
   - 4 held TPVs which had expired and had neither lodged an FPV nor departed Australia;
   - 18 no longer held a TPV due to cancellation; and
   - some 200 had departed Australia.

   (b) Figures for the federal electorate location of TPV holders in Australia are not available as the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) systems do not record the electorate within which a person resides.

Temporary Protection Visa holders are lawful temporary residents of Australia and are able to move freely within Australia. Address information held by DIMIA on clients granted TPVs is constantly being updated as individuals move, lodge further visa applications or provide information in support of their claims for further stay in Australia. Some 75% of grantees currently have reportable residential address postcodes.

In order to protect client confidentiality, data on visa grantees by location has not been included where the number of clients in that location is less than 10.

Reportable residential postcode information held on TPV grantees at 28 November 2003 is set out in the following table.

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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
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SYRIA    4   20  24
THAILAND 1   1
TUNISIA  3   3
TURKEY   7   26  33
TURKMENISTAN  1   1
UKRAINE  1   1   2
USSR     1   1   2
YEMEN    2   2
YUGOSLAVIA, FED REPUBLIC OF  2   2
ZAIRE    2   2
ZIMBABWE 1   1
Total    1806 7056 8862

(4) The recorded age groups of all TPVs granted as at 24 October 2003 (age as at date of data extraction) are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 11 Years</td>
<td>1337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 - 18 Years</td>
<td>634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 - 25 Years</td>
<td>1801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 50 Years</td>
<td>4771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50 Years</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5) Those TPV holders who made a further protection visa application while their TPV was still valid will have their TPV status continued until that application is finally determined. At 24 October 2003 there were 541 current TPV holders who were yet to make a further protection visa application. The nominal expiry of their TPV status is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of Nominal Expiry</th>
<th>Number of TPV Grantees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002/11 – 2003/12</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/01 – 2004/06</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/07 – 2004/12</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/01 – 2005/06</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/07 – 2005/12</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/01 – 2006/06</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/07 – 2006/12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Immigration: Ministerial Intervention**

(Question No. 2047)

Mr Ripoll asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 19 June 2003:

1. How many personal intervention requests under section 417 of the Immigration Act has he received in (a) 2001, (b) 2002 and (c) 2003.
2. How many of these were granted a visa through his personal intervention after the (a) first, (b) second, and (c) third or any subsequent attempts.
3. In those cases, what new information was given that ultimately convinced him to intervene.
(4) From which federal electoral divisions did the requests for ministerial intervention come and which were successful.

(5) In how many of these cases did the request for ministerial intervention come from a Federal Government Minister’s office and in how many of these cases was a visa granted following ministerial intervention.

**Mr Hardgrave**—The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) In the light of interest in issues relating to ministerial intervention, my Department undertook a major exercise to manually cross-check and validate departmental electronic and other records since July 2000. As a result, figures relating to the number of requests received by the former Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Philip Ruddock, may vary from those published before the validation process was completed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Year</th>
<th>2000-01</th>
<th>2001-02</th>
<th>2002-03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of s417 Requests</td>
<td>3370</td>
<td>4472</td>
<td>4498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) The manual validation exercise identified that in the period 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2003, the former Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Philip Ruddock, received the following number of intervention requests prior to the grant of a visa through the exercise of Ministerial public interest power under s417

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Requests per case</th>
<th>2000-01</th>
<th>2001-02</th>
<th>2002-03</th>
<th>Total 2000-03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 **</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or More</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Interventions</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ** The Minister has issued guidelines which enable the Department to identify unique and exceptional cases. Departmental records indicate that these cases were identified and referred by the Department following the Refugee Review Tribunal’s (RRT’s) decision to affirm the Department’s decision, and without the individual or a third party making a request for referral.

(3) My Department does not record the grounds for intervention under the section 417 intervention power beyond the information contained in statements that are tabled in Parliament in relation to such cases. The Minister determines whether to intervene on a case by case basis, depending on the facts in the individual case.

(4) Figures for each of the federal electoral divisions from which the requests for ministerial intervention originate are not available as the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) systems do not record the electorate within which a person resides.

(5) The Department’s computer systems do not capture this information in a form which can be reported.

**Building and Construction Industry and HIH Royal Commission**

(Question No. 2442)

**Mr McClelland** asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 18 September 2003:

(1) What have been (a) the costs to date (including winding-up costs) and (b) the further budgeted costs of the (i) Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry, and (ii) HIH Royal Commission.
(2) In respect of each Royal Commission, what was the total cost of the services of (a) each counsel assisting the Royal Commission, (b) solicitors assisting each Royal Commission, including fees, disbursements, accommodation and travel costs and all other expenses and allowances.

(3) In respect of each Royal Commission, what was the total cost of the services of the Royal Commissioner, including salary, superannuation, accommodation and travel costs, and all other expenses and allowances.

(4) In respect of each Royal Commission, who provided media liaison services and what was the total cost of those services.

(5) In respect of each Royal Commission, (a) how many copies were printed, and (b) what were the total publishing and printing costs of (i) any interim report, and (ii) the final report.

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

Officers of the Attorney-General’s Department have made every effort to obtain the necessary information to answer the questions. However, some detail regarding some expenses processed in the early stages of the Royal Commission may not have been available.

(1) (a) (i) The costs to 31 October 2003 of the Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry were $66.015m.

(1) (a) (ii) The costs to 31 October 2003 of the Royal Commission into the failure of the HIH Insurance Group were $39.020m.

(1) (b) (i) The future budgeted costs of the Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry are estimated to be $0.750m comprising lease make good costs, lease arrears, FBT liability, outstanding litigation costs and the provision of other minor costs.

(1) (b) (ii) The future budgeted costs of the Royal Commission into the failure of the HIH Insurance Group are estimated to be $0.080m comprising outstanding litigation costs, building and motor vehicle lease arrears, FBT liability, records storage costs and the provision of other minor costs.

(2) (a) The total fees and disbursements (excluding GST) paid to each counsel is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Fees ($)</th>
<th>Disbursements ($)</th>
<th>Total ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Agius SC</td>
<td>1,466,972</td>
<td>109,238</td>
<td>1,576,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel Robberds QC</td>
<td>1,268,409</td>
<td>61,358</td>
<td>1,329,767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Green QC</td>
<td>926,588</td>
<td>44,606</td>
<td>971,194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Tracey QC</td>
<td>1,037,050</td>
<td>1,985</td>
<td>1,039,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew O’Sullivan</td>
<td>753,864</td>
<td>86,658</td>
<td>840,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoni Lucev</td>
<td>609,091</td>
<td>7,434</td>
<td>616,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr James Renwick</td>
<td>601,921</td>
<td>72,160</td>
<td>674,081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr John Bishop</td>
<td>726,250</td>
<td>91,434</td>
<td>817,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Matthew Collins</td>
<td>617,727</td>
<td>31,248</td>
<td>648,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Neil</td>
<td>675,250</td>
<td>75,021</td>
<td>750,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Stephen Donaghue</td>
<td>462,944</td>
<td>11,349</td>
<td>474,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy Ginnane</td>
<td>593,273</td>
<td>8,405</td>
<td>601,678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald Gipp</td>
<td>688,595</td>
<td>42,423</td>
<td>731,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Martin QC</td>
<td>1,402,716</td>
<td>150,425</td>
<td>1,553,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard White SC</td>
<td>1,198,550</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,198,550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(2) (b) The total fees and disbursements (excluding GST) paid to solicitors is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Fees ($)</th>
<th>Disbursements ($)</th>
<th>Total ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norman O'Bryan SC</td>
<td>929,091</td>
<td>48,147</td>
<td>977,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Beech-Jones</td>
<td>618,295</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>618,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon White</td>
<td>586,909</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>586,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy McCallum</td>
<td>512,909</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>512,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie Dodds-Streeton</td>
<td>284,727</td>
<td>29,854</td>
<td>314,581</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) The total cost of the services for each Royal Commissioner is as follows:

**BCI**

The BCI Royal Commissioner was renumerated $651,169 pa for salary and superannuation. The period of engagement was 16 July 2001 to 26 February 2003 (590 days). The total costs of the service provided are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Royal Commission</th>
<th>Salary and Superannuation ($)</th>
<th>Travel costs ($)</th>
<th>Accommodation, allowances and other expenses ($)</th>
<th>Total ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCI</td>
<td>1,052,574</td>
<td>17,203</td>
<td>237,650</td>
<td>1,299,853</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HIH**

The HIH Royal Commissioner was paid by invoice to the West Australian Ministry of Justice on the basis of reimbursing the court for a replacement judge. For the duration of his appointment from 8 August 2001 to 30 June 2003 the estimated cost was $591,000 (GST exclusive). Travel costs include the Royal Commissioner and support staff. The department does not have detailed records of payments made prior to this department taking responsibility for the Royal Commissions. The total costs of the services provided are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Royal Commission</th>
<th>Salary and Superannuation ($)</th>
<th>Travel costs ($)</th>
<th>Accommodation, allowances and other expenses ($)</th>
<th>Total ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIH</td>
<td>591,000</td>
<td>94,886*</td>
<td>32,681*</td>
<td>718,567</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Amounts relate to payments processed by Attorney-General’s Department only

(4) The total cost of services provided for media liaison services for each Royal Commission is listed below. The totals (GST exclusive) are for payments made to each vendor by the Attorney-General’s Department only. The department does not have detailed records of earlier payments made by the Department of Finance and Administration in respect of these services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Royal Commission</th>
<th>Vendor</th>
<th>Expenditure (excl GST) ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCI</td>
<td>Network Four Productions</td>
<td>474,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIH</td>
<td>John Dickie Communications</td>
<td>194,650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5) The reproduction costs and number of reports produced for each Royal Commission is as follows:
BCI
(5) (a)(i) An interim report was published by the BCI Royal Commission which was tabled on 19 August 2002. The number of copies printed is not known.
(5) (a)(ii) In respect of the final report for the BCI Royal Commission, 23 volumes were produced. Volume 1 had 1,100 copies printed, volume 12 had 650 copies printed, volume 23 had 40 copies printed and the remaining volumes had 600 copies printed.
(5) (b)(i) The Department is unable to provide a cost of the interim report as detailed records of those costs are not available.
(5) (b)(ii) Total publishing and printing costs of the final report was $1.919m.

HIH
(5) (a)(i) There was no interim report for the HIH Royal Commission.
(5) (a)(ii) In respect of the final report for the HIH Royal Commission, 3 volumes were produced with 5000 copies of each volume being printed.
(5) (b)(i) Not applicable as no interim report was printed.
(5) (b)(ii) Total publishing and printing costs of the final report were $0.163m.

Immigration: Visas
(Question No. 2587)

Ms Plibersek asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 13 October 2003:
(1) What is the number of Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders in Australia.
(2) How many TPV holders reside in each federal electoral division.
(3) How many TPVs will expire at the end of (a) 2003, (b) 2004, and (c) 2005.
(4) How many TPV holders are under (a) 16, (b) 25 years of age.

Mr Hardgrave—The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:
(1) As at 24 October 2003, 8862 people were granted TPVs since the introduction of the system in October 1999 (including children born to TPV holders in Australia). Of those:
• 8 held a bridging visa (they lodged a further protection visa application (FPV) after their TPV had ceased);
• 4 held TPVs which had expired and had neither lodged an FPV nor departed Australia;
• 18 no longer held a TPV due to cancellation; and
• some 200 had departed Australia.
(2) Figures for each of the federal electorate divisions location of TPV holders in Australia are not available as the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) systems do not record the electorate within which a person resides. Temporary Protection Visa holders are lawful temporary residents of Australia and are able to move freely within Australia. Address information held by DIMIA on clients granted TPVs is constantly being updated as individuals move, lodge further visa applications or provide information in support of their claims for further stay in Australia. Some 75% of grantees currently have reportable residential address postcodes.
In order to protect client confidentiality, data on visa grantees by location has not been included where the number of clients in that location is less than 10.
Reportable residential postcode information held on TPV grantees at 28 November 2003 is set out in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postcode Range</th>
<th>Number of Persons with reportable Postcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>800-1420</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2016</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2019</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-2032</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2033-2042</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2048-2065</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2066-2073</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2077-2099</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2106-2114</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2115-2122</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2123-2128</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2130-2138</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2140</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2141</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2142-2143</td>
<td>91</td>
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<tr>
<td>2144</td>
<td>839</td>
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<tr>
<td>2145</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
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<td>2146-2149</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>2150</td>
<td>124</td>
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<tr>
<td>2151</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>2152-2159</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>2160</td>
<td>171</td>
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<tr>
<td>2161</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>2162-2163</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2164</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2165</td>
<td>287</td>
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<td>2166</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>2168</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>2170</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2171-2174</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2176-2177</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2190-2193</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>2194</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>2195</td>
<td>142</td>
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<tr>
<td>2196-2199</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2200</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2203-2204</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2205-2209</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2211-2216</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2217-2218</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postcode Range</td>
<td>Number of Persons with reportable Postcode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2220-2289</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2304-2482</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>2519-2530</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>2560-2582</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>2594</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2601-2602</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2603-2612</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2614-2650</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2680</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
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<td>2705-2710</td>
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<td>2716-2749</td>
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<td>2750-2780</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2830</td>
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<tr>
<td>2850-2913</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3008-3011</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<td>3012-3019</td>
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<td>3033-3039</td>
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<td>3040-3046</td>
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<td>3047</td>
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<td>3048</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3050-3056</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3058</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
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<td>3060</td>
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<td>3061</td>
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<td>3064-3065</td>
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<td>3068-3071</td>
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<tr>
<td>3072</td>
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<tr>
<td>3073</td>
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<tr>
<td>3075</td>
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</tr>
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<td>3076-3079</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3080-3088</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3100-3109</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3110-3129</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>3130-3139</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>3140-3149</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>3150-3169</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>3170-3171</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postcode Range</th>
<th>Number of Persons with reportable Postcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3172-3173</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3174</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>3175</td>
<td>601</td>
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<td>3177</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3179-3189</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
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<td>5023-5024</td>
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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
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<td>5253-5271</td>
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<td>5304-5330</td>
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<td>6003-6004</td>
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<td>6005-6012</td>
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<td>6107-6110</td>
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<tr>
<td>6147-6151</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6152</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Postcode Range Number of Persons with reportable Postcode
---
6153-6196 15
6207-6239 16
6258-6285 19
6317 23
6330-6958 49
7000-7307 31
Total 6638

(3) Those TPV holders who made a further protection visa application while their TPV was still valid will have their TPV status continued until that application is finally determined. At 24 October 2003 there were 541 current TPV holders who were yet to make a further protection visa application. The nominal expiry of their TPV status is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of Nominal Expiry</th>
<th>Number of TPV Grantees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002/11 - 2003/12</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/01 - 2004/06</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/07 - 2004/12</td>
<td>176</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005/01 - 2005/06</td>
<td>140</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005/07 - 2005/12</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/01 - 2006/06</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/07 - 2006/12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) The recorded age groups of TPV holders as at 24 October 2003 (a) under 16 and (b) under 25 years of age are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 16 Years</td>
<td>1648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ie. 0-15 years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 Years</td>
<td>3485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ie. 0-24 years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Aviation: National Airspace System

*(Question No. 2598)*

**Mr Martin Ferguson** asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 13 October 2003:

(1) Does he support the finding in the "Review of the National Airspace System and Competition for Airport Related Services Report" prepared by Wes Willoughby & Associates and tabled in the House of Representatives, that $71.61 million per annum can be saved in air traffic control costs through the introduction of the National Airspace System; if not, (a) why not, and (b) what is his estimate of the potential savings.

(2) Who prepared advice for him on the veracity of the costings in this report.

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

(1) The report was commissioned by the Aviation Reform Group (ARG). I tabled the report in the interests of transparency and debate on the importance and benefits of airspace reform.

The ARG has also in November 2003, asked the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics (BTRE) to undertake a benefit-cost analysis (BCA). The BTRE study is in progress.
(a) See (1) above.
(b) See (1) above.

(2) See (1) above.

New Apprenticeships Scheme

(Question No. 2736)

Mr Albanese asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, upon notice, 6 November 2003:

Which employers received subsidies in (a) 2001-2002, and (b) 2002-2003 under the new apprenticeships program by (i) industry, (ii) size of employer (number of employees), (iii) the proportion of traineeships in the employer’s workforce, (iv) the proportion of existing employees on traineeships, and (v) the proportion of new employees on traineeships.

Dr Nelson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is the authoritative source of New Apprenticeships information. The information requested by Mr Albanese is not available from NCVER and has been produced using the Department’s Training and Youth Internet Management System (TYIMS). This data is not available to the public. The following information provides the number of employers by industry and prior employment status, who received incentive payments for the financial years 2001/2002 and 2002/2003. The TYIMS database is not able to provide information about the size of employer (number of employees) nor is it able to distinguish between trainees and apprentices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>2001/02 Employers</th>
<th>2002/03 Employers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants</td>
<td>5,477</td>
<td>5,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing</td>
<td>1,945</td>
<td>2,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Services</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>370</td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>11,339</td>
<td>12,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and Recreational Services</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>1,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1,529</td>
<td>1,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, Gas and Water Supply</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>1,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Administration and Defence</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Community Services</td>
<td>4,118</td>
<td>4,973</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>8,209</td>
<td>8,916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Classifiable Economic Unit Division</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Other Services</td>
<td>5,461</td>
<td>5,784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and Business Services</td>
<td>6,147</td>
<td>6,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>13,701</td>
<td>14,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Storage</td>
<td>1,749</td>
<td>2,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>1,871</td>
<td>1,959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2001/02 | 2002/03
--- | ---
Existing Employees | 12,119 | 15,158
New Employees | 60,007 | 65,396

Aviation: Federal Airports Sales
(Question No. 2817)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 1 December 2003:

(1) Further to the answer to question No. 2299, which of the following corporations have a financial or pecuniary interest in any designated airport now sold: (a) Macquarie Bank or its affiliates; (b) HOCHTIEF AirPort; (c) the Commonwealth Bank; and (d) any other corporation which forms part of the Southern Cross Airports Corporation.

(2) Does Recommendation 8 at paragraph 1.30 of the Report on the Inquiry into the Development of the Brisbane Airport Corporation Master Plan by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee dated June 2003, state “That the dual roles of AirServices Australia of government advisor and external consultant be critically examined to determine whether there is potential for conflict of interest”.

(3) Was Ms Burke a member of the Board of Airservices Australia at the time of the privatisation process of (a) Brisbane Airport, and (b) any other designated Airport; if so, for what periods of time was Ms Burke a member of the Board of Airservices Australia and what were the respective dates of the privatisation processes of those designated airports.

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

(1) Information about the financial or pecuniary interests in relation to airport operator companies and airports available to the Government, other than that which is publicly available, is information of a commercially sensitive and confidential nature.

(2) Yes.

(3) (a) Brisbane Airport was privatised in June 1997. Ms Burke was appointed to the Board of Airservices Australia on 1 January 1998.

(b) Yes. Ms Burke served on the Airservices Australia Board from 1 January 1998 until 21 April 2000. Fourteen of the twenty-two Federal Airports were privatised during that time, or more specifically between May and July of They were Adelaide, Alice Springs, Canberra, Coolangatta, Darwin, Hobart, Launceston, Townsville, Mt Isa, Tennant Creek, Archerfield, Jandakot, Moorabbin and Parafield.

National Security: Terrorism
(Question No. 2944)

Mr Danby asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 10 February 2004:

Has (a) Mr Yousef Nada and (b) Mr Idris Nasreddin visited or attempted to enter Australia; if so, what action, if any, did the Government take.

Mr Hardgrave—the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

There is no record of Mr Yousef Mustafa Nada (17/05/1931) or Mr Ahmed Idris Nasreddin (22/11/1929) having entered, or having attempted to enter Australia.
Health and Ageing: Aged Care Facilities
(Question No. 2953)

Ms Corcoran asked the Minister for Ageing, upon notice, on 10 February 2004:

(1) In respect of the closure in early 2000 of the aged care facility known as Riverside in Patterson Lakes, Victoria, what date did Riverside close.

(2) How many residents were transferred out of Riverside at that time.

(3) What are the names of the places the residents of Riverside were transferred to and how many were transferred to each place.

(4) Who was responsible for the transfer of residents to their new homes.

(5) Who was responsible for the administration of the closure of Riverside.

(6) Does the Department of Health and Ageing have a protocol for the management of the resident/patient records of residents who transfer out of an Aged Care facility either on death or a change of accommodation.

(7) What was the procedure followed at Riverside for the management of resident/patient records as Riverside closed down.

(8) Does the Department of Health and Ageing have a protocol for the management of drugs and medications no longer required in an Aged Care facility.

(9) What was the procedure followed at Riverside for the management of the drugs no longer required when that facility was closed down.

Ms Julie Bishop—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) 7 March 2000

(2) 58 residents were transferred from Riverside at that time.

(3) Of the 58 former residents that were transferred:

- 54 residents were transferred to The Sisters of Charity Health Service, St Vincent’ Campus, Fitzroy;
- one resident was transferred to Dava Lodge Residential Aged Care Facility;
- one resident was transferred to Brimlea Private Nursing Home;
- one resident entered hospital until 11 April 2000 and then transferred to Ripplebrook Village; and
- one was transferred to Brimlea Private Nursing Home for three days and then was transferred to Chelsea Private Nursing Home.

(4) Because of the circumstances, the Department monitored closely the transfer arrangements of the residents to their new homes. Residents, their families, carers or guardians nominated their transport preference and most were transferred by ambulance under medical supervision.

(5) The Approved Provider, Riverside Nursing Care Pty Ltd. At the date of closure Voluntary Administrators had been appointed to the home.

(6) Under division 89 of the Aged Care Act 1997 former Approved Providers are required to retain records for three years from the date they ceased to provide aged care. At the expiry of that period it is expected that Approved Providers will dispose of confidential records in accordance with the requirements of National Privacy Principle 4 under the Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth).

(7) When the residents were relocated the service was left secure and in the hands of a professional security firm and the Voluntary Administrator appointed to the home.
(8) Approved Providers are required to comply with all relevant State or Territory legislation relating to the storage and disposal of pharmaceutical and chemical materials.

(9) See response to Question 8 above.

Aviation: Air Safety
(Question No. 3000)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 11 February 2004:

(1) Is he aware of recent media reports to the effect that, in light of a number of near aircraft collisions, the Government will reverse the decision to implement the ‘see and avoid’ air safety system.

(2) Will this air safety system be abandoned; if so, when; if not, why not.

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

(1) There has been a long-standing legislative requirement regarding the responsibility of flight crew to see and avoid aircraft. Regulation 163A (CAR 163A) of the Civil Aviation Regulations 1988 provides that:

When weather conditions permit, the flight crew of an aircraft must, regardless of whether an operation is conducted under the Instrument Flight Rules or the Visual Flight Rules, maintain vigilance so as to see, and avoid, other aircraft.

The Government is unaware of any media report to the effect that this requirement will be repealed.

(2) The Government does not plan to amend CAR 163A as it has not received any advice from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) that an amendment is required.

Immigration: People-Smuggling
(Question No. 3111)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 19 February 2004:

(1) With which countries has Australia entered into bilateral arrangements concerning people smuggling and the return of illegal arrivals.

(2) Are those agreements publicly available; if not, will the Minister provide copies of those agreements.

Mr Hardgrave—The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) Australia has a range of return arrangements with a number of countries. The specific arrangements which detail people smuggling and the return of illegal arrivals are with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>China, Peoples Republic of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>Laos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Yugoslavia, Federal Republic of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) In general, no. There is one exception, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Australia and the People’s Republic of China concerning the “Safe Third Country” arrangement for Sino-Vietnamese settled in China, which is the only publicly available agreement.
Immigration: People-Smuggling  
(Question No. 3112)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 19 February 2004:

(1) Has the Minister developed a protocol on people smuggling.

(2) Is that protocol publicly available; if not, will the Minister provide it.

Mr Hardgrave—The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) No.

(2) Not applicable.

Immigration: People-Smuggling  
(Question No. 3113)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 19 February 2004:

Has an Information Oversight Committee operated within the Minister’s department during calendar year 2003; if so, what assessment did the Committee make in respect of the number of people likely to seek entry to Australia using the services of people smugglers during calendar year 2004.

Mr Hardgrave—The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

No Information Oversight Committee operates within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs although it participates in an Information Oversight Committee established by the Office of National Assessments.

Coastwatch  
(Question No. 3120)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 19 February 2004:

(1) Which agencies within his portfolio have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Coastwatch and on what dates were those memoranda finalised.

(2) What is the nature of those memoranda.

(3) Are they publicly available; if not, will he provide a copy.

Mr Hardgrave—The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Coastwatch, which was signed by the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in November 2000.

(2) The SLA sets out the roles and responsibilities of the two agencies in relation to the delivery by Coastwatch of surveillance and response services on behalf of DIMIA, and the funding arrangements in respect of resources allocated as a result of Government consideration of the Prime Minister’s 1999 Coastal Surveillance Task Force.

(3) The SLA is not publicly available.
Ballarat Electorate: Bulk-Billing
(Question No. 3224)

Ms King asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Ballarat for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Ballarat for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Ballarat for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Ballarat for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Ballarat in 2003 was 43.2%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Ballarat in 2003 was 227,233.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Ballarat in 2003 was $11.33.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Ballarat in 2003 was 526,241.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Isaacs Electorate: Bulk-Billing
(Question No. 3225)

Ms Corcoran asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Isaacs for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Isaacs for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Isaacs for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Isaacs for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Isaacs in 2003 was 65.1%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Isaacs in 2003 was 441,711.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Isaacs in 2003 was $12.72.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Isaacs in 2003 was 678,950.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Newcastle Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3226)

Ms Grierson asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Newcastle for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Newcastle for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Newcastle for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Newcastle for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Newcastle in 2003 was 61.8%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Newcastle in 2003 was 363,727.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Newcastle in 2003 was $13.63.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Newcastle in 2003 was 588,353.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Holt Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3227)

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Holt for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Holt for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Holt for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Holt for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Holt in 2003 was 76.1%.
(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Holt in 2003 was 637,478.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Holt in 2003 was $12.10.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Holt in 2003 was 837,373.

Notes to the Statistics
These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Bendigo Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Bendigo for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Bendigo for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Bendigo for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Bendigo for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Bendigo in 2003 was 48.2%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Bendigo in 2003 was 249,939.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Bendigo in 2003 was $11.68.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Bendigo in 2003 was 518,839.
Notes to the Statistics
These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Banks Electorate: Bulk-Billing
(Question No. 3231)

Mr Melham asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Banks for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Banks for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Banks for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Banks for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Banks in 2003 was 84.5%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Banks in 2003 was 650,095.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Banks in 2003 was $12.01.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Banks in 2003 was 769,202.

Notes to the Statistics
These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.
Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

**Reid Electorate: Bulk-Billing**

(Question No. 3232)

Mr Laurie Ferguson asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:

1. What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Reid for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
2. What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Reid for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
3. What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Reid for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
4. What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Reid for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

1. The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Reid in 2003 was 97.1%.
2. The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Reid in 2003 was 978,173.
3. The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Reid in 2003 was $13.34.
4. The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Reid in 2003 was 1,007,575.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.
The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

**Denison Electorate: Bulk-Billing**

(Question No. 3235)

*Mr Kerr* asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:

1. What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Denison for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
2. What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Denison for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
3. What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Denison for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
4. What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Denison for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

1. The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Denison in 2003 was 47.4%.
2. The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Denison in 2003 was 218,304.
3. The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Denison in 2003 was $10.44.
4. The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Denison in 2003 was 460,283.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a 'fee-for-service' basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans' Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.
Batman Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3236)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Batman for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Batman for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Batman for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Batman for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Batman in 2003 was 83.3%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Batman in 2003 was 665,796.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Batman in 2003 was $13.69.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Batman in 2003 was 799,641.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans' Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Lowe Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3237)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:
(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Lowe for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Lowe for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Lowe for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Lowe for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Lowe in 2003 was 91.3%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Lowe in 2003 was 702,854.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Lowe in 2003 was $19.06.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Lowe in 2003 was 769,681.

Notes to the Statistics
These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Cowan Electorate: Bulk-Billing
(Question No. 3238)

Mr Edwards asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Cowan for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Cowan for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Cowan for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Cowan for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Cowan in 2003 was 73.2%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Cowan in 2003 was 433,635.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Cowan in 2003 was $12.30.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Cowan in 2003 was 592,175.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Rankin Electorate: Bulk Billing
(Question No. 3239)

Dr Emerson asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Rankin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Rankin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Rankin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Rankin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Rankin in 2003 was 81.3%.
(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Rankin in 2003 was 645,825.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Rankin in 2003 was $13.41.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Rankin in 2003 was 794,310.

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Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Fremantle Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3240)

Dr Lawrence asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Fremantle for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Fremantle for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Fremantle for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Fremantle for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Fremantle in 2003 was 64.6%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Fremantle in 2003 was 368,718.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Fremantle in 2003 was $15.76.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Fremantle in 2003 was 570,660.
Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Charlton Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3244)

Ms Hoare asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Charlton for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Charlton for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Charlton for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Charlton for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Charlton in 2003 was 56.0%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Charlton in 2003 was 314,562.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Charlton in 2003 was $12.68.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Charlton in 2003 was 562,211.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.
Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Franklin Electorate: Bulk-Billing
(Question No. 3245)

Mr Quick asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:
(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Franklin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Franklin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Franklin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Franklin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Franklin in 2003 was 51.5%.
(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Franklin in 2003 was 234,401.
(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Franklin in 2003 was $10.69.
(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Franklin in 2003 was 455,501.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.
The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

**Fowler Electorate: Bulk-Billing**

*(Question No. 3247)*

Mrs Irwin asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

1. What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Fowler for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
2. What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Fowler for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
3. What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Fowler for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
4. What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Fowler for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

1. The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Fowler in 2003 was 97.5%.
2. The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Fowler in 2003 was 1,087,542.
3. The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Fowler in 2003 was $12.69.
4. The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Fowler in 2003 was 1,115,908.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.
Mr Martyn Evans asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Bonython for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Bonython for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Bonython for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Bonython for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Bonython in 2003 was 87.1%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Bonython in 2003 was 723,207.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Bonython in 2003 was $9.01.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Bonython in 2003 was 830,626.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Mr Bevis asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:
(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Brisbane for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Brisbane for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Brisbane for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Brisbane for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Brisbane in 2003 was 59.2%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Brisbane in 2003 was 364,440.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Brisbane in 2003 was $14.57.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Brisbane in 2003 was 615,418.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Jagajaga Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3257)

Ms Macklin asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Jagajaga for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Jagajaga for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Jagajaga for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Jagajaga for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Jagajaga in 2003 was 68.1%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Jagajaga in 2003 was 423,295.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Jagajaga in 2003 was $14.43.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Jagajaga in 2003 was 621,353.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Prospect Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3258)

Mrs Crosio asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Prospect for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Prospect for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Prospect for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Prospect for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Prospect in 2003 was 96.9%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Prospect in 2003 was 971,868.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Prospect in 2003 was $13.65.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Prospect in 2003 was 1,003,321.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Canberra Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3259)

Ms Ellis asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Canberra for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Canberra for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Canberra for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Canberra for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Canberra in 2003 was 39.8%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Canberra in 2003 was 232,131.
(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Canberra in 2003 was $18.11.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Canberra in 2003 was 582,608.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases. Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Bowman Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3260)

Mr Sciacca asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Bowman for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Bowman for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Bowman for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Bowman for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Bowman in 2003 was 66.1%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Bowman in 2003 was 456,737.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Bowman in 2003 was $13.59.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Bowman in 2003 was 691,421.
Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Wills Electorate: Bulk-Billing
(Question No. 3264)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 4 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Wills for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Wills for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Wills for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Wills for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Wills in 2003 was 79.0%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Wills in 2003 was 619,890.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Wills in 2003 was $12.79.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Wills in 2003 was 784,787.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

**Badgerys Creek: Airport Site**

(Question No. 3265)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 4 March 2004:

1. For each of the last ten financial years what sum has been collected from commercial and residential rental properties for the Badgerys Creek Airports site and what is the basis of both commercial and residential rents.
2. For each of the last ten financial years, what have been the detailed financial outgoings of the Commonwealth for maintaining the Badgerys Creek site.

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

1. The sums collected from both commercial and residential rentals for each year are:
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sum (m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993/94</td>
<td>$3.3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994/95</td>
<td>$2.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>$3.1m</td>
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<td>$2.3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$2.3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/2001</td>
<td>$2.4m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/2002</td>
<td>$2.4m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/2003</td>
<td>$2.7m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/2004</td>
<td>$2.8m (estimate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   The basis of the rents are determined on the current rental market.

2. Financial outgoings for Badgerys Creek for the years 2002/2003, 2003/2004 and estimates for 2004/2005 are detailed in the table below. From 1994 to 1999, Badgerys Creek was administered by the Federal Airports Corporation (FAC) and from 1999 to 2001 by the Sydney Airports Corporation (SAL). Expenses for this period are not available to the Department.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>$1,598,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04</td>
<td>$1,660,124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Throsby Electorate: Bulk Billing**  
*(Question No. 3271)*  

Ms George asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 4 March 2004:

1. What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Throsby for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
2. What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Throsby for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
3. What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Throsby for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
4. What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Throsby for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

1. The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Throsby in 2003 was 94.2%.
2. The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Throsby in 2003 was 744,537.
3. The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Throsby in 2003 was $12.50.
4. The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Throsby in 2003 was 790,761.

**Notes to the Statistics**

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

**Shortland Electorate: Bulk-Billing**  
*(Question No. 3272)*  

Ms Hall asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 4 March 2004:

1. What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Shortland for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.
(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Shortland for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Shortland for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Shortland for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Shortland in 2003 was 51.3%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Shortland in 2003 was 296,442.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Shortland in 2003 was $11.69.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Shortland in 2003 was 577,520.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Stirling Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Question No. 3275)

Ms Jann McFarlane asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 8 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Stirling for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Stirling for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Stirling for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral
division of Stirling for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are
available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Stirling
in 2003 was 73.2%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Stirling in
2003 was 515,119.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the
electoral division of Stirling in 2003 was $13.01.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Stirling in 2003 was
703,436.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-
service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months
to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public pa-
tients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between
aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible
to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed ser-
vice in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insur-
ance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a
concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of
each postal area, in each electorate.

Hashluck Electorate: Bulk-Billing

(Section No. 3277)

Ms Jackson asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 8 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the
electoral division of Hashluck for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the elec-
toral division of Hashluck for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only)
for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Hashluck for the quarter ending 31
December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the elec-
toral division of Hashluck for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are
available on a calendar year basis.
(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Hasluck in 2003 was 69.2%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Hasluck in 2003 was 400,145.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Hasluck in 2003 was $12.89.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Hasluck in 2003 was 578,547.

Notes to the Statistics
These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

Calwell Electorate: Bulk-Billing
(Question No. 3307)

Ms Vanvakinou asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 11 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Calwell for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Calwell for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Calwell for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Calwell for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Calwell in 2003 was 81.5%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Calwell in 2003 was 765,092.
(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Calwell in 2003 was $12.06.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Calwell in 2003 was 938,300.

Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

**Sullin Electorate: Bulk-Billing**

(Question No. 3314)

Mr Jenkins asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 11 March 2004:

(1) What is the breakdown of the proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Sullin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(2) What is the breakdown of the number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk-billed for the electoral division of Sullin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(3) What is the breakdown for the average patient contribution per service (patient billed services only) for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Sullin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

(4) What is the breakdown for the number of services for total unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Sullin for the quarter ending 31 December 2003.

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

Medicare statistics by electorate are no longer produced on a quarterly basis. Statistics by electorate are available on a calendar year basis.

(1) The proportion of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Sullin in 2003 was 84.8%.

(2) The number of total unreferred GP attendances bulk billed for the electoral division of Sullin in 2003 was 676,850.

(3) The average patient contribution per patient billed service for unreferred GP attendances in the electoral division of Sullin in 2003 was $12.59.

(4) The number of unreferred GP attendances for the electoral division of Sullin in 2003 was 798,377.
Notes to the Statistics

These statistics relate to non-referred (general practitioner) attendances that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of non-referred attendances to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

Average out of pocket costs relate to non-hospital patient billed services, and are the difference between aggregate fees charged and aggregate benefits paid, divided by the number of services. It is not possible to compute accurate statistics on the average patient contribution per service for patient billed services in hospital, since the Medicare system does not record gap payments under private health insurance arrangements.

The statistics were compiled from Medicare data by patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.