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

HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (No. 3) 2004

First Reading
Bill presented by Dr Nelson, and read a first time.

Second Reading
Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Minister for Education, Science and Training) (9.01 a.m.)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Higher Education Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 3) 2004.

The bill makes two important funding adjustments. Firstly, it will amend the maximum funding amounts under the Commonwealth Grant Scheme for 2005 and 2006 to provide funding for places for Commonwealth supported students in the area of radiation oncology at the University of Newcastle and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. This funding was previously made available by the Department of Health and Ageing and will now be provided by my portfolio.

The bill also updates the annual appropriation under the Australian Research Council Act 2001, to reflect revised forward estimates.

As part of the implementation and consultation process for the new higher education reforms this bill also provides an opportunity to make some technical enhancements to the primary legislation and respond appropriately to issues that have been raised by the higher education sector.

As part of the Australian government's ongoing consultation with the higher education sector, this bill will allow higher education providers to continue to operate their summer schools as they do now. This is an important measure which allows students to fast-track their course or make up for a failed unit of study.

This bill also will add Melbourne University Private to the list of table B providers under the Higher Education Support Act 2003. This will allow Melbourne University Private to access Commonwealth funding for research and FEE-HELP assistance.

This funding includes the Research Training Scheme, the Institutional Grants Scheme and grants from the Australian Research Council.

The bill also makes amendments to the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to enhance the implementation of some of the higher education reforms. A number of these amendments are of particular benefit to students.

For example, the bill will extend access to assistance under the OS-HELP—overseas help—scheme. OS-HELP is an important new program that will offer students loans of up to $5,000 per six month study period to finance overseas study. The bill will extend eligibility for this program to include study undertaken by students at an overseas campus of an Australian higher education provider. This will assist students to undertake overseas study while also maintaining the continuity of their studies at their chosen institution.

The bill will also allow students more time to submit their requests for Commonwealth assistance by allowing requests to be received up until the census date.

Full details of the measures in the bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum circulated to honourable members.
I commend the bill to the House and present a signed copy of the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mr Swan) adjourned.

ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (PRISONER VOTING AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2004

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration) (9.05 a.m.)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.


The bill addresses operational problems identified with amendments to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Enrolment Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2004, which was passed by the parliament on 26 June this year.

The provisions in this bill will ensure that the legislation gives effect to the intention of the parliament by amending several provisions in the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Enrolment Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2004 that will not otherwise achieve the objectives of the parliament.

Under the enrolment integrity act, prisoners serving sentences of imprisonment that commenced on, or before, the return of the writs for an election and which continue after the issue of the writs for any succeeding election are not entitled to be enrolled to vote. There is, however, insufficient time for the prisoners’ names to be removed from the roll between the issue of the writs and the close of rolls for an election. This was clearly not the intention of the parliament.

This bill will amend the Electoral Act to prevent prisoners who are serving a sentence of three years or more from enrolling to vote. The provisions will apply to all prisoners, including those whose sentences began before the commencement of the provisions.

For consistency with the removal of early close of rolls provisions by the parliament, the bill repeals items relating to the early close of rolls for referenda in the enrolment integrity act that were overlooked during debate in the Senate.

Finally, the bill clarifies the commencement of name and address evidentiary requirements for enrolment.

I commend this bill to the chamber and I present the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mr Swan) adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Treaties Committee

Report

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (9.08 a.m.)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties I present the committee’s report entitled Report 62—Treaties tabled on 30 March 2004: joint scheme for the regulation of therapeutic products—New Zealand; World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Dr SOUTHCOTT—by leave—Report 62 contains the findings of the inquiry conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties into two proposed treaty actions tabled in the parliament on 30 March 2004. The committee considered and supports the
agreement with New Zealand for the establishment of a joint scheme for the regulation of therapeutic products. This agreement aims to safeguard public health and safety. The agreement will achieve this through the establishment and maintenance of a joint regulatory scheme for the regulation of the quality, safety and performance of therapeutic products and the manufacture, supply, import, export and promotion of therapeutic goods. The agreement provides a framework for a joint scheme and establishes the governance and accountability arrangements for the new regulatory agency. In doing so, the agreement will deliver public health benefits for Australia by providing an enhanced and sustainable regulatory capacity for therapeutic products.

The agreement addresses Australia’s obligations under the trans-Tasman mutual recognition arrangement to work with New Zealand to develop a more integrated trans-Tasman economy by removing regulatory impediments between the two countries. The agreement will also reduce industry compliance costs by increasing regulatory cost efficiency; benefit consumers by increasing the timely availability of therapeutic products, potentially at a reduced cost; and provide Australia and New Zealand with a greater capacity to influence international regulatory policy and standards.

During the inquiry, the committee received submissions expressing some concern about the effects of harmonising Australian and New Zealand laws relating to therapeutic products, particularly in relation to patents and advertising. The interested parties were, however, in favour of the agreement overall. The committee considers that the proposed agreement will enhance the protection of public health and safety and will further trans-Tasman cooperation.

The committee also supports the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which was established to address the growing global tobacco epidemic and is the world’s first international public health treaty. The convention aims to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke. Further, the convention will provide a framework for tobacco control measures to be implemented by parties at the national, regional and international level to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke.

The committee believes the convention will have a positive effect on public health within Australia and enhance Australia’s leadership role in relation to tobacco control internationally. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the organisations, individuals and government departments that participated in the committee’s inquiry—their contributions are greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank the deputy chair, all members of the committee and the committee secretariat. I commend the report to the House.

Mr WILKIE (Swan) (9.12 a.m.)—by leave—I rise to support report 62 of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties on the agreement establishing a joint scheme for the regulation of therapeutic products from New Zealand and on the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. In relation to the agreement with New Zealand, concerns were raised regarding the harmonisation of Australian and New Zealand regulatory approaches. Some of the key concerns raised during the inquiry relate to complementary medicines, dual country licences, parallel importation, clinical trials and advertising.
With regard to complementary medicines, New Zealand classifies some substances, such as dietary supplements, as food rather than medicine, despite the fact that the manufacturers make therapeutic claims. The committee understands that the new scheme will need to introduce a regulatory framework for medical devices and complementary medicines, that the new framework will be based upon current Australian standards and that the agreement will not result in a reduction in standards in either Australia or New Zealand.

Under the new agency to be established under the agreement, it is proposed that only one application and licence—a dual country licence—will be necessary to cover a therapeutic product in both Australia and New Zealand. The committee heard concerns regarding how such licences would interact with differences in patent terms between the two countries. Following on from this, concerns were raised that dual country licences would increase the likelihood of parallel importation of products, particularly from New Zealand to Australia; that importation of cheaper New Zealand products would undermine the local Australian industry; and, further, that parallel importation could make it easier for counterfeit products or substandard products to enter our market.

Australia and New Zealand have different mechanisms for approving the conduct of clinical trials. The committee understands that the industries in each country strongly favour retaining their own systems. Evidence received suggested that Australia should adopt the New Zealand system, which would lead to a significant decrease in clinical research and development as approval time lines increase. Of particular concern to industry groups was the potential harmonisation of advertising standards that relate to therapeutic products. New Zealand allows direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines, which Australia does not permit. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade advised the committee that it is likely that New Zealand will harmonise with Australia in this area.

In conclusion, the committee acknowledges the concerns raised during the course of the inquiry. The committee also recognises that none of the parties which raised these matters objected to Australia becoming a party to the agreement. I hope that adequate consideration will be given to concerns raised during the development of the implementing legislation. I would like to extend my thanks to the organisations, individuals and government departments which made submissions and gave assistance during the committee’s inquiry in relation to that particular part of the report.

With regard to the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the committee heard a range of varying evidence. For example, the national interest analysis states that in Australia the current smoking prevalence rate is approximately 20 per cent, or 3.6 million people aged 14 and over. Furthermore, tobacco use continues to be identified as the single greatest behavioural cause of death and disease. The Cancer Council of Australia and the Heart Foundation advised the committee that tobacco kills over 19,000 Australians each year and in 1998-99 the cost to the community was over $21 billion. Obviously this particular commitment will help to address those issues.

There are a number obligations that Australia has to enter into as part of this agreement. One of the most important is a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, which we all know is very important. The committee heard evidence that Australia is a leader in the area of domestic efforts to reduce smoking and in-
troduce controls to try and protect people from this particular habit. But what I find particularly galling in this report is that, despite the fact that Australia is entering into these obligations which help us to try and reduce smoking in the worldwide environment, we have a situation where the Labor Party has agreed that we will not accept money from tobacco companies for running election campaigns and yet we have the government, who want to promote this particular agreement, accepting that money. I find it absolutely hypocritical that, on the one hand, they support an agreement that looks at trying to reduce tobacco use and, on the other hand, they will take money from tobacco companies to run campaigns in elections. I just cannot understand how the government can on the one hand agree to this agreement and on the other hand take the tobacco companies’ money. They cannot have it both ways. It is high time they adopted Labor’s position in relation to tobacco company sponsorship.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (9.17 a.m.)—by leave—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks when the debate is resumed.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE (LEARNING TOGETHER—ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH CHOICE AND OPPORTUNITY) BILL 2004

Cognate bill:

STATES GRANTS (PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ASSISTANCE) LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2004

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 August, on motion by Dr Nelson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

upon which Ms Macklin moved by way of amendment:

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

“whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House:

(1) condemns the Government for:

(a) refusing to accept its responsibilities for funding government schools as a national priority;

(b) providing only $4 million in new money for government schools out of its $31.3 billion package for schools;

(c) failing to include needs-based criteria in its funding and accountability provisions for non-government schools;

(d) refusing to take into account the total level of funding for non-government schools from all sources—Commonwealth, State and private—in assessing funding needs;

(e) entrenching its divisive and unfair funding arrangements for schools, where the largest increases in funding have been provided to some of the best resourced independent schools in Australia;

(f) failing to meet the urgent needs of students in government and non-government schools who have special needs, including:

(i) schools with concentrations of students from families living in poverty, unemployment and with low levels of school achievement and students with disabilities;

(ii) indigenous students; and

(2) calls on the Government to introduce funding arrangements that reflect the relative needs of schools and students, so that all students have access to the resources they need to achieve the educa-
ional outcomes set out in the National Goals of Schooling for the 21st century”.

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (9.18 a.m.)—The example I gave to the House in the earlier part of my speech on the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and cognate bill last evening shows how the government is more interested in symbolic things than it is in the fundamental parts of our education system. It measures a school’s commitment to the study of civics by whether or not it has a flagpole. Instead of providing resources which would aid teachers in classes where students come from many different societies, instead of developing real experiences through which students can develop an awareness of our society, all the government wants to do is insist on schools having a flagpole. As I have said, that is a test that many schools in my electorate of Fowler would fail.

But, at a deeper level, what this requirement shows is that the government is confusing accountability with responsibility. This government says it is giving out $31 billion and it wants schools to be accountable for that money. But go back to the example of the school which has its flagpole halyard stolen each week, which I mentioned last night. The school principal is responsible for the performance of the school. She is responsible for the school meeting its curriculum requirements and she is responsible for the safety of the students and staff of the school. She is responsible for deciding whether to spend money to repair a flagpole or an electrical circuit, and the choice should be quite clear. If the Minister for Education, Science and Training wants to accept responsibility for flagpoles then he should not only pay for the flagpole but he should also keep paying the cost of repairing the flagpole. Some day the Auditor-General might come along and say that repairing flagpoles is a waste of money and this minister would have to justify the cost of those repairs. If the minister wants school students to learn civics then he should insist on having civics included in the curriculum.

It is one thing to insist on schools meeting reasonable standards in terms of performance and efficiency, but it is something else to set requirements which for some reasons are desirable but which are by no means essential. Australia’s state education systems are amongst the largest in the world but they have developed a much needed flexibility. Now this minister wants to centralise the whole system across Australia. It is said that Napoleon could look at a clock and know what subject students were studying at that precise moment at every school in France. This minister is beginning to remind me very much of Napoleon, and the flagpole idea is straight out of Napoleon’s knapsack. But as far as improving the learning environment in our schools is concerned, the minister might as well be living in exile on Elba. Let us get one thing straight: what makes a difference to learning in our schools is the teachers, the ones at the coalface—the teachers that this minister thinks are too politically correct when writing school reports.

If this minister went along to parent-teacher interviews, he might realise that teachers do not just tick the boxes on school reports. If he spent the time outside school hours evaluating and commenting on each student and being prepared to back that judgment to parents and other teachers, he might have to think twice before suggesting that school reports are too politically correct. And if he were a school principal, he could figure out ways to fudge his school’s results so that the school looked good on the league table of results. But would that improve the education opportunities of even one student? Of course it would not. This minister is only
interested in one opportunity, and that is his own. He has taken Napoleon at his word and carries his own leadership baton in his knapsack. Let us hope he never gets to take it out.

The bill provides funding for public and private schools for the next four years, but that funding is conditional on schools and systems meeting certain requirements. I have already mentioned the requirement for schools to have a functioning flagpole and to fly the Australian flag. I should add that many public schools in New South Wales fly the state flag, and I am sure that is also the case in many other states. Protocol requires that the Australian flag should be flown above the state flag, but, if you look at who is paying for the lion’s share of primary and secondary education, you might question which flag should be on top.

To take the example of New South Wales, this year the New South Wales government will spend around $7 billion on primary and secondary education in public schools, and that is about the same as the Australian government will spend nationally over four years on public schools. But, the way the minister talks, you would think that the Australian government was paying the full cost of school education, and this applies particularly to the Tutorial Credit Initiative. This initiative is to be offered only to states that report to parents on students’ performance against national benchmarks. The tutorial credit of $700 is to be offered to parents of children who do not achieve the national reading benchmark to purchase additional reading assistance for them. When I first saw the word ‘voucher’, I immediately thought of this initiative as a thin end of a wedge to apply voucher funding on a much wider basis, and that is a very big worry.

Looking at the scheme on its own, there are a number of concerns, particularly in areas such as the electorate of Fowler. I should point out that in my electorate 50 per cent of families speak a language other than English in the home. This is the highest rate in Australia. The area is also on top of the list of electorates with a population seen as having a high social disadvantage. This leads to a situation where in many schools less than half of kindergarten students have been to preschool. These factors combine to lower literacy standards in year 3. Needless to say, schools in the Fowler electorate target literacy for special attention. Additional reading assistance is welcome, but you have to question whether this initiative is the best way of achieving improvements in literacy for year 3 students.

As I mentioned, many students in Fowler come from homes where English is not the main language spoken and many have not had the advantage of going to preschool. So there must be some doubt about the potential for out-of-school assistance being taken up in the first place or being successful where it is not coordinated within the school curriculum. New South Wales schools integrate literacy studies into the full range of activities and existing remedial literacy programs link closely with the class teachers. While a once-only intervention may have some immediate impact, the student will require ongoing assistance. You would therefore expect that the additional reading assistance would be integrated with the school’s literacy program. However, the structure of the tutorial credit scheme, with brokers contracting tutors, issuing vouchers and providing advice to parents, makes no mention of linking the program to the student’s school.

Potential brokers are invited to tender for a whole state, so we can expect large organisations with costly infrastructures to be the backbone of the program. This would be a costly structure which would provide limited face-to-face tuition by the time the costs of assessment and administration were taken
into account. By one estimate given to me, that could represent as little as 10 hours of one-to-one tuition or one hour per week for 10 weeks. We have yet to see guidelines for the qualifications of tutors and, given the shortage of remedial reading teachers in many areas, there is no assurance that all tutors will be qualified.

It is not surprising that many educators are sceptical of the initiative and many believe that the money would be better spent on existing remedial reading programs, such as Reading Recovery, which is integrated into a student’s total learning program. It is also disturbing that this minister, who places so much emphasis on accountability, does not look at the ongoing responsibility of brokers for students at the year 5 and year 7 levels. Can we assume that 10 hours of tuition will bring all students up to the national benchmark? What happens if they do not reach that benchmark after 10 hours of tuition? Will their parents be pressured to pay for additional tuition? Will brokers be allowed to up-sell other programs to parents? We are entering a very grey area and there are many unanswered questions.

Given the coverage of a whole state by a single brokerage, we can expect only a limited pilot of the initiative and, as I have already mentioned, areas such as my electorate of Fowler might expect a higher demand than other areas. The Tutorial Credit Initiative pilot will be closely watched by many educators and by many on the Labor side of politics. The Tutorial Credit Initiative smacks of a mickey mouse scheme driven by the minister’s ideology rather than by sound educational practice. It is money that would be better spent on proven existing programs.

There are many critical areas of concern in primary and secondary education. This legislation does not address them. While this minister is waving the flag and preaching values, the teachers in our schools throughout Australia are achieving world beating results with little help and no appreciation from this government. The real issues of concern to teachers and parents are not being addressed.

If I could return to the issue of flagpoles. Since the government’s announcement, I have received a number of inquiries from schools in my electorate of Fowler. It seems that the government is not making it easy to get a flagpole, and there are certain conditions attached to the grant. School principals have to sign a declaration that they will install a plaque with the words: ‘This flagpole was a gift from the Australian government’, and report the gift in writing to parents. The only thing missing is the portrait of the minister in every classroom throughout Australia.

Mr Swan—A terrible thought.
Mrs IRWIN—Yes, a terrible thought.
Mr JOHN COBB (Parkes) (9.31 a.m.)—The Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 that we are debating today is the Australian government’s primary and secondary schools funding package for the next four years, from 2005 through to 2008. This funding package is a huge one. It delivers over $31 billion for schools over that period. It is an increase of over $8 billion on the current four-year course and represents the largest ever funding commitment to Australian schools. We as a government believe that every Australian child has the right to a quality primary and secondary education. Because the government believe this, we also accept responsibility to contribute the financial and other resources necessary to deliver that commitment. This is why the federal government contribute to state governments for the cost of operating the nation’s government school system. Educa-
tion is 100 per cent funded by governments, through both state and federal governments, and a fee-free education is offered to all Australian children, as indeed it should be.

Our federal coalition believes that parents also have a right to a say in how their children are educated. They also have a right to choose to send their child to an independent or a sectional school, if that is their desire and they are willing to make the sacrifices and pay the cost contribution required for that. That is choice, and it comes at a cost to the parents. They pay their child’s fees at any school that they go to. Just because they decide that they want a different course of education or a different provider, the Commonwealth government do not believe that we are absolved from any responsibility in that education. So that is why we believe we have an obligation to contribute not just to those children who go to government schools but also to the education of every child, irrespective of where that education is delivered. I think that is very much the basis of the coalition government’s belief with regard to school funding. Government schools do receive 100 per cent government funding and non-government schools receive a percentage of their costs and that percentage is determined on the basis of need.

The key components of this bill are: the level of funding provided; how non-government schools are funded and what percentage; and performance and standards measurement and reporting—in other words, the parents’ right to know how their child measures up. The funding component is now further enshrined in the SES—the socio-economic status—which has determined how funding has been delivered to most independent schools for some time. That has to be welcomed by everyone as all non-government schools, Catholic or otherwise, will now come under that system. Previously, Catholic schools have been under a flat system. They will now receive an SES score—a socio-economic status score—so all non-government schools, be they Catholic, sectional or independent, will be on the same basis. It also means that no school will receive less than it currently does and some, especially some of the Catholic schools, will receive substantially more.

The state government schools will continue to be funded, as they are now, under an agreed average government school recurrent cost method of indexation. That will be retained as the basis for determining the increase in Australian government funds to state schools. Over the next four years, the Australian government will deliver $9.8 billion of supplementary funding to state governments—an increase of nearly $2 billion. That is $7.2 billion in general recurrent grants and it is a 28 per cent increase over the current four-year period.

The increases for Catholic schools are quite significant—some $392 million in additional funding over and above indexation. That will bring their general recurrent funding to $12 billion, or a 32 per cent increase over the current four-year period. Independent schools will receive $7 billion in that period—a 27 per cent increase, excluding enrolment growth and related effects.

As I said earlier, no school will have its funding decreased and some will have it increased—and, in the case of the Catholic schools, it will increase considerably. I think this recognises that many families decide they want their children to receive an education from a different provider and they are willing to make, in some cases, an enormous sacrifice to achieve that. Quite often there is very real debate about the funding of schools, and the important issue in that debate is the relative government contribution going to the cost of education in both the public and the private systems.
I often wonder why the people who talk about this issue, and come to see us about it, do not seem to understand some very basic things. Both state and federal governments provide funding for every child in the public school system which, when combined, amounts to nearly $9,000 per child, whereas the total that a child at a non-government or sectional school gets is around $4,000. That is a huge difference and obviously the government school system requires a lot more money. But it is the parents of the children at the non-government or sectional schools who make up the difference between the $4,000 combined government component received for each child at their schools and the $9,000 received for each child in government schools. The parents make up that difference in fees—and quite often pay considerably more than that $5,000 difference.

People who look at this issue have to realise the enormous contribution that these schools and those parents make to the Australian Commonwealth and the states right around Australia for the cost of schooling. With some $4,000 in various government components being put towards each student at non-government schools, the Commonwealth and the states are saving well over $4 billion a year. If government, especially the Commonwealth government, did not make a contribution towards the cost of education for every child at a private school, there is absolutely no doubt that many of those children would go back into the public school system—no doubt at all. The increased effort that parents would have to make to keep their child at that school would be beyond a lot of them who are right on the edge now—and I would suggest that that is well in excess of half of them. The costs to the Commonwealth and the states in having to fund the extra $5,000 with those children being put back into the public system—with the extra schools that would have to be built and the extra teachers the state and Commonwealth would have to pay to teach those children—would add up to well over $4 billion. That is $4 billion that taxpayers, in effect—whether it is state or federal funding—would have to find to give those children the free education that every child in a government school deserves. I think that is something that everybody who enters this debate needs to understand straight away.

The final component of this bill is the mandatory testing and reporting measures included to ensure that standards are met. I have also had people come to me on this issue—teachers and others. I do not think it is asking too much as a parent to know how your children are going, how they are measuring up against what the standard might be. I have seven daughters myself and it is not easy to know how your children are going—mine are long grown up. Whether their children are in a government school or a non-government school—and we are talking about all schools here, not just government, independent or Catholic; every school is included in this part of the legislation—I think parents have a right to know whether their children are up with an average standard and whether their literacy and numeracy are of a standard to allow them to enter life with confidence. Does a parent have confidence that their child is above or beyond the average? Does a parent need to get their child extra coaching out of school? Do they have to do more work with them at home themselves? I do not think it is too much to ask for a parent to know how their child is going.

Some seem to see this as meaning—and obviously it is a genuine fear—it will be in the papers every week that this school is not performing well and that that elitist school is performing very well. I do not see that as the issue at all. Nobody is going to put how that school or any one child is going out on a billboard, on the TV or the radio or in the
newspapers. I suspect that privacy legislation could become involved if that happened. This is simply so that the parent and the teacher know how a child is going. I think this would be a helpful guide to teachers to know how their class or school is going. I think we all need to have a reality check from time to time. It is not about that; it is simply about giving individual parents the opportunity to know whether their child is above, below or on the average or benchmark. That is what it is about and I do not think that is too much to ask; I think it is essential. I would hope that at the end of the day both sides of this House could agree that that component of this bill, obviously along with the funding component, is enormously necessary and something every parent has a right to expect.

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (9.44 a.m.)—I rise to speak on the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. This legislation comes to the House only weeks before a general election; yet this legislation was decided in March and allowed for in the 2004 budget only to be presented for debate much later, leaving schools in Australia awaiting funding advice and without funding security for future planning. ‘Why would that be?’ most sensible people would ask. If precedent is a guide, it would seem that the government has held back this legislation and other legislation that holds some wedge politics potential for them to use to continue their agenda of dividing and scaring the Australian electorate throughout the election campaign period. Typically, this government is always more interested in playing politics than in delivering good policy for our students and their schools. Typically, too, this government has very little understanding of schools management practice.

Having been a school principal for 10 years I do know that planning is a continuous process in our schools. Developing programs, identifying and allocating staff, reviewing progress and student outcomes and planning resource budgets accordingly are ongoing processes. Preparing annual plans is a process that schools have begun already. Most high schools plan on a financial year basis for their resource allocation and primary schools do so on a calendar year. But until this legislation is passed they have to imagine or estimate the financial figures for their plans.

As for the government’s agenda of holding back legislation to play politics, on this bill they should not have bothered. Labor will support this legislation that allocates school general funding and specific program funding so that schools do know the financial parameters they will operate under. However, our support is only given, as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has said, for one year. After this forthcoming election, when I believe Latham Labor will be the new government, Labor would use 2005 as a transition year to allow schools to prepare for a new funding model—a funding model that we would introduce to more fairly fund school education in this country from 2006 onwards. The Labor model for school funding would be needs based—an approach that is much desired by educators and well understood by principled Australians, who always look to the common good.

The Howard government’s unfair funding system has given the wealthiest and high-fee independent schools an average funding increase of 150 per cent, while government and Catholic systemic schools have had to make do with adjustments of 20 per cent and 25 per cent respectively. It seems self-evident that, as education is correctly seen as a right in this country and not a privilege, we should make sure every child has an oppor-
tunity to gain a quality education, no matter which school they attend.

In watching the debate regarding the Australia-US free trade agreement, it also seems to me that the greatest protection for Australia in a free trade environment is investment in the knowledge, the creativity and the skills of this country. That has to begin with making education a national priority, thereby boosting funding to public education first and foremost. After all, that is where about 70 per cent of our students seek their education.

Under this government the funding allocation has certainly not reflected an investment in the future of the country. In the electorate of Newcastle, which I represent, approximately 16,000 students, or 68 per cent, attend public schools; and 7,370 students, or 32 per cent, attend non-government schools. Of the 25 non-government schools in my electorate, 21 are religious based, of which 14 are Catholic systemic schools. There are two non-government schools for students with disabilities, one for hearing impaired children and one for students with autism. Three non-government schools offer second chance programs for students unable to succeed in mainstream schooling. One of these is for young mothers.

Federal government funding to non-government schools has certainly had an impact in my area. In 2003 it was distributed thus: government schools in Newcastle received a total of $9.8 million and non-government schools received $27.7 million. Each student in a government school attracted $504 if they were a primary student and $747 if they were a secondary student. In Catholic schools that funding, as negotiated under the old model, was $3,180 for primary and $4,198 for secondary. I must say that I am pleased to see that the Catholic education system negotiated a much better deal for their students; that was long overdue. But our most needy non-government schools—Dale Christian School, the Margaret Jurd Learning Centre, St Dominic’s Centre for Hearing Impaired Children and the Newcastle School for Children with Autism—each received $3,960 and $5,229 per student. The school with the highest SES index, Newcastle Grammar School, in my electorate, received $2,048 and $2,704 per student.

Under Labor’s policies we would see funding to non-government schools not reduced but certainly reallocated. I would have concerns in my electorate that to provide an education for a child with autism may involve a resourcing level that is much higher than any other schools’ in my electorate. The national picture revealed that funding to non-government schools has actually doubled since 1996, while funding to government schools has increased by only 37 per cent. In 2004 funding to non-government schools—a total of $4.7 billion—will outstrip government spending in universities for the first time, and that is seriously concerning. We would be delighted if that were a recognition that universities did not need a higher level of funding than schools and we had the luxury of investing in school education, but that certainly is not the case.

The Prime Minister says that these funding increases reflect choice—choice made by parents. However, it is time we in this country asked: just how much choice can we afford to fund? Our population is not growing, yet one new ethnic or religious based non-government school opens every week. Can we really afford that choice when our retention rates in high school are among the lowest in developed countries and when youth unemployment remains over 25 per cent across the country and recently hit 30 per cent in the electorate of Newcastle?
Wouldn’t we be better as a nation to choose to fund every school adequately so that every child, no matter which system they are enrolled in, is ensured of a quality education? Isn’t that the equity we should aspire to? Only when we set education priorities for government funding rather than give out money to all government schools on a formula basis that has nothing to do with individual schools’ financial wealth and nothing to do with educational outcomes and needs will we have an education system that has universal credibility and some chance of achieving equitable and best outcomes for all children in Australia.

We would be best to spend our school education dollar making sure all our schools can cater for the individual needs and talents of every child. I would like to look at the needs of the schools in my electorate. I was very privileged to have handed to me by my local schools their resource demands—the wish list for ordinary government schools in my electorate. I think we should understand just what resourcing schools has meant under this federal government. Are the schools asking for photography labs? Are they asking for gymnasiums? Are they asking for buses to take children on excursions? No. I will outline the sorts of things they are asking for. In Adamstown, a school in my electorate where I was once privileged to be principal, they are asking for cover for their infants equipment area in the playground—shade cover and shelter cover. They are asking for a school teachers aide so that teachers have some assistance. Like many schools, they are asking for reduced class sizes so that every child gets more attention.

Carrington Public School—another school about which I have very fond memories through serving time as principal—are a disadvantaged school. They ask for improvements to their playground. I have to say I remember that playground well from when we started a circus with the children there. I can tell you that unicycling on uneven playground asphalt is very challenging. But they also ask for basic things like musical instruments and art supplies. They ask for literacy and maths resources.

Glendore, a fairly new school in a growing area in my electorate, also features a request for smaller class sizes. Laptops for teachers might sound like a luxury. But, given that in my job as a member of parliament I have a laptop that I can take home so that I can do work whenever I want to, it seems that teachers, who mostly do their preparation out of hours, should have that sort of access too. The school would like to see their demountable toilets replaced and they would like to see more computer resources. The school also asks for simple things like overhead projector screens for every classroom.

Hamilton South would like increased training and development for all staff, the ability to employ a support teacher to assist students with learning difficulties, to assist in early intervention and to assist students by following up on their basic skills outcomes. They would also like to employ more teacher aides in their support unit for partially sighted children. I wish them well.

Islington Public School would like to upgrade old metal playground equipment. This was the second school I ever taught in. I think back, over 30 years ago, to when I can remember a child falling off that equipment, resulting in the loss of a kidney. I do wonder why that old metal equipment is still there. They also ask whether someone could fix their roof, which sometimes leaks.

Another school in my electorate, Jesmond Public School, would love a school hall and some covered walkways. They would also like to resurface the playground and replace a demountable building. Lambton Public
School wants something as basic as a netball court. I think these stories have to be told. Lambton High School would like a fence that discourages entry, after $300,000 of damage to the school in the last three months.

I know the government might suggest that state governments could increase their public education budgets. Well, the reality is that will not happen unless the federal government is going to help them. Having been in the public education system in New South Wales, I am proud to say that New South Wales leads the world in terms of computer education and computer resource levels. It is a story that perhaps has not been told enough.

Another school in my electorate needs photocopy paper. New Lambton school, a school with a wonderful record in music, would like some soundproofing and equipment for their music resource room. New Lambton South Public School ask for something as simple as doors on every room. They would like a colour printer for their computers for children to use in each classroom.

Shortland Public School would like safety fencing for their school perimeter, and they would like electricity upgrades. I recall that, when we introduced computers and computer labs into schools, circuits would cut out regularly. Most electricity switchboards in schools are not able to take the technology load of a modern education. So there is a catch-up need. Unfortunately, the catch-up need has grown and grown under the Howard government.

Stockton Public School are concentrating on their playground. They do not have a suitable covering on their playground. Waratah school would love some more teacher aides for their young children—at a time of early intervention, that is essential. Waratah West Public School would like additional clerical support to help their teaching principal. I must state on the record that there should be no teaching principals. Certainly, if principals were class free they would engage more with all students and they would be free to track the progress of their school much more effectively.

I would like to look further at the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 and its support for literacy. Fortunately, it has some allocation for particular literacy initiatives that were announced by the minister. On our side of the fence, we would also say: ‘What took you so long to give priority funding to literacy?’ It has always been on our agenda—why hasn’t it been on the national agenda under this government?

I would also like to mention Labor’s Read Aloud Australia policy. In my electorate of Newcastle, Newcastle City Council has for some time had a program called 10 Minutes a Day. It is run out of our council libraries and used Mem Fox, Labor’s first Read Aloud ambassador, to encourage reading at home to young children. I would recommend this program, which is sold to libraries around Australia by Newcastle City Council, as a
highly successful literacy initiative to support young children’s early education.

The other part of this legislation to consider today is funding for the Tutorial Credit Initiative. It is an initiative that, under this scheme, would see an allocation of money to parents. Its total funding is $6.8 million and it is a pilot over one year. Any parent who received information that their child did not achieve the year 3 minimum national reading benchmark in 2003 would receive a $700 voucher to purchase additional reading assistance for their child. Although I do not want to spend much time on this—because this is an initiative that I think will be reviewed eventually—I have to say that as an educator it alarms me, and I support the position of the Australian Education Union’s principals committee, which argued that this money should be provided directly to schools to support literacy needs and intensive remedial programs. I do understand that many parents seek individual support for their child, but I also understand that they are vulnerable to a second-rate tutorial system, they are vulnerable to the emotions that all parents feel—guilt and hope—and they certainly are not always the best judges in terms of the actual details of the curriculum and learning.

I would also like to point out that under this bill all the funding has conditions on it. One of the conditions suggests that government schools are not sufficiently accountable for their education outcomes. I find that quite amazing, knowing that in schools today when you want information about your child’s progress it comes in abundance. It comes in the form of individual meetings with teachers. It comes in the form of children putting out a portfolio of all their work that parents can look at. Sometimes those portfolios include videos of children operating in classrooms—tape-recorded presentations by children. And, of course, basic skills testing is an excellent tool for schools and parents to shape a child’s progress. In concluding, I want to say that I support the amendment moved by the member for Jagajaga. Under this government, these policies have certainly done damage to our public education system. Under Labor we would have a fairer and needs based funding policy.

Finally, I would like to use this opportunity to congratulate the University of Newcastle, a university that has a strong regional presence and a close link to education generally. I congratulate it on its engagement with schools, particularly in my electorate. But I would also like to congratulate it on receiving five-star ratings in the areas of academic service and electronic support, and increasing its ratings in three other categories whilst retaining its already strong ratings in research, grants and Indigenous participation. I wish it well.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (10.03 a.m.)—The Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 highlight the coalition government’s commitment to education in this country and our belief that all children deserve a quality education and support. They reaffirm our commitment to improving literacy and numeracy rates, and they lay down the biggest amount of funding to schools by any Commonwealth government.

The Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 delivers the government’s funding package of $31.3 billion for schools over 2005-08. This is an increase of $8 billion over the current 2001-04 funding quadrennium. Over the next four years the government will provide $9.8 billion in supplementary funding to state government schools, which is a 28 per cent increase over
the current four-year funding period. From 2005 over 1,610 Catholic schools in Australia will become fully integrated into the socioeconomic status funding system, meaning that every non-government school, regardless of denomination, will attract funding according to the socioeconomic status of the communities that the school serves. This will bring the general recurrent funding over the four-year period to $12.6 billion, which is a 32 per cent increase over the current four-year period.

Independent schools will also continue to have their funding determined according to their socioeconomic status scores, and these schools will receive $7.6 billion in general recurrent funding, which is a 27 per cent increase. It is very important to note that unlike Labor, who will be cutting funds to schools like Hunter Valley Grammar School and Newcastle Grammar, the government is increasing funding to all schools and not one school will have its funding cut. There is a very clear difference between the coalition and Labor. According to Labor’s education spokeswoman, schools which have fees that are greater than $9,100, like Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School in Western Australia, will have their government funding cut. The 927 students at Hunter Valley Grammar School, whose parents pay fees of up to $9,537 a year, and the 783 students at Newcastle Grammar School, whose parents pay fees of up to $10,952 a year, are going to be in the firing line of Labor’s policy.

I know parents who send their children to Newcastle Grammar School and Hunter Valley Grammar School and, let me tell you, they do not live in mansions. They do not even go on holidays. They work day and night to put their kids into the education system of their choice. And they are not the only ones. There are 127 schools in Australia where parents pay fees higher than $9,100 who can expect a Labor government to cut their funding—schools like Hunter Valley Grammar and Newcastle Grammar, a fact not denied by the shadow minister for education when questioned by Brendan Nelson, our Minister for Education, Science and Training.

Labor cutbacks will affect 123,000 students across Australia. That is no small number. And, as parents of those schools would argue, they pay their taxes. Why should they not receive some assistance from the government? This is a real problem for Labor, because they fail to admit that parents from the wealthiest communities attract 87 per cent less funding than if they enrolled their child in a state government school. Sixty-eight per cent of children who attend state government schools attract 76 per cent of the combined federal and state government funding. They receive more funding from government than non-government and independent schools. That is an undeniable fact.

When it comes to the funding of government and non-government schools, you have only to look at the schools in my electorate to see the difference in funding that these schools receive. Quite clearly, government schools are receiving far more. For example, if we look at two schools which have the same number of students, one in the non-government sector and one in the government sector, we see that it is the government school which is receiving more funding—deservedly so. St Philip’s Christian College in Salamander Bay had 501 students in 2003, and its combined funding from the state and federal governments was $2.5 million for that year. Wirreanda Public School in Medowie—a great school—which had 502 students in 2003, received $4.5 million for that year. That is a clear example of a government school getting $2 million more than—almost double—a non-government school, even though both schools have the same number of students.
Let us take another example. The smallest Catholic school in my electorate, St Joseph’s in Bulahdelah, had 61 students last year and received combined funding of $311,000 from the state and federal governments. In the meantime, Mount Kanwary Public School in Raymond Terrace, which had 62 students last year, received almost double that amount of funding at $559,000. All schools deserve every cent that they get. But, again, we have an example of a government school receiving more funding than a non-government school even though they have about the same number of students. It is very important to put on the record the funding that is going to the schools in my electorate. At this point I seek leave to incorporate in Hansard tables on funding and student numbers in my electorate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—There being no objection, leave is granted, subject to the tables fulfilling the guidelines, which I think they do.

The tables read as follows—
3. SCHOOLS

Electorate of Paterson

Summary of Identifiable Australian Government Grants for Government and Non-government Schools for the period 1996-2004

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</table>

Note: Information is based on current electorate boundaries at time of payment.

CHAMBER
### Australian Government Capital Grants to Non-government Schools

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School Name and Location</th>
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<th>1998</th>
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*Note: Information is based on current electorate boundaries at time of payment.*

### Australian Government General Recurrent Grants to Non-government Schools

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<tbody>
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<td>971,721</td>
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<td>257,100</td>
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<td>318,542</td>
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*Note: Information is based on current electorate boundaries at time of payment.*
### Australian Government Capital Grants to Government Schools

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<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Michael’s Primary School, Nelson Bay</td>
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<td>645,456</td>
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<td>672,074</td>
<td>751,696</td>
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<td>912,251</td>
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<td>1,010,988</td>
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<td>415,904</td>
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<td>4,059,258</td>
<td>4,677,143</td>
<td>5,619,701</td>
<td>6,150,525</td>
<td>6,632,114</td>
<td>7,025,886</td>
<td>42,969,268</td>
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*Calculated entitlements, not final payment figures.

Note: Information is based on current electorate boundaries at time of payment. If no funding is showing against a school in subsequent years, it may have closed, changed its systemic status or amalgamated with another school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name and Location</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
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<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salt Ash Public School, Salt Ash</td>
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<td>Soldiers Point Public School, Soldiers Point</td>
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<td>900,000</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomaree Public School, Salamander Bay</td>
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<td>5,472,000</td>
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Note: Information is based on current electorate boundaries at time of payment.
### 2003 TOTAL ESTIMATED PUBLIC FUNDING (STATE/TERRITORY AND AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT) FOR CATHOLIC AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name and Location</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Enrolments</th>
<th>2003 Total Estimated Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holy Name Primary School, Forster</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>251.0</td>
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<td>Medowie Christian School, Medowie</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>116.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our Lady Of Lourdes Primary School, Tarro</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>205.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Brigid’s Primary School, Raymond Terrace</td>
<td>Primary</td>
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<td>St Joseph’s Primary School, Bulahdelah</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Joseph’s Primary School, Dungog</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Joseph’s Primary School, Gloucester</td>
<td>Primary</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Michael’s Primary School, Nelson Bay</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Philip’s Christian College - Port Stephens, Salamander Bay</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>501.2</td>
<td>$2,356,240</td>
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</table>

Source: DEST
Notes:
- Amounts reflect grants from governments received by individual schools as reported in the 2002 Financial Questionnaire and DEST’s financial management information system.
- Amounts do not include funding from private sources (eg. from fees, donations, endowments, borrowings etc.). Amounts do not reflect total expenditure by non-government schools.
- Amounts have been inflated where necessary to reflect 2003 calendar year funding.
- School systems are entitled to retain up to 2 per cent of their total General Recurrent Grants funding for administrative purposes; these funds might not be included in the amounts that appear below against their member schools.
- Schools not included in this list: new schools for 2003; schools which closed before 2003; special schools; and schools which have not supplied a 2002 financial questionnaire return.

### 2003 TOTAL ESTIMATED PUBLIC FUNDING (STATE/TERRITORY AND AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT) FOR GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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<thead>
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<th>School Name and Location</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Enrolments</th>
<th>2003 Total Estimated Funding ($000)</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Anna Bay Public School, Anna Bay</td>
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<td>Barrington Public School, Barrington</td>
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<td>Beresfield Public School, Beresfield</td>
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<td>Bobs Farm Public School, Bobs Farm</td>
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<td>Booral Public School, Booral</td>
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<td>Bulahdelah Central School, Bulahdelah</td>
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<td>Bungwahl Public School, Bungwahl</td>
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<td>Clarence Town Public School, Clarence Town</td>
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CHAMBER
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<td>Nabiac Public School, Nabiac</td>
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<td>Pacific Palms Public School, Boomerang Beach</td>
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</tr>
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<td>School Name and Location</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------</td>
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<td>$379</td>
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<td>Tanilba Bay Public School, Tanilba Bay</td>
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Data: Total public recurrent expenditure on government schools, 2001-02; 2003 enrolments.
Source: MCEETYA; DEST.
Notes:
- Amounts reflect estimated total recurrent expenditure for each school and are calculated by multiplying the estimated average per capita recurrent expenditure for each State and Territory by 2003 enrolments for each school. Included are items such as: employee related expenses for teachers including long service leave provisions, administrative and support staff; itinerant teachers who spread their teaching load across a number of schools; other operating expenses such as leases; grants and subsidies; pay roll tax in those State and Territories that charge it to their departments; depreciation; and a notional user cost of capital charge.
- Funding figures have been inflated where necessary to reflect 2003 calendar year funding.
- Special Schools have not been included in this list.

**Mr Baldwin**—The Catholic and independent schools in Paterson had 1,965 students in 2003 and in the same year received combined state and federal funding of $9.5 million. The 56 government schools in Paterson had 17,012 students in 2003 and they received combined state and federal funding of $170 million last year alone. That is a significant difference in funding between non-government and government schools and it really blows apart Labor’s shameless campaign that claims that non-government schools get more funding than government schools. I received a letter yesterday from a couple in Medowie who send their child to Medowie Christian School. This is what they had to say:

Dear Sir,

I call on you, as my Federal Government representative, to stand up for my freedom of choice in my child’s education.

Through the Association of Independent Schools of NSW, I have learnt that the NSW Teachers Federation is investigating the possibility of a constitutional challenge in the Australian High Court to the federal government funding of schools with a religious affiliation, as part of a broader campaign to cut all government support to students attending non-government schools.
I choose to send my son to Medowie Christian School because I want him to receive an education that compliments what he is taught at home. His training in spiritual matters is my primary concern, followed by the education of his mind and body.

I am a full-time mother of three children with another due in December. My husband is our sole income provider. Consequently, we make real sacrifices to ensure our son receives the education we prefer.

The Teachers Federation is working against my right to freedom of choice. Do not stand by and allow this to pass.

That is the sort of comment I am getting from parents who are very concerned about Labor’s policy of funding to schools.

The second bill that we are discussing is the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. This bill will put measures in place for the Tutorial Credit Initiative, which will provide $700 to parents for tutorial assistance for children who have not attained the minimum reading skills as measured by the year 3 national reading benchmark in 2003. The initiative will provide $700 worth of tuition to students on a one-to-one basis, out of school hours, by appropriately qualified, screened and vetted tutors. This means that 24,000 children across Australia who did not attain the minimum reading skills in 2003 will have the opportunity to improve their skills with funding from the Commonwealth government. It is a tremendous initiative, and I have already been contacted by parents who want this assistance for their children. I applaud the Minister for Education, Science and Training on this because it is about tackling poor literacy and numeracy head on. It is a call to our communities that we want to help children who have not performed at their best and that we are willing to go the extra mile to provide parents with assistance for their children.

The coalition has a long history of working towards improved literacy and numeracy. In 1997 the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan was agreed to by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments. To help support the achievement of the goal, ministers have agreed on a set of key priorities for school education. These form the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan and provide a clear framework for the improvement of school literacy and numeracy standards in Australia. The plan calls for a coordinated approach by the Commonwealth, states and territories to improve literacy and numeracy standards. It consists of the following key, interrelated elements: a comprehensive assessment of all students as early as possible to identify those students at risk of not making adequate progress towards the national numeracy and literacy goals, intervening as early as possible to address the needs of students identified as being at risk, the development of agreed national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy against which all students’ achievements in these years can be measured, the assessment of students against the national benchmarks using rigorous state based assessment procedures, progress towards national reporting systems on student achievement against the benchmarks and professional development for teachers to support the key elements of the national plan.

The government believes strongly that accountability for Commonwealth schools funding should include reporting by all education authorities against these minimum literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Student results against the benchmarks are now being reported to the Australian community. It is the right of all parents to know whether their own child has gained these essential literacy and numeracy standards. In July 2003 the Commonwealth secured agreement from all states and territories to provide this informa-
tion on student reports to all parents from 2004. It is information that all parents and students have a right to know. Otherwise, if a child is falling behind, how can a parent make decisions and assist that child to improve? Really, it is just commonsense.

I want to touch on two issues in my electorate which are also about commonsense and the need to support education in regional areas. The first is the need for another high school in Port Stephens. For years now there has been a growing demand for a high school in either Medowie or the Tilligerry Peninsula to cater for the growing family population. At present there are 5,127 students in feeder primary schools in the Tomaree, Raymond Terrace and Irrawang high school feeder areas, or about 934 student places per year. There are 2,866 students currently in the high schools at Tomaree, Raymond Terrace and Irrawang, or about 476 student places each year. Simple mathematics says that that is a shortfall of about 458 student places each year.

Where do these students go? They are bussed out of the area or forced to seek private education that at times parents can ill afford. Clearly, with figures like these, we would be able to fill another couple of high schools in this area immediately. It is an issue that weighs heavily on the minds of parents. I have been contacted by parents whose children are in primary school who are weighing up whether to put their children on long bus trips each day to attend a high school outside their community or sell the family home and move closer to a high school. Many who love living in communities like Medowie and along the Tilligerry Peninsula in areas like Salt Ash, Taliiba Bay, Mallabula or Lemon Tree Passage do not want to move.

This is also a question of planning for future demographics as these areas are growing. At present, as I have said, we could easily fill another high school. But, if one is not built in the immediate future, what will the problem be like in 10 years time? The amount of time and money spent bussing kids out of the area would be far better spent in building another public high school and educating our children. The land is already there. There is actually land allocated next to the Wirreanda Public School in Medowie. It is set aside as a place for the high school. But years of calls from the community, I am afraid, have fallen on the deaf ears of the New South Wales state Labor government. The state Labor government just does not want to know about it.

Fortunately, our own federal education minister, Dr Brendan Nelson, does not sweep community needs under the carpet. When he visited Paterson recently for the sod-turning at a Christian high school in Medowie, I explained the entire issue to him. He said that the Commonwealth could pay 50 per cent of the cost of building a high school. So I am very much looking forward to the New South Wales education minister taking up this challenge, matching the commitment and setting the priority.

The second issue that we have is the need for a school hall at Irrawang Public School. I also took the minister to visit this school and we were shown a clear block of land on the school site which would be ideal for a school hall. Parents explained to the minister that, when they hold special school events, they often have to do so outside in dubious weather conditions. This is Third World stuff being placed upon the children of Irrawang Public School. There are so many uses for a school hall. Parents and teachers alike realise how valuable this infrastructure is for the education and safety of their children. Again the federal minister could see the value in this project and again he said that the Com-
monwealth could provide 50 per cent of funding to construct this infrastructure.

But our real problem is that the New South Wales Labor government prioritise the work for schools. They are the ones who give the go-ahead for capital works. Despite the fact that communities are calling out for public high schools and school halls, parents are getting no response from the state Labor government whatsoever. Instead, we see hundreds of millions of dollars being pumped into road tunnel construction projects in Sydney to suit those in the city while basic school infrastructure in regional and rural areas like the Paterson electorate misses out. I think it is a disgrace and it is about time that the calls of parents in the Port Stephens area were heard on these issues. I commend these bills to the House because, like every other parent in this chamber and as a person who is keen to represent the concerns of parents in my electorate, I demand better education, adequate funding and the capital support for infrastructure that these bills provide.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Burke) (10.19 a.m.)—I rise to support the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and second reading amendment, and the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 before us today. But I do want to make a number of comments in relation to education and government funding. I think it is important to note that there is a fundamental distinction between Labor’s position on funding and that of the government. The fact is that, since the inception of this government, there has been increasingly more funding going to the top 50 high-fee independent schools than to either public schools or other non-government schools. There is no doubt that, from the $25 billion or so that was spent over the 2001-04 period—and this is very clear—the increases in funding have been much higher for those elite wealthy schools. What Labor seek to do by way of amendment—and indeed, if elected, what we will do as a newly elected government—is ensure a needs based system that will provide funds to those schools, both public and non-government, that are in need of more funds. We will quite happily redress the funding deficiencies by drawing from that money provided to the elite wealthy schools.

The Leader of the Opposition has said on many occasions, and I think it is true—indeed, I think most people would agree—that education is critical for people. It is, for many, a passport out of poverty. It is, for many, an opportunity to succeed in life. If we cannot provide to all children in this nation an adequate level of education then we are certainly letting ourselves down as a society. I do not understand how the government believes that it can defend the indefensible with respect to the real increases to those wealthy schools. I cannot understand how the government can continue to provide the likes of King’s School in Sydney not only funding at the level that it does but also, relative to moneys going to Catholic and other non-government schools, high increases.

If we were to look at the sorts of resources that are provided in King’s School in Sydney not only funding at the level that it does but also, relative to moneys going to Catholic and other non-government schools, high increases.

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Commonwealth funding to that school than to Deer Park Secondary College or indeed any other secondary high school in my electorate or in most other members’ electorates.

I also find it a little ironic that members of The Nationals and many Liberal Party members in this place rely very heavily on the public school system. Look at the members who represent regional and rural Australia. A majority are on the other side of this chamber. There are fewer non-government schools in remote and regional Australia. They are reliant on a public school system. As a general rule, there are more students going to public schools in regional Australia than there are in the inner city areas of Sydney, Melbourne and other capital cities. So it is somewhat strange that those members representing a higher proportion of people who go to public schools are not concerned that the system is not needs based. It is interesting. Whilst there have been increases, relative to the increases that have gone to the elite top 50 high-fee independent schools, the increases for others are left wanting. There would be many public schools and indeed non-government schools in regional and rural Australia in great need, but this government turns its back on them.

I should not be surprised. This is Liberal legislation. These are bills that reflect concern for the elite in society over those people in need. These are bills that reflect the ethos of the Liberal Party. That ethos is to look after the top end of town, to look after the children of the elite—rather than people who are less fortunate, people who are deprived of basic educational resources—and provide them with further Commonwealth moneys. So I should not be surprised—indeed, the nation should not be surprised. But my job today and the job of other members of the House, on this side at least, is to expose the inequity, the unfairness, of the government in the way in which it distributes Commonwealth money to wealthy schools before it will look after a school in much need, whether it be public or non-government. It has surprised me too how the government has managed, to some extent, to get away with this increasing inequity, this travesty of spending taxpayers’ money increasingly on those elite schools.

We support the legislation today because we want to provide some certainty of funding for 2005, but I wholeheartedly accept the amendment moved by the shadow minister for education. I would like to reiterate the comments she made yesterday, when she said that, whilst we will support these bills to provide certainty of funding for 2005, if elected we will shift this system so that it is based on need. We will not support massive increases in grants from the federal government going to wealthier schools. We want our public schools as well as our needy non-government schools to get increased resources. I know that all members on this side agree with those words. The fact is that the government wants to continue down the road of looking after the well-off. This would have to be one of the most compelling reasons to change government, because of the way in which this government arrogantly believes it can continue to look after the wealthy families of this country to the detriment of those people less fortunate.

It probably would not surprise you to know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that there are no category 1 schools in my electorate. There are non-government schools, of course, and many, if not all, of them are very good schools. Indeed, I am also very impressed by the way in which some of the schools conduct themselves. In Caroline Springs, one area of my electorate, for example, a Catholic primary school, a public high school and an independent school share common resources and grounds. They even share an auditorium, and they share other resources.
They work together in harmony, and I think they are fantastic schools for the way in which they are able to do that. There is no enmity between those schools because they come from different streams, and I think they are an exemplar for other schools in cooperating with each other. I have had the good fortune to meet the principals and many of the teachers and students of those schools, and they set a fantastic example.

I think they would understand and support the view that we must first ensure that we reach a certain standard for all schools. Whilst there will be privately funded schools that will be better resourced, we have to lift the minima—raise the floor—to ensure that there are decent levels of education and the necessary resources that go with that for each Australian student. Clearly, that is not the case now. It will certainly not be the case if we continue to apply this unfair policy.

I am aware that we are also debating the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004, which deals with literacy initiatives that were announced by the Minister for Education, Science and Training. We support the bill. That is another area where the government is following the Leader of the Opposition’s lead. The fact is that the Leader of the Opposition has placed children’s literacy on the map by announcing the Read Aloud Australia policy. Encouraging parents and teachers to read aloud to children at the earliest possible age is something that the Leader of the Opposition has placed on the national stage.

I welcome the fact, albeit limited and a little late, of the Howard government again following the lead of the Labor Party in this matter, as they have followed the lead of the Labor Party in relation to parliamentary superannuation and in relation to local content, which will now be incorporated into any free trade agreement, if the amendment is to be passed. This bill is catch-up politics on behalf of the government, but it reflects the fact that the government realise that Labor is putting up positive policies, some of which the government cannot resist. This bill reflects exactly that, so I do support it. It goes some way towards the $80 million program to read aloud to children promoted by the Leader of the Opposition.

I have had serious concerns with these bills because they will not adequately look after schools in my electorate. What I and indeed all members on this side of the House would like to see happen—and I know that Labor has now given a commitment that there will be no overall reduction of funding to non-government schools—is the redistribution of funds based on need and not based purely on the inequitable application that currently exists. I do support these bills and I very much support the second reading amendment moved by the shadow minister for education, but I think the government has to seriously reconsider its position. If it is indeed a government that wants to govern for all, then it will reconsider its increases to the wealthiest schools in this land. If the government wants to make sure it looks after the battlers—that cry that the Prime Minister likes to make time and time again that he worries about the so-called battlers—then it will ensure that the money goes to those people in need, not those people with the biggest bank balances. Unfortunately it appears that the empty cries of the Prime Minister about battlers are exactly that. He has exhibited again through these bills that he has no regard for the less well-off in this country and no regard for those people who will need education to be able to advance in this country.

For some people who do not have much money and who do not have the wherewithal to advance in society, education is the only
opportunity for them to advance, to move into positions and to achieve certain places in society. Indeed, I come from a family where education for me and my siblings was vital. That opportunity and the focus on education—the idea that if you acquire knowledge you can do so many things—has allowed me to do things I would not have ordinarily been able to do. I would hate to think that because of the direction of funding to public schools and needy non-government schools there will be students out there who will not be given an opportunity to advance in this country or compete against the children of wealthy families in universities, workplaces and the like. So I support the bills reluctantly, but I wholeheartedly support the amendment moved by the shadow minister for education.

Mr TICEHURST (Dobell) (10.35 a.m.)—I support the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. These bills highlight the Howard government’s unwavering commitment to Australian schools. From 2005-08 the Australian government will provide a record $31 billion to government and independent schools across Australia. This is an increase of $8 billion and the largest ever commitment by an Australian government to schooling in Australia.

The member for Burke’s claims in relation to the Liberal government supporting only elite schools have as much honesty and validity as the New South Wales Teachers Federation’s claims about distorted funding. The schools assistance bill provides funding for Australian government programs of financial assistance to the states and territories for government and non-government schools. It succeeds the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000, which authorised funding and arrangements for the 2001-04 funding quadrennium.

Our children are the future of Australia. These bills therefore represent a major investment in the future of our society. By increasing financial assistance to schools, especially schools serving those of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the Australian government seeks high-quality outcomes for all students. These bills also reflect the Howard government’s principles of equality and fairness in education.

Whether parents choose to send their children to a state, Catholic or independent school, the Howard government wants to continue to support parents in making the choice that they believe is best for their children. Every parent, having paid their taxes, deserves some level of public assistance to support the education of their child, regardless of which school the child attends. Unfortunately, the Australian Labor Party do not share these values when it comes to our children. I will discuss this in depth in a few moments.

I would like to commend the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, on the new literacy tuition credit initiative, for which the states grants legislation amendment bill provides funding. Literacy and numeracy are the most important skills a child needs to succeed in their education. The Howard government is committed to improving the literacy and numeracy standards of all Australian children and ensuring that all parents receive information on their children’s literacy and numeracy achievements against national benchmarks.

The Howard government will offer $700 to parents who have received information that their child did not achieve the year 3 national reading benchmark in 2003. This will enable them to purchase special help for their child. Under this pilot, every family in
my electorate of Dobell with a year 3 child who has not met the minimum New South Wales reading benchmark will be sent a $700 tuition credit. Parents will be able to use the tuition credit to choose the most appropriate type of assistance for their children. I know several parents in my electorate who are grateful for this extra assistance. I am thankful that the New South Wales government finally agreed to report to parents on their children’s performance against the national benchmark standards, so New South Wales parents know that if their children need this sort of assistance they can gain it. If the New South Wales government had not agreed, children on the Central Coast would not be eligible for the tuition credit. It was certainly a late commitment by the Bob Carr Labor government to actually agree to this facility.

I am always fighting for extra support for our kids in Dobell. While I am pleased that the New South Wales government have finally come to the party on the literacy and numeracy funding, why it took as long as it did for them to cooperate is beyond me. The Labor Party like to play games. For example, the Labor Party, rather than join us in our steadfast commitment to quality education, continue instead to spread misleading information about the funding for private and public schools. The fact is that state schools are the responsibility of state governments, which own, manage and provide about 88 per cent of the public funding for state schools. That is why they are called state schools. The Howard government has increased Commonwealth funding for state schools by about 60 per cent since 1996. Inflation has been only around 20 per cent over this period. Sixty-eight per cent of all school students attend state schools but they receive 76 per cent of total public funding for schools. For example, this year Central Coast Grammar School at Erina will receive $4.4 million in public funds; however, Lisarow High School, which has a similar number of students, will receive $12.5 million in recurrent funding—nearly three times as much.

In 2003 the federal budget provided a 5.7 per cent funding increase for New South Wales government schools. The New South Wales Carr Labor government, which owns, manages and has the major responsibility for these schools, increased funding by only 0.8 per cent. The truth is that every time parents on the Central Coast decide to send their children to what the opposition pleases itself by calling ‘elite’ private schools, although many of the parents of children at private schools are anything but elite in terms of their income levels, they are effectively saving the Australian taxpayer around $10,000 annually. The Labor Party is very good at distracting attention from the fact that state governments are underfunding their state schools, for which they have primary responsibility.

Alternatively, current and past federal governments, both Liberal and Labor, have always been responsible for Catholic and independent schools. Independent schools will receive a total of $7.6 billion in general recurrent funding—a 27 per cent increase, excluding enrolment growth and related effects. Independent schools will also continue to have their funding determined according to their SES scores. From 2005 the 1,610 Catholic systemic schools will become fully integrated into the SES funding system, meaning that every non-government school, regardless of denomination, will attract funding according to the socioeconomic status of the communities that the school serves. In joining the SES system, Catholic schools will receive $362 million more in additional funding, above and beyond school indexation. This will bring their general recurrent funding over the four-year period to $12.6 billion—a 32 per cent increase over the cur-
rent four-year period, excluding increases due to enrolment and related effects.

It is important that as far as possible the same funding principles are applied to all schools within the non-government sector. No-one wants or needs competition between different school sectors for the available government dollars. The government feels strongly about freedom of choice. The Australian Catholic community has struggled for a long time to run a school system without any government financial support, and the Howard government is proud of this evolution of government assistance for non-government schools.

Earlier I mentioned the political antics of the New South Wales Carr Labor government. Their initial refusal to report to parents on their children’s performance against national benchmark standards highlights an important factor that the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 addresses. A key feature of this bill is strengthening accountability and reporting requirements for Australian government funding, which will in turn reinforce the link between Australian government funding programs and improved outcomes for Australian students. It is vital that parents are kept informed as to how their children are performing at school. This bill contains provisions to ensure that school reports are easy to understand and that assessment of a child’s achievement is reported against national benchmarks. This bill will also require schools to provide greater transparency of the school’s overall performance. It will include the public release of indicators, such as percentage of students achieving national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy, average year 12 results and teacher qualifications so that parents can make their own assessment of the school.

This bill will also aim to stop the lack of consistency in schooling between the states, which has an unnecessary negative impact on the 80,000 students who move interstate each year. As a condition of funding, states, territories and school authorities will have to agree to implement a common starting age and common testing standards by 2010. Children should be at the same educational standard and learn similar skills regardless of the state in which they reside. Making values a core part of schooling is pivotal to this legislation. Parents consider values an important social factor in choosing a school for their child. The Howard government is seeking the endorsement of state and territory education ministers for the adoption of the national framework for values education in Australian schools. Additionally, every school will be required to have a functioning flagpole and fly the Australian flag. Many schools in my electorate already do so. In fact, I am called to schools on many occasions to participate in flag-raising ceremonies, provide new flags and upgrade flags that have worn out over time. Public schools are just as concerned about doing this as independent schools are.

This bill also seeks to address the paradox that Australia is when it comes to physical activity. Australia’s love of sport has to be one of the strongest of any nation, yet one in four young Australians under the age of 18 suffer from obesity. This is coupled with an increasing incidence of children not engaging in sport or physical activity outside of school. As a condition of federal funding of schools—and this is government schools, Catholic schools and other independent schools—there will be a requirement that those schools offer a minimum of two hours of physical education or sporting activity each week as part of the school curriculum. Now, again, many in my electorate do that. However, if there are schools that are not providing this level of physical activity, in
the light of the alarming statistics I have just quoted it is important that they start providing physical activity opportunities for their students.

Obesity and lack of physical activity are major causes of preventable health problems and schools have an important role to play in promoting a healthy lifestyle for our kids. I will reiterate what the Prime Minister has said in saying this is not to argue against the fact that parents have the primary responsibility for fostering a healthy lifestyle for their children. If parents are not supportive, no amount of government information or funding, and no sportsperson or teacher, can encourage children to exercise and to eat properly. But governments can, by their policies and leadership, reinforce the efforts of parents in communicating the right message to their kids. In doing so, perhaps together we can bring about cultural change for the betterment of our community.

In conclusion, there are many fine Catholic, independent and state schools in Dobell that I have had the pleasure of working with. They are rich in variety and are all committed to working for a bright future for their children. They all offer high standards of teaching and excellent partnerships between teachers, students and parents. As a parent and grandparent I know how important these partnerships are to a quality education. I am confident that this legislation will further assist the education sector to promote quality outcomes for our students. These bills confirm the government’s commitment to ensuring a strong school sector, positive outcomes for Australian students, and choice and transparency for parents. This legislation is absolutely essential to quality education and the growth of our nation, and I urge members opposite to support it. I commend these bills to the House.

Dr Emerson (Rankin) (10.47 a.m.)—Labor continues to have concerns about the inequities in the government’s school funding policies, and in government Labor will amend the legislation in 2005 and implement its policies and priorities for 2006 and beyond. This would have the effect of making 2005 a transition year to provide funding stability, to which Labor is fully committed. It would also provide all non-government schools with more than a year’s notice of their funding entitlements for 2006 and beyond. So we will not be opposing the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. We want to provide funding stability for schools in our country. But I do want to make some remarks about the inequity of the current funding policies of the Howard government.

Federal funding for schools is currently provided through the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000. The legislation enacted at that time provided more than $25 billion for the quadrennium 2001-04. That legislation brought into force the government’s policies that provide the greatest increases to some of the wealthiest independent schools in Australia. Funding for government schools was essentially maintained in line with indexation for the cost of schooling, while students in the large Catholic systems received not much more than that.

The inequities in the government’s school funding policy from the year 2000 are illustrated in these terms: the top 50 high-fee independent schools—that is, the wealthiest independent schools—received funding increases of 150 per cent. Compare that with the Catholic systemic schools, which received funding increases of just 25 per cent, and with government schools, which re-
received only 20 per cent. This unfair legislation terminates at the end of 2004 and that is why we are debating new legislation today—because such legislation is required to provide funding for 2005 and beyond.

Earlier this year the government announced its future schools funding package. It retains the funding arrangements provided by the current act for independent schools, while providing a further $362 million for Catholic systemic schools. Funding for government schools has been maintained yet again only in line with indexation. Increases in general recurrent funding over the coming quadrennium are provided as follows: government schools will receive a 27 per cent increase, which yet again constitutes indexation only; independent schools will receive a 47 per cent increase, and that covers indexation and enrolment growth; and Catholic systemic schools will receive a 39 per cent increase.

We are concerned with the inequities of the school funding policy of the Howard government. I personally am a supporter of choice between government and non-government schools. It is only right that parents have that choice. But for this government to load up funding to the wealthiest schools in this country is anathema to the great Aussie notion of a fair go for all. For the government in an Orwellian sense to pretend that this is fair when it is patently and absurdly unfair is typical of its doublespeak.

Contrast that with Labor’s philosophical approach, which is a fair go for all, opportunity for all. We would in government pursue a national agreement with state and territory governments to bring all schools up to a national standard of resources and education outcomes. Members of the House would recall that just a couple of weeks ago our leader, Mark Latham, with the state premiers, announced a new era of cooperation if Labor were to be elected at the coming election. We would be able to work together with the state Labor governments in producing better results for all children in Australia but most especially for those children in disadvantaged areas, which is the Labor way.

We on the Labor side of politics are firmly committed to needs based funding, for both government and non-government schools. Our platform makes it clear that funding for high-fee independent schools operating above the national standard would be reduced but that funding would be redistributed within the non-government sector against that basic test of needs. We would also in the platform be committed to increased funding for government schools, including schools with concentrations of students with special needs.

That is the fundamental philosophical choice for the Australian people: do they continue to support the Howard government, which is committed to rewarding and entrenching privilege in our school system, or do they support a Latham Labor government, which is committed philosophically to a fair go for all, opportunity for all, giving young people in needy and disadvantaged areas the rungs on the ladder of opportunity so that they can climb that ladder and improve their lives and, in turn, improve the lives of the children they have when they grow up. The choice could not be clearer. Sometimes in modern Australian politics it is said that the differences between Labor and Liberal are becoming smaller and smaller. I say that the differences between Labor and Liberal are becoming more profound by the day, and nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in our approach to school funding policy.

In my own electorate of Rankin there are numerous needy schools—needy schools that fall into both the government and the
non-government systems. I want to see an improvement in school resourcing for those schools—both government and non-government. In the electorate of Rankin I do not have wealthy non-government schools, and I will be working towards a redistribution of resources from the very wealthy non-government schools in Sydney and Melbourne in particular to assist young people in Logan City in my electorate to get a decent education, to be able to climb the ladder of opportunity. I am therefore excited on behalf of the people of Logan City about the prospects that they would enjoy should Labor form government at the looming federal election, because that would deter young people from being able to get into universities, particularly in my area of Logan City and in other areas of need around Australia.

We cannot have this. I am, as are many members of this parliament, a child of the Whitlam era. I would not have had access to a university education had it not been for the election of the Whitlam government in 1972. It has come around again, and it’s time. It’s time to elect a Latham Labor government so we can in fact ensure for all young people, whether they attend school or university or aspire to attend university, that if they have the talent and are prepared to work hard through school they are able to express and develop that talent in university.

This is a simple proposition. It is the Australian way. It is that great Aussie notion of a fair go for all. Yet that great Aussie notion of a fair go for all is being shredded by this government’s plans for universities in this country. Not only has the prevalence of full fee positions been exploding under this government, as Professor Bruce Chapman warned, but the government has allowed universities to increase HECS by 25 per cent, and most universities are taking the opportunity to do that. Why? Because they are pressed financially, and many of them have no choice in the matter. This is yet another obstacle to young people who have talent, who have the drive and who are prepared to work to get into university and develop those talents in a university education.
There it is. The choice is clear: whether we return to that pre-Whitlam era, where privilege and not talent determines if you can get into a university, or whether we return this country to that great Aussie notion of a fair go for all—where young people, irrespective of the incomes of their parents and the location in which they live, get access to well-resourced schools and then get access to vocational education or a university education.

I point out that business surveys are showing an acute shortage of skills in this country. What is the government doing about it? The government in its $52 billion pre-election spending splurge committed not one extra cent to vocational education and training in Australia. Not only is it turning its back on young people in Australia but it is also turning its back on the business community. The business community is screaming out for a government to step forward and help ease this chronic shortage of skills. We have young people who desperately want to develop their talents but do not have the opportunity to do so because of financial penalties and prohibitive fees. This is a scandalous period in Australian history where skill shortages are not being addressed.

I will finish with these observations. In Australia, we definitely and urgently need a second round of productivity growth. Today’s productivity growth is tomorrow’s prosperity. Therefore, unless we invest now in the sources of modern productivity growth, Australia’s future prosperity is not assured. That is the reality of this very moment—this government is not investing in skills development as a critical source of productivity growth in this country. That is going to show up, at best by the end of this decade and maybe much sooner, in faltering productivity growth. Indeed, the government’s own Intergenerational Report, produced by Treasury two years ago, has already forecast that Australian productivity growth by the end of next year will slump back to its mediocre 30-year long-term average. What is the government doing about it? It is failing to invest in the skills of the Australian people as a major new source of productivity growth in this country.

This is a social argument. This is a human argument. This is an economic argument. Yet the government steadfastly refuses to respond to the challenge of acute skill shortages in Australia. It has refused to respond to the pleas of the young people in needy areas of Australia for some financial relief so they will be able to go on to university—so that they will get a good education in our school system, making them eligible to go to university. Once they are eligible, they are being locked out of a university education by the government’s deliberate policy of high fees.

It needs to be understood that this policy of high fees is designed to lock out the sons and daughters of the working men and women of this country. It is returning Australia to the old days when privilege and not talent determined whether a young person had access to a good education. It is a disgraceful period in Australia’s history and the government has refused to respond. In view of that, despite all the pleas of young people in Australia and their parents, this government will not budge. The only way to ensure that young people in Australia get a good school education and have access to a university education is to elect a Latham Labor government in the looming election. That is the choice for the Australian people, and I am confident that the Australian people will make the right choice on behalf of their children and for the future of our great country.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (11.00 a.m.)—I cannot let the last speech go unanswered. The member for Rankin made a number of quite frankly, outrageous claims. They are
the kinds of claims we have heard from the Australian Labor Party, which is hell-bent in this debate on ensuring they divide the Australian people and insert the most disgusting form of class politics and the most disgusting form of wedge politics that the Australian nation has seen for decades.

What we are seeing from the Australian Labor Party is a vacuum of intellectual argument and the most base attempt to try to do what they can to divide the Australian people and to place a wedge among the Australian people. Principal among the mechanisms that the Australian Labor Party disgracefully use is their approach to the debate about independent and public school funding. What is very clear, and we have just heard it in spades from the member for Rankin, is that the Australian Labor Party will stoop to absolutely any level in a gross attempt to ensure that the Australian people in some way feel that there is this great battle going on between the haves and have-nots. The saddest part of this debate is that, despite all the rhetoric from the member for Rankin, we heard such little substance from him. It was completely void of any meaningful figures, of any actual statistical analysis and, importantly, of any facts and figures when it came to the level of government funding.

This debate today on the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 is concerned principally with opportunities in state primary and secondary funding as well as private primary and secondary funding. I would like to address some points made by the member for Rankin. Principal among the claims he made was that it was un-Australian that the Liberal Party and The Nationals, under the Howard government, should allow Australian students to pay to go to university. Do not be confused. After listening to the member for Rankin, I know it may be thought that what this government is doing is imposing fees on Australians to go to university. It is doing no such thing.

It is not compulsory to pay fees to go to university. Certainly there is the HECS scheme, but in recent history there has always been the HECS scheme. In fact, the HECS scheme was introduced by the Australian Labor Party. But what this debate is about is the right of Australians to pay to go to university should they so choose if they do not receive a taxpayer subsidised place. It does not mean that more Australians will go to university who do not have an academic entitlement to be there. But it does mean that if Australian taxpayers can only afford to pay, for example, for 100 places in a course—if the Australian government allocates 100 taxpayer subsidised places in a course—and additional Australian students who meet the academic requirements would like to go to university to study that course, we allow those Australians the opportunity to go to university, study that course and pay for it.

But the Australian Labor Party’s position is to say: ‘No, bad luck, Australians. We can only afford to fund 100 places in that course. And do you know what? Even if you meet the academic criteria and are willing to pay to go, you cannot go.’ That is the Australian Labor Party’s position. More intriguingly—and, I believe, more disgustingly—the Australian Labor Party will deny Australians the opportunity to go and study that course at a tertiary institution, but they will roll out the red carpet and welcome students from overseas. If you happen to be born in Malaysia, Japan or Korea then you are welcome to go, according to Australian Labor Party policy. They will roll out the red carpet and welcome students from overseas. If you happen to be born in this country you are denied that opportunity.
The Australian Labor Party will not recognise this fact and, importantly, it is ashamed to admit it. The Australian Labor Party, in the so-called pursuit of social justice and the so-called pursuit of equity, would like to say to young Australians: ‘Tough luck, you can’t go because the Australian government can only fund 100 places. You are student 101. That’s it; you’re out. It’s denied to you. Oh, by the way, if you’re from overseas you’re welcome. Please come. We’d love to have you.’ It is an absolute joke and it shows the absolute shallowness of the Australian Labor Party’s intellect when it comes to policy formulation in this country.

That is the reason why the Australian people will say no to the Australian Labor Party at the forthcoming election—because, despite the fact that the Australian Labor Party stands up and claims to be concerned about equity and social justice, its policies are so resolutely shallow that the Australian people will see them for what they are: nothing but a superficial gloss on intellectually unsound policies and, importantly, coming from an intellectual vacuum. That is the issue of tertiary funding that I wanted to address, because all Australians listening to this broadcast should know of the actual debate taking place between the opposition and the Howard government when it comes to opportunities for young Australians.

The member for Rankin raised another issue as well: the opportunities available to young Australians. He spoke about the need for productivity gains and about how young Australians would like the opportunity to obtain new skills and said that vocational employment would be a key part of this. Again I would say to the Australian Labor Party, ‘Why don’t you do something about your state Labor mates and for those students who wish to undertake study at TAFE, who do not have access to a HECS scheme and who do not have the ability to defer payment for their course but rather have to pay for it up front? Why don’t you do something to reduce TAFE fees?’

On the Gold Coast and in my electorate of Moncrieff, if a student wants to go to a tertiary institution to undertake university study, they are able to do it by having their HECS payments deferred for that study. But students undertaking a course of vocational study at TAFE have to pay between $4,000 and $6,000 each year. Incidentally, that is the same amount of money they are able to defer through their studies at a tertiary institution. So that is their choice. They can defer $5,000 or $6,000 per annum by undertaking tertiary study and gain all the advantages that flow from having undertaken tertiary study at a tertiary institution or, because of the Queensland state Labor government, they can pay $5,000 or $6,000 up front and go to the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE without having the opportunity to defer that payment. So again, despite all this rhetoric from the Australian Labor Party—all this pretend concern for the lot of working people and about making sure that young Australians have the chance to upgrade their skills—they themselves at a state government level will impose obscene fees up front on working class people who would like to undertake, for example, studies at TAFE. This highlights once again the way in which the Australian Labor Party are completely shallow when it comes to the kinds of arguments we have been hearing from the member for Rankin in this morning’s debate.

I turn to the more important issue at the core of the debate today, funding for primary and secondary schools in both the public and the independent sectors. I have heard and seen many examples of outrageous claims. I turn to this particular document, which was disgracefully circulated by the Queensland Teachers Union through schools in my electorate. This document was circulated by the
Queensland Teachers Union and—I am sure with the blessing of the Australian Labor Party and no doubt with the blessing of the Queensland Labor minister for education—sent home with the children by their teachers and their teachers’ union representatives.

Mr Hardgrave—Forcing them.

Mr CIOBO—That is correct—forcing children to take this kind of material home. I say: good praise to those teachers who recognised this political propaganda for what it was and said to their students, ‘Don’t be obliged to take one’—quite different to other teachers I know that no doubt are Labor Party affiliates who thrust this kind of political propaganda on their children. That is what the Australian Labor Party is about. It is about using Australian kids to take its political propaganda back home to parents—because it believes there are some cheap political points to be won as a consequence of using Australian kids in this way.

So do not let the Labor Party come into this chamber and dare to lecture the Howard government on what it believes is appropriate for Australian kids when, at state government level, Labor Party people are showing this down the throats of Australian kids and making them take this kind of political nonsense back to their parents. But it is worse than that—that document came from the Queensland Teachers Union—because yesterday I received a letter from a constituent, whom I will not name, stating:

Dear sir,

We received the attached letter at our home from the Queensland ALP Minister for Education. No doubt you have already become aware of the content of this letter, however, for my own peace of mind I thought I should forward it to you as an opportunity to express my disgust at seeing the Queensland government using this matter as an opportunity for political grandstanding at the expense of the Liberal Party through the school system. It reminds me of a similar attempt by the teachers union prior to the last election to use the school system as a propaganda arena to support the ALP. Surely if the intent of the letter was simply to advise parents of a special funding assistance scheme then the first last and three paragraphs of the minister’s letter would have been more than adequate and appropriate.

The letter goes on, but I will not read the rest of it. What the letter from my constituent refers to is an outrageous letter that the Queensland state Labor minister sent to all parents. So it is not only the teachers union, with the Labor Party’s grubby hands indirectly involved in it; it is actually direct correspondence from the Queensland state government minister, Anna Bligh, to parents talking about how the federal government was evil and doing all these nasty sorts of things. That is the implicit connotation in this letter. I quote a paragraph from this letter:

It was simply unfair for the federal government to deny help to year 3 students who struggle with reading in some states and provide help to others. Queensland has always been willing to make this information available—

That refers, of course, to the fact that the Howard government was seeking publication of numeracy and literacy benchmark test results among schools, trying to enable parents to make informed choices. That is what it is referring to when it says ‘to make this information available’. It continues:

...to the Commonwealth to ensure that Queensland children receive the help they deserve.

It carries on:

Following the public outcry by parents and teachers and representations by myself and other state education ministers, I am pleased that the federal minister has been forced to reverse his decision and include Queensland in the scheme. This is a victory for Queensland children and a victory for commonsense.

This letter, purely political in nature, is in response to the decision that the education minister took—not at the urging of Anna
Bligh and her crass political means, but rather because of representations that I and other Queensland members had made about how we would like to see the special $700 tuition credit extended to children in all states. That is the reason why it happened. We did it because we believe in investing in and providing opportunities for our young Australian children. One principal way that we do this is through the introduction of the $700 credit to young Australians who have fallen below the national benchmark levels when it comes to literacy and numeracy—levels that this government imposed on schools because we believe that parents have the right to know how their school is performing and, importantly, how their child is performing relative to other children. It is about empowering parents; it is about ensuring that they have information so that they recognise the choices that are available to them and whether or not their child is receiving the kind of quality education that they need.

This letter that purports to be about making sure parents are aware that the $700 tuition credit is available unfortunately also transgresses all the proper protocols with regard to making sure that, once again, students are not used as political carrier pigeons for the Australian Labor Party. It does it regardless, because the Queensland Labor Party and the Australian Labor Party are more than willing to use whatever means are available to them to ensure that children are used as carrier pigeons to get the ALP’s message into Queensland and, indeed, into the homes and onto the kitchen tables of Australian families.

The Queensland Teachers Union flier, which I would like to address, talks about how the funding policy of the federal government is so unfair. It goes on to talk about how there are many rich interstate schools that are receiving big payments from the federal government to support their children, at the expense of public schools. Of course, the Queensland Teachers Union brochure only focuses on federal government funds; they do not like to talk about state government funds, because it serves their political purposes and, indeed, the Labor Party’s political purposes to claim that the Howard government is only interested in giving all of its money to private schools as part of some sort of old school tie network. The fact that this situation has been the case for decades and the fact that there is a legitimate division of funding responsibility for state schools and private schools is conveniently ignored by both the Labor Party and the Queensland Teachers Union.

The reality is that if we are going to have a proper debate on this issue then let us look at the allocation of funds across the board. Surely the debate is about the allocation of public funds, be they state or federal, against the allocation of public funds to private schools, be they state or federal. What we actually learn, despite claims from the Australian Labor Party, is that in fact—and I use figures; this is what I would rather debate, actual statistics and figures, not this kind of bleeding heart rhetoric we have heard from the Australian Labor Party—some 2.25 million students attend state schools and they receive $19.9 billion of public funding. There are 1.04 million students who attend Catholic and independent schools and they receive $6.2 billion of federal funding. In percentage terms, state government schools—that is, public schools—enrol 68 per cent of students and receive 76 per cent of total public funding; and Catholic and independent schools enrol 32 per cent of students and receive 24 per cent of total public funding. That sounds like a pretty good deal to me.

I say to those members of the Australian Labor Party who seem to have it in their
minds that if a parent chooses to send their child to an independent or Catholic school that means they should receive absolutely no federal government support or indeed any taxpayer support at all: the consequence of such an outrageous policy would be that the public school system would collapse, because parents would be forced to pull their children out of independent and Catholic schools and put them all in the state system. The state system would collapse overnight. It has been a part of Australian history for decades that support needs to flow to both private, independent schools and public schools.

The Australian Labor Party likes to claim that wealthy, elite independent schools are the ones that are the beneficiaries of federal government funding policies. Let us look again at the statistics and see how true that claim is. The Australian government funds non-government schools according to a measure which uses the socioeconomic status of the communities they serve. Schools which draw students from the neediest communities receive from the Australian government 70 per cent of the cost of educating a student in a state government school. Schools serving the wealthiest communities receive 13.7 per cent of that cost. That is how much the rich schools get—13.7 per cent. Those schools that serve less well-off, socioeconomically disadvantaged communities receive 70 per cent—not even 100 per cent—of the cost of educating a student at a state school.

They are the facts. They paint a very different story from the one the ALP would like to portray, because the ALP are not interested in facts and figures; they are interested in driving a wedge into the Australian people. The ALP would rather that two neighbours—one who sends their kids to a public school; one who sends their kids to a private school—have a battle between them about which party best represents them. They are not above the politics; they would rather bring the whole thing down to the base level of politics. It is a great shame, and it serves as an indictment of the Australian Labor Party for the way they conduct themselves in this debate.

Turning to local issues, I am privileged to have nearly 30 schools in my electorate—a mixture of both public and private schools. My schools serve a mixed bag of socioeconomic demographics. There are some wealthy areas on the Gold Coast but there are also some poorer areas. I highlight one school in particular as an example: the Southport School, TSS. It has a reputation for being a rich school but in fact the vast majority of its parents—both parents—are working for an income, trying to send their kids to school. This school would lose funding under the Australian Labor Party. The Australian Labor Party would deny parents the opportunity to send their children there. That is the choice they make. This is an important debate, and I urge the Australian Labor Party to stick to facts and figures and not engage in the kind of base political rhetoric that they have been engaging in. Let all Australians know the true facts about school funding. I urge them to support both these bills. (Time expired)

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (11.25 a.m.)—It is very nice to get up after a government member and strongly endorse the sentiments of the very fine speech and very fine contribution to the House made by the honourable member for Moncrieff. He might have been drawing a bit of a long bow in the last bit, but apart from that it was a very sensible contribution to the debate on the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and cognate bill. It is a perspective that should be taken into account by every single person in this House.
Let us look at the second reading speech by the Minister for Education, Science and Training. All of us in this place, whether we like to admit it or not, know that governments can say one thing in a second reading speech—the biodiversity act of course being a classic example—but what happens in reality might be an entirely different thing. But the minister in this case is a man of considerable and outstanding integrity, courage and intellectual capacity. We hope he can deliver on the things that are said here in every respect that he has laid out. He is basically saying that, where there are shortcomings in literacy and numeracy, we will provide funding for those people to catch up.

I represent a lot of areas that are not from a culturally ‘Anglo’ background, for the sake of a better word. I am particularly referring to the old Aboriginal mission areas that I represented for many years as a state minister and now represent in this place. A lot of the parents still do not speak English; they speak the original Australian language for that area. Students start with an enormous disadvantage because of that. Most certainly their grandparents and in some cases their parents have never had the privilege of going to school. The first part of the package—literacy and numeracy—is very enthusiastically supported by me on account of that fact alone.

Allocating funds on the basis of need appeals to me greatly, because I probably represent the greatest number of private schools. The Anglican school system alone in North Queensland has gone from 1,600 to 3,500 people. We give very great credit to Bishop Lewis for the performance of those schools and the fact that people have voted with their feet to go to them. Many people in the state system are worried, and I can understand their worry. I think there is a fear here that the private schools will somehow absorb so much that they will be left with leftovers. They are very sensitive about that.

The other factor, occurring because of the dropping birthrate, is that there are fewer people going to schools. We hear, in a lot of our state schools, people saying, ‘My school might have to close,’ or ‘We will lose the senior high.’ Part of the problem is just that there are fewer kids in this country as time goes on. We previously had a terrific growth rate, when we had a birthrate of 2.7. We have dropped now to under 1.7. Of course, there is a price to paid for that. If you are a school teacher, you may not have a job. There is very great fear out there. I say that by way of explanation for some of the justifiable fears that I have listened to from some of the state people.

The boarding schools at Ravenshoe, Herberton, Abergowrie, Ingham, Mount Isa and, particularly, Charters Towers, where I went to private school, have produced chief justices, heads of government departments, ministers, archbishops, chairmen of national television networks and, more importantly, State of Origin players—Nathan Fien, Matty Bowen, Noely Solomon and Sam Backo—

Mr Hardgrave—Far more importantly!

Mr KATTER—Far more importantly. These people have produced extraordinarily successful results. I am obviously not as familiar with the other schools as I am with where I went to school—and my daddy before me and my grand-daddy before him. Also, of course, Charters Towers has been the centre of my state electorate for over 20 years, so I say these things without any reflection upon other boarding schools in Queensland.

The reason people like me had to go away to boarding school was that, in little towns like the one I came from, Cloncurry, there were no senior top high schools. It was gall- ing and embarrassing for me to come home
from school knowing that there were a lot of kids who were brighter academically than me in my year at the state school and the convent schools who should have been going away to school. We were one of the wealthier families in town. I would not say we were wealthy—we lived in a galvanised iron house with an open verandah, as so many people did—but we most certainly were one of the wealthier families in the town. My parents were lucky enough to be able to afford to send me away to boarding school. But there were only five kids out of about 50 or 60 that had the money to be sent to boarding school, and the rest of them were deprived of a secondary education.

Speaking to this debate I pay very fine tribute to that wonderful lady, a great Australian, Lady Pearl Logan. I think that more than anyone else, and there were many great heroes fighting for the remote area allowances that enabled our people to go away to school, she was responsible for the entire cost—about $6,000 or $7,000—of going to boarding schools in Charters Towers being met by the federal and state governments. I think that was in about 1987. Some 20-odd years prior to that, there was not a single cent to assist a kid, even though some kids in my year had scored 70 and 80 per cent in their scholarship exams. They still could not go away to school. There was a thing called the Commonwealth scholarship, which I got, if you were in the top bracket of passes, but it was nothing like the amount of money you needed to go away to boarding school—however humble that boarding school may have been and however moderate your parents’ assets were.

People think of boarding schools as elitist institutions, particularly a lot of the boarding schools in the capital cities, but that is not true beyond those places. In fact, I would say that a lot of the boarding schools in the electorate of Kennedy pride themselves on their egalitarian spirit and approach to everything that they do. They do not style themselves as elitist and sometimes I think that may not be a good thing for enrolments. But their attitudes are very admirable and the scores on the board are enormously laudatory.

There are massive population movements away from rural Australia. Bad as it is, each day it gets progressively worse. When people wonder if we have it good or bad, I always hold up that map and I say, ‘What’s this map of?’ and people say, ‘Australia.’ Then I say: ‘Yeah, well it looks like a map of Australia but we just took off a hundred kilometres of the coastline. We dropped off Victoria.’ But who would miss Victoria? It still looks like a map of Australia and, in fact, it is 82 per cent of the surface area of Australia. But the number of people living in that area on that green map is about the same number of people that were here when Captain Cook arrived. There are only half a million people living in that area. Australia is empty and, with each passing day, it is emptying even more.

As I have said many times in this place, half of Australia’s agriculture comes off the Murray Darling, and we in the Gulf Country have six times more water than the Murray Darling and about a third more arable land. We have a giant black soil plain stretching from Normanton and Burketown all the way down to Blackall. Seven million hectares of that black soil plain is taken up by a noxious weed that has destroyed all native flora and fauna, so it is a very sad reflection upon Australia that this movement is occurring. But as it occurs, our schools close down. We lost the secondary school and the Catholic boarding school at Julia Creek because the populations were no longer there to sustain them. But of course the cost of looking after those kids in some environment in Townsville, Brisbane, the Gold Coast or wherever becomes colossal because of economic pres-
sures. France and other European countries always justify assistance to their rural communities by saying that they do not want all the people living on top of each other in a city. In fact, they say that their governments could not afford to look after all those people in a city.

You can see that with the disgusting AusLink program, where the Deputy Prime Minister allocated $1,100 million for the southeast corner and the rest of us got $200 million. You can see what is happening here with the colossal demands coming from the cities. The net result of all of this action is that we have fallen behind. Since that wonderful Lady Pearl Logan—who was probably as responsible as anyone for securing the only medical school built in 44 years in Australia at James Cook—ensured that the entire payment for going away to boarding schools was met by the state and federal government, we have gone backwards. Now only about two-thirds of the money required to go away to the schools is provided by government. There is a very interesting article on the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald saying that it is not a free education any more and that it costs you $1,500 if you go to a state school. Probably 20 or 30 per cent of the people I represent have no local top high school that they can go to, and they have that $1,500 plus an extra $4,000 or $5,000 on top of that to send their children away to school, in spite of the assistance that is being given by government. But the facts speak for themselves and they are very sad statistics indeed.

Seventy-three per cent of urban Australia goes on to complete 12th grade. These are the most updated figures and they are a bit old—they are from the mid-1990s. Seventy-two per cent of rural children go on to complete 12th grade. But of the remote category only 55 per cent go on to complete 12th grade. It may be better to lose an arm and go through life without a secondary education, yet half of our people will be going through life without a 12th grade education. We are not talking about tertiary education. The figures for tertiary education are much worse still.

A needs based approach is enormously attractive to those of us who do not have any senior top high schools and are not likely to have any in the future. It may well be argued that it is counterproductive in some of these communities, where they are so small and the kids need competition and to meet other kids who have an interest in, say, chemistry. For example, if you were going to Cloncurry, the chances of another kid in that town being interested in chemistry would be very small, because it is a very small town. If you go away to boarding school your chance of running into someone there who is interested in chemistry is much greater and that spurs on your interest in chemistry.

There is a ranking of the electorates in Australia on the basis of median weekly family income. It is a document that tells a very sad story as well. The poorest 40 electorates, with the possible exception of four which could be argued to be city electorates, are all in rural Australia. So if you want to be rich, go to the big cities. The top 30 are inner city electorates. If you want to be poor, you live in the country in this country. The free trade deal will be exacerbating that situation dramatically.

Canvassing these issues on a needs basis is very helpful, but now a huge gap has widened in the cost of sending a child away to boarding school. There is a tendency in this place, as there was in the state parliament in Queensland, to think that everyone who lives outside the south-east corner runs around on a horse. In actual fact, very few people run around on a horse. In my state electorate it might have been 1,000 people out of an elec-
torate of 20,000. The vast bulk of people live in towns. A lot of people say: ‘The cattle industry is doing well. These people have got a lot of money; they can look after themselves.’ A lot of them cannot, I might add. But the vast bulk of the population in my old state seat were railway workers. If you were a driver it was all right because you were on big money, but the rest of the employees there were battlers. They were up against a huge cost of living difference. This was found by the James Cook University study which was done in conjunction with the chambers of commerce. A separate study was also done by the teachers union. Both of those studies indicated a cost of living difference of 22 per cent. Both of them were almost spot-on. Not only do these people have to contend with a 22 per cent cost of living difference but that is before the child is sent away to school.

A lot of people who go to these towns find that there is no employment for their wives, so they are single-income families. A lot of the jobs in cattle work are done by men, not women. They are done out bush, whether it is shearing or whatever it might be, and you cannot take your wife into the shearing sheds with you. The result of that is a single income situation on top of the cost of living. If $1,500 is required in Sydney for a state school student, I leave to your imagination what we are talking about when you have to send a kid from Cloncurry 700 kilometres to the nearest boarding school—and the colossal expense of looking after that child for 24 hours a day.

There is a colossal need for the government to look again at the remote area allowances for Australia. There is no easy way out here. It is a reflection upon successive governments in Australia. I will just hold up the green map to show that 82 per cent of the surface area of Australia falls into the remote category. In the remote category 45 per cent of our kids are deprived of a 12th grade education. The simple reason that that situation exists is money: parents cannot afford to send their kids away. That can be fixed up by this government. We are not talking about a huge amount of money here.

Equality of education in Australia did not exist when I was a kid. Out of 60 kids in my town, only five of us got away to get a secondary education. There was no equality of education in those days. By the late 1980s, because of wonderful work done by Lady Pearl Logan, whose name I mentioned before, and many other people as well, we were able to secure equality of education for the first time ever in Australian history. We do not have equality of education in Australia now. If you live outside the big towns or cities there is no equality of education for you whatsoever, unless your parents are wealthy enough to provide $5,000 or $6,000 per child. If you have three kids, that is $18,000 you have to find, with no tax deductions for it. How many families in Australia could find $18,000 a year for five years of secondary education? That is before you get to tertiary education.

In my own family there were three of us, and we did tertiary education as well. The cost to our parents was hundreds of thousands of dollars. How many families can afford that sort of cost? What we are saying here today is thank you, we are very keen on a needs based system, but there is one huge need out there at the present moment that is not being addressed. We would plead with the minister—and a very excellent minister he is—to come to grips with the most serious problem of disadvantage in this country at the present moment in the field of education.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (11.45 a.m.)—I rise in the House today to speak on the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportu-
nity) Bill 2004 and the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. The education debate is a very important one and it is vital to the future of our country. It is vital that we maintain a government sector and a non-government sector that deliver the sorts of outcomes that our young people deserve. It is certainly the view of this government that we should be supporting choice in education so that families, as taxpayers in Australia, can choose the type of education that they feel is appropriate for their children. Whether they choose a government or a non-government education, this government believes that it should be within the ability of the families to choose. In doing so, that basically underpins this government’s philosophy of supporting not only the government sector but also the non-government sector.

It is unfortunate that, in this debate, much of the discussion seems to turn on the politics of envy. Much of it seems to concentrate on those few elite schools that have superior facilities to other schools in the country. But, at the end of the day, the bottom line is that as taxpayers in this country the parents of children who attend any school should be able to receive support from this government. It is a concept that I think we should stick with. The concept that the government is sticking with is that every student in this country has the right to receive some support from the federal government. This government believe that obviously we need to concentrate the resources in the areas of greatest need. But that does not mean that, just because you are in a particular school, you have no right to support from this government. It is, I think, a fundamental right—and one that I am very passionate about—for any student that they should be supported by Australia’s federal government.

Certainly one of the disappointments that I have in the campaign against supporting non-government schools is that much of the information being put forward by those who oppose this federal government’s support for such schools is dishonest and misrepresents the facts. It misrepresents the facts about the amount of total government funding that goes to schools. We all know that, in the government sector, the primary funding responsibility rests with the states. In many of the representations that are made about the level of funding for government versus non-government schools, the amount of funds put in by the state sector is conveniently ignored by those who seek to run an argument that says that our state sector is receiving less funding than our non-government sector. That is clearly an incorrect argument. That argument is being proffered to try and skew the debate and end up with inequitable outcomes. I certainly think that the teachers federation should be condemned for the way they advocate that there should be less support for our non-government sector. I think that we should be supporting both. This government is supporting both. I think it is an end which we should aspire to.

I am certainly delighted at the effort that our Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, makes in ensuring that every Australian child has appropriate access to education. He visited my electorate on 30 June and we visited a number of government and non-government schools. In visiting that electorate we called at Smithtown Public School, a wonderful little school in the town of Smithtown, as the name implies. The principal is Judy Baldock, and it is a beautiful school. These are the children of hardworking families in the Lower Macleay, many of whom work in the Nestle factory, which is a major employer in Smithtown. It was great to see the federal education minister calling in at a small school to say hello to the students, see the hardworking staff and see the great work that
the students do in a small country government school. It is a great school with great outcomes for the kids and it is fantastic to see. We also called at Nambucca High. The principal there, Hilton Humphries, is one who cares very greatly for his school. He is a very motivated principal and he is very keen to see that his students receive the very best education that he and his staff can give. Certainly there are many disadvantaged families at Nambucca High, but Nambucca High does its best to provide a quality education to the children of the Nambucca Valley.

We had a good tour around the school. We observed a range of activities. We visited the special education unit, we visited various students around the school and we also managed to see a very fine musical performance put on by the students of the school. It was a sort of rock performance, if you like, with some acting and some very fine singing. I have to say that the minister was actually able to give an impromptu performance in that rock opera. Whilst he may not have been a candidate for *Australian Idol*, he certainly did perform amiably in singing into the microphone for the students. I must say that, despite his other qualities, if principal Hilton Humphries were to give him a report card for his performance, he would probably have scored, ‘Could do better.’ I understand that he is working on his singing. Certainly it was a great visit to Nambucca High.

We visited the Coffs Harbour Christian Community School. The principal there is Rod Lind. He is very innovative in his approach to education. It is a very fine non-government school and there are very interesting programs there. They have a very fine program in relation to horses. They do a lot of good work at the Coffs Harbour Christian Community School. We also visited Boambee Public School. Boambee recently celebrated its centenary and I was privileged to attend that centenary. There is a very fine principal there, Bill Gates, and a very dedicated team of teachers. We inspected a new assembly hall that was substantially funded by the federal government under its capital works program; $1 million was given in funding to assist Boambee Public School in building a new assembly hall and canteen facility.

At Boambee Public School, though, it is a bit of a mix. We have the contrast of a brand-new assembly hall, beautifully fitted out and very appropriate for the school needs, with a number of demountable buildings that are also there. It is a beautiful school in a great environment, with strong growth being recorded in that area, but we have that contrast between demountable buildings and a beautiful new assembly hall.

But one of the things that really makes the difference between a good school and an average school is the approach of that school. On arriving at Boambee Public School, we went to an assembly. The students recited the school motto, which is ‘Achievement through effort’. I think that is a great ideal to pass onto students: achievement through effort. The students also recited the pledge, and I would like to read it out, because I think it is very important. It shows the types of values that the principal, Bill Gates, and his staff are keen to impart to the students. The pledge at Boambee Public School says, ‘In our hands lies the future of this great land. If we all work together, doing our best, there is no limit to what we may achieve.’ I think that is a very fine pledge. It sets out many of the things that our education system—our government and our non-government education system—is attempting to achieve. I think the existence of that school motto and the existence of that pledge are major elements.

Many of the schools we visit have pledges, mottoes and school songs. The exis-
ence of those types of road maps, if you like, for students goes a long way to imparting the sorts of values that we as a community would expect of our young people. They are really guideposts for what we want our children to achieve to build a better Australia. I commend Bill Gates and his staff at Boambee for the great work that they are doing in educating our students, educating young Australians, and imparting the sorts of values that are going to build a better Australia. What makes a school is not necessarily the physical assets, the land and buildings, but the quality of leadership—we have many fine principals in our school system—and the dedication of the staff that actually build good young Australians. The bricks and mortar are important—we do need to have good facilities—but the sorts of goals that we set and the sort of leadership that we give our children are major determinants in the success of our community.

The bills before the House today are part of achieving those goals. We cannot achieve them without funding—funding is a vital part—and this government is certainly committed to that. The bills provide some $31.3 billion over the period 2005-08, which represents an $8 billion increase over the current quadrennium. Basically, this legislation secures the funding for both the government and the non-government sector. It provides a substantial increase and it provides for better education outcomes in this country over the next four years.

We support the state government system. We are retaining the AGSRC method and we are indexing funding upwards. Over the next four years, the Australian government will provide $9.8 billion in supplementary funding to state governments for their schools—this is an increase of $1.9 billion over the current quadrennium—and $7.2 billion of this $9.8 billion will be in general recurrent grants. This represents an increase of some 28 per cent over the current period after adjusting for changes in enrolments.

The bills also provide for additional funding to the Catholic system. We have many fine Catholic schools right around the country. The Catholic system does a great job in supporting choice in education. It does a great job in providing an education framework for the children of those parents who wish to have their children brought up with the Catholic ideals and in the Catholic faith but also for other students—Catholic schools are open to a wide range of students from many beliefs. Certainly I believe the government should be commended for the support that they have given to the Catholic system—an additional $362 million to support Catholic schools under the budget. The funding for Catholic schools is some $12.6 billion in total over the four-year period—a 32 per cent increase over that period after adjusting for enrolments.

I have been visiting a number of Catholic schools in my electorate. I recently went to Mary Help of Christians Primary at Toormina, and they actually convened a youth parliament. They had a mace, a speaker, a leader of the opposition, a prime minister and all the various ministers and shadow ministers. They had a question time, and it was great to see.

Mr Kelvin Thomson interjecting—

Mr HARTSUYKER—They had a treasurer. They had a very civilised parliament, and I must say that there was a great deal of respect shown by all of the members to those across the chamber—in fact more than is shown in this House from time to time! It was really great to see the young people getting involved in the way that parliament works, and the staff at Mary Help of Christians Primary are to be commended for the great job they did in raising the children’s awareness of the role and function of parlia-
ment, getting them involved and getting them enthusiastic. They voted on a range of proposals, which may have related to a certain social event or whatever the case may be but which were things of importance to the young people at the school.

St Augustine’s in Coffs Harbour is a very fine local Catholic school. The principal there, Mike Hogan, does a great job in running that school. He is retiring—it will be his last year this year—and certainly over the years that Mike Hogan has been the principal of St Augustine’s it has grown a reputation for quality education in the non-government sector. He does a great job; he is very innovative. We have other great Catholic schools such as St Francis Xavier Primary School at Woolgoolga. Sister Margaret Bannon, the principal of St Francis Xavier, also does an excellent job.

As well as Catholic schools, the federal government will be supporting independent schools. Independent schools will receive a total of $7.6 billion in general recurrent funding—a 27 per cent increase after adjustments for enrolment growth. With this funding announcement it is important to note that SES scores will be updated so that no school will have their funding reduced. That is a very important point: this government will be retaining funding to these independent schools. Unlike the members opposite, who would be taking funding away from many of our non-government schools, this government will be ensuring that no school has its funding reduced.

There will be special purpose grants for literacy and numeracy, those most important skills. The legislation includes an estimated $2 billion for a new targeted program—the literacy, numeracy and special learning needs program. This represents a major increase on the previous quadrennium. There is no more important thing that we can do than target those children who are at risk of not getting as good an education as they possibly could have and give them the maximum help that we can to give them the best possible outcomes for their future careers in whatever field they choose.

The legislation also includes funding to assist geographically isolated children. I note the member for Kennedy spoke at some length on some of the issues that relate to geographically isolated children. There are probably few things on which I agree with the member for Kennedy, but certainly support for children in isolated locations is a worthy goal—it is deserving of financial support. In the legislation there is also support for newly arrived students from non-English-speaking backgrounds and $110 million to improve learning outcomes of students learning languages other than English.

There are some conditions attached to this funding. They are conditions that strive to achieve some important outcomes. One of the most important outcomes is that of achieving greater national consistency in schooling. It seems unbelievable that in the 21st century when one moves interstate with one’s education the differences are so great it is like moving to another planet. Certainly one of the conditions attached to this funding is that we aim to get consistency in education—things such as a common starting age, common testing standards and common curriculum items. It is vitally important that we have that consistency. We are becoming a very mobile population. People are not staying in the one place to the same extent that they once did. A mobile population demands an education system that allows people to move interstate without being disadvantaged. It goes without saying that something as simple as a common starting age is vital.

The funding also has a condition of better reporting to parents. It is the right of every
parent to receive accurate and appropriate information on the performance of their children. That is a condition that will be of great benefit. It is one that the parents of my electorate approve of. They are very keen to see much more information. Every parent wants to know how their children are going: are they falling between the cracks; are they going okay? Consistency in reporting and better reporting will allow parents to make better judgments on factors influencing their children’s education.

Transparency of school performance is one of the aims of this legislation. Schools certainly should be accountable. They are receiving public funding; they are also receiving fees from parents. We should be able to judge the performance of schools. If we are unable to judge that, we may have a whole range of students who are not receiving the sort of education that we as a community would like. Transparency in the performance of schools is not a threat but a safeguard. It is a safeguard for young people to ensure that they receive an appropriate education no matter what school they go to.

Another condition of the funding is greater autonomy for principals. We believe we have great principals out there. We need to give them the ability to make the sorts of decisions that will give the sorts of education outcomes that we want. It is inappropriate to assign responsibility to a person to manage what is a very large business, if you like—an education business—and not give them the autonomy to make the sorts of decisions required to improve the outcomes on which they are being assessed. The aim of providing greater autonomy to principals can only improve the system and the outcomes. The principals on the ground are those best placed to make staffing and operational decisions in relation to their particular schools.

We are keen to create safer schools. The funding conditions in these bills attempt to provide a safer framework for our young people. The legislation acts to make values part of our core schooling. It also encourages a commitment to physical activity. Childhood obesity is a major issue. The measures that are part of these bills will seek to ensure that our young people are active at school as part of the curriculum. This is something that I think everyone on both sides of this House would agree is a very appropriate action.

I would like to conclude by saying that the goal of choice in education that this government has been pursuing is a very appropriate one, and something that should be available to all parents—to make a choice between very fine government schools and very fine non-government schools; to select the sort of education that those parents believe will give the best outcomes for their children. Both sectors should be supported by government. This government is totally correct in continuing to fund the non-government sector despite the angst that it causes amongst some sectors of the community who seem to say that funding should be taken away from the non-government sector and put into the government sector. The government wants to see a strong non-government sector and a strong government sector. These bills work towards that goal. The Minister for Education, Science and Training should be commended for the work that he has done to secure education outcomes for the children of Australia.

(Time expired)

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (12.05 p.m.)—It is always a pleasure to talk on issues related to education and young people. Only recently I attended two award ceremonies recognising excellence in education and training in my region of north-west Tasmania, including King Island, in the two education districts of Barrington and Arthur. I congratulate Jenny Breen, the District Superin-
tendent of Arthur District, and Carey McIver, the District Superintendent of Barrington District, on the excellent leadership that they offer in their education districts. I congratulate all the winners of the awards of excellence in education, training and administration. I also again pay recognition to the teachers of all our young children throughout Australia and thank them very much for the task that they have taken on and for the job that they do.

The previous speaker, in his presentation on the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004, was talking about choice in education. We hear this in relation to the government’s ideological direction in the so-called provision of choice in lots of areas related to health and education. I would like to remind the previous speaker and members on the other side that choice only has meaning if you really have choice. A great percentage of Australians do not have choice—they do not have the means to choose an alternative to public education—yet we have a totally funded public education system, in that all schools throughout Australia, as far as I know, have public funding, but not all schools throughout Australia that receive public funding are publicly accountable. So not only do the majority of Australians not have choice in education because they do not have the means to have that choice but, where people do exercise that choice and choose independent schools which receive public funding, many of those independent schools are not accountable to the taxpayer as the public schools are. That is another debate that we need to have in this country.

We on this side have a simple philosophy in terms of education: indeed, we should support the teaching and learning of all students in our nation, but where we allocate that funding should be determined by need, wherever that is. That is not the system that exists in our country at the moment. No matter how many times those on the other side try to pretend that the funding system that exists now is fair and equitable, it is not. We know that there are particular schools in this country—and I do not deny that they do a good job, their teachers are as dedicated as any other teachers, as are their administrators, and the parents have aspirations for their children—that receive funding that is disproportionate to their need. No amount of hand-wringer is going to deny that fact. The Labor Party say that we should fund according to need. Therefore, if you adopt that philosophy then you have to determine the criteria that are used to determine need. You have to take all factors into account, not just an overall geographic indicator. An area may have pockets of low economic status, and that will be included in the indicator. I do not believe that is truly a genuine criterion to determine need.

Whilst supporting this legislation in principle, the Labor Party say that 2005 will be a transition time for schools that are receiving public funding to prepare themselves to enter a funding arrangement whereby need will form the basis of the allocation of those public funds. I think the greatest percentage of Australians will accept that very basic principle. That is not to say that those on the other side can turn around and say we are anti private school, anti private education. That is a nonsense and they know it. It is the same when they try to peddle the trashy argument that our very sensible amendments associated with the enabling legislation for the free trade agreement are anti-American. That again is a trashy argument. The average Australian does not fall for that and I do not know why we play those games. Our shadow minister for education and our leader are on
the record as saying that we will fund according to need. 2005 will be a transition period in terms of preparation for that funding model, and from 2006 it will be implemented. We look forward to being able to introduce that very equitable funding arrangement for education.

Part and parcel of the legislation before us is a tutorial credit initiative which was introduced by the Minister for Education, Science and Training on 19 May 2004. In short, it is a system whereby vouchers are paid to parents who have received information that their child did not achieve the year 3 minimum national reading benchmark in 2003. Those parents will receive, according to this scheme, a $700 voucher to purchase additional reading assistance for their child. The initiative, as proposed, will operate in terms 3 and 4 of this year. This came in the wake, of course, of the call by the Leader of the Opposition, Mark Latham, for a complete reading culture to be maintained and developed, in the Read Aloud system. Lo and behold, out popped the tutorial credit initiative. When it was announced, there was not a lot of accompanying rationale or details associated with it. What is associated with it, of course, is a wad of money being thrown around to the states to get on board with this initiative.

Whilst we on this side accept the principles involved with this tutorial program, my state of Tasmania did not, and for good reason. First and foremost, they believe that there are flaws in this program—not surprisingly, as it was such a knee-jerk reaction to the Read Aloud program introduced by Mark Latham. Also in Tasmania, as in other states, there are fairly comprehensive reading and remedial programs already in place. Also, in terms of the initial agreement between the federal minister and the states, this initiative came online before the agreed timetable.

The reasons why Tasmania did not take this initiative on board are numerous. In the main, Tasmania believes there are significant problems with the way such a program could be implemented. I would like to introduce some of these for the consideration of the minister and all those interested in this debate. These problems include, for example, the likely lack of cohesion between the child’s overall learning program and the privately funded tuition, the potential lack of quality control and monitoring of the remedial tuition that is provided, the lack of sustainability of any gains that are likely to be achieved in such a short-term program, the lack of equity of access to providers for rural and isolated students and the lack of accountability for the use of the funding by parents.

There are major technical issues with premature reporting against an estimated benchmark that still includes a wide margin of error. That still exists. This means that some parents will be erroneously informed about their child’s position in relation to the benchmarks because the 2003 benchmarks result has not been finalised. So what are we judging against? The margin of error can be quite considerable.

The real fear is that these are the first steps—and I do not believe this is an exaggeration—towards the privatisation of our public education system. What are we going to have next: voucher systems for numeracy and civics? That is certainly not out of the realm of possibility with this minister’s horizons. The voucher proposal is a denigration of all our schools and the hardworking teachers within them. Those schools know how best to aid those students, know best the learning and personal biography of those students and can implement programs. So if you want to put your money somewhere, Minister, you should put it into the schools instead of into the grandstanding voucher
system that has been introduced, with very little accountability to it.

The Tasmanian government in fact had already implemented several initiatives—and these initiatives are within the system, not without it—specifically directed at students who had already failed to meet benchmarks, initiatives that have proved to be very successful in improving student outcomes. This is evidenced by the significant gains in the proportion of Tasmanian year 3 and 5 students who achieved the benchmarks over the past two years. Was there any consultation related to that from the federal minister? No. But we all know why he introduced the tutorial credit initiative, with all the hand-wringing that went with it.

I, along with hundreds of teachers in my state, also strongly object to the misinformation implying that the parents of students in Tasmanian government schools have not been provided with information about their child’s literacy outcomes. This is blatantly untrue. I do not know what happens anywhere else but that is untrue in Tasmania. As stated at the 2003 MCEETYA meeting, Tasmania has agreed that these individual student reports will be expanded to include an indication of the benchmark level from 2004, which is according to the agreed time line—a time line which was not followed by the federal minister. He had to get it out quicker than the agreed time line because Mark Latham had an initiative out before him and, as we know, they must play catch-up.

Tasmania has consulted widely with parents about this process to ensure that the reporting format is both meaningful and useful to parents. Within the system, the consultation process had been in train for some time. Tasmania intends to proceed with reporting to parents against the benchmarks according to the agreed time frame and will not be bullied into making changes to support the political agenda of Dr Nelson—an agenda which I truly believe is not really in the interests of children. Our public school system is under attack by an ideologically led federal government that continues to denigrate, undermine and underfund government schools in the name of so-called choice and accountability. Here we have a minister more intent on defining what is meant by a functional flagpole than truly funding according to need.

The $700 voucher would provide approximately 21 hours of tutorials. How can a program of such a short time frame run by a person unknown to the students and not linked to the school program be expected to improve the literacy outcomes for the students? The money should go to the schools, where it could be used to enhance their ongoing literacy intervention programs and where it is more likely to assist the child. The voucher system proposed will not improve the learning outcomes for the kids involved unless the program is linked with their school literacy learning. The expectations raised will not be met, I fear. It was a political stunt from the outset, without a scrap of educational rationale. But what is surprising about that?

What I would like to do in the time remaining is to point out what in fact Tasmania has in place to assist the literacy of students who do not meet what are determined to be national benchmarks. The Tasmanian education system has developed a program called 4LAP. That is to provide additional support to identify low-achieving year 4 students. This initiative provides additional resourcing to deliver the following four benefits for the students in year 4 who did not reach the year 3 reading benchmark in 2003: an individual educational plan based on diagnostic assessment of the student’s literacy capabilities; an interview between the student’s teacher, principal and parent or parents to discuss the
program and the student’s progress; a ‘read at home’ kit for each parent, including suggestions for home reading, recommended texts and a library registration form; and a foundational literacy training program for volunteers, which incorporates elements of successful training programs.

A teacher with recognised experience in literacy intervention and professional learning facilitation skills will be employed to assist in the provision of elements 3 and 4 of the 4LAP approach. The primary purpose of the role of the 4LAP facilitator is to facilitate a literacy training program for volunteers working with middle primary students and to develop a read-at-home kit for parents. The 4LAP facilitator will be supervised by a principal project officer for literacy and numeracy. The 4LAP facilitator will liaise with and receive advice from colleagues with recognised expertise in literacy teaching, learning and assessment. These will include the Being Literate and Being Numerate district leaders, Bridges, Spalding, Reading Recovery, First Steps, equity and library personnel. The development of both the read-at-home kit and the literacy training program will be underpinned by the learning, teaching and assessment principles articulated in the Essential Learning Framework No. 1 in Tasmania. The kit and training package will be informed by a thorough understanding of current best practice approaches and resources.

In addition, there will be consultation with the Faculty of Education, TAFE Tasmania and school principals. District support managers will be used to inform the project. The model of intervention of the 4LAP volunteers/tutors will be an individual approach. While the program is aimed at improving literacy, there will be a focus on reading during intensive instruction to enable students to develop strategies that will enable them to access a wide range of texts. The 4LAP facilitator will provide the literacy training program for both the nominated 4LAP volunteers and tutors and the identified literacy coordinator within participating schools. Finally, schools will provide their literacy coordinator appropriate time to coordinate the work of the 4LAP facilitators and record and monitor students’ progress in relation to their individual learning plans.

So that is the heart of the 4LAP program in Tasmania—a program that has come about as a consequence of long experience in dealing with remedial literacy, particularly in relation to reading. That is the type of program where—within the system, within the schools—the biography of the students’ learning is best known, and there is support from other learning institutions and from educational district learning resources. That is where the money that has been put into this so-called Tutorial Credit Initiative should have gone. That is where it should have gone, but we all know why this system came about—it was in reaction to the Read Aloud program of Mark Latham. It was a knee-jerk reaction and, of course, Dr Nelson, with his fistful of dollars, set about intimidating and enticing other state governments to follow this initiative. They need the money, but I think the program could be a lot better.

(Time expired)

Ms PANOPOULOS (Indi) (12.25 p.m.)—The Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 debated today in cognate affirm this government’s commitment to quality education. Funding contained in this package for Australian schools is the biggest commitment ever made to Australian schools: a total of $31.3 billion over the 2005-08 quadrennium. The end result for our nation’s students is that Australian government spending on education is rising significantly: for non-
government schools, by some 27 per cent; for Catholic schools, 32 per cent; and for state schools, 28 per cent. No other government at a federal level has invested so much in our nation’s young people.

Through maintaining the AGSRC indexation formula, the Australian government will increase spending on state government schools by more than $1.9 billion in the current quadrennium, to $9.8 billion. Independent schools will receive $7.6 billion in recurrent funding for this period. Following our joint announcement with the Catholic Education Office in Australia in March this year, that office will be funded under the socioeconomic status model, and Catholic schools will receive $12.6 billion over the 2005-08 period.

These bills cover a diverse range of aspects in the totality of the education debate. They are important measures designed to make our education system stronger and to ensure that our young people gain every opportunity to excel. There are 79 state primary schools and 21 state senior schools in my electorate that will benefit from this measure. Similarly, the strong Catholic school sector in my electorate will benefit through becoming part of the government’s socioeconomic status funding model. Indi’s 19 Catholic schools will see a real boost in recurrent funding through this legislation.

In relation to funding for state and territory schools, the government has made clear its intentions to keep the average government school recurrent cost indexation method. Disappointingly, the state and territory governments were behind this push. Never mind the revenue that state jurisdictions are receiving through increased levels of stamp duty or increased revenue from fines that are now indexed to inflation in Victoria, the states will always run cap in hand to the Australian government asking for more money. It is an interesting but compelling fact that, if the Victorian government lifted their spending on education at the rate that the Australian government has, then schools in my state would be almost $200 million better off. Sadly, such funding is not forthcoming, and my constituents are asking the question of the Victorian Labor government: ‘Where is all the money going?’ At the announcement of the Catholic funding package, Cardinal Pell said:

The extra funding the Government has provided is targeted at the poorest Catholic schools ... It will in particular direct extra support to the small Catholic schools in rural areas that are struggling with the impact of drought, rural decline and isolation.

Two nights ago we heard the member for Jagajaga once again trying to foster the archaic class envy that is synonymous with so many Labor members talking on this issue. So much for the fraudulent rebadging of Labor as ‘New Labor’ under its new leader. Whether it is union control of preselections, tokenism for women or fair funding for all schools, it is the same old Labor Party that is unencumbered by reality and the modern needs of today’s Australia.

If anyone thinks Catholic schools in my area are elite or overfunded, they should read a letter that came my way addressed to the state Liberal Party from a year 5 student at a local Catholic primary school in Wangaratta. It read:

I’m writing a complaint because Catholic schools are not getting enough money.

Our school needs money for new reading books, a new playground, new toilets, new drink taps, new stationary and new classroom seats.

Hardly a cry of elitism from the non-government sector with which the Labor Party seems to have such a problem. In fact, prior to the announcement of funding to the Catholic school sector earlier this year, the
member for Jagajaga described this announcement in the following way:

This is education policy on the run by a rattled Prime Minister. The Howard government’s schools funding policy is unravelling and needs wholesale reform.

Hardly an insight into the needs of Catholic education by the alternative minister in this place.

Providing a good start in life through a decent education is the greatest preparation a nation can give to its young people. This is what underpins the measures contained in these bills. Not only are we talking about a record boost in school funding across all sectors, we are also allowing parents to have a greater knowledge of their child’s academic development through insisting on plain English reports, and assessing the numeracy and literacy development of young students against national benchmarks.

Another facet of this legislation is to ensure greater consistency in education policy from a national perspective. Speaking as a member of an electorate which borders another state, I have encountered numerous examples of misguided bureaucracy gone mad due to interstate regulations creating havoc. Department of Education figures state that 80,000 students move interstate each year. For some constituents of mine, simply travelling five minutes across the border to Albury means a whole new set of arrangements and differing educational standards and requirements. These confusing anomalies need to be addressed. We need the states to come on board and implement a common starting age and uniform testing in such seminal areas as maths, science and English, not to mention civics and citizenship.

School principals require greater self-determination and independence in what goes on in their schools. This includes a greater say in staffing and personnel employed in their schools. Our principals are the people with whom the buck stops when something goes wrong at a particular institution, but we cannot lay claims against them when they are given little power to control the administration and budgetary requirements of their own school.

We have seen the background to the demise of Moreland City College in Coburg. It is perhaps an unfortunate manifestation of the type of behaviour in the administration of some schools that the measures contained in these bills seek to address. Schools that are performing below the expectations of parents need to have such problems addressed. They need to do better for their students and their whole school community. Parents should be able to see for themselves the standards and achievements of the schools to which they are sending their children against national benchmarks.

This legislation requires greater accountability for our schools in ensuring the public release of information such as the destinations of school leavers, staff and student retention rates, student absenteeism rates and other barometers of educational indicators. This legislation also requires schools to give a greater commitment to physical education as part of the challenges posed by the growing childhood obesity problem. A mandated level of at least two hours per week will be entrenched in the curriculum. Hawthorn ruckman, Peter Everitt, recently visited a school in Wodonga in my electorate to participate in a physical activity program with students. When he was asked what he thought of the Labor Party’s proposals to ban junk food advertisements so children could not see them, he said he thought the idea was ‘just crap’. We do not need policy platitudes from the Leader of the Opposition based on Big Brother tactics in the fight against childhood obesity. What is required is the implementation of sensible policy proposals to
attack the symptoms of the problem. I know this bill is a great relief to many teachers and parents.

One other important aspect of this debate is the insistence of the government that, in return for the massive increase in funding that this bill enshrines, each school in Australia have a functioning flagpole. There are some on the other side who deride this measure and think it is a quaint throwback and an appeal to an earlier era of puffed-up patriotism. These are people who are usually found deriding other aspects of Australian symbolism, history, traditions and institutions. However, it does not stop them from being photographed giving out flags to schools or a local RSL branch, especially if they are in a marginal seat.

Perhaps their real hatred of this particular measure stems from the fact that they themselves do not want to see our current flag fly over this nation. Such Labor members should have been with me at the unveiling of a newly installed flagpole at Benalla’s FCJ College last month. Admittedly, it would have been quite unusual to see them there, and I would have been quite surprised if any of them had shown up, but it would have been very enlightening for some of them to have been there. The request for a flag came out of an initiative from a number of students who wanted to fly the flag at their school. When they wrote to me and I in turn wrote to the minister, I was pleased to tell them, ‘Yes, the Australian government will help with the cost of installing a flagpole.’ I was pleased to be able to present the flag at a morning assembly. Similarly, the Wodonga Catholic College SRC decided, on their own initiative, that they wanted to fly the flag and invited me to present a flag to them in July last year.

These students and these schools have shown that we need not be reticent about proclaiming who we are and what we stand for. They have shown that patriotism is not a dirty word, and I commend them for it. Perhaps they may have some sobering lessons for the deriding baby boomers on the other side who find it so difficult to come to terms with the many symbols and institutions that are uniquely Australian.

As part of the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004, I would like to make mention of the Tutorial Credit Initiative for students who have not met the year 3 reading benchmark. One concerned parent came to my office recently seeking information on this initiative, and was very pleased to be informed of the $700 tutorial reading credit for individual tuition assistance for their child, outside of school hours. This will benefit some 24,000 children nationwide, and is measured against the national benchmark standards which give further weight to enabling standards to be uniform across the country. Parents have every right to be informed of their child’s progress.

The notion of choice should be a right of parents in deciding where to send their children to school, and that very right is at the heart of this debate. The government also acknowledges that every Australian student is entitled to and receives a level of government money to support their education. This huge boost in funding for all sectors of education, whether they are non-government, government or Catholic, contained in these measures displays the commitment of this government to ensuring quality education. The important areas of national consistency and uniformity are certainly a step forward, as are the measures on civics and civic education. I commend the bills to the House. I can only hope that state Labor governments around the nation similarly increase their funding and invest in the future of all Australian children.
Mrs HULL (Riverina) (12.37 p.m.)—Today I rise in the House to speak on the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and cognate legislation and to put forth my concerns with the issues and debates taking place not only in my community but certainly across my electorate and across Australia that I think have been distorted beyond belief. Just a few weeks ago I had cause to have great concern over a major front page article in my local paper. Graphically displayed on that front page was a silhouette of children with the words ‘Figures prove public schools are losing out financially—the great divide’. Within that article was the amount of federal funding for students both at a public school and at a private school, which totally distorted the debate and the argument. That article also contained comment from the teachers association. That article prompted me to try to get the message across to the community that this debate can be distorted in any which way one wants. It is almost like the Crocodile Dundee story: ‘You show me your knife and I’ll show you what a knife is.’ It is about doing things with figures. Anyone can make figures appear to tell the story they wish them to tell; it does not do to let a little bit of truth get in the way. It would be so good if we could just concentrate on the issue of education. Signage all around my electorate saying ‘the issue is public education’ is quite discriminatory. This is a difficult story to tell. I think the issue is education per se—education and equity of education for all Australian children, not that only public education should be funded by the Commonwealth.

I am an enormous supporter of the public education system. I have sometimes found myself in the very unenviable position of coming into this House and defending to past ministers the rights of the public education system—defending our right to ensure the retention of funding in the public school system when a student chooses to leave a public school to go into a non-government school. I have argued that that funding should stay with the public education system. As I have indicated in the past, taking one desk out of a classroom or removing one arm from a teacher does not mean that less heating or fewer teaching aids are needed. Resources of the same amount are needed to teach 26 children as are needed to teach 27. So I have found myself coming in here and arguing strenuously for the ability of the public school system to retain funding. To its credit, this government retained such funding in the public school system and put it into programs such as intensive science, professional teacher development and redevelopment—and I was very proud of that.

I was a public school student all my schooling life; my children have been public school students and my grandchildren are public school students. So I have a strong affinity with public schools and particularly with those in my electorate for disadvantaged students that battle the odds and have the difficulty of not being able to refuse students who take an enormous amount of time, effort and resources out of their system. I certainly have great sympathy for them.

However, having said that, I cannot condone the campaign being conducted in my electorate by the teachers association. It is built on untruth, bias and pure propaganda. As I have said, this campaign has taken away from the issue of education per se for all Australian children. It is apparent that these proponents would deny a reasonable share of government funding to children who attend a private school. I say ‘reasonable’ because clearly it is not equitable when currently the proportion of total taxpayers’ funds that go into public education for 2.25 million students is $19.9 billion, or about $20 billion,
against 1.04 million students in Catholic and independent schools receiving $6.2 billion or thereabouts.

Surely funding for the education of our children is an equity issue. We provide equity in health; we provide equity with the same Medicare rebate for children regardless of their parents' income status. The current coalition government strongly believes that every parent, having paid their taxes, deserves some level of public assistance to support the education of their child regardless of the school that child attends. I think that is what is right in government policy.

I am a very strong supporter, as I said, of public education, but it is my belief that the debate on funding for public schools and for private schools misses the point. The point is that there needs to be a minimum standard for all schools, regardless of whether they are public or private, and there has to be a minimum benchmark. I have witnessed conditions and the availability of resources at private schools in my electorate that simply would not be acceptable in a government school. I think there are more wealthy families with children accessing public schools and getting full taxpayer support for doing so than there are wealthy families with children in private schools. Many families in my electorate have children in non-government schools and they work very hard to achieve that. They might send their children to these schools because they want a Catholic systemic education or an Anglican education for them.

One thing we need to be cautious about is allowing a school to start up in areas where it appears there is sufficient choice in education. It is important that we do not have numerous schools starting up with one, two, five or 10 students ultimately building to have a different curriculum when there is already significant choice. That certainly would diminish the dollars available for education on the whole.

It is important that we recognise that, if there a suitable amount of choice covering religious choice and independent choice in communities, we should be very cautious about funding the start-up of other schools, which will see a draining away of resources. I would like to see my schools, regardless of whether they provide public or private education, get up to a benchmark. We should be able to say: school A and school B should have covered playgrounds; they should have an ability to have X, Y, Z resources available to them; every school should be able to have a music hall or a covered auditorium where they can hold assemblies; every school should have an ability to have so many electives; and, every school should have the ability to have sporting facilities and training facilities to ensure that our children are kept healthy and physically active whilst they are at school. If not, schools have to decide that, because they do not have sporting facilities, they will choose to sit their students in front of computers or in other areas rather than taking them out and getting healthy physical activity and sport happening in their lives.

I think that there should be a benchmark. We should be saying: look, regardless of whether you are public or private, we are going to get every school up to a minimum benchmark. We are going to have an acceptable form of education. After that we will then start looking at how the funding moves in. I tell you something now: an enormous number of schools in my electorate can do with an enormous amount of funding to get them competitive and to a situation where they are able to say to their families that they really are providing the best form of education.

I want to see accountability in schools. I want to see accountability in both public and
private schools so parents know how their children are performing on a national and state average. I want to see a recognition of some of the challenges and obstacles that some schools in my electorate face in complying with that request. They might have the very best of teaching skills but their capital infrastructure is so poor that the children’s minds just cannot be kept on the issue at hand, simply because they are trying to learn in unacceptable conditions. Those are things that I would like to see addressed—not the issue that we find in this House day in, day out about whether or not a HECS fee is charged on something or whether or not the Commonwealth government favours non-government education over government education. That is not what the debate is about. The debate is about the entitlement of all Australian children.

Just the other day I was reading the APC Review of May 2004. That is the national publication of the Australian Parents Council Inc., which is always a very informative booklet. If you look at what they have said you see that they put down the facts in answering the question: who pays for schooling? The APC publication states:

If your child goes to a government school
10% of the funding for his/her schooling, on average, is provided by the Commonwealth Government;
90% is provided by State/Territory Governments.

If your child goes to a non-government school
40% of the funding for his/her schooling, on average, is provided by the Commonwealth government;
17% is provided by State/Territory Governments; and
43% is provided by private sources.

That about tells the story, but that is not taking away from the fact that an extraordinary amount of resources are provided by parents and citizens in public education as well. I know the amount of resources that I provided to our public education system when my children were growing up and I know the amount of resources that my daughter-in-law and my son provide to the public school system for their two sons. It is absolutely astronomical. My daughter-in-law is basically at that school full time—day in, day out—providing facilities and resources to that school that they may not be able to afford to provide for the children if not for parent-teacher associations and dedication and devotion. I think all teachers, regardless of whether they are in a non-government school or a government school, are devoted to what they are trying to achieve for their students. Some are better than others. There has to be give and take.

In every aspect of life there are some people who are better at what they do than others. In the business that my family has been in for over 25 years, the employees all get the same training; they all have the same opportunities. But there are different tradesmen with different levels of skills. Some are better at doing their job than others. In the aftermath of a motor vehicle accident, some tradesmen will have a far different result than others. You are always going to get disparity in the way in which people teach or in the way in which people carry out a chosen task. There is disparity in this House in the way in which people represent their constituency. Some are excellent representatives for their constituencies, and others are purely not up to the job. But they are still in the position. Let us not feel threatened by accountability. Let us know that we are in there with our heart and soul doing the best possible job for the students we are teaching or in the role we are playing.

That leads me to the issue of TAFE fees, which is not directly covered in this legislation, but I think it is relevant. In following on from government schools or non-government
schools there have to be choices for students. I have long been critical of the amount of debate that takes place in this House on the issue of HECS fees and the lack of debate that takes place in this House for the 70 per cent of students—whether they be from government or non-government schools—who do not attend a university. A lack of debate takes place on their futures, on ensuring that, whether or not our children decide to attend tertiary education, they are made to feel worth while.

If somebody wants to undertake a trade course, they should be made to feel worth while and to feel that it is an honourable profession—they will be out there providing employment opportunities for people in years to come—rather than being made to feel that they are failures because they cannot undertake university studies. That is something that the minister, Brendan Nelson, made clear right from the beginning when he took over this portfolio. It was so refreshing to hear this statement. We have become so obsessed with university education that we have forgotten 70 per cent of Australian children. We have forgotten children who deserve better than being made to feel that if they have not accessed a university degree then they are worthless and the profession that they have chosen to operate in is less than worth while.

The other day I said to Australian Business, who do some fantastic surveys: ‘Wouldn’t it be great if you surveyed businesses, particularly longstanding businesses, and asked how many business owners who have been employing people for, say, 25 or 30 years—maybe longer or less—have a degree? How many of them actually finished their schooling?’ It would be very interesting to find that the majority of proprietor-owners of small to medium enterprise businesses who commenced those businesses maybe never even finished an education. Yet they are employing over 50 per cent of the Australian people.

It would be very interesting to find this out, because then we may solve the issue of the critical shortage of tradesmen, particularly in rural and regional Australia, and solve the throwaway issue. You now throw away your washing machine because you cannot get a washing machine mechanic to come and fix it. You have difficulty getting a plumber. You cannot get a builder, you cannot get electrical engineers and you cannot get an electrician because nobody is training in anything. Do you know why nobody is training anybody? It is because they are disillusioned. They are disillusioned despite the fact that they have great incentives from the federal government in New Apprenticeships and the funding of New Apprenticeships.

I was pretty excited to see the new apprenticeships in my electorate of Riverina and to see the changes since 1995 in female new apprentices. In 1995, I had 150; in 2003, I had 1,060—a 607 per cent increase. That is fantastic. In 1995, before this government took office, there were 930 male apprentices. Right now, there are 2,800. The movement is just sensational. We have a whole breakdown of the qualification levels of certificates I, II, III et cetera.

I remind the House that I am a small business person. I am still involved. My son owns and runs our family business. Just recently, there was a comment in an article—and I might add that my son is in this article and has commented himself, but that is not my interest—about the rise in TAFE fees, which is what I am interested in. It said:

Those undertaking graduate diploma courses will see their annual TAFE administration fee go up to $1,650 from $710. Graduate certificate courses, including those required for trades apprenticeships, will increase from $260 to $850. Students and teachers have strongly opposed the fee hikes, which New South Wales Teachers Federation
President Maree O’Halloran at the time said would stop some students from getting an education. But Minister Refshauge—the state minister, Andrew Refshauge—has defended that rise, saying TAFE fees in New South Wales were probably lower than those in other states and are being brought into line.

What can I say? On the one hand, we have the ability for students to progress along a pathway with incentives from the federal government, with equal opportunities for children, whether they are in a government or non-government school, when you look at funding in its entirety. We then move them on and we do not get caught up just in HECS fees. We say, ‘No, let’s have a look; we’re going to provide incentives in apprenticeship money.’ That is a significant amount of money. There is almost $7 million going into New Apprenticeships in my electorate of Riverina. These are incentives that are designed to encourage our kids to feel that they have a worthwhile career and that in the years to come they are likely to be employing people and to encourage them to feel proud and worthy and that they had an education—and that, whether it was in government education or a non-government education, it was an equitable one.

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Minister for Education, Science and Training) (12.57 p.m.)—I thank all the members who made a contribution to the debate on the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Bill 2004 and the associated bill. Unfortunately some of it, particularly from the other side, carried much more rhetoric and antipathy generally to the non-government sector than would be informed by any examination of the facts. Firstly, the government’s vision of education in this country is that every human being—in particular, every young person—should be able to find and achieve their potential. The government’s vision is also to recognise that, in 2004—as, in this century, we face horizons which are quite different from those of the last century and as we as a nation go through a very difficult transformation from agrarian and land- and labour-intensive industries that made Australia what it is—as a relatively small country the standard of living and the economic and cultural legacy that we leave the next generation is going to be determined entirely by our ability to learn how to learn and to develop from ideas and technologies that we apply as best we can in our own country to both sustaining traditional industries and supporting new and emerging ones.

This legislation gives effect to the government’s four-year commitment to schools throughout Australia. It does two things. The first is that it delivers much needed resources to Australian schools, both government and non-government, throughout Australia. But secondly, and equally important, it sets conditions into that funding which will drive national consistency in Australia in standards, starting ages, teacher professional training, reporting information to parents, safety in schools and also a values based framework in school education.

When I first started in this portfolio, the Australian Education Union put to me in rather strident terms their concerns about the funding of schools. I pointed out to the union something I also point out to the parliament: if you look at where parents are choosing to send their children in Australia, all of the growth in non-government schools is at the low-fee end—in Catholic systemic, Christian, Adventist, Lutheran and Anglican schools, in Aboriginal community schools, in Islamic community schools and in a whole range of other low-fee, non-government schools. In fact, in the four years to 2000, there was a four per cent contraction in the high-fee end of the non-government school
sector and a 14 per cent growth in the low-fee end.

The facts are, firstly, that there are 2.2 million children in Australian government state schools. There are 1.04 million—in other words, almost 1.1 million—in Catholic and independent schools throughout Australia. The 2.2 million students in government state schools last year received $20 billion to support their education: $2½ billion from this government and $17½ billion from the state governments, which are responsible for managing, owning, administering and primarily funding their state schools. The 1.1 million students in Catholic and independent schools did not receive half that money—they did not receive $10 billion for their education, nor did they receive $9 billion or $8 billion; they received $6.2 billion for their education, and parents paid $4 billion in fees to support the education of those 1.1 million children.

Parents are looking for many things in schools. They are looking for schools which transfer enthusiasm for learning how to learn, as well as skills and knowledge, to their children, but they are also interested in discipline, they are concerned about the identity or the meaning that the school will bring to the life of their children and they are also concerned about values which they believe ought to be explicitly taught at every level of the school.

What is being perpetrated at the moment in Australia are half-truths parading as full truths and lies by omission of key information. I would like to work through some of those as I sum up this piece of legislation. On 3 March 2004, the Canberra Times, in its editorial on the funding of schools, said:

… those who want more resources for government schools act as though state-government funding were not the basic source of government-school funds or that the Commonwealth is systematically starving their sector. The suitability of the Commonwealth as whipping boy is also assisted … by the fact that the growth of state-government funding for schools has not matched the growth of Commonwealth assistance, although the states have been enjoying a revenue bonanza in recent times. The states, in short, are diverting money which ought to go into health and education into other projects, hopeful that the public will blame the Commonwealth for lower standards or outcomes if they perceive it.

It also said:

No non-government-school student is subsidised by the state to anything like the extent that government-school students are.

The facts in relation to those two points are, firstly, that the states that are primarily responsible for funding state schools year after year are increasing the funding to those schools at a rate well below the cost of opening and running schools. Last year when I met with all of the state and territory ministers I proposed that every government—every state and territory government and this government—commit every year to at least an inflation increase in school funding. Not one state government would commit to a minimum consumer price index indexation for their schools, yet this government increases its funding to government state schools, not according to the inflation rate, not according to cabinet sitting around deciding, ‘Well, how much are we going to give government schools this year?; the indexation for the schools is determined on the basis of the cost of actually running schools.

This year, for example, this government has increased funding to state schools around Australia by 5.4 per cent. Over the last eight years, this government has increased funding to state schools by 68 per cent, when enrolments in state schools have increased only 1.6 per cent. If you look at South Australia, this year this government increased its funding to state schools there by 5.9 per cent. The South Australian government increased its
funding by only 1.4 per cent. Had it matched the Commonwealth, another $74 million would have been available to fund state schools in the state of South Australia this year. Last year, right around Australia, had the states actually matched the level of indexation delivered by this government to state schools, there would have been another $669 million available last year alone for state schools. In fact, of the money that goes into state schools from state governments, which as I said was $17½ billion last year, almost half came from the federal government in the first place.

The second point that needs to be made is on this very important issue about whether students in public schools get less money than students in Catholic and independent schools. In 1962, the Catholic Bishop of Goulburn was instructed to improve and repair the toilets in local Catholic schools. The Catholic Church did not have the money to do the repairs, so the Catholic schools in Goulburn were closed for a week and the Catholic students were sent to local state schools. That began what is now 40 years of governments, both federal and state, providing financial assistance to the parents of students in Catholic and independent schools. Every single child in this country whose parent has chosen to send them to a Catholic or independent school receives less public money for their education than if they attended a local state school. The kids from the poorest families get 30 per cent less; the kids from the wealthiest families get 87 per cent less. They all get something but they all get less.

The teachers unions are distributing material throughout Australia which is seeking to falsely lead Australians to believe that children in independent schools are getting more money than they would if they went to a state school. In fact, there is an advertisement on television which has on one side of the screen Scotch College in Melbourne and on the other side Glen Waverley Secondary College. Both educate just over 1,800 Victorian students, Australian citizens. The union ad invites the viewer to the conclusion that Scotch College is receiving $3 million in public funding whereas Glen Waverley Secondary College, the high school, is receiving only $1.4 million. What the unions conveniently forget to put in the ad is what the state government contributes to each school. When the state government contribution is added, the total for Scotch College goes to $3½ million and the total for Glen Waverley Secondary College goes to $20 million.

The problems with state schools are further compounded by the fact that more than a quarter of the money allocated to state school children is tied up in crippling education bureaucracies, whereas in Catholic and independent schools it largely goes directly to the school. The teachers unions are distributing material throughout Queensland, for example, which says:

**Seeing through political tricks**

Federal Coalition politicians are trying to combine State and Commonwealth funding ...

Of course state and Commonwealth funding needs to be combined if we want to understand the full story of funding for schools. In other words, if the unions are accusing the government of tricks by combining state and federal funding, they are also accusing the Catholic Church in Australia. His Eminence Cardinal George Pell said on 29 February this year:

The bulk of government funding for Catholic schools comes from the Federal government, although state governments also make a significant contribution. For government schools the opposite is the case, with the bulk of funding coming from state governments. Recognising the importance of parental choice in education means that we all need to work for the best possible government and non-government schools ...
In other words, the Catholic Church has worked it out, and I think the average Australian is smart enough to know that state governments basically fund and look after state schools. In fact, the Catholic Education Commission in the state of New South Wales, as a consequence of some of the things that we have heard from the other side in this debate, has now found it necessary to distribute brochures to every Catholic family which set out the facts in relation to the funding of Catholic schools. It points out that there are two sources of government funding for schools—one from the federal government and the other from the state government, which they describe as the larger source.

The teachers union that is distributing material has some very interesting views. At the moment there is some controversy in Sydney, for example, about a performance that is being conducted at the rock eisteddfod where students are presenting a particular and extremely biased view of the efforts of the coalition of the willing to unseat Saddam Hussein, who killed, on average, 69,000 people a year for 15 years. In fact, when I recently addressed the New South Wales Teachers Federation, one of its delegates said to me and to the audience that they were proud of their political correctness. I was told that the three R’s today are ‘refugees, republic and reconciliation’. Whilst the average Australian would think that those are not unimportant issues, the average Australian parent still believes that reading, writing, arithmetic and learning how to learn are the fundamentals of education.

The teachers union that is distributing this material and funding the misleading advertisement on television has some very interesting policies. In fact, one of the policies of the Australian Education Union is on heterosexism, which apparently ‘describes the pervasive assumption of heterosexuality which is common to language, the law and other institutions in Australian society, for example, the education system’. They say:

Heterosexist assumptions may be fueled by homophobia or by a lack of knowledge.

The assumption that heterosexual sex and relationships are “natural” or “normal” and practiced by all members of the community leads to legal and social invisibility for many GLBT people.

GLBT is short for ‘gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender’. Another policy of the teachers union is that they reject any form of assessment which is used to construct ranking of students or ability groupings. They reject any assessment which is used for program administration, the measurement of educational output, efficiency or productivity or to allocate funds or measure the value of programs—and on it goes.

This legislation, as I said earlier, is groundbreaking in that what the government is determined to do is to drive national standards. This legislation will require that by 2010 there will be a common starting age in Australia. Eighty-four thousand school-age kids moved interstate last year, and their parents could be forgiven for thinking that educationally they had moved to a different country. We will also be requiring that there be common tests by 2007 in reading and writing, science, information communication technology, and civics and democracy. It will also be a condition that principals have a say over who teaches in the school. Imagine running a school—this is what happens in many state schools throughout Australia—where the education politburo sends you 10 teachers and says, ‘They’re all terrific.’ I bet in many schools the principal would say, ‘There are at least two I wouldn’t have teaching my own kids.’

The government will also demand that all schools—Catholic, independent and government—will report to parents the results of
national benchmark tests in years 3, 5 and 7 in literacy and numeracy. We want to make sure that teacher qualifications and the ongoing professional training of teachers is also publicised at the school level. We want to know how much money is being spent on our teachers for their ongoing training. We also want to know about teacher retention rates. One state minister asked at the meeting of ministers what a teacher turning up at school had to do with the education of children. That is the crippling ideological nonsense with which I have to deal. We are also requiring publication of teacher and student attendance; the average year 9 and 10 results delivered by the school; the average year 12 results; and what proportion of students went from the school to apprenticeships, to training, to jobs and to university.

It is also important that we start to get plain language reports about how our kids are going. I have received thousands of reports from parents across Australia that are absolutely meaningless, written in politically correct jargon that means nothing to any parent. Most particularly Aboriginal parents are concerned that, to their great grief and consternation, their kids get to early secondary school and are barely literate, yet they have had meaningless reports throughout primary school. What does it mean to get a report that says your child is almost achieving or is achieving? What does it mean to get a report that ticks a box that says ‘Competent: usually, sometimes or not yet’? The government is putting into this legislation the requirement that schools will deliver reports that are timely, presented early in the year, at least twice a year, and that are written in plain language.

We want to make sure that students are ranked in quartiles. If my son is in the bottom 25 per cent of the class, somebody has got to be there, but I want to know about it, because if he is there it is likely he has got a problem and I have a right as a parent to know something about that. Before the government hands over $31½ billion of taxpayers’ hard-earned money for school education in the next four years, we are determined that these conditions will be met and that there will also be a safe schools framework delivered and implemented in every school and a national values framework in trustworthiness, responsibility, inclusion, care, tolerance and understanding, and that all of those things are explicitly taught in all schools, whether they are Catholic, independent or government schools.

The other thing that is extremely important which has not been done relates to the proposal of the teacher unions that there be a High Court challenge on the funding of religious schools. This debate, one would have thought, was resolved by the High Court in 1979 and in 1980. There is deep and growing fear in Australia, not only because the Labor Party has targeted 127 schools to have their money cut but also that there is a threat again to the funding of Catholic, Jewish, Anglican, Christian and a whole range of religious schools. I implore the Leader of the Opposition and I implore the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who have said nothing about this, to join with the government and rule out any support at all for a High Court challenge on this.

The other thing is that, if the Labor Party wants to cut schools on the basis of their resources, what is it going to do about the Hurlstone Park Agricultural College in Sydney, with 220 acres of land worth $125 million? What about The Gap State High School in Brisbane, which has a state-of-the-art climbing wall that would be half the size of this parliament? What does the Labor Party intend to do about Centenary State High School, which has got state-of-the-art magnificent performing arts facilities, all of which they deserve? By contrast, 30 per cent
of independent schools have not even got a library, yet the Labor Party wants to cut their funding. This legislation will drive standards and quality in education and it is time the Labor Party presented consistent policy in relation to schools. *(Time expired)*

Question put:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

The House divided. *[1.22 p.m.]*

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr Barresi)

Ayes............ 80

Noes............ 60

Majority........ 20

AYES

Abbott, A.J.
Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E.
Baldwin, R.C.
Billson, B.F.
Bishop, J.I.
Cadman, A.G.
Causley, I.R.
Cibbo, S.M.
Costello, P.H.
Draper, P.
Elsom, K.S.
Farmer, P.F.
Gallus, C.A.
Gash, J.
Haase, B.W.
Hartseyker, L.
Hockey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A.
Jull, D.F.
Kelly, D.M.
Kemp, D.A.
Ley, S.P.
Lloyd, J.E.
May, M.A.
McGauran, P.J.
Nairn, G. R.
Panopoulos, S.
Prosser, G.D.
Randall, D.J.
Schultz, A.
Secker, P.D.
Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J.
Thompson, C.P.
Tollner, D.W.
Tuckey, C.W.
Vale, D.S.
Washer, M.J.
Windsor, A.H.C.

NOES

Adams, D.G.H.
Beazley, K.C.
Brett, L.J.
Byrne, A.M.
Cox, D.A.
Crosio, J.A. *
Ellis, A.L.
Evans, M.J.
Ferguson, M.J.
George, J.
Gillard, J.E.
Griffin, A.P.
Hatton, M.J.
Irwin, J.
Jenkins, H.A.
King, C.F.
Livermore, K.F.
McClelland, R.B.
McLeay, L.B.
Melham, D.
Murphy, J. P.
O’Connor, B.P.
Organ, M.
Quick, H.V. *
Roxon, N.L.
Sciaccia, C.A.
Sidebottom, P.S.
Swan, W.M.
Thomson, K.J.
Wilkie, K.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Original question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.
Third Reading

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Minister for Education, Science and Training) (1.28 p.m.)—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

STATES GRANTS (PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ASSISTANCE) LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2004

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 August, on motion by Dr Nelson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Minister for Education, Science and Training) (1.30 p.m.)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

There are a few other remarks I would like to make on school funding. The performance of schools is something that is extremely important to Australian families. As I said in relation to the legislation earlier, the government is determined that information will be published at a school level on the literacy and numeracy performance of the school; teacher retention and attendance; teacher professional development and investment in teacher training; student attendance; median year 9, year 10 and year 12 results; and career leaver destinations for the school. That information can be published in a number of ways, such as on a web site, in a newsletter, on signage inside or outside the school, or by advertising in local newspapers.

It is interesting that there is a culture of resistance to schools actually publishing information. I had the experience of attending a primary school several months ago where the principal said that it would be wrong to publish information about the school’s performance. In fact, the principal told me that were the community to know how poorly the school was performing it would be closed down within a year. She further added that the task of the school was to provide hope to students. I said to that principal—whose school, by the way, I found to be a very good school—that we need to equip our children with more than hope as they move from primary to secondary school and that, if the school is performing so badly, once discovering this is the case parents would presumably put pressure on the relevant state government, and also the federal government, to find out exactly why this is occurring and what could or should be done about it.

The single most important determinant of educational outcomes in schools is the quality of teaching. The Australian Council for Educational Research, which has done an enormous amount of research on this, has found the impact of teaching accounts for a 59 per cent variation both within and between schools. Dr Ken Rowe, who is the chief researcher in this field, said that everybody is talking about social injustice and resources but that the real social injustice is being taught by an incompetent teacher. The real challenge we have in school education is how to raise the respect this country has for teaching as a profession and how governments support that with serious resources in professional learning and quality assurance for teachers. With regard to that, the government has announced and funded the establishment of the first National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership, which will be based at the Australian National University. It will be run by the pro-
fession for the profession and will play the critically important role of driving national consistency in setting standards for leaders in schools—that is, principals—and also for quality teaching, ensuring that that is developed nationally. If you move from Hobart to Bunbury or Brisbane, you need to be confident that the quality of teaching that your child is going to have is broadly consistent.

The other point that needs to be made in this debate—and this will not be surprising, given the things we have heard from the opposition—is that the Labor Party has an agenda, which it has set out in part, to cut the funding to a number of non-government schools. The deputy leader of the Labor Party answered a question on 26 March this year at the William Carey Christian School in Sydney. She was asked by the reporter, ‘In what way is this particular school not well resourced?’ and she said:

Well, as I was just mentioning, the number one issue is fees. There’s a massive difference between the level of fees paid by parents at this school compared to the fees paid at the King’s school.

The reporter then asked whether it was just a handful of schools that would be cut according to their fees. Let us be clear about this. The higher the fees you pay as a parent—the greater the sacrifice you make as a parent—the less assistance you will actually get from a Labor government. That is great logic! In other words, it is a tax on sacrifice. It also ignores the fact that within non-government schools are parents who have made enormous sacrifices to get their kids to those schools. There are parents who have not just two but three and sometimes four jobs between them. They live in very modest circumstances, never have a holiday, drive a very old car and go without the little luxuries of life to send their kids to a Catholic or independent school. And the Labor Party says you should not do that. The Labor Party says, ‘The more you pay for that, the less support a Labor government is going to give you.’

How do you think a school might respond if the Labor Party said, ‘We’re going to cut the public money you get, on the basis of the fees you charge’? Do you not think that the school might say, ‘Let’s reduce the fees so we can get more public money’? What kind of nonsense is that? On 26 March, when asked again, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said:

It’s more than a handful because once you go into Melbourne as well as Sydney, there’s many …

The following day the *Australian Financial Review* listed a number of the schools that apparently were to be targeted by Labor, and one of them is Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School in Western Australia. Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School charges $9,200 for year 12, so it is a reasonable assumption to think that if you charge more than that your school will have its funding cut. Let us have a look. There are at least 127 schools, which educate 123,000 Australian children, that will have their funding cut under a Labor government. That is what we have been told. The King’s School, in particular, has been targeted. That ignores the fact that every child at the King’s School is getting about one-quarter of the public funding they would get if they went to the local state school.

If you have a look at Melbourne, what do you find? If you look at the schools that charge more than $9,200, one of them—as I pointed out in this House in the last sitting—is Mount Scopus Memorial College. Firstly, in Caulfield South, it charges nearly $15,000. Mount Scopus Memorial College Gandel Besen House in St Kilda East is one of these schools—in fact, Mount Scopus Memorial College charges higher fees than the King’s School does. But the member for Melbourne Ports has been to the school and has said in this House that their funding is not going to
be cut. He has been told by the frontbench that they are not going to be cut. Now somebody is lying to somebody here; somebody is being misled here.

We know that the Labor Party hate you sending your child to a Catholic or independent school. They have targeted the King’s School and at least another 126 schools. I made the point, logically, that funding for the Mount Scopus Gandel Besen House would be cut. Yet the member for Melbourne Ports has gone there and said, ‘No, your funding is not going to be cut.’ So how do we work that out? Then I notice the member for Newcastle has been to Newcastle Grammar and said their funding is not going to be cut. If every one of the 59 former category 1 schools received not one dollar to support their education, you would deliver $45 per student per year in the government sector. If it all went to the rest of the non-government sector, you would deliver $93 per child per year.

The Labor Party says this is also about resources. If this is all about resources, what is the Labor Party going to do with some of the government schools that are very well resourced? There needs to be a lot more rational thought given by the Labor Party to the funding of independent and Catholic schools. It needs to also never be forgotten that parents are making enormous sacrifices. By the way, 20 per cent of parents who earn less than $28,000 a year are sending their children to non-government schools. Again, in its inconsistency, the Labor Party has said that it is going to change the system. Parents throughout Australia who have budgeted and made sacrifices to send their children to schools for six, and sometimes 12, years have already worked that into their budget—some of them have taken second mortgages.

The Labor Party are totally opposed to the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 but they are happy to vote for it, apparently—work that out. Then they are going to change it all in 2005 for 2006. So if you are a shop assistant and your husband is a policeman and you decided to send your child to the Bega Valley Christian School or you have decided to go to Mount Scopus and your child is in year 3, what are you going to do when they get to year 5? You would be hoping and praying that there is no change of government shortly. Australian parents deserve and demand that the Labor Party set out in detail now what their policy will be in relation to school funding, and it needs to be done well in advance of the election.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION (TARGETED ASSISTANCE) AMENDMENT BILL 2004

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 23 June, on motion by Dr Nelson:

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (1.41 p.m.)—The Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2004 sets up the funding framework for the government’s supplementary measures specifically targeted at Indigenous students. It amends the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000 to provide the next four years of funding starting from January 2005.

Debates relating to education always arouse strong feelings, particularly on this side of the House. All of us in the Labor Party have a strong understanding of and commitment to the fundamental importance of education in enhancing the life prospects of individuals and in creating a fair and progressive society. Nowhere is the role of education more critical than in improving the
lives of Indigenous Australians. We are all aware that on every measure of quality of life, Indigenous Australians fall far behind the rest of the population. Whether we are looking at life expectancy, health, rates of employment, access to services, income levels or housing standards, Indigenous Australians are worse off than other groups in our community are.

When it comes to overcoming the widespread and historical disadvantage of Indigenous Australians, there is little argument that education is the key. It is education that holds the promise of narrowing the gap between the opportunities that we in the general population enjoy and the poor quality of life that many Indigenous people now experience. That is why today’s debate is so important. We would all agree that we have a long way to go in this country before we can say that Indigenous Australians are getting the educational opportunities and achieving the educational outcomes that they need and deserve. As someone who represents a significant Murri community within my electorate, I am very well aware of the gap that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians when it comes to educational attainment across a whole range of measures, whether you consider literacy and numeracy standards, retention rates or attendance levels.

My observations as I move around the Central Queensland community and talk to representatives of schools and the Murri community are confirmed by the official statistics. Since 2001, the government has been reporting annually to parliament about the outcomes in Indigenous education. The latest report covering the year of 2002 shows that while there have been improvements, at least in terms of the reported benchmarks, Indigenous students are still performing far below the results achieved by non-Indigenous students. Clearly, the challenge for all of us is to do better on behalf of those Indigenous students, who are relying on us to meet their educational needs. For example, the report from 2002 shows that the 80.2 per cent of Indigenous students in year 3 achieved the national numeracy benchmark in 2001 compared to 93.9 per cent of their non-Indigenous classmates. For the national year 3 reading benchmark, the 2001 figures showed that 72 per cent of Indigenous students achieved that compared to 90 per cent of non-Indigenous students.

The gap worsens for each of the year 5 benchmarks. For example, 66.9 per cent of Indigenous students are achieving the national year 5 reading benchmark, compared to 89.8 per cent of non-Indigenous students. It is a similar story when it comes to retention rates. In 2002, only 38 per cent of Indigenous students stayed on to complete year 12, compared to 76.3 per cent of non-Indigenous students. While those enormous gaps exist there remains a huge challenge to be taken up by all governments.

There has been no shortage of rhetoric and, I am sure, very well intentioned pledges made over the years to make Indigenous education a priority in the hope of reducing the inequality of access and outcomes that have held Indigenous students back for generations. In 1989 all governments in Australia signed up to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. The central goal of that policy is to achieve broad equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes in all forms of education. Since that time, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy has guided the development of programs delivering supplementary funding to education providers for Indigenous-specific education initiatives.

More recently, in 1999 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Train-
The bill we are debating today is largely a continuation of those programs for the 2005-08 quadrennium, albeit with some significant changes. We know how important this funding is for schools and Indigenous students, so, in the interests of ensuring that the money is available for the start of the 2005 school year, Labor will support its passage through the House. However, we do have serious reservations about some of the changes that the minister proposes to introduce to existing programs. Those concerns are set out in the second reading amendment that I will move following my speech.

That second reading amendment makes four points: there is no real increase in funding for Indigenous education in this bill, changes to ASSPA committees have been made without adequate consultation, the new tutorial scheme proposed by the government will not meet the needs of struggling Indigenous students, and the funding formula used throughout the package ignores the needs of metropolitan Indigenous students.

The funding appropriated through this bill will implement the package of measures announced by the Minister for Education, Science and Training in April this year. In his media release announcing the 2005-08 funding and in the subsequent press conference, the education minister made much of the so-called increase in funding for Indigenous education that this package is supposed to represent. He said:

The Howard Government will provide a record $2.1 billion in funding for Indigenous education to pre-schools, schools, tertiary education providers and Indigenous students (including through ABSTUDY), over the next four years. The 2005-2008 funding represents an increase of $351 million or 20.5% over the current quadrennium.

As we in this House all know, there is nothing the minister likes better than a good
mouthful of figures. But it appears that it does not really matter to him whether those figures are accurate or paint a misleading picture of what is going on. In fact, the minister’s claims of record funding and 20 per cent increases were inflated by his inclusion of Abstudy in the figures for Indigenous education funding, even while he was admitting that Abstudy will continue under the current structure. This certainly made a nice headline for the minister, but the claims do not stand up to much scrutiny at all. As the shadow minister for education pointed out at the time:

The Abstudy increases account for 60 per cent of the Minister’s claimed $351 million increase. That means all other Indigenous education programs combined received just a 3.25 per cent per annum increase which is barely inflation.

Indexation—not new policy—is responsible for the main funding changes. The funding changes almost entirely result from annual adjustments to cover cost increases—not new investment in the portfolio.

So much for the 20.5 per cent increase. In another media release about the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program, the minister was at it again—not telling the whole story. The minister stated: ‘The $513.5 million for supplementary recurrent assistance for 2005-08 is an increase of 20.2 per cent over the 2001-04 funding provision.’ However, it is important to realise that SRA funding is based on enrolment projections over the quadrennium. According to figures obtained by the Australian Education Union, Indigenous enrolments in the schooling sector alone increased by 5.4 per cent in just one year, 2001-02. So increases in funding for the next quadrennium will reflect projected growth in student numbers across all sectors. The bottom line is that the new money claimed in the SRA component of this funding announcement is mainly attributable to growth in Indigenous enrolments. This analysis is backed up by similar statements from state governments.

Despite the minister’s grand claims, the package announced in April does not represent a significant new investment in Indigenous education. I notice that those grand claims did not get an airing in the minister’s second reading speech on the bill, but that certainly did not stop him from making one of his typical hand-on-heart pledges. He said: Accelerating Indigenous educational outcomes is a key element in the Australian government’s 10-point national agenda for schooling. Closing the education divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians remains one of this government’s highest education priorities.

Based on the funding announced for the next four years, that is just all talk and no action; and clearly the minister knows that, which is why he pulled the old smoke and mirrors stunt back in April, when he jumbled the Abstudy money in with the rest of the Indigenous education funding that he announced. Nice try, Minister, but Indigenous students deserve better.

The second point that I wish to raise is the changes flagged in the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program, particularly the abolition of ASSPA committees. There are currently some 3,990 ASSPA committees in schools around Australia. Basically those committees operate wherever there are Indigenous students enrolled. The ASSPA program came about in response to one of the key goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, and that is ‘to establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of preschool, primary and secondary education services for their children’. The ASSPA program provides resources to school based Indigenous parent committees for activities designed to enhance education opportunities...
for Indigenous students in preschool, primary and secondary schools and, importantly, to involve Indigenous parents in educational decision-making processes.

Funding under the existing ASSPA scheme is currently automatic, based on a per capita enrolment of Indigenous students. Schools set up committees of Indigenous parents and community members to work with principals and schools to achieve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The current program guidelines state the objectives of ASSPA as being to encourage greater Indigenous parent or caregiver involvement in schools and preschools, encourage Indigenous parents and caregivers to participate in decision making in the school so that they can influence the development of the school curriculum to meet the needs of Indigenous students, encourage schools and preschools to create a more supportive and welcoming environment for Indigenous students and their parents or caregivers, make parents or caregivers more aware of what is happening in the school or preschool and how it teaches Indigenous students, and encourage the participation of Indigenous children in preschool education programs.

The kinds of activities that have previously been supported through the ASSPA program fall under six categories of activities. They are: to encourage the parents of Indigenous students to become actively involved in the education of their children, to improve the access of Indigenous students to education, to increase the educational participation and attendance of Indigenous students, to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students, to enable Indigenous students to participate in school based educational and sporting excursions and cultural activities, and to assist with administration costs. An example of the kinds of activities that ASSPA committees get involved with—which I took part in not so long ago, and I am sure many other members of the House have had similar experiences—is NAIDOC Week. There were a great many activities arranged at schools throughout my electorate to celebrate NAIDOC Week back in July, and it was a great example of the role that ASSPA committees play in schools. Having said that, I note that the government proposes to abolish ASSPA committees and replace them with a whole-of-school intervention strategy.

According the discussion paper circulated in relation to the 2005-08 quadrennium funding round, a new initiative known as parent-school partnerships will see school based parent committees and school councils competing on the basis of written submissions for a share of $62.5 million. Indigenous parents and communities, in partnership with schools, will be encouraged to implement creative approaches to address local barriers to achieving the best possible learning outcomes for Indigenous students. That all sounds fine in theory, but I have to wonder what planet the minister and his advisers are living on and how many schools they actually work with and get to know. I have to ask myself: who is going to be writing the submissions for that funding, and what happens to the activities that are already funded through the ASSPA program—things like school excursions, sporting activities and, in many schools, breakfast clubs for Indigenous students? There were clearly no real answers to those very important questions in the estimates hearings just a few weeks ago, when Senator Trish Crossin from the Northern Territory did a great job of trying to shed some light on these very significant changes to the ASSPA program.

The changes to the IEDA Program and the abolition of the ASSPA committees were based on a review into the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program that was conducted by the Department of Education,
Science and Training between September 2002 and December 2003. It is quite clear that the minister is relying on the findings of that review in scrapping 4,000 ASSPA committees around Australia. You would have to imagine, reading this report into IDEA, that these ASSPA committees must have been found to be monumental failures to justify such a drastic step. But indeed that is not the case at all. When you look at the report, there is absolutely nothing in it that would justify that very drastic step that will have an enormous impact on Indigenous parents and students right around the country.

Mr HOWARD—I indicated that, as the proposal by the Leader of the Opposition did not alter the substance of the local content rules, we had no difficulty with that proposal. It did not work any kind of harmful effects. I am told that the amendment has been drafted and has in fact been lodged with the table office in the Senate. But I do not control the table office in the Senate.

Mr HOWARD—I certainly do not. If people want to inquire, that is fine. But while I am on my feet there is another amendment that I am a lot more interested in, and that is the amendment that the Leader of the Opposition has talked about in relation to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Most of my attention on this issue this morning was focused on the interview that the Leader of the Opposition gave on the Today show. I have been busy comparing what he said this morning with what he said on Tuesday when he announced the Labor Party’s policy on the free trade agreement, and I find a very interesting contrast.

I find that on Tuesday the Leader of the Opposition was saying that what we ought to have were penalties for failed patent applications, for bad patent applications. The whole basis of everything that the Leader of the Opposition was saying on Tuesday was that there was concern about the possibility of an increased number of bodgie patent applications. He said: ‘We want an amendment to go through the Senate to ensure we deal with this problem and that we eliminate the possibility of these bodgie patent applications in Australia holding up the introduction of cheaper generic drugs.’ That is very interesting. I am reading from the press release that was made by the Leader of the Opposition. He said that Labor will fight for amendments to:
Protect the PBS by preventing and penalising drug companies that try to stop cheaper generic drugs coming onto the market by lodging dodgy patent claims.

We have already pointed out—and maybe by this morning the Leader of the Opposition, having spoken to the Labor Party’s lawyers, had been advised that we were right—that it is not possible to stop generics by lodging a dodgy patent claim because, as the Leader of the Opposition now apparently knows, the Australian law operates very differently from the American law where, if you lodge an application, you get automatic entitlements.

Under the Australian law, you do not achieve anything if you lodge an application for a patent. You cannot, as the Leader of the Opposition was wrongly saying on Tuesday, secure the stopping of generic drugs simply by lodging an application. The whole proposition that the Leader of the Opposition was putting on Tuesday was not properly thought through. It was another example of the Leader of the Opposition making up policy on the run. The government quite properly have said that we are not willing to support an amendment that imposes a penalty in relation to an application for a patent. There are something like 24,000 patent applications lodged every year, and about 50 per cent of those are culled on first blush by the patent office.

What the Leader of the Opposition demonstrated on Tuesday was that he had absolutely no understanding of how the patent law in this country operates. Once again, it was the Leader of the Opposition making up policy on the run and putting forward a proposition. Any reasonable interpretation of what the Leader of the Opposition said—both in his joint statement with Senator Conroy and also in his very lengthy news conference—is that he was proposing an amendment that would apply a penalty in relation to a patent application. But, fast forward to this morning, and on the Today show—apparently informed now by people who understand a little bit about this within the Labor Party—he is now not talking about applications; he is talking about litigation. He is talking about court applications. He has totally changed his ground.

What is he talking about here? He is talking about a big company that is trying to stop the generic product getting onto the market. They take legal action and these things are determined in the courts. We are not talking anymore about dodgy applications. No, we are not. We are talking about the Leader of the Opposition having taken two days to find out how the patent laws of this country operate.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition that it is about time he told the Australian public which amendment he has in mind. Does he have an amendment dealing with patent applications? Does he propose to impose a penalty on people who make applications that they shouldn’t or is he talking about some amendment in relation to the court action that might be taken by a patent holder against a generic manufacturer? We still do not have the amendment. It is two days since the announcement was made. The Leader of the Opposition made it up on the run at his news conference on Tuesday. He is now in a position where this morning he has very seriously shifted his ground. I think the Leader of the Opposition owes the Australian public an explanation. What amendment does he really want?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I remind all members on my left that the Leader of the Opposition, seeking the call, has been denied the call because he could not have been heard above the noise behind him. Is the Leader of the Opposition still seeking the call?
Mr Latham (Werriwa—Leader of the Opposition) (2.08 p.m.)—Yes, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister said he had been told about the cultural content amendment. I seek leave to table the amendments—almost on behalf of the government—for the information of the House.

Leave granted.

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr Pearce (2.09 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Trade. Would the minister inform the House how the Australia-United States free trade agreement has overwhelming support? Is the minister aware of any alternative policies?

Mr Vaile—I thank the honourable member for Aston for his question and acknowledge his support for the quick passage of the enabling legislation for the free trade agreement with the United States through both houses of the parliament. He knows, as do all other members of the government, that this agreement offers 30,000 new jobs in our economy. A $6 billion benefit to the bottom line in our economy has been indicated by independent analysis of this agreement.

Mr Gibbons interjecting—

The Speaker—Member for Bendigo!

Mr Gibbons interjecting—

The Speaker—I warn the member for Bendigo!

Mr Vaile—On the basis of those facts, the agreement is widely supported across the Australian community. We have seen that from both sides of politics across the Australian community, particularly from state Labor premiers. They have been behind this agreement and have worked with the government in pursuing this for quite some time. We should note that when the enabling legislation passed through the House of Representatives, I think about six weeks ago, it was supported by 14 members of the Australian Labor Party. They voted in the affirmative for the enabling legislation for this agreement and actually crossed the floor and came and sat over here when a division was called. I think you will recall that, Mr Speaker.

We should look at who crossed the floor. Two of the members who crossed the floor from the Labor Party were the opposition spokesperson for health and the opposition spokesman for industry. They are the two people in the Australian Labor Party who have the core responsibility in a policy sense for the issues that have been debated this week: the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the Patents Act. Both those members of the Labor Party voted for the government’s legislation six weeks ago in the House without a murmur about the issues that the Leader of the Opposition has raised this week.

Mr Albanese—Table the Hansard.

The Speaker—Member for Grayndler!

Mr Vaile—It is recorded in the Hansard who voted for the legislation.

Mr Albanese—Table it.

The Speaker—I warn the member for Grayndler! He is ignoring the chair.

Mr Vaile—That was done without raising these amendments then, without raising the concerns about these specific issues then, and the Labor Party supported it in this House. But by Tuesday they had both shifted their position after the caucus meeting and had jumped on the Leader of the Opposition’s roller-coaster ride of policy on the run. As we have seen, it is a hallmark of the Leader of the Opposition—policy on the run. They jumped on board and they were with him. It was interesting to note that the Sydney Morning Herald this week, reporting on that caucus meeting, quoted Senator Conroy’s submission that he took to caucus. In
talking about the ALP’s proposed amendment on this issue, he said that it was subject to legal advice. He said:

Legal advice is being obtained ... Subject to that advice, Labor will insist on the amendment.

But did the Leader of the Opposition wait for that advice? No. They raced straight out and announced what they were expecting the government to do. They raced straight out and suggested the amendments that they thought should be put in place. He was conjuring up a problem and a solution at the same time—a problem that does not exist.

He first insisted that this alleged problem could be fixed through the patent application process. By this morning, on the Today program on TV, he was suggesting that it is the job of the courts to fix it. From Tuesday to today the emphasis of that remedy has made a big shift. Again, it is an indication of the Leader of the Opposition making policy on the run then playing catch-up in terms of how this could be implemented through the legal process. The question the Leader of the Opposition should be answering is: why didn’t he get the legal advice first? Why did he say on television this morning, ‘The lawyers are out there doing the work on it and now we’re finding out’? Over the last five months why hasn’t the Leader of the Opposition sought or received a briefing from DFAT? Why hasn’t he sought to get that clarified? Again, the Leader of the Opposition has been caught out making policy on the run, and that is no way to be a leader of this country.

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr LATHAM (2.14 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. What representations have the Prime Minister and his office received from the Business Council of Australia that the government should accept Labor’s amendments to protect the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme? What is the government’s response?

Mr HOWARD—I get a lot of representations from a lot of people, and I can tell you this: the business community of Australia has been a supporter of the free trade agreement for much longer than the Leader of the Opposition. What we want, and what the business community wants, is to know exactly what the form of the opposition’s amendment is. What are you trying to do? Are you trying to do what you said on Tuesday? I tell you what: putting representations aside, I have obtained some advice.

Ms Macklin interjecting—

The SPEAKER—If the member for Jagajaga persists with her interjections I will deal with her!

Mr HOWARD—I have received advice from five departments of state—the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources, and the Attorney-General’s Department. They have told the government, ‘We do not believe a legislative amendment to deliver on the opposition’s stated policy can be drafted.’ That is the advice that I have received and that my colleagues have received. The stated policy that they were referring to was the policy enunciated on Tuesday by the Leader of the Opposition—the policy where he talked about the bodgie applications. That was the policy that he had alighted upon before he was properly informed by the Labor lawyers as to how the patent system operated.

All I can say to the Leader of the Opposition is that our advice from five departments is that you cannot draft an effective amendment to give purpose and point to what the Leader of the Opposition said on Tuesday. If the Leader of the Opposition has some other
proposal maybe he will inform us, but the stated policy of the opposition is not one that we will accept. We will not support an amendment that imposes penalties in relation to patent applications. We will not support that. It is not only unnecessary and unworkable but also potentially very damaging to the operation of our patent laws.

It remains our very strong view that, if a change like that were introduced, it would inhibit innovation, it would reduce the generation of new ideas and it would work against the interests of the sound intellectual property law that we have in this country. I simply say to the Leader of the Opposition on the policy that he enunciated on Tuesday: an amendment along those lines remains quite unacceptable to the government for the reasons that I have stated. On the advice that we have from five departments of state, you cannot draft a workable amendment in relation to that. We do not believe, despite our strong support for the free trade agreement, that it is good government to accept bad policy to solve a political problem. We do not intend to accept an amendment along the lines outlined by the Leader of the Opposition on Tuesday.

Mr Sidebottom interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I warn the member for Braddon!

Foreign Affairs: United States of America

Mr FARMER (2.17 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister please explain why Australia’s alliance with the United States is so important to all Australians, especially those interested in Australia’s economy and job growth? Is the minister aware of any alternative views?

Mr DOWNER—First, can I thank the honourable member for Macarthur. I do not think anyone would doubt that he has a commonsense understanding of the importance of the American alliance and how valuable that is to Australia. He has taught himself a bit about it, he has had a bit of briefing and he has understood the issue.

Mr Hardgrave—That’s a contrast!

Mr DOWNER—As the minister says, that is a contrast. The government will indeed continue to build its relationship with the United States through cooperation on a strategic, an economic and also a people-to-people basis. It is important that we do so. We will also continue to build our economic links with the world’s largest economy—the economy in the world which has the strongest record in terms of innovation, research and development. It is very important that we strengthen those relations.

As to whether there are any alternative views, I have said it before: the Leader of the Opposition is viscerally anti-American. When there is an issue that involves America, there is always a controversy—not when we have a free trade agreement with Thailand or Singapore; that is all fine. The Leader of the Opposition has never even looked at those free trade agreements. When it comes to America, his knee-jerk reaction was that he was against it. That is what he said in February last year.

I pointed out yesterday that the Leader of the Opposition has had nine different positions on ‘troops out by Christmas’ because he makes it all up on the run. His erratic style and his dangerous approach to policy making has led to nine different positions on ‘troops out by Christmas’. Yesterday I said that he had had four different positions on the free trade agreement with the United States. That was yesterday. This morning the Today program went to air with Tracy Grimshaw and the Leader of the Opposition. Out came the fifth different position on the free trade agreement with the United States! On Tuesday the Leader of the Opposition wanted
amendments, including in relation to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. He said that he wanted bodgie patent claims to be penalised—in other words, all patent claim applications that are rejected get fined. Nobody thinks this is a good idea.

All of the benefits from the free trade agreement for agriculture, manufacturing and our services sector as well as access to $200 billion worth of federal government procurement in the US would be lost because anybody who makes an application for a patent which gets rejected should be hit with a fine. I think that is a very good example of loose, dangerous and erratic policy making. As the Prime Minister has said, somebody has spoken to the Leader of the Opposition since then and said: ‘Mate, I don’t think you quite understand this’—by the way, the stare is back—I don’t think you quite understand the facts here. I don’t think you’ve quite got it. Let’s see if we can adjust our position so that it makes a bit more sense.’ So today he comes out with a new position. The fact is that the Leader of the Opposition is just making stuff up on the run.

You wonder where he gets these ideas from. Some people say that he gets these ideas from Google searches on the Internet. Where would you go to, what site would you go for, to find out where the Leader of the Opposition is getting his ideas from? Take these two quotes—political advice from somebody in the United States:

... curb the appeals process which permits drug companies to delay their introduction—of generics—onto the market ...

That was political advice to Senator John Kerry. And some other political advice came to Senator Kerry just before the US Democratic convention:

... Kerry and his convention have four nights to convince America that ... the prescription drug benefit is inadequate ...

And who said these things? Yes, Dick Morris. So the Leader of the Opposition googles Uncle Dick to find out what his policy should be, runs out and has a press conference and says, ‘Haven’t I got a great policy for you,’ and then somebody comes to him and says, ‘Mate, it doesn’t work like that in Australia; that’s how it works in America. You’ve mucked it all up.’ And he comes back today and goes on the Today program with a completely new yarn. This Leader of the Opposition is a dangerous man and he is an extremely erratic leader.

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr Latham—My question is to the Prime Minister. Has the Prime Minister seen the comments made yesterday by the Vice President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Mukesh Haikerwal, that Labor’s proposed amendments to the FTA enabling legislation would ‘make those generic drugs more freely available or at least make sure that there are no flaws or snags along the way to getting them approval’? Prime Minister, isn’t it time that the government listened to the weight of independent and expert opinion calling for it to accept Labor’s proposed amendments to the FTA enabling legislation?

Mr Howard—I rhetorically ask the Leader of the Opposition: isn’t it about time you told us which amendment you want?

The Speaker—Order!

Mr Howard—That is your difficulty. On Tuesday, it was an amendment about patent applications.

The Speaker—Prime Minister!

Mr Howard—By Thursday morning, no doubt instructed by lawyers for Labor, you had had a bit of a fast reading course on
the patent law of this country, and you had been told—

The SPEAKER—Prime Minister!

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I have already indicated to the Prime Minister that he will address his remarks through the chair. I need no assistance from those on my left.

Mr HOWARD—By Thursday morning, the Leader of the Opposition, having received a bit of advice on how the patent laws of this country operate, realised that what he proposed on Tuesday would do enormous damage to the intellectual property system in this country. And that is the reason why I indicated that not only was that amendment unnecessary but it was positively harmful. There are two reasons why such an amendment remains unacceptable to the government: it is unnecessary and, on the advice of five departments of state, it is unworkable. In addition to that, it is clear on any examination of how our intellectual property system operates that, if you impose penalties in relation to failed patent applications, you will undermine the free operation of the whole patent system. That is not a price that this government is prepared to pay, because that goes to economic stability—

Mr Crean interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Hotham!

Mr HOWARD—it goes to economic predictability and it goes to the certainty of the investment climate. This is yet another example of the Leader of the Opposition not thinking things through. He grabs hold of an idea and he says to himself, ‘It would be a great idea to have an amendment about the PBS.’ So, instead of trying to learn how the patent system operates, the Leader of the Opposition says, ‘You know what we’ll propose? We’ll propose a penalty’—to use his own language—‘on dodgy patent applications,’ without knowing that if you did that you would potentially cripple the whole intellectual property system. That is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition has done. Now he realises it—he realised it this morning—and if you read through the transcript from this morning he does not tell Tracy about any of these dodgy applications.

Mr Bevis interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I warn the member for Brisbane!

Mr HOWARD—By this morning he had shifted his ground. He is now talking about court proceedings being taken by the holders of patents against generic manufacturers. He has finally learnt something that we put to him a couple of days ago—that is, that you cannot in this country under our law take legal proceedings against a generic manufacturer on the basis of a patent applied for; you can only take them on the basis of a patent granted. So when the Leader of the Opposition talks about Labor’s amendment, I ask him: which amendment? When anybody else talks about Labor’s amendment, whether he is an officer of the AMA or indeed any other organisation, I might ask: what Labor amendment? I again ask rhetorically of the Leader of the Opposition: will you please let us have your amendment? We have looked at the two, and I would be delighted to see it.

Ms Macklin interjecting—

Mr Crean interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Jagajaga and the member for Hotham are persistent interjectors!

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mrs DRAPER (2.27 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Is the minister aware of claims that spurious patent applications must be heavily penalised in order to protect the Pharmaceu-
tical Benefits Scheme? Minister, what is the government’s response?

Mr ABBOTT—I thank the member for Makin for her question, and I admire her determination, which the government totally share, to protect the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme of this country. Let me make it very clear that the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme has been protected by this government and Labor knows it. We have protected the PBS and Labor knows it. Not only did Senator Conroy tell the shadow cabinet that the government’s free trade negotiation protected the position of the generic manufacturers and not only did Senator Conroy announce at a press conference that the process known as patent evergreening did not take place in this country but Senator Conroy on Monday even complimented the government on how we had stood up to the American pharmaceutical manufacturers. Yes, this particular rooster crowed three times, and he crowed three times on the government’s behalf. Let me quote Senator Conroy, ‘The government resisted the Americans’ ambition on the PBS.’ For the record, let me repeat that. Senator Conroy, on the government’s conduct of the free trade agreement negotiations, said, ‘The government resisted the Americans’ ambition on the PBS.’

But all that was on Monday before the Leader of the Opposition had his little brain explosion and decided that it was absolutely necessary to ban dodgy patent applications to protect the PBS, even though a mere application does not ground any rights whatsoever under Australian patent law. This was yet another example of the Leader of the Opposition doing his talking first and his thinking later—another example of the Leader of the Opposition announcing policy and only doing the research subsequently.

Yesterday the Labor Party were asked to name an expert who backs Labor’s position on this amendment to the free trade agreement enabling legislation, and they came up with Professor Peter Drahos of the ANU. When Professor Drahos was asked what he thought of the ALP’s proposal, he said:

Have they actually drafted something?

All I’ve heard them using is the word “evergreening”.

It shows how little homework the Labor Party has done that it has taken them this long to stumble across the concept.

That is Labor’s friend! But he did not stop there. He did not stop at the 7.30 Report; he talked to the Age as well. On the Labor Party’s policy, he said to the Age:

... it’s a joke. It’s window dressing.

And he was not content with that. On PM he said of the Labor Party’s policy:

... it has all the hallmarks of policy on the run.

Labor’s policy is completely unworkable because it destroys the whole basis of patent law in this country. How can we ever have a clever country if unsuccessful patent applicants face massive fines? Every year there are some 22,000 patent applications in this country and 50 per cent are unsuccessful initially. That is some 11,000 entities—entities no doubt employing tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Australians—all of whom would be liable for massive fines if the Labor Party’s unnecessary and harmful proposal were ever put into practice.

Let us be clear about this: Labor’s proposal could be used against Australians just as easily as it could be used against Americans. If the Labor Party’s proposal were ever to become law, Ralph Sarich would not have got a patent; he would have got a $40 million fine. That is the absolute insanity of the Labor Party’s unnecessary and harmful proposal.

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Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr LATHAM (2.33 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister guarantee that as a result of his government’s FTA enabling legislation and the new pharmaceutical notification procedures there will be no attempts by drug companies to evergreen their drug patents in the future in Australia? If the Prime Minister cannot give this guarantee then why is he opposed to Labor’s plan to penalise drug companies that might engage in evergreening?

Mr HOWARD—I might rhetorically ask, yet again: which plan—the plan enunciated on Tuesday or the plan towards which the Leader of the Opposition was rapidly moving this morning? I do not think the Leader of the Opposition knows. The opposition may have tabled an amendment in relation to the local content rules, but I have not seen any amendment in relation to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. What the Leader of the Opposition was talking about on Tuesday was a vastly different thing from what he started to talk about this morning on the Today program. There is a mile of difference between clobbering people who put in patent applications that fail and talking about the legal action that a patent holder might take against a generic manufacturer.

What I can tell the House is simply this: nothing in the free trade negotiations has weakened the protections of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme—absolutely nothing. That was the view of Senator Conroy. I can acknowledge that there is concern and support in the Australian community for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. That is why the government were resolute in our determination during the negotiations not to concede anything, and we have not conceded anything. In fact, in one important respect we have increased the protections because we have expanded the grounds on which patent applications can be opposed. In that respect we have made the protections even stronger. So I say to the Leader of the Opposition again, rhetorically: when you ask me about Labor’s amendment, would you please preface that question by telling me which amendment? Are you talking about the amendment that you enunciated on Tuesday that would effectively cripple the operation of our patents scheme—

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I warn the member for Sydney!

Mr HOWARD—or are you talking about the amendment that you were creeping towards on the Today show this morning, which was an amendment dealing with something entirely different? There is a world of difference between the Leader of the Opposition on this issue on Tuesday and the Leader of the Opposition on this issue this morning. I think the Leader of the Opposition owes the Australian public an explanation about which amendment he speaks of when he asks me questions.

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr NAIRN (2.36 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources. Would the minister inform the House of the importance of Australia’s patent system to Australian innovation? Is the minister aware of any threats to this system?

Mr IAN MACFARLANE—I thank the member for Eden-Monaro for his question and acknowledge the very strong work that he does in terms of promoting innovation both in his electorate and through the committee he chairs. He knows that innovation is the cornerstone of our competitive economy, and the cornerstone of innovation is patents. We have a very robust patent system in Australia—in fact, one of the most robust patent systems in the world. The system that we
have in place now already weeds out and rejects spurious and invalid claims in the lodgment of patents. None of that system—I repeat: none of that system—has been changed in the transition to the FTA.

I am asked by the member for Eden-Monaro whether there are any threats to the current patent system. There are, and they are coming from the opposition, who are putting forward ill-considered changes to our patent regime which will introduce penalties for those people who want to innovate, for those people who want to be inventive, for those people who want to show their ability in terms of taking Australia forward. The Labor Party amendment, as we think it is—not that we know, Prime Minister—relates to what the Leader of the Opposition was talking about on Tuesday when he talked about amending patents. The amendment that the Labor Party is proposing will damage our IP system irrevocably. That is not just my opinion and not just the opinion of those people who understand patent law but the opinion of the keeper of intellectual property in Australia, IP Australia.

We have heard all sorts of experts being quoted, hither and thither, about IP law. IP Australia administer the law and understand it better than anyone else. I asked the Director General of IP Australia to give me and the government an opinion on the proposal we thought that Labor was going to progress following the press conference of the Leader of the Opposition on Tuesday. This is the response from the director general, Ian Heath. I will quote only parts of it, but I will table the whole letter. Dr Heath says:

The letter goes on. Further down the letter, Dr Heath says:

However, to introduce penalties for making such claims in the first place would undermine the system.

I table that letter. What we have here from the Leader of the Opposition is a series of policies on the run. We do not actually understand—because he does not understand patent law—what he is asking for. At Tuesday’s press conference he talked about ‘bodgie patent applications’. He said that bodgie patent applications are evergreening. I have news for the Leader of the Opposition: applying for a new patent is not evergreening. Applying for a patent for a new use is not evergreening; it is part of an established patent system. Senator Conroy agrees with that, because at the press conference on Tuesday with the Leader of the Opposition he said that evergreening does not occur in Australia. Evergreening does not occur in Australia, but applying for new patents for new uses does, and that is not evergreening.

By Tuesday night the Leader of the Opposition had sort of expanded it a bit to ‘refine financial penalties for drug companies that do a bodgie patent’. You do not do a bodgie patent in Australia. We have IP Australia to prevent that. Then yesterday the Leader of the Opposition actually started to mix up the acts that govern this whole issue. He pretended to be quoting from the Patents Act when he asked me a question about certifying patents when he was actually quoting from the Therapeutic Goods Act. No wonder that, at the first instance, I could not understand where the question was coming from. It highlights that the Leader of the Opposition has got absolutely no idea what he is talking about.

This morning I sat in my pyjamas and watched Tracy Grimshaw asking him questions, and I thought, ‘The Leader of the Op-
position has got no idea what he is talking about, but he has moved away from trying to
amend patent law to trying to amend court
process in the instance of an injunction.’

Mr Zahra interjecting—
The SPEAKER—The member for McMillan is warned!

Mr IAN MACFARLANE—We want to
know where the Leader of the Opposition is
coming from. Put out your amendments so
that we understand, so that Australia under-
stands, what it is you are trying to change.
Are you trying to change intellectual prop-
erty law in Australia? If you are, show us
your amendment. If you are trying to change
court process, show us your amendment.
This is just another series of mistakes by the
Leader of the Opposition to add to a long
catalogue of mistakes during his term as op-
position leader.

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr LATHAM (2.42 p.m.)—My question
is to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minis-
ter aware that this morning, when asked
whether the government was considering
Labor’s policy or any comparable amend-
ment to the FTA enabling legislation to pre-
vant evergreening, the Deputy Prime Minis-
ter said, ‘We will have more to say about that
during the day. I will leave that to the Prime
Minister and others during the course of the
day.’ Is the Prime Minister also aware that
the member for Fisher and Parliamentary
Secretary to the Minister for Finance and
Administration said on radio 4QR this morn-
ing that the government might have its own
amendments on the PBS? Prime Minister,
what is the government’s position?

Mr HOWARD—I am aware of both of
those statements and, as usual, the Deputy
Prime Minister was absolutely right. He said
the Prime Minister and others would be hav-
ing something to say—and you have been
hearing it for the last 30 minutes. Can I take
the opportunity while I am on my feet to
draw the attention of the House, and particu-
larly the Leader of the Opposition, to a
statement that has been released today by IP
Owners, which is the Intellectual Property
Owners Association of Australia. I think it
would have been a good thing, in a way, if
the Leader of the Opposition had consulted
this organisation before he made his rather
unfortunate pronouncements on Tuesday
about amending the law of this country. The
statement says: ‘The Intellectual Property
Owners Association of Australia is a not-for-
profit organisation that represents the inter-
ests of all owners of intellectual property in
Australia by dealing with IP issues from the
owners’ perspective,’ and so forth.

I would have thought that intellectual
property is a very valuable asset of the Aus-
tralian people. I would have thought that one
of the things we want for the future of this
country is to have an intellectual property
regime that encourages people to think up
new ideas, that encourages the entrepreneur-
ial spirit and that encourages innovation.
The IP Owners Association makes it very
clear that it disagrees with the Labor Party
proposal about spurious patent claims, which
is what the Leader of the Opposition enunci-
ated on Tuesday.

The Leader of the Opposition keeps ask-
ing us whether we are going to support La-
bor’s amendment. Labor’s amendment as
outlined on Tuesday—the amendment on
which I have obtained the advice of five de-
partments of state—was that you were going
to impose a penalty on a failed patent appli-
cation. That was spelt out very clearly by the
Leader of the Opposition. Let me read again
from his press statement, in which he said
there is:

... concern ... about the possibility of increased
number of bodgie patent applications.
That can only mean one thing: a patent application. It does not mean a bodgie court procedure; it means a bodgie patent application. In making that recommendation, the Leader of the Opposition was drawing directly on recommendation 25 of the Labor members of the Senate committee.

I say again to the Leader of the Opposition: when he asks me questions about the government’s attitude to Labor’s amendment, will he please in future tell me which amendment he is referring to? Is he referring to the amendment that he outlined on Tuesday and which has been branded by five departments of state as unworkable? It has been rejected by the Director General of Intellectual Property. It has been rejected by the IP Owners Association. It has been branded by anybody who understands the operation of patent law in this country as completely unworkable. Or is he talking about some other amendment? Would the Leader of the Opposition please enlighten the Australian public.

Economy: Oil Prices

Mr DUTTON (2.46 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer outline for the House any recent developments in world oil prices and domestic petrol prices? What will be the economic impact of these developments?

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for Dickson for his question. I inform the House that on Wednesday of this week world oil prices reached an all-time record of $44.15 per barrel. Since then, the world oil price has come off a little to $43. But that is a 35 per cent increase in price since this time last year and oil prices have increased by 12 per cent in the last month alone.

The increase in the world oil price has been a result of both supply and demand factors. In relation to demand, the recovery of the US economy has had an effect and so has the emergence of China. Between 1997 and 2003, world demand increased by 5.8 million barrels per day and China accounted for around 40 per cent of that increase. The estimates of additional capacity in the world are that there is only about one per cent of global consumption as spare capacity, indicating that there is little room for manoeuvre in the face of this very strong demand for oil. As the House would be aware, events in the Middle East, unrest in Nigeria and speculation on Russia’s largest oil exporters are also contributing to price pressures.

The IMF and the OECD estimate that a sustained $US10 per barrel increase in the price of oil results in the OECD area as a whole losing 0.4 per cent of GDP. So the rise of $12 per barrel over the last year alone would lead us to believe that maybe half a percentage point of global GDP could have been lost. Undoubtedly, that will have an effect on Australia. If the world grows slower, then our exports will be affected and that would have an effect back in Australia.

I should also comment on the revenue effects in relation to this. The Commonwealth’s tax on petrol is a flat excise. It does not move as the petrol price moves. It is 38c a litre. It was actually 44c a litre before this government cut it and if the indexation arrangements had continued it would be substantially more than that.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr COSTELLO—But 38c a litre—

Mr Crean—Give us the angry look!

Mr COSTELLO—It was the member for Hotham who actually criticised the abolition of indexation. I just thought he was perhaps renewing his objection to the abolition of indexation. I can assure you that, if the member for Hotham had had his way, the excise on petrol would be around 5c a litre higher than it is today. I think the people of Australia would like to know where the Aus-
tralian Labor Party stands in relation to this. I will say this: the Leader of the Opposition promised Labor’s tax policy 12 weeks ago, on the Thursday after the budget. He said that there would be a tax policy, and it has not been released as yet.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. That has absolutely nothing to do with the question he was asked.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer was asked a question about world oil prices and their impact on economic management.

Mr COSTELLO—As I pointed out, the excise does not move and in fact is considerably lower than the Australian Labor Party would like it. I also indicate that, because GST is a value added tax, GST does move in relation to value. But every last dollar of GST goes to the eight state and territory Labor governments, who now have a windfall of $1.6 billion.

I was a bit surprised that there is at least one Labor member calling for a variable GST. The member for Bass believes that the rate of GST on petrol should move up and down in relation to the petrol price. So it would be 10 per cent on everything else, and it could be nine per cent or eight per cent on petrol. It would vary presumably from day to day or month to month, massively complicating the system. The last person to call for variable GST rates was the member for Werriwa, who wanted a geographic GST, which would be one rate on one side of the road and another on the other. I point out that not only would that be a massively complicated system to introduce but, of course, the people who would receive less under such a system would have to be the state Labor governments and territories. If the state Labor governments and territories are prepared to vary the GST rate downwards on petrol, they may not be getting the windfall of $1.6 billion, but there would be no effect whatsoever in relation to the Commonwealth, which does not collect any of that revenue.

I advise the member for Bass to look a little more carefully at the taxation system. And I advise the member for Werriwa not to hide from the Australian people his tax policy, which is now 12 weeks late, but to come clean with the Australian people and let them in on the secret so that they can adequately scrutinise Labor’s plans, which invariably will amount to a detraction from the Australian economy.

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr LATHAM (2.54 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration and the member for Fisher, Mr Slipper, correct in saying, ‘Yes. The free trade agreement will pass through the parliament in some form by the end of next week’?

Mr HOWARD—The question of whether the free trade agreement passes through the parliament by the end of either this week or next week is not in my hands. It is not in the hands of the parliamentary secretary; it is in the hands of the parliament and, indeed, in the hands of the Senate. I simply say to the Leader of the Opposition that he raised on Tuesday a proposal that there should be an amendment purportedly to protect the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. We do not believe that such an amendment is necessary but, furthermore, we believe the particular amendment he canvassed on Tuesday, which was to introduce penalties for failed patent applications, would undermine the intellectual property system of this country.

We have demonstrated that today with the letter from the Director General of Intellec-
tual Property, the statement I referred to from the IP Owners Association and the reference to numerous statements by intellectual property lawyers. Even the nominated academic of the Leader of the Opposition in relation to these matters, Professor Drahos, has indicated that the proposal that the Leader of the Opposition put forward on Tuesday is doubly objectionable: it is unnecessary and unworkable and, in addition to that, it would be positively harmful. We are not prepared to accept an amendment that has both of those defects. We are not prepared to accept an amendment that is not only unnecessary and unworkable but also positively harmful.

This morning the Leader of the Opposition, perhaps recognising the mistake he made, had begun to shift his ground. He was no longer talking about bodgie patent applications; he was talking about court proceedings.

Mr Latham interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—The Leader of the Opposition interjects. The Leader of the Opposition ought to be reminded of what he said. He said:

Protect the PBS by preventing and penalising drug companies that try to stop cheaper generic drugs coming onto the market by lodging dodgy patent claims.

Mr Latham—Read the next sentence.

Mr HOWARD—I will read the next sentence:

The validity of patent claims would be determined by a court …

What? You are going to have 24,000 claims a year determined by a court! The reality is that the Leader of the Opposition knew absolutely nothing about the operations of the patent law of this country, and that is why five departments of state—that is, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet; the Attorney-General’s Department; the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources; the Department of Health and Ageing; and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade—have jointly said to the government: ‘We do not believe a legislative amendment to deliver on the opposition’s stated policy can be drafted.’ That was the advice of five departments.

What the Leader of the Opposition has to do, when he gets up on his feet in this House and talks about amendments, is that he has to tell the Australian people what amendment he has in mind. Does he have in mind Tuesday’s amendment or does he have in mind some other kind of amendment? Tuesday’s amendment, according to five departments of state, cannot be drafted on the basis of the opposition’s stated policy. They are not my words; they are the words of five departments of state. Perhaps that is why the Leader of the Opposition has so dramatically shifted his ground to today’s position, because what he was saying on Tuesday is quite different to what he is saying today. I simply say to Leader of the Opposition: what amendment is he talking about? Is he talking about an amendment that is going to clobber the working of the intellectual property system or is he talking about some other amendment? If he is, could he please give us the amendment?

Trade: Sugar Industry

Mr CAUSLEY (2.58 p.m.)—My question is directed to the Minister for Trade. Is the minister aware of media reports regarding the outcome of Australia’s World Trade Organisation challenge to the European sugar export subsidies? What would a win in this case mean for Australia’s sugar farmers?

Mr VAILE—I thank the member for Page for his question. Of course, it is a very important question, and it has been a very important case that the government has been running on behalf of Australia’s sugar producers in the WTO. Yes, I am aware of me-
dia reports overnight that an interim report has been released by the panel with regard to Australia’s challenge, along with a number of other countries, to the European Union’s export subsidies that are applied to their exports of sugar. I can confirm that we have received information in terms of the interim report that has come out overnight. We should acknowledge that that is a draft report. The final report will be due out in September.

In answer to the member’s question, it would be a significant and very important win for our sugar producers. A win would require the European Union to remove four million tonnes of its current sugar exports from the world market—that is, four million tonnes of heavily subsidised sugar from the world market. That would result in increasing the world price for sugar in the longer term and raising the income of Australia’s hard-working sugar farmers, who rely very heavily on exports for their income. In fact, about 80 per cent of their returns come from exports.

This is going to be a very important case coming at a crucial time in the history of the multilateral process. Only last week, we resolved in the WTO an agreement on a framework to go ahead in the Doha Round which included a negotiation to eliminate export subsidies—the ultimate elimination of the most distorting mechanism that is used by exporting countries. We achieved three key areas of further negotiation as a result of the efforts over the last couple of years, particularly last week in Geneva. Firstly, there was a historic commitment to eliminate agricultural export subsidies. These are the export subsidies that we have just challenged in the WTO, and the interim report indicates we may very well be successful in that challenge which will deliver significant benefits to Australia’s sugarcane farmers. The second area of success is that we have achieved agreement to go ahead and negotiate significant cuts by rich developed countries in domestic support provided to farmers in those wealthy countries. Thirdly, we have agreed to go ahead and negotiate substantial improvements in market access for all agricultural products.

In answer to the member’s question, in terms of the government prosecuting the case in the international forums on behalf of Australian sugar producers, it seems that there may be an imminent and very positive outcome in this case for Australia’s sugar producers by removing some of the inequities from the global marketplace. In the longer term, we have established a framework to go ahead and negotiate, once and for all, the elimination of these iniquitous export subsidies from the global trading regime, which will, over the longer term, deliver significant benefits to Australia’s sugar producers.

Quarantine: Biosecurity

Mr KATTER (3.02 p.m.)—My question without notice is to the Attorney-General. The minister would be aware of the writ of mandamus, which enshrines in the common law remedies ensuring that officers of the Crown carry out their responsibilities. In light of this, is the minister aware of a report in the Australian of 16 July 2004 which read:

“Pacific Century Production which owns the central Queensland farm hit by the... citrus canker [mooned to cost Australia $50 million] paid $5,500 to a National Party research company and in the same year... signed an uncommon confidential agreement with the federal Government’s Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service which allowed the [corporate] farm to harvest a grape crop despite having been investigated for illegally importing plants from China, California and The Philippines.”

Is the minister further aware of a report on the same day in the Courier Mail which read:
“The Quarantine Advisory Board which proposed the controversial import of Philippine bananas has been rocked by the shock resignation of its chief executive Mary Harwood.

Primary producers believe the federal government agency (Biosecurity) is influenced by trade considerations instead of scientific evidence.”

The SPEAKER—The member for Kennedy will come to his question because this is a much longer question than would normally be tolerated.

Mr KATTER—I have got about four lines, Mr Speaker. This is a matter of importance to the people of Australia.

The SPEAKER—The Chair does not judge the importance of the question but the length, and you still have the call.

Mr KATTER—Finally, in light of the banana decision, which will cost Australia $380 million and 7,000 jobs, would the minister confirm reports that Mary Harwood now enjoys a senior position in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade? Would he not agree that these facts and the appalling bias and error disclosed in the Senate inquiry in the banana decision demand a commission of inquiry?

The SPEAKER—Before I recognise the Attorney-General, I should also point out to the member for Kennedy, and I am happy to discuss this matter with him, that the inclusion of a name in the question in this instance was not strictly necessary to authenticate the question. The application of the standing orders would rule that out of order. I will allow the question to stand, but indicate to him that it was much more detailed than is normally appropriate.

Mr RUDDOCK—I thank the honourable member for his question. I am aware of the purpose of prerogative writs. I have extensively read the newspapers to which the honourable member refers, but I have no particular recollection of the articles that he has alluded to. It appears to me that he is asking a legal opinion, which I am not entitled to give. But I will have the matters raised and examined to see whether there is any further information I can add.

Foreign Affairs: North Korea

Mr LINDSAY (3.05 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister inform the House of steps that Australia is taking to help address international concerns about North Korea’s nuclear activities? Minister, how do these steps serve Australia’s national interest?

Mr DOWNER—I thank the honourable member for his question, and I appreciate his interest as well. Obviously, being a representative for Townsville, he has a particular focus on security given the presence of the Australia Defence Force there. I will be visiting North Korea on 17-18 August and will meet with senior North Korean leaders to obviously talk about our bilateral relationship, but in particular to discuss concerns about North Korea’s nuclear activities. I think the visit is particularly timely because it reinforces proposals that were made in June to the North Koreans during the six-party talks. Given that these proposals were only finalised in June, I think Australia can play a particular role in assisting the process of eventually dismantling North Korea’s nuclear programs but also potentially providing other assistance as well.

I will take the opportunity while in North Korea to urge its leaders to take the opportunity they now have to re-engage with the international community and to give the North Korean people the opportunity to see their own living standards—and hopefully, too, their human rights—improve. This visit comes on the back of discussions that we have had at the officials’ level with the Chinese, the South Koreans, the Japanese and
also, importantly, the Americans. During the last month I was over in Washington with Senator Hill for AUSMIN. During the course of AUSMIN there was, needless to say, quite substantial discussion about the issue of North Korea.

I think it is probably worth making this point: countries around the region know that we are close to the United States, and we make no secret of that. And the Labor Party makes no secret of the fact that they think we are close to the United States—though they think it is a mistake. But within the region they do not think it is a mistake. Within the region there is a view that Australia’s close relationship with the United States is advantageous to the region. We can bring perspectives to bear that others cannot. We can handle diplomacy in ways others are not able to do.

I notice that in a doorstop this morning the sometimes loquacious member for Griffith was asked by a journalist about this visit to North Korea:

Doesn’t this show that Labor’s position that Australian ties with Asia have been jeopardised due to our closer ties with Washington—doesn’t that reject, repudiate your position?

The member for Griffith said:

When have I ever said that?

The journalist went on to ask the next question, and the member for Griffiths said:

No. I think you’re verballing me enormously on that question. I never said that.

The member for Griffith is one of those who always call people liars. Do you know what they say about people who do that? They say with those sorts of people you always need to look very carefully at what they themselves say. Laurie Oakes asked him on Anzac Day this year:

Where does the fact that we have been invited—this was, to an Australia-ASEAN summit—leave Labor’s claim that Australia is being shunned in Asia because we are too close to the Americans?

The member for Griffith—a different day, a different month, a different thought and a different doorstop—said:

It leaves our claims in fundamentally good shape, Laurie.

So it was in good shape back then in April and now he says, ‘When did I ever say that? I never said that.’ It is all part of the Leader of the Opposition’s team and style, carried on by his lieutenants, that you just make stuff up as you go along. You do not think anything through. You do not try to work through an argument. You do not try to think out a serious policy. You just play politics and play politics endlessly. Needless to say, those sorts of cheapskate remarks do not get any run in the media because they do not deserve any run.

### Family Services: Family Payments

Mr SWAN (3.10 p.m.)—My question is directed to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister recall claiming on Meet the Press after the budget that there would be no clawback of budget family benefits after the election, telling viewers on 16 May:

That’s just completely wrong. It’s completely inaccurate. It’s dead wrong.

Prime Minister, didn’t the government backflip yesterday and announce that legislative action is required to reverse the clawback? Didn’t the Prime Minister get it wrong? Doesn’t yesterday’s announcement prove Labor was right all along? And isn’t this the same pigheadedness on the FTA that is threatening our Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme?

The SPEAKER—If the member for Lilley persists with questions like that, he will find them ruled out of order.

Mr HOWARD—The answer to the bulk of the question—in fact, to all of the ques-
tion—is no. But I might take the opportunity while I am on my feet to point out that, in the rare morsels that we have received in relation to the Labor Party’s economic and tax policy, there is no guarantee that you will not cancel the $600 in the second year of the forward estimates period. You have only guaranteed them for this coming year; you have not guaranteed them thereafter. The man with the largest claw in this House is the member for Lilley.

Workplace Relations: Policy

Mr RANDALL (3.12 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Is the minister aware of any independent analysis into the effects of deregulating the workplace relations system of the Australian economy? What is the government’s response?

Mr ANDREWS—I thank the member for Canning for his question and his ongoing support for business, particularly in his electorate and generally throughout Australia. There has been some interesting analysis of workplace relations policy recently—on some occasions in the media and on some occasions by other organisations. In the media a couple of weeks ago on radio in Sydney, the Leader of the Opposition was asked by Alan Jones:

So would you keep the award though to the current 20 allowable matters?

The response from the Leader of the Opposition was:

Well, we’ve got no policy to expand those matters …

Dr Emerson interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Rankin will be dealt with if he consistently interjects.

Mr ANDREWS—The Leader of the Opposition is, once again, not across the detail of matters before him—and, in this case, it is his own policy, which calls for the re-introduction of ‘a system of comprehensive, contemporary and relevant awards’. In fact, the member for Rankin went on the radio in Newcastle on the same day and—contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition told Alan Jones that morning—he said:

There’s no numerical limits on the matters that can be included in awards.

So we have a situation here, a bit like we have today, where the Leader of the Opposition does not have a grasp of the detail of policy. In relation to his own industrial relations policy, the Leader of the Opposition does not understand it; in fact, he was corrected on the same day by the member for Rankin—on the same day.

But that is not the worst of it, because this shows that, so far as awards are concerned, if the Labor Party is elected to government the sky is the limit—the sky is the limit for the number of awards and the matters in them. We would have a return to this: hundreds of pages of awards that seek to regulate every minute of workers’ lives in Australia. We know for sure that this will be sought by the unions because we have already been told so. The CFMEU mining secretary, Tony Meagher, left us in absolutely no doubt about this when he promised that his union—and you can bet the others will do this as well—will pursue everything that was taken out and then some more. So what we would have is not 20 allowable matters but ‘the sky’s the limit’ under the Labor Party’s industrial relations system.

Why would the CFMEU be pursuing it? For four million good reasons—the $4 mil-

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lion that the CFMEU has donated to the Labor Party since 1996. We are not the only ones saying this. I read with interest an article in the *Australian Financial Review* on Tuesday under the heading ‘Labor heads back to the bad old days’. This was not written by me or by someone from business; this was written by John Edwards. Who is John Edwards? John Edwards was the former senior economic adviser to Paul Keating when the Labor Party was in government. What does John Edwards say in his article in the *Australian Financial Review*? Amongst other things, he says:

... the Australian industrial relations system could thus leap back to the 1960s and 1970s—a backward leap to the 1960s and 1970s under the proposals of the Latham Labor Party. Professor Edwards continues:

... it reinvokes the very worst element of the old system.

So here you see someone who was one of the architects of Labor’s industrial relations policy under Prime Minister Keating canning it and saying that Labor is heading back to the bad old days. When asked about this, we had the member for Rankin come in here a day or so ago and say, ‘This won’t lead to paid rates awards.’ That is like saying, ‘We’re going to put a huge hole in the dam wall and we are not going to expect the flood to come through.’ You bet it is. That is what the CFMEU is saying and that is what other leaders of unions around Australia are saying. I heard the Leader of the Opposition quoting the Business Council earlier. I bet we do not hear him quoting their recent report on the Labor Party’s industrial relations policy, which was commissioned from Access Economics, which I note in passing was, at one stage at least, the economist of choice of the Labor Party. In their analysis of the ALP’s industrial relations policy, the Business Council and Access Economics say this in part of their conclusion:

The overall direction of the ALP platform appears to be towards more regulation, a broadening of the factors and parties involved in the determination of wages and conditions and that workplace relations system and structures will increasingly be used to deliver non-market outcomes and objectives.

They go on and say:

Such policies are unlikely to deliver on the four goals espoused by the ALP, high growth, low incomes, low unemployment and a fairer Australia. For the reasons outlined above and earlier, the ALP workplace relations policy platform runs the risk of moving Australia further from these goals.

In other words, that means fewer jobs, higher unemployment, lower productivity and lower growth in Australia. That would be a disaster for the Australian economy and a disaster for Australian workers. A vote for Labor is a vote for fewer jobs. A vote for Latham is a vote for lower living standards.

### Family Services: Family Payments

**Mr SWAN** (3.18 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister and relates to the announcement yesterday that legislation is needed to reverse the government’s budget clawback of family benefits. Prime Minister, hasn’t the government had nearly three months to fix this problem but not yet even drafted the legislation? Prime Minister, when will this legislation be introduced and will the Prime Minister guarantee that it will be introduced and passed before the election?

**Mr HOWARD**—The best proof of the bona fides of the government on this issue is that the benefits announced in the budget are flowing. They are flowing to the great satisfaction of Australian families.

**Mr Swan interjecting**—

**Mr HOWARD**—I had the opportunity over the five weeks of the winter recess to travel extensively around the Australian na-
tion and I can assure the member for Lilley that families of Australia like the family benefits contained in the last budget. What is more, they would like them to stay. Most of them are quite insulted by this line being run by the Labor Party that average Australian parents are not capable of knowing how to spend $600.

Mr Swan interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—This idea that they are all too uneducated and too foolish, that you cannot really trust them, is good old Labor Party paternalism: do not trust the parents of Australia. For heaven’s sake, do not give them $600; that is too much to manage. I think the best people in Australia to know how to spend money for their children are the parents of those children. I think they are better than any social security minister. I think they are better than any politically correct adviser. I simply say to the member for Lilley and to all those sitting opposite: the Australian people know where they stand with their family benefits under this government. They have actually gone up by more than 100 per cent in real terms in the 8½ years that this government has been in power.

Mr Swan interjecting—

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

Mr WILKIE—Yes, most deliberately and grievously.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr WILKIE—In this week’s edition of the Southern Gazette community newspaper, in the letters to the editor section, a letter claiming to be from 86-year-old Emily Dickman claims that I organised a crime powwow in Belmont but that I failed to attend. When a member of my staff called in to visit Mrs Dickman to clarify the issue, Mrs Dickman claimed that she had not written the letter but was asked to put her name to it by her friend Mr Murfin. She also said that she did not attend a forum because she never leaves the house. I did organise and attend a crime forum in Belmont, but Mr Murfin, who is the Liberal candidate for my seat, did not. The claim in the letter is false, and I call on the Prime Minister to investigate why his candidate is using 86-year-old senior citizens in this dishonest way.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Swan is familiar with the standing orders and
he will be aware that a matter of personal explanation allows him to indicate where he has been misrepresented, not to call on a particular action.

**AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS**

*Report No. 6 of 2004-05*  

The **SPEAKER**—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit Report No. 6 of 2004-05 entitled *Performance audit—Performance management in the Australian Public Service.*

Ordered that the report be printed.

**PAPERS**

Mr **ABBOTT** (Warringah—Leader of the House) (3.24 p.m.)—Papers are tabled as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the papers will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings* and I move:

That the House take note of the following papers:

- Tax Laws Amendment (2004 Measures No. 4) Bill 2004—Correction to the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Gillard**) adjourned.

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Trade: Free Trade Agreement**

The **SPEAKER**—Before we move to the matter of public importance, I remind a number of members in the House that they have been warned. I do not propose to indicate who they are—they will know who they are—but I think they should remember that the warning extends for the rest of the day.

I have received a letter from the Leader of the Opposition, the honourable member for Werriwa, proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The Government’s failure to defend the national interest, especially its failure to ensure that the Free Trade Agreement enabling legislation has adequate safeguards in relation to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and drug prices in Australia.

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

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

Mr **LATHAM** (Werriwa—Leader of the Opposition) (3.26 p.m.)—The parliament is experiencing a *Groundhog Day*. It takes my mind back to the first parliamentary sittings of the year, when the parliamentary Labor Party put forward the proposal for the reform of parliamentary superannuation. For two days in here, the government banged on. Time after time, they said it could not be done. Then they said that Labor’s reforms were not genuine, that they were full of problems and difficulties. Then the Prime Minister, having tried to open up this false point of distinction, set about putting forward his own proposal—a retrospective proposal—until he was rolled in the chaos of the party room, where the Treasurer had to restore order. Then—surprise, surprise!—at the end of the week, on Thursday afternoon, as question time finished and everyone wandered out of the chamber, the Prime Minister called his press conference to say that he was going ahead with the reform of parliamentary superannuation and he was going to legislate the Labor proposal.

Doesn’t it sound familiar? Doesn’t it sound like the pattern of the Prime Minister’s behaviour this week? We know from this Prime Minister that he only ever gives the House part of the truth. We had to draw out of him today in question time the true nature of Labor’s announcement on Tuesday. Time after time, the Prime Minister quoted just part of the truth. He gave the House just part
of the truth, avoiding time after time the second statement in our policy announcement on Tuesday. Finally we got it out of him: the validity of patent claims would be determined by a court. The statement that was made today reflected the policy on Tuesday.

What do we get from this Prime Minister? Surprise, surprise! In trying to draw his false points of distinction, the Prime Minister has got departmental advice that he is happy with. What does that remind you of—kids overboard, the war in Iraq, Mick Keelty and the AFP? It is another Groundhog Day. We have seen this charade from the Prime Minister so many times in the past. He is a Prime Minister who plays politics with these matters instead of fronting up to the national interest and getting these matters resolved as quickly as possible. This is the charade of a Prime Minister who for two days has said that the Labor amendment on the PBS cannot be accepted. Then he tries to draw the false point of distinction, knowing full well that he is on his way to a press conference today, tomorrow or the day after—sometime soon—to announce Labor’s policy. It is the same old charade that we have seen time after time after time.

It displays a stunning ignorance about the nature of evergreening. The Prime Minister is trying to have the House believe that, under the new arrangements for the FTA in the enabling legislation, with these notification procedures in place, when the big pharmaceutical companies get a notice that they have a generic competitor coming into the market, all they are going to do is to put out one new patent application—just one. We know from experience overseas of the true nature of evergreening that they spew out dozens of applications in their desperation to avoid competition in the market, in their desperation to keep the generic drugs out of the market, in their desperation to keep the prices high for Australian consumers. They spew out dozens of these patent applications—some of them accepted, some of them invalid.

Mr Hunt interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—The member for Flinders!

Mr Hunt interjecting—

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

The member for Flinders then left the chamber.

Mr LATHAM—But, as the Labor Party has said, matters determined in the court form the basis of our policy, so the Prime Minister has displayed his ignorance. He is trying to give the House an impression that when the patent companies get the new notification procedures and find out that something generic is about to come onto the market and form competition they will sit there and say: ‘We just need to do one new application. Let’s put it through and see what happens.’ They throw out dozens of them. That gives a scenario where there will be some successful patents and some invalid patents, and then the matters determined in the court can form the basis of a penalty regime—just as the government is introducing a penalty regime for the generic companies. It is doing it under the Therapeutic Goods Act and it is doing it under the enabling legislation for the FTA, and that, of course, is consistent with Labor’s policy approach.

So I say that we have had enough of this charade. Time after time, the Prime Minister gets the departmental advice he is happy with, he flags all the problems that he sees with the Labor proposal and then he goes out and adopts it and tries to claim it as his own. Of course it was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration who let the cat out of the bag on radio
4QR this morning by saying that the government might have its own amendment and, yes, the free trade agreement will pass through the parliament in some form by the end of next week. So at least the member for Fisher is willing to bell the cat and end the charade. He is ending the charade by pointing out exactly what the Prime Minister proposes to do.

This is a pea and thimble trick to try and make it look like his own amendment. He does not even know what is going on on his own side of the parliament. He had the embarrassment today where I had to table for him the amendment on the cultural content that he said he had been told about, but which he did not have a copy of. Apparently he had not seen it. I had to table it on behalf of the government. We are the real government on this side when these matters are considered. We tabled the matter that the Prime Minister had been told about: the amendment in the Senate on cultural content. Of course this just points to the legitimacy of Labor’s policy making approach. We said it was very important to have proper scrutiny of the free trade agreement and the enabling legislation. All we got was the bagging from the Prime Minister. This is a Prime Minister who blames everyone else but himself. In this case, he was trying to bag the Labor Party when we were doing nothing more than giving the Australian people the proper consideration of looking at this free trade agreement and enabling legislation in detail.

He tried to blame the public servants for kids overboard and the war in Iraq. He has tried to blame the public servants for the ethanol scandal. He is a master of blame shifting. He never takes the responsibility himself. Now the Prime Minister has to take the responsibility. He rushed in with the signing of the trade agreement and then he wanted to rush in without proper consideration of the enabling legislation and left two vital matters out that go to the welfare of the Australian people. I want this Prime Minister, at long last, to take some responsibility for that and to stop blaming others for the things that he is responsible for. He should take responsibility for the rushed agreement that left out sugar in the first place—something that the Deputy Prime Minister said would be un-Australian. But that is what the National Party did by its own definition: something that was un-Australian.

Then the Prime Minister wanted to rush this parliament, squash the parliament, into signing up and passing the enabling legislation before the full details had been seen and considered. But we have a simple standard. We think the Australian people deserve better than that. They deserve the full consideration of the examination of the 1,100 pages—all the detail. The fact is that the Minister for Health and Ageing only provided the full appeal mechanism information for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme two Sundays ago. We wanted to give the Australian people the decency of having their say about the FTA and also the decency of knowing that this parliament was doing exactly what we are paid and entrusted to do: to consider legislation in all the fine detail and then get it right for the Australian national interest.

Already, with my tabling of the amendment on the cultural content provisions, the Australian people have had a dividend from Labor’s approach. It is a dividend that they would never have seen or realised if we had followed the carping advice, the negativity and the criticism from the Prime Minister. He sounds more like an opposition leader—all that carping criticism, whingeing on, day after day, about the things that are happening. All we were doing was looking at the detail and trying to get it right for the Australian people. The Australian people have got the dividend of knowing that the local content rules for television and radio are going...
to be enshrined into the laws of this parliament, and there will be no Flint type flunkey down at the ABA who can reduce them with impunity. It will take a decision of both houses of the Australian parliament if they want to change the Australian cultural content rules.

That is the amendment I tabled today on behalf of the government. That is the dividend that the Labor Party has delivered to the Australian people. The Prime Minister said that this was a test of leadership. Leadership lies in getting it right for Australia. This is a Prime Minister who is always playing politics. He wants to play politics with the cultural content and he wants to play politics with drug prices in this country. He is always trying to play politics. We have seen it in the lead-up to this election campaign. He is a Prime Minister who says that it is leadership to spend $130 million on government advertising. He is a Prime Minister who says that it is leadership to throw $52 billion of new spending out in the budget. It is short-term policy making with a raft of administrative problems that have been exposed since May.

The charade must end. The pattern must end. The Prime Minister must start taking some responsibility for the mistakes that he has made. In trying to deny this parliament the opportunity to scrutinise the enabling legislation for the trade agreement he sold short the national interest. He left two vital concerns out, and Labor is fighting tooth and nail to put them back in. We have got the dividend on the cultural content, and I rather suspect the second dividend is about to greet the winner’s circle. I have seen it in so many areas. I have mentioned parliamentary superannuation. And then, of course, we have the baby care payment. They said they could not do that but then, in the May budget, with the maternity allowance, they did.

In the May budget they left out the pneumococcal vaccine—so vital to the health care of our children. When Labor put it forward the government said: ‘No, you can’t do that. There are administrative delays, problems with the company. You can’t do that.’ Then, of course, they did it. We saw it with cultural content; we are about to see it with the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The Prime Minister has been involved in the charade of trying to make a point of distinction so that he can go out and claim that this amendment is uniquely his own. In fact, he is doing nothing more than what he has been doing all year with parliamentary superannuation, the abolition of ATSIC, the baby care payment, the pneumococcal vaccine and cultural content—and we are about to see it with the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. He has been doing it all year; he has been following the lead and the agenda setting of the Australian Labor Party.

I am starting to worry about it. What about some of my other policies and approaches? I am worried now about the sanctity of the ladder of opportunity. That will be the next thing he tries to nick. In fact, I am half tempted to put a patent on it—a fair dinkum patent that reflects the fact that you have to guard against this Prime Minister. He is always there, trying to knock off Labor’s policies and claim somehow, in his political desperation, that they are his own. The truth is that if I were not putting policies forward the Liberals in this place would have nothing to offer the Australian people. If I were not doing the work for them, what would they have? What would they have to offer the Australian people?

The truth is that this government are out of ideas, out of puff and out of time. They are a government for whom it is time to go. We will be sending them on their way in the near future. But, in the days, weeks or even months leading up to the election campaign,
if they want to do some more good for the Australian people in knocking off Labor ideas, in replicating the things that the Labor Party have been advancing on our agenda, I say to them: do not stop at parliamentary superannuation, the abolition of ATSIC, the baby care payment, the pneumococcal vaccine, cultural content rules for the Australian people, cheaper drug prices and the protection of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in the FTA enabling legislation. Do not stop there. Go steps further: enact a national dental program for the 500,000 Australians on waiting lists—senior citizens, people who have served this country well and who want nothing more than the opportunity to have their teeth fixed up. Enact our plan to save bulk-billing, to get the national rate up to where it belongs at 80 per cent. Enact our plan for Medicare services after hours, providing vital services for the health care of Australian families right around the nation. Go further than the pneumococcal vaccine and adopt our policy for the chickenpox and the new polio vaccines.

Instead of running down the importance of reading aloud to our infant children, adopt Labor’s policy for reading aloud and building literacy in the early years. But do not stop there. If the government wants to do good things for the Australian people in its last weeks and months, it should adopt our plan for fair school funding to give Australian students a fair go in the education system—where we fund all the schools to an acceptable national standard and approach. Then go further, when our young people leave the school system, and expand the TAFE system by 20,000 places. Adopt Labor’s policy to do that. For young people who cannot get a fair go, for the 45,000 young people who leave school early and do not go into any full-time training or employment, act on our youth guarantee, providing the 45,000 opportunities for those young people who go without. For those who go on to university, how about reversing the 25 per cent increase in HECS? How about expanding the system by 20,000 places without creating a generation of debt for our young people?

What about mature age workers, our public housing plan, a new structure of federal-state cooperation, trade practices reform, BAS simplification, the coastguard and the department of homeland security? Whether it is social investment, whether it is economic reform, whether it is national security or whether it is the protection of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and cultural content with the FTA, it is Labor that is showing the way forward in this country, Labor that is doing it from opposition and looking forward to doing it where we belong—in government in the future.

Mr VAILE (Lyne—Minister for Trade) (3.41 p.m.)—I was going to agree with the Leader of the Opposition—which is going to happen very rarely—that it is Groundhog Day, because this MPI was debated yesterday. But then, as the Leader of the Opposition got into his stride, not too much of his contribution was actually about the substance of the MPI; it was more like an election campaign speech. We look forward to engaging in the broader range of issues during the election campaign.

The matter of public importance that is before the House this afternoon goes to the essence of the debate this week about whether the government has ensured in the national interest a defence of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the affordability of those pharmaceuticals and their availability to the Australian public, both before and after the implementation of the free trade agreement. As I outlined yesterday, the government has achieved that. It is reflected in the enabling legislation, in a couple of areas.
The issue that is being debated this week is the change in the notification process for introducing a new generic drug to the market and the impacts that that may have. The mistake that the Labor Party and the Leader of the Opposition are making is in thinking that that notification is going to have some impact on patents that are in existence. In his press release that came out on Tuesday, after the Labor Party established their position on this, the Leader of the Opposition said:

Labor will fight for amendments to:

Protect the PBS by preventing and penalising drug companies that try to stop cheaper generic drugs coming onto the market by lodging dodgy patent claims. The validity of patent claims would be determined by a court ...

This cannot be achieved. It is unworkable. That has been proven, during the debate this week, with expert advice from senior bureaucrats that has been pooh-poohed by members of the Labor Party. But these senior people providing advice in a nonpartisan way to the government of the day have been prepared to put that information down in writing, to say to ministers that the stated objective of the Australian Labor Party—we have not seen the amendment—cannot be achieved and is not workable. The issue is about a generic drug coming onto the market and a patented drug slowing down the process of that coming onto the market. The Leader of the Opposition keeps referring to a process called evergreening. It happens in America, but it does not and cannot take place in Australia because we have different patent law in Australia.

I outlined that prior to the caucus meeting earlier this week in response to some inquiries by Senator Conroy on this issue. I wrote back to him after he sought assurances from me that this would not be the case. I said:

Let me assure you that neither the amendments to the Patents Act nor the TGA act in the free trade agreement implementation bill will make evergreening of patents more likely. The Australia-United States free trade agreement does not require us to make any change to our patent extension regime and will not provide patent owners with any opportunity to extend the term of their patents beyond what they can do now.

Equally, the Australia-United States free trade agreement makes no change to what is patentable under Australian patent law and therefore there is no increased risk of pharmaceutical companies seeking additional patents in relation to relatively minor changes to a product. If an application for a patent meets the existing requirements of section 19 of the Patents Act, it will be granted. There is nothing in the Australia-United States free trade agreement or the bill, including the amendments, which will impact on this.

We made that quite clear to Senator Conroy prior to the caucus meeting on Monday. He then went into the caucus meeting. It was reported in the Sydney Morning Herald that he went to that caucus meeting and made the point in reference to the proposed amendments that ‘legal advice was being obtained’. You would have thought that, after five or six months of deliberation by the Labor Party on these issues, legal advice would have already been obtained before they went ahead and made these proposals. These proposals have not manifested themselves in an amendment that can be tabled either in this House or in the other place. They have not manifested themselves in terms of the parliamentary process. I will go back to what Senator Conroy said: ‘Legal advice is being obtained. Subject to that advice, Labor will insist on the amendment. This amendment will deny spurious patent claims.’ This is the language that the Labor Party have used all week. It started in a press conference with the Leader of the Opposition. He said at that press conference:

Through the notification proceedings [in the FTA] it is possible there’ll be more bodgie patent applications.

That is not correct. He then said:
... these are applications that are put forward not on scientific grounds but for commercial reasons to try and delay the introduction of cheaper ... drugs in Australia.

He kept using the language ‘bodgie patent claims’. The system already rejects patent claims which are frivolous and which you might call bodgie or spurious. What we are saying is that the proposition being put forward by the Labor Party would have a detrimental effect on the overall patent system in this country.

More interestingly, as I indicated in question time, this issue goes to the patent law and the PBS in this country. What is being claimed in this MPI is that the government have not protected the significant position of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme as a result of the FTA. We maintain that we have. When we voted in this House on the enabbling legislation, the people in the Labor Party responsible for these two areas—patent law and the PBS—both crossed the floor and voted with the government on the enabling legislation. It is recorded in Hansard. The member for Rankin did cross the floor and vote for the legislation. The member for Lalor did cross the floor and vote for the legislation. There was no mention at that stage of these amendments that the Labor Party proposed as a result of the caucus meeting earlier this week.

I will go back to some of the comments that I made yesterday with regard to the objectives that the government embarked upon in negotiating the free trade agreement with the United States. I informed the House that we had very clear and publicly stated objectives that we took with us when we went into this negotiation. Firstly, on the offensive side, there were things we wanted to try and achieve in terms of opening up markets and reducing tariffs on many of our exports, such as agricultural commodities, services and manufactured goods. We wanted to get those into the United States market over barriers which exist now and which will be removed as a result of this agreement. We went with clear objectives which we put on the public record and which were quite transparent.

We also said that we wanted to get access to the government procurement market in the United States. That government procurement market is worth an enormous amount of money—$200 billion. That is the federal government procurement market—that of the central government in the United States. It is worth more than $200 billion at a state level. Even after signing the agreement, two more states in the United States have signed up to the government procurement chapter. They are two very important states: Michigan and Illinois. Only yesterday, Illinois came on board. It is a major manufacturing area and a major market for Australian exporters, and they have come on board. So we outlined those offensive points that we wanted to pursue and prosecute in our negotiations with the US negotiators.

At the same time, we set out a very clearly stated defensive position with regard to areas of great importance in public policy in Australia. One was the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. We said that, as a result of the FTA, we were not going to allow or agree to any conditions that would cause pharmaceuticals or prescription drugs to rise under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. We also said that we would uphold our position of being able to maintain local content rules as far as the audiovisual sector in Australia was concerned. We wanted to maintain an ability to deliver Australian stories in Australian voices on Australian free-to-air radio and television. We have achieved those outcomes in the negotiation, the agreed text and the enabling legislation. We have not at any stage tried to be smart or smooth or to cover up our objectives in that regard or keep away from the
Australian people the actual outcome of the negotiations.

We also had other defensive positions to take—for example, for our auto manufacturing industry. We have the phased tariff reduction in PMV tariffs in Australia. But it is clearly set out in the negotiated outcome and now in the text that has been signed off on that we have defended very important areas of public policy such as the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in terms of it being able to deliver drugs at affordable prices to all Australians. This is a scheme that is the envy of the rest of the world. We have also clearly set out and it is clearly understood that we have defended and maintained Australia’s ability to deliver local content rules at the set levels that existed prior to this negotiation.

As I said yesterday and have continued to publicly state, that is in terms of not just the 55 per cent local content rules for free-to-air television broadcast but also the 80 per cent local content rules on commercial advertising. It is critically important for the acting fraternity in Australia to always be able to maintain a level of employment between major projects. This is something that representatives of the audiovisual sector made loud and clear to us in our consultation process before the negotiations. We have achieved these things. On the matter of public importance, we say to the Leader of the Opposition that that has been dealt with. The government have honoured their stated responsibility on these issues and we have delivered on these issues.

I will just point to one crucial element of this agreement that epitomises the government’s position on and commitment to the generic pharmaceutical industry in Australia and that industry’s ability to get generic medicines on the market in a timely fashion to help maintain the sustainability and affordability of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and that is in the area of data protection. Currently, in this country, the data about the molecular structure of a patented drug is protected for five years. So when a drug becomes patented, the drug company comes along and seeks the protection of the data about the molecular structure of that drug for five years. In America it is eight years. The Americans negotiated right to the bitter end to try and achieve an extension of this in Australia to eight years. The government were prepared to walk away from this agreement if we had to give in on that point—the Prime Minister was prepared to walk away from this agreement if he had to give in on that point—and we did not. It remains at five years, and this has been clearly acknowledged as a significant win and a significant benefit for the generic drug industry in Australia and for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in Australia.

We have achieved that and, as I say, that clearly shows the government’s commitment to preserving what is arguably one of the best schemes in the world—the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. We have done that. We have argued the point all through this week that we have done that. We have also argued that point with regard to the proposed amendments that the Labor Party have put forward in two areas. We immediately said, ‘If it is necessary, if people feel that it gives them more comfort to strengthen one other area’—we have accommodated that. The government actually had to draft the amendments on the audiovisual chapter. The Labor Party did not draft them; they could not draft them. They made their claim, and in the statement that came out after the caucus meeting the Leader of the Opposition said: Labor will fight for amendments to:

• Allay concern about any future reductions in local content for free to air television, pay...
television and radio—an amendment to legislate the current local content standards.
That is all well and good. We believed as a government that we had protected those. The reservations in the agreement in the services chapter were about not increasing them, and we said, ‘We want to maintain these levels.’ The American negotiators said, ‘Yes, you can maintain those levels.’ The Labor Party said, ‘We want to see this in legislation to maintain minimum levels,’ but the Labor Party could not draft the legislation, so we had to draft the amending legislation. As was pointed out today, that has been done.

With regard to Labor’s stated position as we know it at the moment about generic drugs being blocked from coming on the market by—as the Labor Party say—‘dodgy patent claims’, we have sought advice about drafting amending legislation to put their claims into effect and about whether that is workable. As the Prime Minister has clearly outlined in question time today, the advice from five different departments is that it is unworkable.

We do know that that is the position that the Leader of the Opposition started with at the beginning of the week. Now, at the end of the parliamentary sitting week, we hear on the Today program from this morning that he has moved his position. He is now talking about the process in the courts, when a patent holder might take legal action against a generic drug coming on the market. That is totally different to putting punitive measures into the Patents Act so that, if a so-called dodgy or spurious patent claim lobs up to IP Australia, they can automatically say, ‘No, it’s spurious,’ and then slam that with a significant fine—and there have been all sorts of suggestions about the size of that fine. We have seen—obviously on advice about what he originally suggested should be done—that the Leader of the Opposition has moved from talking about bodgie patent claims, amending the Patents Act and putting these punitive measures in the act to a position where injunctive procedures can be taken in the courts. This is clearly a fallacious MPI that has been moved. (Time expired)

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand) (3.56 p.m.)—Today the Leader of the Opposition is exactly where he was at the beginning of the week. There is another politician who is not where he was at the beginning of the week, and that is the Prime Minister, who has moved himself perceptibly towards the position of the Leader of the Opposition. Why is that? I think it is because yesterday, as we contemplated the position that the Prime Minister had managed to talk his government into, we could say the following, in all honesty but with some surprise: given his rigid attitude to at least one of the two proposals the Labor Party had put forward, and given the Labor Party’s support for the free trade agreement, the only way the free trade agreement was likely to be implemented on time—which is 1 January next year—would be for a Labor government to be elected in the elections in September-October. That is the only way the free trade agreement would get through. The parliamentary circumstances would work in such a way that the irony of ironies would have been created in Australian politics: Labor passing the free trade agreement.

I think it finally dawned on the Prime Minister at some point yesterday that he had a problem—that this in fact was an accurate assessment of the politics of the situation. After the efforts that he and a number of his ministers had made persistently over the months to try and exploit the Labor Party’s genuine search for the right outcome on the free trade agreement—to portray as a product of vicious anti-Americanism that genuine accountability that we showed to the Australian people by our preparedness to sit down and work through whether or not this agree-
ment was in the national interest—he finally saw that he had talked himself into the position where it would be Prime Minister Latham signing the document in Australia, as it was President Bush signing it yesterday. So in this House the Prime Minister has had his one ministerial cleanskin defending him. That happens to be the Minister for Trade. When the Prime Minister has been on the television, of course, it has been the person who will follow me in this debate, his Minister for Health and Ageing, defending him.

I saw the minister for health the other day on the ABC’s *Lateline* program, debating with our spokesperson on health. Our spokesperson on health was talking about the national interest—the price of drugs for ordinary Australians. We are not a super-wealthy country; we are reasonably well-off, and we know darn well that we do not want to have to pay American level prices for pharmaceuticals in this country. We know that. That is why we have been concerned about this issue.

Supportive though many of us are—and, in my case, very enthusiastically—of the idea of a free trade agreement with the United States, we do not believe we need or want to pay that sort of price, to see directed into our health care system American levels of prices for drugs. We were concerned about that—that is what our health spokesperson was talking about. And what was the Leader of the House, their Minister for Health and Ageing, talking about? He was ranting that she was an anti-American and that all this emanated not from any concern with ordinary Australians but from a desire to be anti-American.

That has been the government’s positioning—this Prime Minister’s positioning—over the course of the last few years. They understand that bipartisan support for the US alliance is an important thing to achieve for the longevity of the alliance, but they also understand that in the past Liberals have made some headway against the Labor Party by trying to take those statements that we make from time to time which reflect our profound Australian nationalism—our deep belief in the independence of the Australian mind and character, and our utter determination to defend ourselves—and apply them to the alliance and accuse us of anti-Americanism. They love the opportunity to be able to do that, and they will infuse every debate—on defence, in this matter on health care, on the creation of trading arrangements—with that essentially schizophrenic approach: on the one hand understanding that bipartisanship is essential for the longevity of the alliance and on the other hand desperate for the possibility of a political gain from it.

The consequence of what the government are doing can be seen in the results of an interesting poll that appeared in the *Age* the other day. In 2001, when asked about the relationship between Australia and America—‘too close’, ‘about right’, ‘not close enough’ or ‘don’t know’—25 per cent said ‘too close’, 66 per cent said ‘about right’, nine per cent said ‘not close enough’ and there were no ‘don’t knows’. In a poll taken a week or so ago, 42 per cent said ‘too close’, 51 per cent said ‘about right’ and four per cent said ‘not close enough’. They have produced something like a 20 per cent shift in public opinion and started to divide down the middle the Australian community on an issue of vital importance to Australian national security, one which requires the broadest possible public support to be sustained if we are to achieve from it these things: firstly, our own security and national interests; and, secondly, the right outcome for our ally, the United States. That right outcome is not necessarily always arrived at by coming out with an opinion identical to that of the United
States administration. Sometimes being a decent ally means informing your close friend where you think they may be going wrong.

One of the most profound things I regret from not having been able to win the last election was that in June 2002 I was not the Prime Minister of this country. As we now know from reading Woodward’s book on the way decisions were being made inside the United States administration, there was a last-ditch struggle going on in the Department of State to try and get a balanced view as to how to handle the problem of possible weapons of mass destruction and obvious manifest breaches of UN resolutions by the Saddam regime in Iraq, to try and keep on board the maximum possible international coalition and to try and keep that properly discrete from the general struggle and the war on terror. Those folk in the state department were fearful that, if they got this one wrong, rather than contain terrorism they might in fact expand the field of jihad. That is what Secretary of State Powell was dealing with in June 2002.

In June 2002 Prime Minister Howard and Alexander Downer were in the United States urging war. They took the other side in that debate, not because they had analysed the issues but because they saw an opportunity to position Simon Crean, then the Labor Party leader, who said, ‘This is a UN problem. Let’s deal with it first in the UN,’ ‘That,’ said Alexander Downer, ‘is evidence of Labor anti-Americanism. That position that he adopted is evidence that the Labor Party is insecure when it comes to dealing with the American alliance.’ That position, Mr Howard, was to lead the United States into a terrible problem; to assist them into a situation where there is not a single person in the American administration, whatever they might say publicly, who would not desperately prefer not to be in that situation now.

When you get up and accuse us of anti-Americanism, remember that sometimes inadvertently you are selling your ally down the drain as well as trying to position Australian political debate in a way that diminishes support in this country for the United States alliance rather than advancing it. You know darn well that there are possibilities to deal with this particular problem. The minister was quoting Professor Drahos. Well, let me tell you what Professor Drahos said today on Western Australian radio:

Exactly that’s exactly right—that is the position on evergreening. He continues:

The Prime Minister is wrong to say that evergreening is not a problem in Australia, it’s a problem in every single country and we have lots of evidence, lots of studies which show how evergreening delays the entry of a generic company which makes these off patent cheaper versions of the drug and we know this happens in many countries.

He knows there is a problem related to this now. We have identified this as a problem not because we are hostile to the free trade agreement but because we have now had a chance to look at what you have had to say about the regime in relation to drugs. We have now had a chance to see your legislation and how it matches with what the Senate has done and to say, outside the treaty—we do not want to renegotiate the treaty—that there are one or two things you could do to protect the interests of the ordinary Australian in the national interest. (Time expired)

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (4.07 p.m.)—I will say this much for the member for Brand: he has demonstrated by his speech today that he will show much more loyalty to the member for Werriwa than the member for Werriwa ever showed to him. That is what he has demonstrated today. He has demonstrated his own decency. At least he has stayed more or less on the topic,
Unlike the Leader of the Opposition in his contribution, I say this to the member for Brand: if the Leader of the Opposition’s amendments are so absolutely right and necessary now, why was the member for Brand perfectly prepared to support the free trade agreement without them? He said so in this House before the member for Werriwa ever dreamed up these last-minute, eleventh-hour amendments.

What we saw today was the Leader of the Opposition as he really is. He is inspired by Whitlam, he is advised by Keating, but he is modelled on Doc Evatt. That is the Leader of the Opposition as he was exposed today. He really does think that he is somehow running this country from opposition. He really does think that he is somehow the great helmsman, the great back-seat driver of Australian politics. If that is what he thinks now, just think what instability, what near insanity, we are likely to get from him if he ever becomes the leader of this country, if he ever becomes the Prime Minister.

Today we had a couple of nostalgia trips opposite, didn’t we? We had the member for Brand dreaming about how different things might be if he had been the Prime Minister back in November 2002, but most of all we had a nostalgia trip from the Leader of the Opposition himself, dreaming of the glory days back in February, when he was new, when he was fresh, when he could pull stunt after stunt and strike pose after pose and somehow get away with it. It is not good enough now. An election is in the offing. People want to know exactly where the Leader of the Opposition stands. It is not good enough to come into this place and say, ‘Why don’t you do this?’ You have to actually spell it out, and no-one will take the Leader of the Opposition seriously until he actually spells out what he wants to do with this free trade agreement amendment.

What we saw today from the Leader of the Opposition was more evidence that he does not know what he is talking about—that all this has been thought up at the last minute as an eleventh-hour attempt to say, ‘No, no—don’t give the hated Prime Minister a victory. There’s got to be something in it for me.’ What he said today was that under Labor’s proposal the validity of patent claims should be determined by the courts. I would suggest that this is a very important statement. With knowledge and forethought, he repeated today that the validity of patent claims ought to be determined by the courts. Anyone who knows anything about patent law knows that the validity of claims is at present determined by the patents office. The only thing the courts do is determine the validity of challenges.

What this half-trained Leader of the Opposition, this P-plate Leader of the Opposition, is suggesting is that 22,000 patent applications every year should not be determined by the courts but by the courts. Mr Bevis interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—The member for Brisbane is in a very perilous position.

Mr ABBOTT—On the basis of one day’s sitting per application—not unreasonable, given all the things that would need to be gone into—that means 100 courts sitting continuously just to satisfy the mad vanities of the Leader of the Opposition in his pathetic attempts to derail at the last minute a free trade agreement, which everyone, including the member for Brand, knows is in Australia’s national interest.

There is no doubt about the Leader of the Opposition. He is constantly trying to be all things to everyone and ends up being nothing of any seriousness or substance to anyone. For five months the Leader of the Opposition went around the countryside, up hill and
down dale, criticising the free trade agreement. To every audience he could find he was saying that this is a bad agreement, a dodgy agreement, done with a flaky and dangerous President by a Prime Minister who we all know is the most obsequious, fawning, forelock-tugging slave to the United States.

Mr Beazley interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT—The member for Brand says that, yes, that’s precisely what the member for Werriwa was saying. The member for Brand knows what the member for Werriwa is like, and this was what he was doing. Now, of course, the member for Werriwa says, ‘Not only was I against it for five months but now I actually own the thing.’ This government has done years of painstaking work to get this free trade agreement in place. This did not just get summoned up in a matter of a fortnight. This was not some quickie job, like a Senate inquiry. This is something that this government has been working on for years. Now the Leader of the Opposition comes along, looks at the Opera House which has been built by this government, puts one tile on it and says, ‘It’s mine.’ That is what the Leader of the Opposition, the Doc Evatt of this generation, is saying.

For the record, let me say that this free trade agreement is one of the significant achievements of contemporary Australian politics. This is one of the great achievements of recent Australian history. It is a once in 100-year opportunity. That is not what the government says but what Premier Beattie says about the free trade agreement—not the free trade agreement as proposed to be amended by the Leader of the Opposition. The free trade agreement negotiated by this government was described by Premier Beattie as a once in 100-year opportunity.

This will give us the same sort of relationship with the United States with regard to economics as we have long had with the United States with regard to defence. This is the ANZUS of trade. This will do as least as much for Australia over the next couple of decades as the Japanese trade agreement of the late 1950s did for our economy and for our prosperity and for our society in the 1960s and the 1970s. For years, we in this country have been plagued with insecurity, knowing that we are a small nation perched on the edge of a difficult and sometimes dangerous world. This will finally dispel that historic insecurity, because what it will mean is that we are not 20 million people; we are part of a domestic economy of 300 million people.

The Leader of the Opposition has flagged two amendments. We have accepted the first, about local content, because it does not add anything to the existing situation. We have rejected the second, about bodgie patent applications, because that would destroy the basis of patent law as it has been understood in this country. We are not hard or cruel in the government. We are perfectly prepared to humour the opposition. We are perfectly prepared to accept unnecessary but innocuous amendments, but we will not—we will never—accept unnecessary and dangerous amendments, and that is precisely what the Leader of the Opposition has proposed.

It was none other than the Leader of the Opposition, back in his days as mere member for Werriwa, who said: ‘Oppositions can afford to be irresponsible.’ Oppositions can afford to be irresponsible and this opposition has been demonstrating that from day one. Governments cannot afford to be irresponsible. This free trade agreement is important to Australia. Members opposite keep saying that there is bipartisan support for the US alliance. Show a bit of bipartisan support and
pass the free trade agreement now. *(Time expired)*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)*—Order! The discussion is now concluded.

**INDIGENOUS EDUCATION (TARGETED ASSISTANCE) AMENDMENT BILL 2004**

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) *(4.17 p.m.)*—Just before question time I was explaining how the government’s decision to abolish ASSPA committees was based on the review by DEST of the IEDA program over 2002-03. As I said before the break, you would think, because the government took such drastic steps and abolished ASSPA committees—4,000 of them—in each and every school around the country, that this review must have found some pretty shocking things about the way that ASSPA committees were operating and the failure was manifest in the program. When you read the report it is quite to the contrary.

For example, one of the statements in the key findings is:

There was support for the concept of the ASSPA program among those consulted. Many people were of the view that the emphasis it places on involving parents in school education makes it one of the most important Indigenous education programs. A large number of respondents to the discussion paper were of the view that greater ownership in the decision making process by Indigenous families was a positive outcome of ASSPA.

The report goes further in looking at the ASSPA program and does make some suggestions about how perhaps it could be made more effective. It looks at areas where it was working particularly well and says:

ASSPA is considered to be effective where:

Indigenous parents contribute significant levels of energy, time and effort to the program; an AIEW—

an Indigenous education worker—is employed in the school;

a genuine working partnership has developed between the ASSPA committee and the school; and

there is a supportive school environment where the Indigenous culture is recognised and valued and a proactive approach is taken to implementing Indigenous education programs and initiatives.

These are hardly damning findings about the program. In summary, the review team concluded:

Through the introduction of the ASSPA program, the school gate has been opened to a greater proportion of Indigenous parents. Through its committees, either discrete or part of existing structures, and through the implementation of ASSPA activities, the program appears to have facilitated a significant increase in Indigenous parent and community involvement and participation in schools. The program is seen as having potential to effect change, but the level of progress and attainment nationally is patchy and uneven.

With those sorts of findings reported in the review, you really wonder how the government is relying on it as a basis for taking the step of abolishing ASSPA committees. Yes, the review says that there is work to be done and that ASSPA could be made more effective and then highlights ways that it could be made to operate better and achieve even better outcomes for Indigenous students and their families. But certainly to say that that is a basis for abolishing the ASSPA committees is drawing a very long bow.

It is also interesting to look at how the review team came up with its conclusions about ASSPA, because the process that the department went through also leaves a lot to be desired. If we look at the exposition of the process that came about through the Senate
estimates hearing—courtesy of Senator Crossin’s questions—we see that the process was quite ad hoc. It left a lot to be desired.

The department said in estimates, in answers to questions from Senator Crossin, that they sent discussion papers to a selection of 400 ASSPA committees. That is 400 out of 4,000 committees across Australia. The department received 10 responses to those 400 discussion papers. When questioned further about the consultative process that took place, the departmental officers were very vague about who exactly was consulted and how that consultation was carried out. The results of that approach are showing up now in my electorate when I speak to schools and members of the community and there is a very low level of awareness and understanding of what exactly is planned for ASSPA—even to the extent where I am talking to schools and they are telling me about plans that they have for their ASSPA committee next year and what they are going to do about this and that activity and I am the one telling them, ‘Sorry, there won’t be an ASSPA committee next year if the government has its way.’

The government is now proposing this sweeping change that will affect every school in the country on the basis of a review that clearly did not consult effectively with the people most affected by the potential changes and did not reach a firm conclusion about the success or otherwise of ASSPA committees. But the government, on the basis of not much at all, is barging ahead with this proposal to abolish ASSPA committees and to replace them with a submission based approach to delivering funding for initiatives encouraging greater community and parental involvement in schools. Yes, we have had the review of ASSPA committees, which said that there are ways they can be improved, but I have not seen any evaluation or evidence anywhere that says that the submission based approach is going to be more effective. It seems that they have created a vacuum by abolishing ASSPA, and that is just the next best thing they have come up with.

Labor have already promised that we will go back and do this properly. We are not in favour of a submission based approach. In government we will consult with Indigenous communities and schools to get a thorough understanding of how the ASSPA committees are operating and what can be done better, and then we will develop a model, in consultation with those important stakeholders, that works to strengthen relationships between schools and Indigenous parents and schools and Indigenous communities.

The other change that falls within the IEDA program is to the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme. This is described in the department’s discussion paper as being more strategically targeted than the existing Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme. The focus of the new scheme will be on those Indigenous students who have not met the years 3, 5 and 7 national benchmarks for literacy and numeracy. Having failed those tests, students will be eligible for tutorial assistance in the following years—that is, years 4, 6 and 8. Tutoring will also be made available to students in years 10, 11 and 12.

Again that sounds okay on the surface until you examine it more closely and listen to what people with actual experience in teaching Indigenous students have to say about it. When you do that, you realise that this scheme is more about producing statistics for the minister than producing educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Why should the teachers of Indigenous students be dictated to as to when they can access the additional help and resources they need to assist the students they know need extra help, whether they are in years 1, 2, 3 or what-
ever? Surely the teachers who are with these students day in and day out need the flexibility to call on extra tuition for them as and when they need it. Why do they have to wait for the student to fail in year 3 or 5 before help is available? Wouldn’t it be better to get in early and give those students the best possible chance of reaching the year 3 benchmark?

Throughout the funding package announced by the minister runs a divide between Indigenous students in remote areas and those living in metropolitan areas of Australia. In a whole range of initiatives there is a redistribution in favour of those Indigenous students living in remote parts of Australia. The government is quite up-front in its approach to this. In its discussion paper, it states that one of the key directions for the latest round of funding is to provide greater weighting of resources towards Indigenous students at greatest disadvantage, which is those in remote areas. Who could argue with Indigenous students in remote Australia receiving more resources toward their education?

It is not that Indigenous students in remote areas are getting more that we take issue with but the way that it is being done. It is not being done by way of a loading for those students but by way of a redistribution of resources away from other Indigenous students. The government is ignoring the evidence in its own report to parliament showing that all Indigenous students, regardless of where they live, are disadvantaged compared to the rest of the population. Instead of addressing that problem faced by all Indigenous students by increasing funding for Indigenous education in real terms overall, the government has chosen to redistribute the same resources away from one disadvantaged group to another disadvantaged group. I am sure that my colleagues from non-remote areas will be making this point; all those in metropolitan and regional seats know that the Indigenous students in their electorates can ill afford a reduction in targeted assistance when it comes to their education.

The government’s approach is seen throughout the programs announced in April. For example, at least 50 per cent of the Parent School Partnerships money will be reserved for remote schools. Similarly, under the supplementary recurrent assistance component of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program, remote students will attract per capita funding at twice the rate of Indigenous students in non-remote areas. This approach appears to be based on the assumption that Indigenous students in non-remote areas will have their educational needs met through mainstream services. This is an approach that the government believes in but not one that has demonstrated results for Indigenous people in the past.

The implications are significant because the latest census data shows that, while 25 per cent of Indigenous Australians live in remote areas, the remaining 75 per cent live in larger centres and cities. There is no proof that mainstream services can meet the needs of Indigenous people in all areas, including education. The whole rationale for supplementary funding for Indigenous students is that they achieve at lower levels in the education system when compared to non-Indigenous students. Making some Indigenous students more equal than others is not going to bridge the gap that exists between Indigenous students overall and the general population. I move the second reading amendment in my name:

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

“whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House condemns the Government for:
(1) failing to provide real increases in funding for urgently needed recurrent and capital programs in primary and secondary schools for indigenous students and their families;
(2) introducing major changes to the operation of programs, particularly ASSPA committees, without full consultation with indigenous communities;
(3) failing to provide strategic intervention in the early years of primary schooling by changing the focus of support for tutorial assistance to indigenous students who fail to meet national literacy and numeracy benchmarks in Years 3, 5 and 7; and
(4) fostering instability in funding arrangements for the Supplementary Recurrent Assistance program and failing to recognise the disadvantage experienced by all indigenous students whether they live in metropolitan, regional, rural or remote areas of Australia.

The SPEAKER—Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Edwards—I second the amendment.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 4.30 p.m., I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Fowler Electorate: Orange Grove Designer Outlets Centre

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (4.30 p.m.)—On 25 August, three weeks from now, the Orange Grove designer outlets centre in my electorate will close its doors. Sixty-four businesses will cease operation and 450 local jobs will be lost. The closure will cause hardship to hundreds of families in the Fowler electorate and the loss of a popular specialist retail centre. The closure will not occur because of poor trading performance. It will not occur because of business failure. The closure will occur because of a decision of the New South Wales government. The refusal to approve an amendment to the Liverpool local environment plan is effectively a death sentence for the Orange Grove designer outlets centre.

In November 2002, Liverpool council granted development consent for the use of the site as an outlets centre. The centre was opened in November 2003 by the Planning Minister, Craig Knowles. In December 2003, Liverpool council resolved to prepare and exhibit a draft LEP to introduce a new definition for ‘outlets centre’. This included the Orange Grove site and an AMP-owned site at Crossroads. In January 2004, Westfield successfully challenged the consent on the basis that the permitted uses in the zone were not broad enough to allow this use. The Minister Assisting the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning then had the option to regularise the use through an amendment to the Liverpool LEP. This request was made by council’s administrator in April 2004. However, the Crossroads site was excluded from that request.

In making the decision not to approve the LEP amendment, the minister rejected the findings of the section 69 report prepared by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, which recommended that the minister sign the Liverpool local environment plan amendment. The report prepared by the senior environmental planner, Sydney region west, was supported by a study by the principal policy adviser, metropolitan strategy, which concluded:

Taking into account the assessment using the net community benefit criteria and the broader considerations relating to consumer choice, business competition and local employment generation, the conclusion reached is that the benefits of developing the proposed outlet centre outweigh the disbenefits.

The advice to the minister by the department’s corporate counsel on 22 June stated:
There are no legal reasons that would require the draft LEP to be or not to be made. The minister is required to decide whether or not to make the draft LEP based on the planning merit of the rezoning and having regard to the section 69 report and the act.

The advice also stated:

The spot rezoning of land to regularise a use which already exists (or to prevent a particular development proposal) has occurred in numerous cases before.

A number of examples were given. It was therefore surprising that the decision was made not to approve the LEP. In a letter to the centre’s solicitors, the regional planning coordinator. Sydney region west, advised on 22 June that a section 69 report had been completed, but then added cryptically:

A number of issues remain to be resolved.

On 24 June, the department’s director-general advised the executive director of metropolitan planning:

I am not satisfied with the department’s report or the council’s case for amendment and I will be seeking a further briefing on this matter to clarify a number of matters.

I do not know who provided that briefing. However, on the following day the director-general advised the minister in a one-page memorandum referring to the section 69 report. It stated:

In my view the contrary conclusion namely that the plan should not be made having regard to its planning merit would also be reasonably open to the minister.

It then gave five dot points to consider before it stated:

If so then the minister could reasonably conclude that the plan be not made.

The process and the minister’s decision leave many unanswered questions. But I have just one question: why must 450 people, many from the Fowler electorate that I represent in this parliament, lose their jobs?

Kalgoorlie Electorate: Port Facilities

Mr HAASE (Kalgoorlie) (4.34 p.m.)—This evening I want to acknowledge the outstanding improvement in port facilities in my electorate. We all recognise that Australia has a vast coastline with many ports. My electorate of Kalgoorlie has about 30 per cent of the total coastline of Australia. That amount of coastline demands a surveillance system that will link remote and regional ports to the larger security system on a national level. Our ports in the Kalgoorlie electorate are entitled to the same protection measures against illegal entry and quarantine risk as those in metropolitan areas.

I am pleased to announce my government is tackling the task by enhancing the monitoring of our ports with a comprehensive closed-circuit TV network along our nation’s waterfront. There will be new CCTV services in eight ports across the north-west of my electorate, from Carnarvon to Kimberley. Thanks to this federal initiative, the ports of Broome, Cape Cuvier, Carnarvon, Exmouth, Onslow, Useless Loop, Wyndham and Yampi Sound will benefit from greater border protection technology. This is in addition to the existing closed-circuit monitoring facilities at ports in Dampier, Esperance, Port Hedland and Port Walcott, more than doubling the CCTV monitoring network.

This is the result of more than $70 million in the customs maritime security strategy and it will increase Australia’s security in two key areas: container inspection and port area surveillance. There are now 12 ports in my electorate covered by this remote monitoring system, out of 16 state-wide. With 75 per cent of the state’s CCTV port-monitored surveillance in the Kalgoorlie electorate, this announcement is a significant boost for customs border protection resources, and provides significant peace of mind for the constituents of my electorate. Almost 20 per cent
of the nation’s CCTV cameras are in the Kalgoorlie electorate. The existing network consists of more than 220 cameras at 95 wharves across the nation. All cameras are linked to local customs houses, regional monitoring centres in each state and the national monitoring centre in Melbourne.

The new customs strategy means an even higher level of protection for Australia against illegal arrivals, drug runners, pests and disease. Extra funding allows for long-term posting of 10 additional customs officers for Western Australia, including five for Dampier, two for Geraldton and a further officer in Port Hedland.

Australian government funding of $17 million over four years will mean that the number of ports covered by the network can be more than doubled. There will be 63 CCTV services linking ports across the nation. This network coverage means that our port will be monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year. That is constant surveillance, with no respite for Christmas or other holidays—or ill health, for that matter. Automated video motion detection makes sure that any activity on the waterfront, no matter what time of the day or night, can be targeted and monitored. Customs is Australia’s key frontier border protection agency and it deserves the sorts of technological support and resources this new funding package allows. No other country can boast this comprehensive system of linking major international seaports over such vast distances and often in remote locations—and no other electorate has as much coastline depending on a strong and viable border protection strategy.

I am pleased also to announce that the port of Port Hedland was declared, as of the end of the financial year just passed, as the largest tonnage port in Australia, with movement of some 90 million tonnes. It just outstrips the Port of Dampier, which has some 89 million tonnes per annum. I believe we would all agree that is a magnificent achievement for two locations that are only some 250 kilometres apart.

**Australian Labor Party: Industrial Relations Policy**

**Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR** (Burke) (4.38 p.m.)—I rise this afternoon in the adjournment debate to comment on the government’s attempts to misrepresent Labor’s position on industrial relations. You always know that a Tory government is in trouble and devoid of policies or ideas when its members go about bashing unions—and the member for Corangamite would be well aware of this; he would have seen it over many years.

Mr McArthur interjecting—

**Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR**—He may well have been. But we know that they are not really bashing unions; they are bashing the Australian work force. The most productive element of this country—and this will always be the case—is the Australian work force: Australian families working hard to make this country a better place. It is those people and their right in the workplace to organise collectively, if they wish to, that this government abhors. It has an ideological hatred towards collective bargaining and towards people working in collective ways. The fact is that, when a Tory government is in trouble, it is usual for it to come out and bash unions.

We know that the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations is a novice minister in relation to industrial relations. He has no form and no history in relation to industrial relations, and it shows. Today he selectively quoted an article in the *Australian Financial Review* and misrepresented its author when indicating Labor’s position.

Mr McArthur interjecting—

CHAMBER
The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Corangamite might consider the standing orders and not the gallery.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—If he were honest and up front with that article, he would have ensured that John Edwards’s views of Labor’s position were properly articulated. He avoided mentioning in particular the statement in that article that the proposed abolition of AWAs would have a negligible, if any, effect upon the economy. Of course, he chose not to make mention of the proposed abolition of AWAs. He chose to talk about one area where he thought he could reach agreement with the author and, therefore, misrepresented the views of the author and, in doing so, misrepresented the position that Labor takes on industrial relations.

I know the government does not like it, but it was Labor that introduced and decentralised the industrial relations system. It was Labor that introduced a system that allowed for collective bargaining. Indeed, when the now Prime Minister was in government in the late seventies and early eighties, he did nothing towards devolving the authority of the Industrial Relations Commission and the capacity for employees to bargain at the workplace level. It was a Labor government that introduced those changes. However, it introduced them with protections for people in the Australian work force, to ensure that the playing field was as level as possible and to ensure that, yes, we do bargain and discuss change of the workplace at the workplace level and not just centrally but we do it with protections. What this government has set about doing since its election in 1996 is to continue the devolution and the decentralisation of negotiations but rip away those protections that have been afforded to the Australian work force. This minister, like his two predecessors, is no different in his dedication and ambition to remove every entitlement and protection afforded to the Australian work force.

So I think it is a bit rich for him to come in here in question time and misrepresent Labor’s position in relation to industrial relations by quoting from articles in the daily newspapers and then to misrepresent an author of an article in Tuesday’s Australian Financial Review; it is a bit rich for him then to expect us to have any regard for him as a minister. The fact is that he has no experience as a minister for industrial relations, and it shows. He is full of wind and hot air when it comes to answering questions in question time, because he is devoid, like the government generally, of policies that would protect Australian families and properly balance their rights, and would ensure that people can look after their families but still have a productive role in the workplace. It is that failure to properly balance the rights of workers in looking after their families on the one hand and industrial rights on the other which I think turns many Australian workers off this government. This government has to properly reconsider its views in regard to this area.

Corangamite Electorate: Woady Yaloak Catchment Group

Mr McARTHUR (Corangamite) (4.44 p.m.)—I would like to acknowledge the Woady Yaloak 10-year celebration that was held on 19 April 2004, attended by former minister, the Hon. David Kemp. Before I do that I also acknowledge that the toxic dump that was going to be created at Pittong has been overturned—the decision of the Labor government. I raised that matter here in this parliament and I am delighted that the actions of the local people and the federal member were such that the state government saw the light and removed that toxic dump at Pittong.
The Woady Yaloak catchment group have been operating for 10 years in the Pittong, Rokewood and Werneth area in conjunction with the Victorian Farmers Federation and Alcoa. They involve 80 landholders and cover 3,500 acres. They have had a program of improving productivity, improving conservation and getting rid of the rabbits. They have planted 135,000 trees and they have managed to involve the community, the farmers and the landholders.

I would like to acknowledge in the gallery Mr. Ian Smith, with his band of supporters. He is a well-known farmer from an area on the Emu Creek which is part of the Woady Yaloak. He has been removing rabbits from his farm for the last 40 years with great success. He is an embodiment of the farmers of the Woady Yaloak who not only make some money from farming but are keen to pursue conservation values.

The viability of these farms has been improved because of the activities of the group. The planting of perennial pastures has improved the stocking rate of the farms. There has been a 67 per cent participation rate by the landholders, so much so that trees have been planted, rabbits have been removed and the erosion of that difficult area has been contained.

Back in 1990 Alcoa joined with the group and over the 10-year period has contributed $750,000 to the landholders and the farmers in making this a landmark project for Australia. It is interesting to note that Alcoa has contributed 42 per cent of the funds, the federal government 21 per cent, and the state government 19 per cent. The group have put nine per cent of the funds into the project and there has been a contribution by individual landholders of $1.5 million to their farm works. I would just like to quote what Mr. Wade Hughes, who came all the way from New York to this celebration, was quoted as saying on the Woady Yaloak:

“\[In Woady Yaloak, there was widespread willingness to work flexibly through the issues and complete faith that the community could build mutually beneficial partnerships to restore this economically and environmentally important ecosystem,\]” said Wade Hughes, one of the original members of the Alcoa Landcare Project Management Team, who has since gone on to manage Environmental Health and Safety Communication for Alcoa globally.

“When the eco-system includes multiple land uses ranging from nature conservation through to intensive agriculture, a systemic approach requires all the land users in the system to discover how to work together for the common good,” said Wade Hughes.

This was a quite unique approach which Alcoa participated in and led them to participate in other projects. I also acknowledge Mr Cam Nicolson, the project officer, who managed to keep the farmers involved. He encouraged them to have a go at some of these difficult issues. Through participation, good leadership, a dedicated staff in Cam Nicolson and a positive attitude, the Woady Yaloak has proved to be a very successful project. Mr Kevin Knight, who has been the Mayor of the Golden Plains Shire, provided outstanding leadership in the project over the years and also was a very good farmer in his own right. His sister Alice Knight provided the hospitality and enthusiasm to keep the project going through some of the tougher times. I would like to finish with a quote from Mr John Carr, a well-known farmer from Rokewood:

“We wanted to be able to manage our resources so that we could leave the land in a better condition for the next generation. It was this guiding principle which struck a chord with many landholders and encouraged them to get involved.

I wish the Woady Yaloak landcare catchment group all the best for the future. To their chairman, Mr Michael Rowe, I say that I...
hope they continue their very good work. This is an outstanding project by an outstanding group of individuals who have stuck together and provided conservation in reality; they have provided better farming practices and a guide for communities all around Australia. (Time expired)

Swan Electorate: Crime Forum

Mr WILKIE (Swan) (4.49 p.m.)—I rise on the adjournment to raise a very important matter. In this week’s Southern Gazette there is a letter to the editor by Emily Dickman from Rivervale claiming that I organised a crime forum in the electorate and did not attend. I will read the letter that is allegedly from Ms Dickman:

Action needed, not rhetoric
MR Wilkie has been the Member for Swan for six years and finally realises we have a crime problem in our community. Well done mate.

To his credit, he organised a pow-wow on the matter. No doubt it would have revealed some good feedback. If only he had been there. Obviously there was something more attractive in Canberra.

We, in the Belmont area, need action on crime, not more words. We not only get robbed by the burglars, but I read in the papers we get robbed further by the insurance companies because of our local crime rate.

Emily Dickman, Rivervale.

I was amazed and astonished to see this letter. As the member for Swan for almost the last six years I know that my constituents are concerned, as I am, about the growing incidence of crime in our area. I have therefore organised many forums over the years where crime has been addressed. Just recently, I organised another crime forum which was held in Belmont and I can assure the House that I certainly attended the forum along with many concerned citizens.

Knowing that the statements in Ms Dickman’s letter were incorrect, I asked my staff to ring Ms Dickman to ascertain why the facts in the letter were wrong. Unfortunately, Ms Dickman—who did not attend the forum because she rarely leaves the house—did not have a phone and the staff member ended up going to Ms Dickman’s house. She made the following observations: she had not written the letter herself; rather, she had been asked to sign it by her friend Mr Murfin, who is the Liberal candidate for Swan. Incidentally, Mr Murfin did not attend the crime forum. I would like to read to the House a statutory declaration made by my electorate officer, Mrs Deeahn Helen O’Brien, to explain clearly Ms Dickman’s account of the events:

STATUTORY DECLARATION
I Deeahn Helen O’Brien ...

I will not mention her address. It goes on: On 5 August 2004 at approximately 12 noon, I visited the residence of Ms Emily Dickman ...

I will not mention Ms Dickman’s address either. The statutory declaration continues:

The purpose of my visit was to speak with Ms Dickman about a Letter to the Editor published under her name in the Southern Gazette, August 3-9 2004 edition. (Copy attached)

I asked Ms Dickman about her letter and she replied that she had not seen the letter and that it was written for her by her friend Mr Andrew Murfin. I also asked Ms Dickman if she had attended the Crime Forum referred to in the letter and she replied that she did not and that she never went out. Ms Dickman is 86 years of age. The telephone RSVP list and attendance list taken on the day of the Crime Forum at Belmont Sport and Recreation Centre on 26 June 2004 at 10.00 a.m. confirms that Ms Dickman did not attend.

When I explained to Ms Dickman that the letter was factually incorrect, Ms Dickman said that she was unaware of the content of the letter because she had not seen it.

I said to Ms Dickman that Mr Kim Wilkie MP had actually hosted and attended the Crime Fo-
rum in person and that her letter was misrepresentative of Mr Wilkie. I suggested that she should immediately speak with Mr Wilkie on my mobile phone about her Letter to the Editor but Ms Dickman indicated that she did not want to. I also advised Ms Dickman that we would be investigating her Letter to the Editor further and that Mr Wilkie would be raising the matter in Federal Parliament later that day.

And I make this solemn declaration by virtue of section one hundred and six of the Evidence Act, 1906.

Declared at East Victoria Park this fifth day of August 2004 before me, Paul Lindquist
Commissioner for Declarations

The bottom line is this: an elderly lady in my electorate was approached by the Liberal candidate for Swan to sign a letter which has proven to be untrue. I am sure that all members will agree that this tactic is dishonourable and must be rejected by all political parties. I ask the Prime Minister to have this matter investigated as a matter of urgency and to ensure that the Liberal Party does not resort to such unacceptable activities in either my electorate or elsewhere. I seek leave to table the statutory declaration.

Leave granted.

Mr WILKIE—As I said before, this would appear to be a concerted campaign on behalf of the Liberal Party not just in my seat but right across Western Australia. In fact, ‘Inside Cover’ of the West Australian today reports similar letters being produced in Kalgoorlie and other electorates. Not only have they used people inappropriately but on many occasions the people named in the letters simply do not exist. The names have been fabricated. Clearly this is a practice that must stop. The Prime Minister needs to put an end to it. I am particularly concerned in relation to Mr Murfin, because I worked with him when I was a councillor at South Perth and he was at Belmont. Given his past Salvation Army background, I am very disappointed that he would stoop to this sort of activity.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 4.54 p.m.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley) took the chair at 9.40 a.m.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Burke Electorate: Train Accident

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Burke) (9.40 a.m.)—I have some bad news I wanted to convey to the parliament about a train accident that occurred at 6.15 this morning in Furlong Road, St Albans. It would appear—and I only have preliminary information—that three people were killed when a car and a commuter train collided at a level crossing in St Albans, in Melbourne’s north-west. Emergency services were on the scene very quickly, apparently, because they had been attending a minor car accident near the crossing when the second car was struck by a Melbourne-bound Sprinter train travelling from Kyneton.

There is no doubt that some of the passengers on that train would have been constituents of mine in the electorate of Burke. The accident occurred in the newly constituted seat of Gor- ton, for which I will be a candidate in the next election. This is certainly a tragic set of circumstances. The passengers in the car were not able to get out in time. The 100 or so people on the train were transferred to buses, but there is no clear information as to whether there were any serious injuries to those passengers. I am aware that the railway line has been closed and traffic is being diverted from the area.

There have been concerns about this crossing in recent years. There have been fatalities in the past. A passenger waiting at the station was killed, as I recall. We have been looking at ways to prevent any other serious accidents. I am not aware whether this accident had anything to do with the problems associated with that railway crossing. I hope that was not the case and I hope therefore that the authorities examine—the circumstances of this tragic accident. I just wanted to this morning convey my condolences to the families and friends of those that have died. I will be gaining further information to see whether there were further injuries. It was a tragic accident, and I only hope that we can improve that railway crossing. I hope the weaknesses of the system did not in any way cause this awful accident.

Employment: Centacare Chermside

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie)—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence) (9.43 a.m.)—I would like to also pass on my condolences to the family and friends of people who perished in that accident. I join with the member for Burke in my sympathies to all concerned. I speak today regarding the Centacare Chermside office, which celebrated their first year in operation last week. I was happy to join in their celebrations because it was a celebration of not only their success but also their being recently granted a 4½-star rating. They have assisted many hundreds of people who have entered the premises looking for work over the past year.

One hundred and ninety people have remained in their jobs for at least three months, or in education for one semester, and that was truly a great milestone. In the past three years, Centacare, as part of the Job Network, have grown from 11 to 15 sites around the country and now they are the 11th largest Job Network provider in this country—but they are also one of
the top performers. It is important that we acknowledge that, while they may be 11th, they are top of the list in terms of their star rating, their performance and their outcomes.

One of the wonderful things that Centacare has done, because of its close alliance to the Mater Children’s Hospital, is to start a great initiative where it will give $50 for every job vacancy that is filled with a fully eligible Job Network job seeker. Through this initiative they hope to raise some $10,000 for the Mater Little Miracle program. What better way for an organisation to help our sick babies and children than by helping to get hundreds of job seekers in the Petrie electorate working. It has been a truly terrific initiative. It is a great initiative because it is getting people working, it is giving staff and job seekers enormous satisfaction and it is helping the community. I congratulate Centacare on that great initiative.

Centacare is also at the forefront with its initiation of a free course for single non-custodial parents. This course is to help men in the Petrie electorate, and in the Browns Plains area in south-west Brisbane, who have separated or divorced from their partner. The breakdown of any marriage can be a traumatic time. It is a terribly isolating experience for men—and particularly so when they do not have custody of their children. The federal government’s Child Support Agency will fund Centacare to enable them to support fathers in the Petrie electorate by providing the four-week course for single non-custodial dads. They have also launched a free course for separated fathers who are out of work and in need of professional support and direction. Centacare family and community services and Centacare Employment are piloting the Fathering After Separation program with funding from the federal government’s Child Support Agency.

I commend the Centacare organisation for all the wonderful work that they do in the community. I wish them well in the Job Network front and also in their Centacare fathering program. (Time expired)

**Australian Greens: Employment Policy**

**Mr ORGAN (Cunningham)** (9.46 a.m.)—On 20 July, the Australian Greens employment policy was launched by Senator Bob Brown and me in Wollongong, a part of Australia where the unemployment rate remains around 10 per cent. The policy outlines a commitment to full employment. A key aspect of this commitment is support for the Job Guarantee initiative, which is an initiative of Professor Bill Mitchell of the University of Newcastle and business and union groups in the Hunter region. This initiative will see the federal government become more actively involved in job creation.

As the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s July 2004 survey points out: the living standards of Australians are firmly based on jobs. Our prosperity as individuals, and as a nation, is a product of having jobs and creating more of them … From employment flows economic opportunity and social advantage for our community. Conversely, unemployment is the major contributor to poverty and social disadvantage.

This is true, but the ACCI has left something out. There are thousands of working poor in Australia at the moment, and much of this has arisen because of the increasing trend towards casualisation of the work force. The recently released ACTU report on how casual work affects employees, households and communities in Australia highlights this problem. The casual rate now stands at a record high of 27.9 per cent, and this is something that we as a country should not be proud of.
When we talk about jobs and employment, we must talk about a living wage—adequate wages and conditions so that workers can provide themselves and their families with the basic necessities of life, so that they can have financial security, and so that they can go to work and return home safely at the end of the day. The living wage is something which is easily forgotten—meaningfully or otherwise—in material from organisations such as the ACCI and this government. Buried beneath terms such as ‘increased flexibility’, ‘efficiency improvements’, ‘industrial relations reform’, ‘simpler minimum standards’ and ‘decentralisation of the wage fixing system’ are the harsh realities of lower wages, loss of entitlements and increasing casualisation.

Casual work is just that: short term and casual—a stopgap, interim measure which is insecure and transitory. Casual employees do not have access to holidays or holiday pay, long service leave, sick leave, sick pay, maternity leave, appropriate superannuation, financial security, wage increases or staff development programs. Last week, I heard the story of Telstra call centre employees in Wollongong. Permanent employees there are paid approximately $20 an hour with conditions, but the casual employees who sit right next to them, and who are doing exactly the same work, are paid $16 an hour. Some of them are being told that they must work 37½ hours a week, and some of them have been doing this for up to three years—with no holidays, et cetera. This is a disgrace. The flexible workplace the Prime Minister is so proud of is becoming more and more exploitative, denigrating and inflexible. Many of these people are now the working poor. They deserve better and this country can provide them with a lot better. We must strive for full employment in Australia, and we are a long way from it at the moment.

Murray Electorate: Indigenous Affairs

Dr STONE (Murray—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage) (9.49 a.m.)—In September 1839, Edward Stone Parker, who was an assistant protector under the protectorate system in Victoria, then a colony, wrote to the government of the day about his concerns about the Indigenous people in northern Victoria. Identifying several important issues, he wrote:

The first is the rapid occupation of the entire country by settlers, and the consequent attempts made to deprive the aborigines of the natural products of the country and even to exclude them from their native soil. The entire country of the Waverong and the Witourong tribes with scarcely any exception, is now sold or occupied by squatters.

A considerable portion of the country ranged by the Jajowrong and Taoungurong tribes is also taken up by sheep and cattle runs.

All the available portions of the tracts that remain will speedily be absorbed in like manner by stock. The very spots most valuable to the aborigines for their productiveness—the creeks, watercourses and rivers—are the first to be occupied.

It is a common opinion among the settlers that the possession of a squatting licence entitles them to the exclusion of the aborigines from their runs.

This was in 1839. It was just some 10 years later that the Dja Dja Wurrung were in the worst situation that Stone Parker described. They had been pushed from their country. Their grinding stones, the evidence of their canoe trees, their scar trees and their kitchen middens were what remained of their life over thousands of generations. A local squatter, John Hunter Kerr, collected three artefacts amongst many others and sent them to a Paris exhibition that ended
up in the British Museum. These items have recently been loaned back to the Victorian museum.

You can understand the Dja Dja Wurrung’s extreme concern that those items do not again disappear from their immediate custodianship. They understand the problem with museums. It is a bit like the situation with the Elgin marbles. The British Museum is afraid that, if it relents on this issue, there might be an unravelling of its policies that have kept indigenous artefacts over a very long time. But this is a situation where the traditional owners of the Boort area in the heart of my electorate have very little left in terms of their ancestors’ material possessions. To them it is a sacred thing.

I ask that the Victorian and British governments act very generously and agree to have materials sent back to the British Museum in order that they be repatriated to this country on permanent loan so that the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples can have access to those materials, can look after them and can teach their children and grandchildren what their traditional culture was all about.

Good news has come out of this whole process. Mr Paul Haw and the Lodden shire are now talking to the Dja Dja Wurrung about a permanent collection of what materials are still around in other localities, to have them properly interpreted and protected. This is a good outcome, but I ask the Victorian government to be very sensitive, to assist the Dja Dja Wurrung so they do have something of their past, and to do this as speedily as possible. (Time expired)

**Rankin Electorate: Chung Tian Temple**

**Dr Emerson (Rankin) (9.52 a.m.)—**On behalf of the Australian parliament, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those of the Buddhist faith who practise their faith at the Chung Tian temple. A pagoda foundation laying ceremony will be held at the temple on Saturday, 7 August 2004. This ceremony marks the commencement of the second stage of the temple’s development. The blessing will be hosted by Venerable Master Hsing Ting, head abbot of the Foguanshan Buddhist order. Spiritual guidance has been provided at the temple by Honourable Master Yi-Lai. The temple is an inspiration to the people of south-east Queensland. Master Yi-Lai, Reverend Chueh-Shan and all the monks at the Chung Tian temple are enriching our understanding of Buddhism. They are making a wonderful contribution to our society, helping to weave a rich tapestry in a multicultural community.

Although the Buddhist presence in Queensland goes back a century, it was not until the completion of the Chung Tian temple in 1993 that local Buddhists could deepen their practice in such a serene environment. One of the most endearing features of the temple is the regular attendance of large numbers of children. To them the temple is a place of learning, worship and fun. It is a very happy and joyous environment. Chung Tian means middle heaven. The temple is a little piece of heaven. More than 100,000 people have visited it. Stage 2 of the temple will provide additional space for learning, community gathering and dining. It is hoped that the pagoda will be completed in 2005. The style of pagoda being constructed at the Chung Tian temple has been a feature of traditional Buddhist architecture for more than 1,500 years.

I wish to commend all members of the Buddha’s Light International Association of Queensland for all their religious and charitable works. I am very sorry that I will not be able to attend the ceremony: as a father of three, I am committed to a major sporting activity involving
my children. On behalf of the Australian parliament, I extend best wishes and congratulations to all involved in the Chung Tian temple and the Buddha’s Light Association. We are very grateful for your contribution to our society and our nation.

Gilmore Electorate: Education Funding

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (9.55 a.m.)—In the last two weeks in Gilmore we had three wonderful announcements which have actually made a dream come true. They range from $10 million to the Shoalhaven campus of the University of Wollongong’s medical school; to $660,000 to what was known as a sea lab, which is now the Shoalhaven Marine and Freshwater Centre; to $15,000 to Nowra primary school for reading assistance.

Let me talk about the Nowra Public School reading assistance program, for which Brendan Nelson issued $15,000. It will train teachers to use the program in their classrooms and for training more volunteer helpers. The reading assistance program involves the training of parents and community tutors in running reading assistance sessions. Tutors work in teams, supervised by the school’s learning difficulties teacher. They withdraw students in small numbers from classes and provide daily intensive reading tuition which is continued until students reach a satisfactory level. The average length of time a student is on the program is one term.

We have excellent public schools in the Gilmore electorate, and I have always taken a great interest in what our students are achieving. One of the activities that I have always looked forward to is the reading sessions, and I have been honoured to be able to take part in that at the Nowra Public School. Having had some involvement in the program, it is obvious that children who find reading difficult do much better in smaller groups and with extra help along the way. Congratulations go to Mr Clive Robertson, the headmaster of Nowra Public School. I welcome the $15,000 that the Australian government has given it.

Last week, $10 million was also given to the Shoalhaven campus of the University of Wollongong’s medical school. That has been a dream come true. This is a real solution for the health needs of the Gilmore electorate. Training doctors from our community, in our community, who will stay in our community will protect and secure GP services in our region. Currently, more than three out of every five doctor visits are bulk-billed in Gilmore. There is every indication that this is increasing with our high representation of children and seniors, who attract the $7.50 bulk-billing bonus under Medicare.

There is evidence that doctors end up practising not all that far from where they do their training. It has certainly been one of the difficulties in supplying doctors to regional areas like ours. The University of Wollongong has consistently demonstrated that it is ahead of the pack in adopting innovative approaches with a regional focus, using campuses such as the one in the Shoalhaven and the one in Moss Vale. So it makes perfect sense for this government to build on this five-star record by funding this expansion to the program.

I wish to congratulate Vice-Chancellor Gerard Sutton. I also wish to thank the Divisions of General Practice and all our GPs, who were totally united in working on this project. I also want to thank Professor Don Iverson, whose dream it was to have a medical school at the Shoalhaven campus in Gilmore, and Canio Fierravanti-Wells from the university. The work that he did was absolutely superb, and it was a pleasure working with him on this innovative, exciting program.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—Order! In accordance with standing order 275A, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

ADJOURNMENT

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (9.58 a.m.)—I move:

That the Main Committee do now adjourn.

Lyons Electorate: No Dole Program

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (9.58 a.m.)—I wish to speak of a very important event that occurred in my electorate last week. That event was the Campbell Town District High School ‘No Dole’ launch and charter signing, which was shared with another local district high school, Cressy. Grade 10 students from both schools have undertaken to sign a charter which states:

I willingly commit myself to participate in the No Dole Project which aims to place every Grade 10 student in further education, training or employment by 31 March, 2005.

The pledge was a most important milestone for the students who have made this commitment and signals that they mean they are serious in choosing and training for a future and rejecting the need to go onto the dole. With community support, they can achieve their goals and dreams. This need to encourage and mentor young people is at the base of Labor’s ‘Learn or Earn—no third way’ program, and programs and places are being funded to ensure that young people get the best of chances. It is not easy, but I know it is possible. I was educated at the Cressy school, and I know that if I had not found work and had the benefit of many mentors at work I might not have had the success I have had in my work and life. I know the value of this sort of help because it worked for me.

The No Dole program is an initiative of the Beacon Foundation, whose mission statement is ‘to influence the attitudes and cultures of Australians so that each young person develops an independent will to achieve personal success for themselves and their community’. They are talking about young people being able to find real jobs, dignity and respect, which can be so lacking if support from both the educational environment and the local business community is not there. This is a real commitment by the students, but it is also a commitment by the supporting adults—those in the schools and training establishments, those in local business and those in the community. This is a very significant program. It binds our young people to our communities, and it binds those communities in support of them into the next phase of their lives. The schools are very committed to a direction that encompasses transition programs to college or TAFE, career learning, and personal confidence and presentation assistance and helps to develop a direction for the future and motivation to achieve these goals.

Not everyone is set out for an academic career, but there are many jobs that are meaningful and rewarding and do not require you to be an Einstein. One lad has been given the opportunity to work one day a week on a farm while still in the last months of school so that the transition from school to work can be done seamlessly. He starts his working life with a paid job and continues some training that will enhance his skills through this job. This student has improved his school work, his self-esteem has lifted and he has much more confidence in his dealings with the community. It may be a simple idea, but it is surprising how it has escaped the attention of many communities.

I am very impressed with both schools’ efforts to ensure that their students have a proper future. They are fostering a family atmosphere where all community members are valued.
They believe that this ‘learning for life’ program starts with child care and goes through to further education. Further education allows students to continue their studies through VET courses in community services, hospitality and tourism, and small business management, as well as basic subjects such as information technology, English and mathematics.

Campbell Town has changed so much over the last few years. It used to be a little country town which people sped through on the way to somewhere else, and now it is a destination in itself. The community have got to work and made Campbell Town a place to be. In fact, they won a national Can Do Community award in 2003, and I reckon they will be up for more awards this year after the viewing of the transit of Venus that took place in June. Campbell Town school was involved in all this too, which is going to ensure that jobs will be created in and around the town that were never there before.

Cressy has now got the challenge to do something similar. The school is ready and the community is geared up, so it was with great pleasure that I participated in this terribly important event. I want to take this opportunity to broadcast their success around Australia and to let people know that Campbell Town and Cressy are can-do schools and can-do communities and indeed are leading the way in our can-do state. I wish all the students who have made this commitment the very best success in the future, and I will be there cheering them on all the way. (Time expired)

Environment: Plastic Bags

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (10.03 a.m.)—It must be a Tasmanian thing: the member for Lyons speaks with all the aplomb of a regular Insiders guest. It is very interesting.

Mr Sidebottom—How do you get on?

Mr RANDALL—Yes, how do you? I am not a person renowned for signing pledges for campaigns—other than, obviously, my own re-election—or agreeing very easily to give up things, but the campaign to give up plastic bags is one campaign that I did not hesitate to sign up to, to take the plunge and to help get rid of this threat to the environment on our planet. My electorate of Canning is a diverse mix of suburbia and semirural and farming land. We enjoy some of Western Australia’s most beautiful semi-wetlands and have a coastline which is home to hundreds of species of native flora and fauna. Our environment is fragile, and plastic bags are the scourge of modern-day living. I am constantly driving around my electorate, and I despair at the sight of plastic bags on the side of the road or caught in fences, knowing the damage that they can cause to livestock that become entangled in them or that eat them. Plastic bags kill an estimated 100,000 marine animals and birds every year. Local and state governments are spending over $200 million annually on picking up litter that includes plastic bags. Imagine what good use that money could be put to if only we could reduce the usage of plastic bags that may only be used for minutes but will obviously be around in the environment as landfill for many hundreds of years.

I am not just paying lip-service to this campaign. Even before I signed up to the pledge to say no to plastic bags I undertook my own campaign to bring this message to my electorate by advertising on the reverse of paper shopping docketts. The message was simple. It did not advocate a political line or advertise a political party; it simply said, ‘Don Randall says no to plastic bags.’ I had been using this message in the Kmart in Armadale and other suburbs in the electorate for several months and was pleased that the public reaction to the campaign had
been very positive. Many people have congratulated me on taking the initiative to get the message out there.

I was so pleased with the public reaction to this that I thought I would extend the campaign into other shopping centres in my electorate but was unfortunately told by the advertising company acting for Coles and Woolworths in Mandurah and Kelmscott that the message was too political and they would not let me get my message out there. I had sent my money in and signed the papers to sign on to the shopper docket program for this important message, but they sent my money back. Call me cynical, but I cannot help thinking that some of these large retailers are not fair dinkum in their support of the environment or that they have some other sort of vested interest or hidden agenda.

I was also keen to promote the same message along the Albany Highway in Kelmscott by taking out advertising on large billboards with the same message: ‘Don Randall says no to plastic bags.’ But again I was thwarted—not by the advertising company this time but by the owners of the land, the Western Australian state government, through MetroRail, telling me that it was too political. These signs were not going to have any mention of the party that I represent or any other political message but were to say, ‘Don Randall says no to plastic bags.’ We are all guilty—and I certainly am—of using plastic bags, and together in Australia we use 6.7 million plastic bags at checkouts every year. On the weekend of 21 to 22 August, as part of the campaign sponsored by National Science Week and Planet Ark, I urge all Australians to do what I am doing and say no to plastic bags. I will certainly be setting an example.

**Braddon Electorate: Education Awards**

**Medicare: Services**

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (10.08 a.m.)—I support the member for Canning’s call for a much more prudent and considered use of plastic bags in Australia. I spoke on this in parliament over 18 months ago, even before Senator Brown started the campaign. It is good to see that people have picked up on an idea that was going around in Braddon a long time ago and to know that we can spearhead important national campaigns, because a good idea in Braddon is a good idea anywhere.

Today is a very sunny day outside, fortunately, in Canberra, and in the sunshine of the day I would like to congratulate people. The first people I would like to congratulate are the many teachers, educators and administrators in education in my region in the education districts of Barrington and Arthur who received awards for excellence in teaching and training. I attended one of those awards ceremonies and unfortunately missed the other one, but there were many worthy recipients of these very important awards. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those teachers, administrators and people who work in our schools for the terrific job they do and to congratulate everyone that was an award winner. It certainly is very edifying to appreciate the terrific things that go on in our schools—the innovation, terrific goodwill and dedication. Congratulations to all award winners in the Barrington and Arthur education districts.

I would also like to congratulate the community of the central coast in my electorate, and particularly their mayor, Mike Downie, and Independent MLC in the Tasmanian parliament, Sue Smith, as well as the good number of community organisations that have been battling even before 1998 to get a Medicare office returned to that municipality and to be located in
Ulverstone. Proudly, I was a central coast councillor before I got into federal parliament and I remember being part of the campaign to have a Medicare office reintroduced into the area. Central Coast Council is, I think, the seventh largest municipality in Tasmania, and Ulverstone is one of the most significant towns on the north-west coast. It has a relatively large older population and a relatively young population as well. They are the two groups that use medical facilities more often than the middle-age range group.

What currently happens in the central coast is that, once people have visited the doctor, with bulk-billing in free fall in my district most have to try and get their rebate from Medicare. Unless people use electronic means, and many of them do not, they have to travel to Burnie or Devonport. We do not have a good public transport system between these towns and Ulverstone. Petrol has always been dear in my neck of the woods and many of these families live in the hinterland, so they have a lot of travel to do. They have got to go to Devonport and Burnie to get their rebate, yet there is a very good case that there should be a Medicare office in the central coast area.

The government members have been approached on several occasions over a number of years to take up this case, a very worthy case, to introduce a Medicare office for the central coast, located at Ulverstone. Unfortunately they got nowhere with that. I am pleased to say that Labor’s shadow spokesperson for health, Julia Gillard, came to this community, met them, heard their case and promised to go away and consider that case. She has done so, has done the costings and in actual fact returned on 22 July to meet directly with the community. She has pledged that if Labor become the next government, and I truly believe we will become the next government of Australia, a Medicare office will be installed at Ulverstone for the municipality of the central coast. I was very pleased to hear that commitment and I know that Mike Downie, Sue Smith and all the representatives that have put this case for so long have been very pleased by that pledge. My next cause is to take up the case of a Medicare office in Circular Head, but that is a fight for another day. (Time expired)

Moncrieff Electorate: Tourism Industry

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (10.13 a.m.)—I am very pleased to rise in the Main Committee this morning to discuss the importance of an industry that is crucial to the long-term sustainability and long-term employment of the people of Moncrieff and in particular all the people of the Gold Coast. That industry that makes such a valuable contribution to the Gold Coast economy is, of course, the tourism industry. I am pleased to rise to speak on the tourism industry because the Howard government has seen the implementation of the white paper, a medium- to long-term strategy to ensure that the tourism industry not only is sustainable but, importantly, has the opportunity to recover from the blows it has suffered over the past several years. These blows include, for example, the SARS crisis, the collapse of Ansett Airlines, and uncertainty about travel to international destinations. Each one of these has taken its toll on the Gold Coast economy, Gold Coast tourism and hotel operators, as well as restaurateurs, throughout the past four years.

Importantly, the Howard government has responded, and it has responded in spades. The new $620-odd million flowing into the tourism industry over the next four years from the Howard government is a concrete investment in the future of the tourism industry. I know that all those people employed in the tourism industry on the Gold Coast stand to benefit directly as a consequence of the increased certainty that is flowing to the Gold Coast tourism sector.
Interestingly, yesterday I had the opportunity to attend the TTF Australia forum and the luncheon associated with that. At that lunch I received the most up-to-date data from TTF, which indicates that, in my electorate alone, there are some 9,131 employed in full-time equivalent positions in the tourism industry; some 2,500 in the accommodation, casino and gambling sector; some 1,500 in cafes, restaurants, pubs, clubs and taverns; about 2,300 in the tourism retail sector; approximately 500 in the transport sector as it pertains to tourism; as well as about another 2,500 in a variety of areas associated with the tourism industry. That industry accounts for some 12.6 per cent of employment in my electorate of Moncrieff, and I am pleased—in fact, I am delighted—that the Howard government is ensuring that the future of these people is strong and that the future of these people as a consequence of the tourism white paper is assured.

That stands in stark contrast to the future for these 9,100 people if the Labor Party were elected to government. What is very clear is that the Labor Party are certainly making sure that they run a mile from giving any commitment to maintaining the funding that is available under the tourism white paper. To this day the Labor Party are still refusing to commit to providing the $600-odd million to the tourism industry over the next four years. Despite the fact that tourism is Australia’s single largest employer, the Australian Labor Party are seeking to walk away from the funding commitments of the Howard government when it comes to the tourism industry. I say to those 9,100 people employed in the tourism industry in my electorate: ‘Be very wary of the Australian Labor Party and what the Australian Labor Party would do to tourism.’ According to the Australian Labor Party, it is an industry that does not need help; it is an industry that seems to be bubbling along just fine, and that is the reason why among the most concerning of the Labor Party’s policies is their proposal to cut from the white paper some $60 million that would be spent on the See Australia campaign.

Domestic tourism is fundamentally important to the people of the Gold Coast and the people of my electorate. Some 60 per cent of our local tourism market on the Gold Coast is from the drive market. And that 60 per cent of local Gold Coast tourism would be directly under threat and, in fact, would not have its future assured in the slightest if the Labor Party were elected. So again I say to the people of the Gold Coast: ‘Don’t dabble with the Australian Labor Party, because the consequence would be $60 million cut immediately from the bottom line of domestic tourism promotion.’

I am a very big supporter of the restaurant and catering industry in my electorate. This morning the Restaurant and Catering Association raised the question of commitment: they say it is vital that the ongoing work of Tourism Australia in the implementation of the tourism white paper continues to focus on domestic tourism and that both sides of politics must sign on to maintaining the domestic tourism role of Tourism Australia and maintaining the much increased funding to tourism. Come on, ALP, do it. *(Time expired)*

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**Newcastle Electorate: Manufacturing Industry**

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (10.18 a.m.)—I rise to speak on a matter of great concern to the people of my electorate of Newcastle, to the Hunter region generally, and to the Australian manufacturing sector as well. A Newcastle company, Varley Engineering, recently missed out on an $18 million Airservices Australia contract to manufacture rescue and response vehicles for Australian airports. This would have been a considerable contract and would have guaranteed 60 direct jobs and an extra 15 apprenticeships in Newcastle, with a flow-on effect of jobs...
for another 180 people, as well as the development of skills and capacity in the region. But instead we now learn that these jobs and skills, and the wealth of this country, will go to an overseas tenderer. I am told that, after two years of work on this tender, Airservices Australia advised Varley—via fax on 1 July 2004; and let me say the manufacturing sector had already heard the answer on the grapevine—that they had missed out and that the successful tenderer was an Austrian company, Rosenbauer International. I assume this contract will now have no Australian content whatsoever.

While everyone does expect that a tender process would be competitive, we would also expect it to be open, transparent and fair. We on this side of the House would also expect that it might invest in the country’s skill development, invest in the wealth of this nation in terms of employment prospects and security, and invest in an industry that we would always be trying to make more competitive. That of course is not the case under this government.

I thank the shadow minister for industry, innovation, science and research, Senator Kim Carr, for his recent work in my region with manufacturers. We have collaborated on a series of questions that will be put on notice in the Senate today. Those questions raise serious concerns—concerns that we want very serious answers to. It was evident that in this tender a security deposit was required in the documentation, and that was set at 30 per cent of the project value. General practice is usually 10 per cent of project value. I do wonder how SMEs in Australia would find 30 per cent of project value for major projects. To tie up that amount of cash does not sound like good practice to help Australian business prosper.

We were also informed that Airservices Australia officials spent no time visiting Varley, one of the two final tenderers. Unless they came covertly overnight, no Airservices officials inspected the Varley group’s sites around Australia. However, it has been suggested that Airservices Australia spent at least four days in Austria visiting Rosenbauer’s sites during the tender process.

I am also concerned about the loss of the contract by Varley Engineering, because these vehicles are obviously going to be in greater demand. Defence will be seeking these sorts of vehicles for airport response. The whole Asia-Pacific market has great potential, in a terrorist environment, for us to tender for vehicles around our region, because everyone is increasing their security and response presence at airports and ports. These vehicles require a particular chassis construction to be off-road vehicles. There are concerns held by manufacturers that perhaps Australia is not being assisted to develop that particular capacity. Although I am told by manufacturers that New Zealand has that capacity, Australia is slipping back, unfortunately.

So we will be requiring the government to account for Airservices Australia’s actions in their awarding of this tender, and we certainly regret sincerely the loss of skills, jobs and training opportunities, and capacity building for Newcastle and the Hunter region in Australia. The thought of these vehicles rolling off a ship into this country without any Australian content is just appalling. There is another potential opportunity, with Defence replacing all its truck fleet over the next 15 years, but one wonders whether we are going to see more Defence work continually going overseas.

Labor does back the call from Australian Business Ltd for the Howard government to implement effective government purchasing, even if it is eight years too late. A Latham Labor government will use government purchasing as a premier industry policy tool to support Aus-
Mr JOHN COBB (Parkes) (10.23 a.m.)—This Saturday, 7 August 2004, the Dubbo ballet school will celebrate its 70th anniversary. One person who is synonymous with the Dubbo ballet school is Mrs Joyce Schneider. It was Joyce’s passion and vision that saw the establishment of a ballet school. She set it up and taught there for many years. In fact, she is still actively involved with the school, although she has sold the studio and retired from teaching. It was Joyce’s vision of a ballet studio devoted to excellence that has allowed many students to fulfil their own dreams.

Joyce is a remarkable woman who has managed to this day to keep everybody on their toes. Her services to the community, particularly the arts, have been recognised through several notable awards, including the Citizen of the Year award in 1998, sesquicentenary recognition in 1999 and an Order of Australia medal in 2000. On behalf of the people of Dubbo and the central west of New South Wales, I thank Joyce for her vision and commitment to bringing to Dubbo her love of the performing arts. Her commitment to excellence and her passion for dancing were infectious and will be recognised this Saturday night.

Over the past 70 years an incredible 18,000 students have been taught at the Dubbo Ballet Studio, and it is widely regarded as one of the most successful dance schools in regional New South Wales—an accolade to be justly proud of. Time after time the studio achieves excellent results in the Royal Academy of Dance exams and at eisteddfods. Last year, for instance, three performances were awarded a perfect score of 100. This is extremely rare at eisteddfods and something the students, teachers, parents and supporters can be very proud of.

Over the studio’s long and illustrious career several students have found success in performing arts careers. This is no easy task. Pursuing a full-time career in the performing arts takes equal measures of grit, determination and dedication. Students who have taken this path include Hayley Farr, who became a soloist for the Queensland Ballet Company and is now under contract to the prestigious San Francisco Ballet. Dwan Attwood followed her dream to become a successful singer, dancer and actress on stage and screen in the United States. Recently two Dubbo ballet students, Kyle Davey and Ella Havelka, were accepted into the Australian Ballet School in Melbourne and are now full-time students. Also studying performing arts in Melbourne is Hollie Hewett, who last year was named the best dancer at the Victorian school of performing arts. Several students have gone on to be teachers. By teaching others they provide a lasting legacy of what the Dubbo Ballet Studio stands for and contribute to the future of Australia’s dance sector.

Most students will not make a career in the performing arts, but the confidence, poise and sheer enjoyment gained during their time with the studio is completely beyond measure. They will have a lifelong interest in and appreciation of the performing arts and a confidence in themselves that they would not otherwise obtain. On Saturday night I will join many friends, supporters and past and current students of the Dubbo Ballet Studio to celebrate the success of the performing arts in that town, the students who have realised their dreams, the ones on their
way to achieving personal milestones and the people behind the scenes who have made all this possible—people like Joyce Schneider.

I also want to draw attention to the Dubbo brass band and the fact that last Saturday night some of us honoured Mal White for 60 years—I repeat, 60 years—of continuous service to the Dubbo brass band. He joined the band in 1944 at the age of 12. In all those 60 years, he has seldom missed a rehearsal or performance, and still makes himself available for public occasions, for performances and, even more importantly than that, for teaching others to play their instruments. Mal White plays the euphonium, but he has obviously learned other instruments over that time. This band has been going for 125 years, so Mal White has been an active member of that band for almost half of its entire existence. Involved in this band are sons and fathers, and grandsons and grandfathers. It is very much a family band. It is, without doubt, one of the oldest existing still functioning gatherings in Dubbo and does a wonderful job. I do not think you will ever hear again of somebody putting 60 years of continuous active service into a band as Mal White has done.

Australian Fishing Industry

Mr QUICK (Franklin) (10.28 a.m.)—Yesterday I had the pleasure of attending a couple of meetings with the Australian fishing industry. Representatives from around Australia were here in parliament conveying to members and senators their concerns about some of the trials and tribulations of the Australian fishing industry. As a Tasmanian and someone with large fishing areas in my electorate, it was pleasing to see Tasmanian representatives here putting forward their case. As honourable members would know, as Tasmania is a rather small state, quite often it is marginalised when it comes to representation on national bodies.

One of the concerns that people raised with me and with other members and senators was the fact that large amounts of fish and fish products are being imported into Australia. That is not a bad thing: in this time of free trade, importation of products from overseas should be welcomed as long as we can reciprocate. But the thing that concerned me and fishing industry representatives was the fact that the large supermarket chains—Coles, Woolworths and, to a lesser degree, the IGA supermarkets—are importing fish products from overseas, particularly from China, putting them into their supermarkets and not telling people where they are coming from. Whether this is a fault in the labelling rules and regulations in Australia, I am not too sure. I know that when I get back home tomorrow I will certainly visit my Coles, Woolworths and IGA supermarkets and give the owners and the managers in each of those a bit of a hard time. I will go along and buy some prawns and some scallops, and if they are not labelled Tasmanian or Chinese I would like to know the reason why.

I was informed—and I take it on good authority—that Chinese scallops are washed and washed and washed, because there is a presumption in China that people like white scallops. If you taste beautiful Tasmanian scallops you will notice that they are a little bit grey and have wonderful roe on them. It was interesting last night at the cocktail party to note that obviously the chefs had no idea how to prepare scallops: they had removed the roe from all the scallops, which is almost like neutering the poor old scallops. But 30 per cent of the weight of Chinese scallops is water content. If Australian consumers are having scallops that contain 30 per cent water foisted upon them, and the scallops are Chinese and they are not being labelled, it is incumbent upon the IGA supermarkets, Coles and Woolworths to do the fair dinkum thing and

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say, ‘These are Chinese scallops. These are Australian scallops. Here are the prices. You judge the quality, you judge the taste and you then make up your mind what you are going to buy.’

The two large supermarket chains and the IGA supermarkets are doing exactly the same thing with prawns. When you go and buy them there is no labelling. One of the things I offered to the Tasmanian fishing industry representatives was that I would have a yarn to the managers of the two large supermarket chains to try and have knowledgeable people behind the counter. In many cases there are young people working part time and as casuals who have got no idea about which fish is which. They do not know about the names, the texture and the quality. They are more interested in selling red meat and sausages, getting it out to you and getting rid of the next number in the queue. If we are going to promote our fishing industry around Australia there is a case to be made about quality. It is about labelling. And when you do go and ask about what is there in front of you, it is about having people behind the counter who know what they are talking about, who know the quality and who can actually give you the right perspective. I look forward to doing that when I get back home tomorrow.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. D.G.H. Adams)—Before I call the honourable member for Macquarie, on behalf of the Main Committee I would like to recognise the participants of the interparliamentary study group. You are welcome today and I certainly hope that your program is a very successful one.

Environment: Hawkesbury River

Mr BARTLETT (Macquarie) (10.34 a.m.)—Last week the government announced a grant of $250,000 to extend the work of some weed harvesters on the Hawkesbury River in my electorate. I thank the government for their quick response to help us out with this urgent local problem. Members might remember that I have spoken in this place before about this issue. Over the last summer and through this year we have had a massive outbreak of a noxious aquatic weed, *Salvinia molesta*—the largest outbreak, in fact, in the Southern Hemisphere. There are a number of reasons for this: the high nutrient levels in the river, exacerbated by the drought, the low water flow and the unusually high temperatures.

In ideal conditions, *Salvinia molesta* doubles in biomass every 24 hours. During the infestation, hundreds of thousands of tonnes of this aquatic weed blocked navigation in parts of the river and prevented waterskiing and many other aquatic sports that previously occurred there. Members might remember that, in March of this year, the Prime Minister announced $300,000 towards addressing this problem, and this was matched with a commitment by the New South Wales government of another $300,000. With that $600,000 we were able to hire three weed harvesters which have been working at removing the weed from the river. Over the past few months they have done a tremendous job. However, given that winter temperatures were higher than expected, the length of time needed to do the job properly has blown out. I went to the government to ask for a further commitment of money to extend the work of these weed harvesters, and I am very pleased that last week the government announced they would grant another $250,000. This was matched immediately by the state government, so there is another half a million dollars to extend the work of the weed harvesters. This will allow, first of all, the removal of the remaining weed and, secondly, trials for biological controls.

They will trial a weevil that eats the salvinia and prevents its multiplication and expansion. These weevils have been successful in other areas, particularly in warmer climates, and the
catchment management authority will use this example as a pilot to see if we can get this weevil to work in this case. Some limited spraying will also be undertaken in areas that are less accessible. The important thing is that the area requiring spraying is smaller than it would otherwise be because we will have another month or several weeks to remove most of the weed that is still there.

In the short term, we are working hard to remove this mass of salvinia; however, it does highlight longer term issues. The salvinia outbreak is a symptom of a much larger, more fundamental, long-term problem with the Hawkesbury River, and that problem has two sources. One is the extremely high levels of nutrients flowing into the river. There are some 30 STPs—sewage treatment plants—in the catchment flowing into the Hawkesbury River system and these are discharging nutrient-loaded effluent into the river. Sadly, at times of low water flow, discharged effluent can account for up to 80 per cent of the flow of the river—which is not a pleasant thought. So we need programs long term to reduce the levels of effluent discharge entering the Hawkesbury River. The state government really does need to take this issue seriously. We need better use of constructed wetlands and we need more integrated approaches to using grey water and recycling to reduce the demand for water out of the river.

The second fundamental issue is the question of the volume of flow. For environmental reasons, there has been inadequate flow to flush out the river, particularly in times of drought, as we have had in the last couple of years; thus the relative loading of nutrients is much higher than usual. With Sydney’s population growing by approximately 1,000 people a week, we need to address Sydney’s long-term water needs so that we are not so dependent on the Warragamba Dam and the Hawkesbury River. This would allow more water to flow down the river to flush out the nutrients and maintain the environmental health of the river. This does require long-term planning. We need an integrated approach that involves the state government—they are the prime carriers of responsibility for this—with input from the federal government, local councils, Sydney Water and the Sydney Catchment Authority.

The health needs of the Hawkesbury River must be addressed as a matter of priority because Australia’s largest population is based in this area and is dependent on the health of this catchment. We need to do something about it. For some time now I have been advocating an integrated approach by government and all the major stakeholders to improve the health of the Hawkesbury River system for the sake of us all.

**Aviation: Bankstown Airport**

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (10.39 a.m.)—Bankstown Airport Ltd have just released the preliminary draft master plan for Bankstown Airport, which gives their vision of the way Bankstown Airport should operate in the next 20 years. The reason that Bankstown Airport Ltd have done it, and not the federal government, is that the federal government sold the lease on the airport before it had worked out a plan for how Bankstown is to be used in the future.

The expectation of most people in Bankstown was that this master plan would not dramatically change the way things happen in Bankstown. On the briefings that I got from Bankstown Airport Ltd, I did not expect any major change; I expected that this general aviation airport would continue to operate in the way it had operated in the past. I understood that the one thing they were looking for was an extension of the runway by 200-odd metres in order to send freighters out of Bankstown Airport fully laden. However, here today—as I did in a press release recently—I absolutely condemn the fundamentals of this plan.
The demand for a 220-metre extension to the runway is matched by the consideration that they want to strengthen that runway so that it could regularly take not 20-tonne loads, as it has taken historically, but 50-tonne loads. The thrust of this draft master plan is that regular passenger transport operations should be introduced to Bankstown Airport. When you look at the figurings for the future, you see that that would knock out most of the general aviation operations that are the core of Bankstown Airport’s current operation.

This is the biggest business in Bankstown. This is the fundamental heart of our industrial activity. General aviation training and general aviation bring income from all over the world into Australia. It is the very engine of our economy in Bankstown. What the draft master plan would seek to do is to supplant general aviation with regular passenger transport services—jet and turbo-prop. What this plan does not seek to do at all, as the government has never sought to do, is to write out 737s and above using Bankstown Airport for the whole of the future and certainly for the next 20 years.

The minister for aviation needs now, given that he has never done it before, to specifically prohibit by regulation any code 4C aircraft—717s, 737s and above—from ever using Bankstown Airport, because of its proximity to Kingsford Smith airport. He should refuse, if he is still the minister when this comes to his desk, to countenance a master plan that would put our airport security at risk and our national security at hazard. Clearly, 100-passenger aircraft, turbo-prop or jet, running out of Bankstown Airport—26 kilometres from the General Post Office in Sydney—do not have the same restrictions that aircraft running out of Kingsford Smith have in terms of airport security; they have the same kinds of restrictions that are in country airports in New South Wales. You could load up those jets or turbo-props with up to 100 passengers, and it would be possible for them to be used as those planes were used in New York: as flying bombs, to fly into either Kingsford Smith or targets in the city. Bankstown Airport does not have the security apparatus to deal with large regular transport activity.

The proponents of this say that they do not want Bankstown Airport to become Sydney’s second airport, but it is clear that they want the money from the passengers on seats in regular passenger transport. They want to bring a new activity that Bankstown Airport has never seen. I completely reject this on behalf of my constituents in the electorate of Blaxland. Historically, people have by and large supported Bankstown Airport’s operation, but they do not want it extended and they do not want it dramatically expanded. Six thousand people turned up at Bankstown Paceway to protest against the federal government’s attempt to turn Bankstown Airport into an overflow airport for Kingsford Smith. They do not want the jets, they do not want regular passenger transport and they do not want to be fooled into this airport being changed over the next 20 years. It is time the minister for aviation totally ruled out those larger jets, and it is time he gave an indication that he would not be adopting this kind of plan for Bankstown Airport. (Time expired)

Cook Electorate: Kurnell Peninsula

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (10.44 a.m.)—I wish to draw the attention of the chamber to a recent development with regard to the protection of the Kurnell Peninsula, which is in the eastern extremity of my electorate. As members would be aware, the Kurnell Peninsula is the place where Captain James Cook and the crew of the Endeavour first landed in 1770. It is the site where Captain Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet had their first encounter with the Indigenous population. The Kurnell Peninsula is a place of great natural beauty and contains over 95 per
percent of the remaining salt marsh habitat in the Sydney Basin and more than 50 percent of the remaining mangroves. It provides a home for many threatened or endangered species as well as migratory birds from as far away as Siberia and Russia.

On 18 May this year I nominated the Kurnell Peninsula for protection on the Natural Heritage List under the new provisions of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999. This listing is currently being considered by the independent Australian Heritage Council. Many local residents took the opportunity to lodge submissions with the Heritage Council as to why this listing should go through.

It is unfortunate that the New South Wales Labor government does not take seriously the protection of this environmentally sensitive and historically and culturally valuable area. The New South Wales government has recently written to the Sutherland Shire Council and other interested bodies to notify them that it intends to amend Sydney Regional Environmental Plan 17. SREP 17 was instigated in 1989 by the then Liberal Greiner government, of which I was a member. SREP 17 called for the phasing out of sandmining at Kurnell as a priority. Since SREP 17 was passed, there has been no action of any type to protect or phase out sandmining at Kurnell. Indeed, it does not look as though a phase-out is likely under the existing government in New South Wales.

The proposed changes to SREP 17 include some measures which, though long overdue, will be of some limited benefit to Kurnell. However, the devil is in the detail. The proposed changes to SREP 17 contain two areas which give me grave concern for the future of this area. Firstly, the section which deals with sandmining only proposed to halt sandmining operations and does not contain an end date. This means that applications for further sandmining are still acceptable and it is business as usual. An application merely needs to contain a date that it will stop. The date could be in two, five, 10 or even 50 years from now, although scientists question whether there will be any sand left after 2011.

It is interesting to note that the New South Wales government is working with Rocla Limited—one of three sandmining companies that are working the neck of the peninsula—to complete an application to extract a further 4.5 million tonnes of sand from Kurnell. The New South Wales minister responsible for the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, Craig Knowles, had the courage to write to the local newspaper, the Sutherland Shire Leader, to inform local residents that his government wants only the best for Kurnell. If this is truly the case, if Labor really wants to protect this beautiful area, why doesn’t the minister just pick up his pen and stop sandmining this area? The New South Wales government assumed the powers of the consent authority for all sandmining and development on the peninsula some years ago when the shire council tried to stop the destruction of the area.

The other area in the proposed amendment which gives me cause for concern is the provision to allow for light industrial and residential development on areas previously subject to sand extraction. For some years, the New South Wales Minister for Planning has had on his desk a contentious proposal by the development company Australand for the development of 500 homes and villas on the peninsula. This development is located on the site of one of the very last remaining sand dunes, now known as Australand dune. This site is also located adjacent to the habitat of the green-and-gold bell frog, which is a species listed as endangered under the New South Wales statute. This amendment to SREP 17 is nothing short of development by stealth. It is a green light to Australand that Labor is willing and ready to sign on the

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dotted line and let them press ahead with their plans for these homes eight months after they
got the green light to build factories on the remainder of their site.

I am bitterly disappointed that Labor in New South Wales has not used this review of SREP 17 to spell out once and for all the end to sandmining and development on our nation’s birth-
place. For far too long, the New South Wales government has sat on its hand watching what is arguably our most valuable historical and cultural site be carted away by the tonne. It is clear
to me that shire residents want this area conserved, protected and restored. We want this area
to be given the respect and protection that our nation’s birthplace deserves.

Maribyrnong Electorate: Transport Infrastructure

Mr SERCOMBE (Maribyrnong) (10.49 a.m.)—At about 6.15 this morning in my elector-
ate, a tragedy occurred. It involved a V/Line country train striking a motor vehicle on a level
crossing at Furlong Road in St Albans. Three people have been killed in this tragedy and I
extend my condolences to the families of the three victims. My thoughts are also with the
train driver; we are aware of the trauma that train drivers experience in this sort of situation.
And our thoughts are with the emergency service personnel who have had the most unenvi-
able task of attending the scene of this tragedy.

It is obviously not appropriate to talk about the particular circumstances of the accident so
soon after it occurred, but I think it is appropriate to talk about the context in which the trag-
edy occurred. This is a rapidly growing part of Melbourne. It is an area with rapid population
growth, with new estates opening up. That has significantly increased the volume of motor
vehicles on local road networks. It is also an area where there has been a significant increase
in rail movements. The electrification of the suburban network a number of kilometres be-
yond this point to the north and west has resulted in increased train movements on this section
of track. It is also a section of track that is most important for country train movements. In-
deed, as I said, the train that struck the car this morning was a country train. The train track
services a very large section of the north and west of Victoria.

The state government in Victoria has announced its intention to grade separate the Furlong
Road crossing and to fund other works in the region to address the problems. I have always
believed that a more fundamental solution is required, involving the lowering of a significant
section of the track—not just to grade separate at Furlong Road but also to grade separate fur-
therto the north and west along this line. There are other crossings—particularly the Main
Road, St Albans level crossing—which also unfortunately are tragedies waiting to happen.
Such creative work in grade separation, utilising the funds that the state government has al-
ready earmarked for work along this section, could be supplemented with a more ambitious
project to attract private sector commitments to works because of the air rights that would be
created over sections of the railway line if the lowering were to occur. This is also a situation
where, in the context of the Commonwealth’s AusLink policy, there is a need for the Com-
monwealth to look at ways in which it can creatively collaborate with Victoria in an ‘inte-
grated approach’—to use the words of the member for Macquarie, talking about environ-
mental matters—to solving problems which both the Commonwealth and the state have re-
sponsibilities for in relation to land transport.

As I said, I do not think there is any doubt that this particular problem is an area where the
state of Victoria needs to provide the lead. But it is entitled to look to the Commonwealth to
collaborate with it creatively in addressing the fundamental problems. In order to address the
strategic problems of land transport in the area, we need to look to the Commonwealth to move forward much more rapidly with the Deer Park bypass proposal which is outlined in the AusLink document recently produced by the minister but which needs to be brought forward significantly more quickly than the minister is talking about. We need to look at opportunities to significantly upgrade the capacity of the Western Ring Road through this part of Melbourne. It is primarily a Commonwealth road: it was funded in sections—particularly this section—as a 100 per cent Commonwealth project.

As I said, this is an area of rapid population growth in Melbourne. It is an area where land transport routes are not just important for the economy and society of the north-west of Melbourne but also crucial for large tracts of provincial Victoria. This is the area through which the main networks servicing Bendigo and Ballarat—and right up to Mildura—pass. This is an area where we are entitled to ask the Commonwealth, through the AusLink process, to creatively and collaboratively work with Victoria and thereby minimise the prospects of further tragedies such as that which has occurred this morning.

Child Support Agency

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (10.54 a.m.)—Last night in the adjournment debate in the House I talked about the arrogant, jackboot approach, the abuse of constituents’ rights and the abuse of legislative procedures of the Child Support Agency. I did not get to finish my second example but I am going to refer to it now and then raise another abuse by the Child Support Agency of one of my constituents that I received information on last night in my office. I want to make the point that I believe it is disgraceful that the Child Support Agency and indeed Centrelink treat clients and their legitimate, lawful concerns with such arrogant disregard and disrespect. Should the CSA’s investigation of the court documents that I talked about last night find that my constituent is required to pay the amount of child support then I would be pleased to support the decision. However, until these ongoing issues are resolved, I request that this money be returned to my constituent with a full written apology from the Child Support Agency.

I am talking about $9,000 illegally confiscated or garnisheed from his bank account in an environment where the 28-day objection period that the CSA is required to give my constituent was abused, because the money was handed straight over to his wife without him being given the opportunity in the 28-day period to prove that what it did was illegal. I have to say, too, that failure to give the two constituents I am talking about a written apology will force me to expose, as I am doing today, how I believe CSA has illegally usurped a decision made by a court and how, unlawfully and without due diligence for the rights of individual, it has confiscated by way of garnishee $9,000 from the bank account of that individual and has given that money to another person without lawful or indeed legislative proof that the money was lawfully owed to that other person.

Let me go to the problem that I received notice of last night. My office yesterday received a phone call from a constituent, a female 60 years of age, complaining about her treatment by the Child Support Agency. This constituent lost her son, who committed suicide in June this year in what she considers to be partly the result of the CSA hounding him for payments. She was very concerned then that the CSA asked her by letter to contact them after his death. When she did contact them by phone, they asked her for personal details, her date of birth, which she refused to give out. My constituent feels that they are going to hound her for payments and does not trust the agency at all.
Leaving aside the trauma and the distress that it is causing to this particular lady, I will go on and talk about what flowed from there. After contacting the CSA, my office was told that what happens is that if the payer dies, as in this case, the CSA will then chase up any outstanding payments by suing the estate of the deceased. If the mother was the executor of the estate, which seems to be the likely case, they would then seek to recover any costs before the deceased’s assets are distributed. My constituent is not liable for any costs, ongoing or owing, but if her son left her his car, for instance, this would have to be sold to pay any outstanding debts to the CSA before it could be given to her. Ultimately the issue is the CSA requesting the mother to ring them while in her grief and then demanding her personal details. Why would this be necessary? She does not owe any money to the agency and is not personally liable for any amounts which might be owed by her son.

In closing, I say that responsibility of ministers of the Crown and parliamentary secretaries to make departments and officers accountable is paramount. If there is no will, if there is no strength, if there is no commitment and, more importantly, if there is no personal knowledge of management skills, then this abuse of power by CSA will continue. I am not prepared to allow this to continue. I will speak to my constituents and if need be will put them in front of cameras and microphones to educate the community about this abuse of people’s rights and the inappropriate, illegal use of power by CSA officers. The very strong point I am making here today is that I am no longer going to tolerate the sort of nonsense by any department, any bureaucrat or any employee of a department that deprives my constituents of their rights and abuses their role in the community as law-abiding people fulfilling the obligations that they have under the legislation.

**Agriculture: Dairy Industry**

**Agriculture: Apple and Pear Industry**

Mr ZAHRA (McMillan) (10.59 a.m.)—Last week I had the shadow minister for agriculture, the member for Corio, Gavan O’Connor, in my electoral district and we met with a number of key groups in the agricultural sector to discuss Labor’s approach in these areas. The message came through loud and clear that ordinary people who are employed in or who run businesses in the agricultural sector are fed up to the back teeth with the Howard government. People are frustrated with the lack of initiative, the lack of effort, the lack of interest from the Howard government in this important part of the national economy. We met with a couple of different groups of dairy farmers and set out our approach in relation to creating a better and fairer trading system for dairy farmers, who at present are having a terrible time with a very low milk price, which is something that is driving a large number of dairy farmers out of the industry. Ordinary dairy farmers are very plain about their plight right now. They are very upfront and very straightforward about what they think of the current trading system, where basically they get told a milk price by the dairy company or the milk cooperatives and, even though they understand that that milk price will send them into debt or will send them quite possibly bankrupt or out of the industry, they have no choice, no negotiation in relation to that.

Labor have come up with a better approach, which seeks to introduce some negotiation and, where there cannot be an agreement, to put in place a compulsory mediation system to try to create some fairness and some dialogue in this key industry between the milk suppliers and the processors. That is what we want to see: a fair system that will ensure that the dairy...
industry has a future in which people can confidently make business decisions about the way their farms are going to develop and also ensure that the most productivity that they can get out of their businesses they get out of their businesses because they have that certainty about the prices they are going to get into the future.

The shadow minister for agriculture and I also met with a group of orchardists from around the Pakenham district. Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, I know that you and the other representatives from Tasmania take a great interest in this issue. People in the apple and pear sector are very frustrated indeed—and that is the understatement of the century—with the Howard government’s approach to the draft import risk assessment in relation to the importation of apples from New Zealand. Just to repeat what the issue is here, everyone understands, it seems, except for Warren Truss, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, that bringing apples from New Zealand into Australia would create an extraordinary risk to the apple and pear industry because of the rampant presence of fire blight in the New Zealand apple and pear industry. We do not want to see that disease come into Australia. We are proud of our fire blight free status and we understand that it has a lot of economic benefit for the apple and pear sector in Australia.

In many cases, as you would understand, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, people have been running these orchards for three and four generations. They have worked their guts out and made a great contribution to their local communities and to the local economy, where they have employed hundreds—and in Tasmania, I am sure, thousands—of people over many years. It is an industry with an enormous potential for export. They are doing a bit of export now, but the industry has great potential for further export market development. All of this will be undermined, all of this will be ruined, if we have a situation where the Howard government allow the importation of apples from New Zealand. Why would they do that? I always understood that it was the role of the Australian government to stand up for the Australian national interest. I cannot understand for the life of me why the Howard government are acting as agents for the New Zealand apple and pear growers. I thought the Australian government were supposed to be there for Australian people, not for people from another country. I say to the Howard government today: let us get this right. Let us see the Howard government admit that they have made an enormous mistake over 3 1/2 to four years in their handling of this process and then start a new import risk assessment process for apples from New Zealand which is based only on science.

**Marriage**

Mr BARRESI (Deakin) (11.04 a.m.)—Yesterday over 1,000 people came to Parliament House for the National Marriage Forum organised by the Australian Christian Lobby. I want to record my congratulations to Jim Wallace from the lobby and Warwick and Alison Marsh from the Fatherhood Foundation for their work and for combining with other groups to form the National Marriage Coalition. With less than three weeks notice, the forum saw people with a passionate view about the institution of marriage come from all over the country.

I was pleased to offer my support to the forum and for the values it seeks to espouse in our society. It comes at a time when the parliament is still to pass the amendments to the Marriage Act. One thing resonated above all else yesterday: the undeniable fact that the marriage of a woman and a man is more than financial and even transcends procreation. The marriage of a man and a woman is sacred. For those who look to the Judaeo-Christian faith underpinning
our values, this is paramount. But it is also a perspective widely accepted in non Judaeo-Christian faiths. I know the forum yesterday was heartened by the press release from the Islamic community also supporting the traditional interpretation of marriage.

I am not going to suggest that, as a result of being underpinned by our faith, all marriages are infallible. Marriages fail, and for many that often leads to the greatest regret and disappointment in their lives. But the fact that some marriages fail and that that leads to some people exploring alternative models of union cannot be used to advance an argument against enshrining in law a definition of marriage. In some instances same-sex couples may live together. They may love each other and be happy. I respect them, as I hope they would support my choices in life. But, because I accept the reality of an alternative lifestyle, surely that should not be confused with an endorsement of it being enshrined in our legal definitions of marriage.

The respect that we have for marriage is well-established in our culture and has long been accepted as a given, yet it has never been definitively formalised in law. The definition of marriage through the national parliament is extremely important. It establishes a clear and unambiguous legally recognisable definition which can be relied upon, particularly by the judiciary. In my opinion it would be grossly improper for an issue of this kind to be left to the courts to decide. Whilst I have the utmost respect for the judiciary, I am sure they will acknowledge that definitions of this nature are best left to the legislature. If we were to leave this definition for the courts to decide, future generations would reflect on this point in our history and feel betrayed. That is unacceptable.

The second point I would like to make relates to the importance of marriage in raising children and its role in strengthening the fabric of society. The benefits children get from their parents living together, through the ups and downs, the highs and lows, cannot, in my opinion, be replicated. Whilst those of us who are separated and have failed marriages strive to do our utmost for our children, it never does replace the original family unit of having mum and dad together. Where children are conceived and born into the care of their loving married parents, that is the best scenario for all concerned. Of course there are extenuating circumstances where that is not always possible. However, despite the claims of some individuals and contrary to their aspersions, this actually still does occur: believe it or not, happily married couples are raising children in homes right around Australia today. And I know that others, who have had failed marriages, are trying to do exactly the same thing.

I wish to reaffirm my belief that the union of man and woman in holy matrimony, living as a family with their children, is an institution that belies all critics. This leads me to my final point. A society ought to be judged by the respect it shows for its institutions. These institutions help define who we are and certainly play a part in determining where we are going. They give otherwise despondent members of society hope and comfort. They provide us with direction and a sense of purpose. Our schools now teach the importance of acceptance and tolerance. Our children are taught to appreciate that we are a diverse nation and that we stand as a bastion of democracy and freedom.

I believe there is one question that governments ought to ultimately be judged on. That is: is the fabric of the nation stronger than it was when it we were elected? In my opinion, inserting a definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman will embolden an institu-
I rise this morning to make some comments on the changes that have occurred as a result of an electoral redistribution in Victoria. As you know, I am currently the member for Burke. Under the redistribution, the electorate of Burke is to be abolished and large parts of it are to go into six different electoral divisions. There is a new division being created, the electorate of Gorton. During this period I am trying my best to represent the constituents of Burke—that is my first responsibility; I continue to do that and hopefully I am doing that effectively—and, at the same time, I am acquainting myself with the new areas that I seek to represent and which, if I am lucky enough to be elected to that seat at the next election, I will represent. There are some significant differences between the current electorate and the new electorate that I will seek to represent after the election.

The electorate of Burke is a rural seat with some metropolitan areas, whereas the new electorate of Gorton encompasses the western suburbs of Melbourne. There are differences in demographics beyond just the rural-suburban change. The constituents of Gorton in general are ethnically more diverse. Indeed, it will be one of the most multicultural electorates in Australia. More than 50 per cent of households in that area speak a language other than English in their home. That is not to say that they do not speak English, but they speak another language as well. That is an extraordinarily high proportion of households. That shows how diverse and how ethnically rich the region is.

I have had the great fortune in the last 12 months of meeting with many of the leaders of the different ethnic communities in the new electorate. I have been to Maltese functions. Recently I was at a Greek elderly citizens day at which they were celebrating not only the fantastic soccer win in the European Cup, which was definitely a David and Goliath story, but also anticipating the success of the forthcoming Olympics, which will be back in their original home in Athens in a few weeks. I had a great time there. I have also been invited to and attended Croatian, Serbian and Vietnamese functions.

I see my responsibility as the Labor candidate for Gorton to be to look after the generic and general matters that all constituents face—whether it be issues affecting health or education services in the area or other matters such as transport infrastructure. I am happy that the shadow minister for transport was able to announce recently our commitment to the construction of the Deer Park Bypass, which contrasts favourably with the current government, which unfortunately failed to fully fund that very important piece of infrastructure. I think such things are the critical matters, but I also think it is important for me to represent and recognise the leaders of the ethnic communities in the area. They are Australians, but they are proud of their heritage, as we all are. I am an Australian first and foremost, but I am proud of my Irish background. They have the same affinity and pride when it comes to their own backgrounds, so I am very happy that hopefully I will soon be representing that diverse area.

This Saturday I have been invited to the Abruzzese Night. Abruzzese is a province of Italy. I will be going to that function at the Italo-Australian Social Club. I am sure I will have a fantastic time. It is organised by Peter Perna, who is a very important and significant community leader in the area. On the same night I will also be attending a function celebrating the 30th
anniversary of the Macedonian Community Centre in Sunshine. It will be a busy Saturday night. I am looking forward to having a great time with those very important community members of the new electorate of Gorton.

Dickson Electorate: Health Services

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (11.14 a.m.)—Health is an issue important to all of us who live in Pine Rivers. This is especially so because we have one of the fastest growing regions anywhere in the country. The demand on health services has grown considerably and is rapidly increasing. When I came to office the Labor Party had done very little in our local area on the issue of health. When I was elected three years ago as the member for Dickson I inherited from the previous, Labor member the problem of a serious shortage in the number of doctors, with local residents having to drive long distances to access hospital services. Attracting new doctors and fighting for proper health services in our local area has been and remains my priority.

In Pine Rivers, we are proud of the fact that we have attracted 18 new doctors under the Outer Metropolitan Doctors Scheme. This was an initiative of the Howard government and has provided financial incentives for doctors to relocate to areas like Pine Rivers. It should be noted as part of my speech here today to the Main Committee that 18 is the most significant number of doctors attracted to any region across the country. I want to take this opportunity to say, on behalf of the people of Pine Rivers, that we are grateful to those doctors for relocating to our local community; but we also want to say that we need more doctors. We need more of their friends to join us in the Pine Rivers Shire. The growth in the number of young families and older Australians making Pine Rivers their home means that we need more doctors and health services.

Anyone who knows the north side of Brisbane would understand that we are desperately in need of hospital based services. Currently, we have Prince Charles Hospital at Chermside, as well as Redcliffe and Caboolture hospitals. We are told by the state government in Queensland that these hospitals are all we need for the north side—that, despite all the current and projected growth, there is no need for a new hospital. Again today I want to put on the record my strong disagreement with that position of the state government in Queensland.

When you look at the thousands of new homes being built in places like North Lakes and the surrounding suburbs in the adjoining electorate of Petrie, as well as developments in the Caboolture Shire, it becomes clear that demand on Redcliffe and Caboolture will be overwhelming in years to come. There is no doubt that developments in areas like North Lakes will take up any services that are provided by the Redcliffe Hospital and indeed Caboolture Hospital. To suggest to the people of Pine Rivers that they should access services out of Redcliffe or out of Caboolture is an insult to the people in my local community.

I believe that as local community leaders we must be planning for the future of our local area. I am passionate about continuing to deliver services to the people of Dickson, and if we are serious about planning for the future of Pine Rivers then our plans must include the provision of a public hospital. This is an issue for which I have been fighting for some time and I must say that I am at the point now where I am totally frustrated by the stonewalling by the state health ministers and the state government in Queensland.
In May 2003, in response to a survey that I sent to my electorate, I received overwhelming support for the provision of health services in the form of a public hospital in the Pine Rivers Shire. The people of the Pine Rivers Shire support my position and they believe very strongly, as I do, that we need to start planning for a Pine Rivers hospital. There is no suggestion that a Pine Rivers hospital could be built overnight; there is of course the realisation that it would take many years for the provision of such a service. But we need to understand that the demand is there, the future growth in the Pine shire will be phenomenal, and it will not be met by the services that can be provided out of Redcliffe or Caboolture hospitals or, for that matter, the Prince Charles Hospital.

One of the big concerns that we in the Pine shire have is about transport issues, again because of the phenomenal growth. To ask people, particularly older people, to travel long distances to hospitals outside the shire is, in my view, unacceptable. I want to put on the record today that I have written to the respective state health ministers on several occasions, including 7 August 2003, 7 October 2003 and 8 December 2003, and we have followed up with a number of phone calls in the intervening period. I wrote again on 12 July 2004—still no reply. This is despite advice from Queensland Health’s Data Services Unit that information has been prepared for me as part of this debate and as part of our argument for this service, but—for whatever reason—the Beattie government are refusing to release that information. I call on them today to release that information and to get serious about providing health services to the people of Pine Rivers. (Time expired)

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr Murphy (Lowe) (11.19 a.m.)—When federal Labor leader Mark Latham visited Five Dock in my electorate of Lowe on 27 January this year, he met with Five Dock pharmacist Mr Mathew Massasso to discuss Mr Massasso’s concerns about the impact the Australia–United States free trade agreement would have on Australia’s Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Critically, Mark Latham also announced that day that the 1,100-page text of the FTA would be referred by Labor to a Senate committee for calm and rational investigation and that Labor’s support for the FTA would be confirmed only when the benefits of the agreement were clear.

In contrast, the Howard government immediately and shamefully placed a gun to our heads, and the head of any Australian who had any questions or doubts about the agreement, and called for unconditional support for this agreement, sight unseen. Moreover, the Prime Minister insisted that, if the ALP did not give it unconditional support, we were anti-American and opposed to Australia’s alliance with the United States—an absurd and offensive claim that the government is still making to this very day.

This week a Senate inquiry reported that the overall package of the FTA is marginally in Australia’s interest. Labor understand its net economic benefit for Australia is estimated at $53 million—and, on this basis, it should be supported. We do not want Australia to pass up the chance to trade with the world’s largest and most dynamic economy, with increased two-way investment flows which would be of long-term benefit to Australia. However, critically, the same Senate committee, which includes members of the government, unanimously raised genuine concerns about protecting the regime that ensures that all Australians have access to affordable medicines—namely, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme—and about protecting Australian culture by guaranteeing local content rules. Unfortunately, the Howard government...
has failed to negotiate the best deal to safeguard the PBS and local content for free-to-air television.

These concerns have been raised by many of my constituents, and I would like to thank many of my constituents who have taken the trouble to let me know their concerns about the FTA—including Dr Gavan and Mrs Judy Young from Abbotsford; Martin Lester from Burwood; Charles and Joy Jago, Sister Mary Britt, Peter Molony, Nancy Walker and Steven Smith from Concord; Geoffrey Brown from Concord West; Trish O’Neill, Margaret Pridham, Patricia Taperell and Elizabeth Mars from Croydon; Gary Lennan and Frouke de Reuver from Croydon Park; Hilary Ivery from Drummoyne; Margaret Phillips and Mona Helal from Enfield; Therese Campbell from Haberfield; Bernard Quinn from Homebush; Anna Logan from Homebush West; and Dr Neville Andersen from Strathfield.

Labor have said that we will allow the FTA through the parliament only if the government addresses key concerns to protect the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Australian media content on free-to-air television. In January the government said improved sugar exports must be part of the deal but it backflipped on that. The government has already accepted Labor’s amendment on local content on free-to-air television—a second backflip. Today we are asking the government to listen to the concerns of my constituents and support legislative amendments that will protect the PBS while still allowing the agreement to take effect. A third backflip to protect the PBS is, in my view, not too much to ask. The amendments will protect the PBS by preventing and penalising drug companies that try to block cheaper generic drugs coming onto the market by lodging spurious patent claims. The validity of patent claims would be determined by a court.

From day one of the FTA negotiations, Mark Latham has acted responsibly and unambiguously in the interests of the Australian people. In contrast, the Howard government has been myopic and full of bile. Labor’s position has already achieved changes that ensure the FTA protects Australian culture. We now wait for the Howard government to stop the ridiculous claims, cease trying to deceive the Australian people and next week accept Labor’s amendments to protect the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in the interests of all Australians.

**Transport: New South Wales Rail**

Mr ROSS CAMERON (Parramatta—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (11.24 a.m.)—When people ask me what my constituents are concerned about, I am reminded of that scene which I think was from _The Elephant Man_. The guy puts his head in his hands and he says, ‘The bells, the bells!’ because of the sound of ringing in his ears. When I talk to my constituents, they put their heads in their hands and they say, ‘The trains, the trains!’ They are just haunted by this incredibly shabby, unreliable and increasingly diminished service that is being offered to them by the State Rail Authority and the New South Wales government. It is easy to take a cheap shot at Bob Carr, because, frankly, wherever you look his administration appears to be in crisis—whether it is the public hospital system, the ambulance services or the police, it is just one area after the other.

Mr Baird—Water.

Mr ROSS CAMERON—And water. It is just this crisis-ridden state, and you see a Premier in a sort of free fall. It is not my objective this morning to add to his discomfort, but the problem I have is that when I say to my constituents, ‘What are the problems we need to fix in
our electorate?’ they say to me, ‘The trains, the trains!’ A woman said to me the other day, ‘I’m standing there stranded on Clyde Station because the train that was meant to come simply never arrived. I have a connection to make because I have to get home and a group of young children are depending upon me to be there to feed them. Does Bob Carr understand what it’s like to have a group of teenage and younger children who need to be fed and their mother is not there because she cannot rely on the train service?’

On the Carlingford line, for example, we used to have three direct city services. But, following the promise of the state government to build the Parramatta to Chatswood rail link and then three weeks after the last state election simply axing it after 28 press releases promising it, we now find that the SRA under its last timetable is axing a whole range of services on existing lines. In particular, the Carlingford line used to have three direct city services in the morning and two in the afternoon; it went from three to two and, under this latest timetable, from two to one. What it means is there is massive disruption in this basic area of service provision. When people look at a member of parliament, they say, ‘There are not that many things I rely upon you for. There are not many ways in which you actually add value to my life. But I ought to be able to rely on the published timetable. The trains running on time is a basic area where government can add value to my life and, so far, it is dismally failing.’

The axing of the 6.36 direct service from Carlingford to the city and through the City Circle and of the 7.03 service from Carlingford through the City Circle and to the airport has had a very significant effect on access to employment, for example, for my constituents. When you see that the federal government have driven unemployment down in Parramatta since I got elected, from over 12 per cent under the Keating Labor administration to 4.1 per cent today, it is a stunning achievement. The problem is that all those people have got to get to work somehow. This is where we in turn are relying on the state government to deliver basic services, which they are failing to do. So I established the train trouble hotline, and I am getting inundated with reports from constituents about the problems they have been having.

Here I have a report from a commuter from Telopea who is visually impaired with low mobility and has great difficulty changing trains under the new timetable. In the past she travelled on a direct service to Strathfield, which suited her well. Going up and down stairs to change platforms is a major dilemma—she is arriving late at work and considers the new timetable to be a major hassle. Another commuter was left stranded on Friday night at Wynyard Station. Trains to Clyde after 9.40 p.m. are virtually nonexistent. On top of the morning and afternoon fiascos, evening services are far worse. A resident reports that the promise of the Parramatta to Chatswood rail link vanished into thin air after the last New South Wales state election. That resident says that the rail link is very important to the community, with high-rise developments and a growing population, and she encourages me to continue to fight for the Parramatta to Chatswood rail link. I am asking Bob Carr to get back to basics—to basic service delivery, which is what state governments are meant to do, and restore services to the commuters of my electorate of Parramatta.

Aviation: Qantas

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney) (11.29 a.m.)—I am rising today to speak about a very serious issue not just for my electorate but for Australia as a whole—that is, the plans that Qantas Airways has to relocate up to 400 of its flight attendants to London. This has very serious implications for those 400 jobs that would otherwise be Australian jobs, but I think the implica-
tions are much broader ranging than just those 400 jobs. Qantas is apparently planning to move these flight attendants offshore in December this year, but I believe this really is just the tip of the iceberg. It has already moved a number of jobs offshore to Thailand and New Zealand and there was an agreement with Qantas staff that those numbers would be limited. Qantas now seems to be reneging on that agreement to limit the numbers being moved offshore and is seeking to get rid of the quota for people working offshore—to save $25 million a year, it claims.

I can understand that any business has a desire to save money and minimise costs but, frankly, I would say that having well-qualified, friendly, charming Australian staff is one of the greatest selling points that Qantas has. Its safety record and its Australian staff are I believe its two greatest assets. When Australians travel by Qantas, they are travelling with Qantas because it is an Australian airline. Of course, on any trip they would expect there to be some flight attendants who are bilingual at least or multilingual. Some of those may not be Australian citizens; some of them may be based offshore. But what we are looking at with Qantas now is a plan to move offshore as many of its flight attendants as possible. I think that is really going beyond the pale.

The plan apparently is to pay flight attendants based in London £16,000 a year. Translated into Australian dollars, that would seem like fairly good money. However, anyone who has been to London knows how very difficult it is to live in London on £16,000 a year. Where will these people come from? Will they be local Londoners or will Qantas be relying on people from further afield in the European Union where £16,000 a year perhaps is decent pay? I have absolutely nothing against companies internationalising their work forces. What I am concerned about is that we are undercutting the wages and conditions of Australian workers by farming off what is skilled work—flight attendants need to know a great deal about the safety and the operation of a plane and what to do in an emergency. I am concerned that as many as possible of these skilled jobs are being farmed off overseas—not just the occasional job because someone has particular linguistic skill or knowledge of a particular overseas market but as many of these jobs as possible—purely as cost-cutting measures.

Qantas announced this before any meetings with the staff. It has made a public announcement. It has its eye on its share price obviously and has gone out into the marketplace and made this announcement. Doing this in this confrontational way, without any discussion with staff, is extremely provocative, particularly as there is a round of enterprise bargaining coming up. I am not surprised that Qantas staff feel that what will happen is that there will be 400 workers employed in London, a bunch of workers employed in Bangkok and a group of workers employed in New Zealand, and it will make it very difficult for Australian Qantas employees to take any effective industrial action.

Qantas profits were down, like those of every airline, after the SARS epidemic and after the terrorist attacks in the United States and in Bali. It is no wonder that profits dropped slightly in the last few years. But the profits are still almost $1 billion, so this is hardly a reason to be looking at these cost-cutting measures at the expense of its reputation and at the expense of the Australian work force. There is a great deal of concern in my electorate about this and about Qantas’s lack of commitment to apprenticeships. It used to be a huge employer of apprentices and it has really let down the side on apprenticeships, as it has on relocating flight
attendants. I am very concerned about what goes offshore next. Its safety record is first-rate because we have well-trained, highly qualified people working on the planes. (Time expired)

Makin Electorate: Law and Order

Mrs DRAPER (Makin) (11.34 a.m.)—One of the most important responsibilities of government is the protection of its citizens—protection from enemies abroad and from crime on our own shores. The people of Golden Grove and, more widely, the city of Tea Tree Gully in my electorate of Makin could be forgiven for thinking that the South Australian Labor government does not care about their safety. Since the election, albeit under questionable circumstances, of the Rann Labor government in 2002, it has made much of its supposed ‘tough on crime’ credentials. Barely does a month go by without some sensational headline appearing in the Adelaide Advertiser, with ever stronger words coming from the mouths of the Premier and the Attorney-General. Truly, this is a Labor government that desires the appearance—appearance only—of being tough on crime.

Unfortunately for my community, the truth is somewhat different. One of the first decisions of the Rann government was to cut funding to all local crime prevention programs—unbelievable as that is. This included the highly successful program operated by the city of Tea Tree Gully, which they were forced to abandon when their funding was cut. This was despite all evidence that it was having a very positive effect on reducing crime in our local community, including a massive reduction in graffiti and a drop of 25 per cent in the number of vehicles stolen in the Modbury regional centre.

Crime continues to be a major problem in my electorate, and for many years the residents of Golden Grove have been asking for an increased police presence in their neighbourhood, including the establishment of a local community police station. The local ALP member for state parliament, Jennifer Rankine, campaigned on this issue at the last two elections, and it was a promise by both sides of politics at the last election. It has been more than two years since Mike Rann became our Premier, and still there is no police station in Golden Grove.

The obvious need for a police station was recently highlighted by the plight of the local Royal District Nursing Service. Facing mounting bills for repair of the damage caused by constant attacks by vandals on its base in Golden Grove, the Royal District Nursing Service considered closing its doors in our community. According to local press reports, the cost to the service reached $100,000 over the past year. Clearly, the time for talk is over. We do not need any more false promises coming from the mouths of Jennifer Rankine or Mike Rann. We need a police station in Golden Grove, and we need it now.

I have written to the Premier and to Ms Rankine, and I will continue to support the community campaign for a police station for as long as it takes for these pleas to be heard. How many more properties have to be invaded and vandalised before the state government will take action? How long do we have to wait for urgent assistance to protect this community from crime? The state government happily collects a great deal of increased stamp duty and land tax from the building boom throughout Adelaide, and that boom has been particularly noticeable in my electorate. Surely it is not expecting too much to have some of that money spent on improved infrastructure and support the community with a police station that we badly need. After all, we are asking for nothing more than that the Rann government live up to its responsibilities.
Ms O’BYRNE (Bass) (11.38 a.m.)—My home state of Tasmania is extremely serious about vocational education and training. Set against a background of unacceptably high youth unemployment levels and the accompanying irony of shortages in apprentices in many trades, Tasmania continues to place a high priority on VET. Quite rightly, there has been much debate about the need for appropriate opportunities for Australians—however wealthy their families are and wherever they may live—to access further education. A large proportion of Australian parents, whether or not they have ever seen a single building inside a university, want the opportunity for their children to engage in tertiary study. But this is not possible for everyone, nor is it the wish of every Australian. Access to VET is also critical for older Australians. Opportunities for them to retrain and upskill are fundamental in a changing society. It is therefore incumbent on the legislators of Australia, both state and Commonwealth, to adequately provide for vocational education and training.

As it happens, it is time for the Australian National Training Authority agreement to be renegotiated between the Commonwealth and the states. I am concerned that these negotiations may be proceeding on the faulty assumption of a demand forecast which significantly underestimates the real need. The Tasmanian government has acknowledged this and has responded accordingly. It has substantially increased both capital and recurrent funding for vocational education and training. The increase between 2001 and 2002 was by more than 13 per cent. Further increases in recurrent funding occurred in 2003 and 2004 and more are foreshadowed for the future. The previous ANTA agreement expired at the end of December 2003. The new agreement, for 2004-06, has been under negotiation since the 2003 federal budget but remains unfinalised. A cooperative outcome from these negotiations is essential. It is vital that all parties acknowledge, and take seriously, the critical role which VET plays for so very many Australians.

VET takes many forms. In Tasmania we have, for example, an outstanding program called Studentworks. Many of my colleagues have had the pleasure of visiting this fantastic operation in recent years and meeting Linda Farrington, its administrator. Established in 1978 as a targeted youth training model for educationally disadvantaged secondary students, it is 60 per cent funded through its own commercial workshop. It targets grade 9 and 10 students who have difficulty with the mainstream school system and who might fall through the cracks. Students enter an agreement which requires spending half their time at the workshop and the other half in their original school. They must attend school in order to go to the workshop, and this has led to a sharp reduction in the levels of truancy. Students are offered nationally accredited training in carpentry, metalwork, furniture making and spray-painting, as well as learning the environment of a workplace and the need for workplace safety.

Over the last five years, around 97 per cent of students who have participated in this program have achieved recognised educational and trade qualifications. Eighty-two per cent of those students have gained full-time employment. In addition, the program was recognised recently at the recent skills expo in Sydney supported by Dusseldorp. I am delighted to say that it does not end there: these amazing young people are off to London, where they have been invited to participate in an international skills forum representing Australia. It is totally appropriate that these outstanding young Tasmanians have been recognised. The work at Studentworks is an example to all who are interested in alternative learning options. I congratu-
late Amber Coleman, Ashley Roberts and Dean Richardson—none of whom live in my electorate but they are supported by a program that is located in my electorate—and I wish them well in this very important journey in their lives and those of their fellow students.

It seems that the Minister for Education, Science and Training now wants to get in on another Tasmanian success story in education and training. Tomorrow he will join me in Launceston for the 2004 launch of the Brooks No Dole program. This 1995 initiative of the Brooks High School and the Beacon Foundation is designed to address the factors which lead to students in their community leaving school prematurely and finding themselves stuck in the poverty and welfare cycle. It has made a significant impact on addressing the problems of youth unemployment in the area by assisting in developing a work ethic and providing workplace training and connections with employers. The program has been such a success that it currently boasts a 100 per cent retention of year 10 students in further education or employment and has been adopted by schools elsewhere in the country.

The program is always launched by a particularly high-profile person, but in recent years the school has striven to get really exciting individuals to come along and capture the imagination of the community. Last year the school was delighted to embrace Peter Brock, quite a legend, who came down and participated, really raising the profile of the program. Since then the school has wanted to make sure that it has high-profile public figures performing the launch. It has been advised this year that the Minister for Education, Science and Training will be making the launch, and it has of course accepted.

Both of these programs illustrate the superb work being undertaken in Tasmania in VET, but more can be done. I urge the Commonwealth government to place a high priority on the resumption of the ANTA agreement negotiations in order to provide a truly productive and cooperative outcome for all Australians.

Drugs: Naltrexone Implants

Mrs Hull (Riverina) (11.43 a.m.)—Just a few weeks ago, in July, as Chair of the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, I took a delegation of committee members to Perth to understand the issues of naltrexone implants in the treatment of drug addicts, particularly those on heroin. During that visit, we were able to witness a host of people who had been heroin addicts, who had had naltrexone implants and who had been able to achieve a basic form of abstinence, thus gaining a different life experience. Can I say from the outset that not one member of the committee believes that using naltrexone implants for heroin addiction is the be-all and end-all and is for everybody who has a heroin problem. We recognise clearly that the use of naltrexone implants is only for—

Ms O’Byrne interjecting—

Mr Brendan O’Connor interjecting—

Dr Emerson interjecting—

Mrs Hull—I have a bit of competition over here. Madam Deputy Speaker. Could you recognise that it is a bit difficult to speak when you have three people holding a very loud conversation during your speech.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms Corcoran)—I am trying to catch their eye.

Mr Brendan O’Connor—Speak louder.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Mrs Hull—I would be very happy to speak louder.

Dr Emerson—You are wasting our time.

Mrs Hull—You are wasting my time.

The Deputy Speaker—The member for Riverina will not respond to interjections.

Mrs Hull—Basically, what we have here is a treatment that has the great potential to be utilised for those people who are on heroin and have tried forms of treatment, such as the methadone program and buprenorphine programs, and who now look towards abstinence. That treatment is very difficult to find and it has received a lot of controversy. The committee had the experience of watching a naltrexone implant and seeing how it was performed in a clinical setting. The committee then had the opportunity to go and speak with people who had had implants and who had had a re-education program and a rehousing program to determine how they might experience a better outcome for their lives for having had a naltrexone implant. As I said, there has been a lot of controversy around this and not one member of the committee feels, by any means, that it is an appropriate treatment for all addicts of opiates. However, it certainly should be clinically trialled in a safe and effective way to determine the safety and efficacy of naltrexone implants for heroin addicts and to ensure that, if it is a safe and effective product, it be made available to those who wish to become abstinent from heroin use.

In the discussions that the committee had with many of the people in the halfway houses, it was evident that for some of them who had chosen to have a life that was without drug use, particularly heroin use, naltrexone implants had played a very important role. But it was not the only thing that was required. It was necessary that money be spent on rehousing, on availability of accommodation away from an environment that might see them move back into a using situation. It also meant that they required further education to enable them to undertake employment opportunities and give them the first opportunity that many of those people have had in their entire lives to be drug free and to be able to contribute to their community and also to their own future lifestyle.

We saw and spoke with people who had taken up prostitution at a very young age—13 years old and younger—in order to feed a drug habit, who had finally been able to get their lives back on track by having an implant after trying many treatments. They were then able to be rehoused—which is a very important part of the naltrexone program, should it be implemented—and re-educated so that they could finally take an employment opportunity for the first time in their lives. It appeared to us that it was an extraordinarily good program. The naltrexone implant deserves to be clinically trialled without influence from external factors and the naltrexone implant process should have safety and efficacy proven. If that were to be the case then it should be made available for those people who choose to use naltrexone, who might choose to have a life of abstinence. For many people in the outside sector it seems that if you are seeking to be abstinent, as a former heroin user it is not available. (Time expired)

Health: General Practitioners

Dr Emerson (Rankin) (11.48 a.m.)—I wish to draw the attention of the Australian parliament to the scandalous treatment of Logan City by this government about an acute doctor shortage in the area. I have now obtained a list from the Department of Health—I had to do so through a circuitous route because it was not generally available. That list shows that of the
five worst areas in Australia in terms of doctor shortages, Logan City occupies not one, not two, but four places. Four of the five areas where doctor shortages in Australia are most acute are in Logan City. The scandal in all of this, as I will demonstrate, is that the government has been denying it, and today I will reveal just how duplicitous it has been.

Two years ago, on 16 September 2002, I wrote to the then minister for health, Senator Kay Patterson, on behalf of the residents of Park Ridge, which is one of the areas identified in this department of health document as suffering one of the most acute doctor shortages in Australia. I wrote on behalf of the residents at Park Ridge who were complaining about the shortage of doctors. I received a response from the minister on 30 October 2002. That response said in part:

... the Statistical Local Areas of Greenbank-Boronia Heights and Logan (C) Bal have currently been assessed as only partially eligible for the More Doctors for Outer Metropolitan Areas Measure. This is because these areas have a doctor to population ratio better than a national benchmark set for the Measure.

The figures reveal that, in terms of doctor shortages, this is one of the worst areas in Australia and one of the most shabbily treated by the Howard government. Yet two years ago the minister was saying to me that this area was better than the national average. It is one of the most acutely suffering areas in Australia. The minister went on to say:

However, my Department will review areas assessed as ineligible for the More Doctors for Outer Metropolitan Areas Measure following release of September 2002 quarter Medicare statistics.

I think, and I am being very generous to the government, that the government did in fact carry through with that review and identified—conceded reluctantly—that there was a problem. But I now have correspondence from the Park Ridge medical centre, the Park Ridge Family Practice. It is very revealing. On 9 January 2004, the Department of Health and Ageing responded to the pleas of that centre in the following terms:

This advice is a preliminary assessment as to whether the following location(s) are currently considered to be a district of workforce shortage for the purposes of section 19AB.

No ...

It was not considered to be a district of workforce shortage. The letter goes on to say:

The practice must provide evidence of genuine unsuccessful efforts to recruit a suitably qualified Australian doctor through the More Doctors for Outer Metropolitan Areas Measure in the first instance.

The practice has been trying and trying to recruit such a doctor. I now have a letter of 2 April 2004 from Medical Recruitment Pty Ltd to the practice. It says:

Thank you very much for your request for a permanent locum or assistant for your practice. I advise that we have had your request for 3 years and unfortunately during that time we have been unable to secure you a permanent doctor.

They have been seeking this support for three years and it has not been obtained. To cut a very long saga short, finally an overseas trained doctor was provided. Before that doctor could start, another doctor resigned. Now they are back to where they started. They have applied again for an overseas trained doctor and they have been told no. So the whole process is going to start again, with the Howard government denying that there is a doctor shortage in the area. It is a scandal. *(Time expired)*

MAIN COMMITTEE
Aviation: Bankstown Airport

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (11.53 a.m.)—Earlier today, I spoke on the preliminary draft master plan for Bankstown Airport. I want to say a few further things in relation to that now. Simply to reiterate what I said before, I and Daryl Melham MP, the federal member for Banks, have expressed our absolute opposition to and total rejection of any regular passenger jet airline services operating out of Bankstown Airport. We are opposed not only to any regular jet airline passenger services but also—given national security considerations, given Bankstown’s history of never having had regular passenger transport services, given that we do not want to become Sydney’s second airport and given that this is a completely new operation to jet aircraft and nonjet aircraft of up to 100 or so seats. We do not think it is reasonable or sensible, effectively through subterfuge on the part of the people who put this master plan forward, that either we as federal members or the community at large in the city of Bankstown should be expected to just say, ‘Oh well, we understand. We know there hasn’t been any regular passenger transport except, exceptionally, during the pilot strike of the early 1990s, when RAAF aircraft used Bankstown Airport.’

When the normal operation of regular passenger transport in Sydney had effectively collapsed, Bankstown Airport was there as an interim substitute to get through the difficulties of the pilots strike. That cannot be, should not be and must not be taken to be a core set of reasons for saying that this general aviation airport should be utterly changed in its mode of operation. I do not accept—and no other federal member that has been in the seat of Blaxland accepts; there have only been three of us, but I refer particularly to the former one and myself—that Bankstown Airport should be expanded, extended and changed so that its mode of operation becomes something different from general aviation.

When you look closely at what is actually in this—not at the briefing that we got and not at what I was told six months ago but at the statistics here—some very interesting things come out. The first is that Bankstown, historically the busiest airport in the whole of the Southern Hemisphere, has gone up to about 410,000 movements a year. Currently we are operating at 250,000 movements a year, as a result of what is happening in the Asia-Pacific area with the downturn across a number of countries in their economic activity and in their capacity to pay for their students to come to do flying training in Australia. We have also had the impact of the SARS epidemic and the general impact of the change in economic circumstances and cost imposts on general aviation. But more of those activities have been displaced elsewhere.

These figures say that, given the current level of 250,000 movements a year, if you project forward another 20 years that will move up to about 425,000. But 288,000 of those movements would be regular passenger transport aircraft, whether BAe146s—jet aircraft that are the model aircraft taken for all the figures here—prop jets or others. So there would only be about 120,000 movements left for general aviation and other operations out of Bankstown Airport, including all of the firefighting and medical work that is done. What is clearly intended is a displacement of general aviation activity to Camden, Wedderburn and other cheaper airports in Sydney and for that displacement to give effect to the imposition, for the first time, of regular passenger transport planes.

It would have been useful for the people running Bankstown Airport Ltd to have been up front about what they really want here, not to slide an argument through by saying, ‘There have been a few in the past and this is where we want to go for the future.’ I know of no sig-
significant section of my electorate of Blaxland that would cop Bankstown being turned into a jet way. I know that there is no support for Bankstown becoming Sydney’s second airport. And, as for what they have to say in this master plan—that, cross their hearts and hope to die, they do not want that to happen—I will return to that fairly shortly if I get the chance of another five minutes on this matter. \textit{(Time expired)}

\textbf{Roads: Funding}

\textbf{Ms GAMBARO (Petrie)—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence) (11.58 a.m.)—}I am very pleased to speak today about the recent AusLink announcement which will guarantee further funding to the Bruce Highway. I was very pleased to be at the launch of this great announcement with the member for Dickson and the member for Longman. That now brings to a total of $280 million the sum that will be spent on upgrading the Bruce Highway, which is one of the major highways that links the south-east corner to some of the northern areas and which is the main route that is used for produce and for people who travel up to the wonderful tourist destinations of Maroochydore, Noosa, Hervey Bay and the other terrific spots that we have in Queensland. The upgraded Bruce Highway is going to make a significant difference for the region. It was one of the worst spots in terms of congestion and the number of incidents that occurred.

I have done my very best to deliver on the local scene as much as I can as a federal member, but sadly that is not the case for the two state members that represent the area. I want to thank the people of Petrie for their wonderful response to the petition that was tabled some months ago on the Houghton Highway Bridge. It is official: it is Queensland’s worst road. The RACQ nominated it as the worst road. The other day the \textit{Courier-Mail} did a survey that said it was one of the worst roads in Queensland. So what further validation does the state member, Ray Hollis, need that it is Queensland’s worst road? A number of the residents who signed the petition have written to me. They have mentioned some terrible incidents of road rage, being late for work and fearing for their safety. They feel that they are being treated as second-class citizens. The people of Redcliffe have really had enough of the two state members making poor excuses. They are sick of constant stalling and feasibility study after feasibility study. I want to read into \textit{Hansard} a selection of comments that some of the residents have made:

\begin{quote}
I recently broke down on the bridge, on the one open lane. I was abused by motorists for causing delays. I was stuck there for over half an hour. The traffic in both directions was banked back for kilometres. That was a Scarborough resident. A Redcliffe resident said:

We moved here 12 years ago and nothing in all that time has been done to upgrade the Houghton Highway Bridge. Driving over it once or twice is very different to those who drive over it twice a day, five days a week.

I do that, so I know how this person feels.

How many times have you driven over it, Mr Beattie? As for this beautiful peninsula consider those of us who live here who need a rail link to travel to beautiful Brisbane instead of driving.

‘The Houghton Highway is a three lane death trap!’ said a Clontarf resident. Another Redcliffe resident said:

What does one say to the employer who no longer wants to believe that excuse again for being late! ‘Isn’t there another way to go?’ asks the employer. No, there is no other way to go! One cannot drive over water!
\end{quote}
Another resident said:
I feel very upset being treated by the Beattie government like a second-rate citizen. But I won’t forget when it comes time to vote.

Other comments include: ‘The bridge is a disaster waiting to happen’; and ‘The 60 kilometre speed limit will only aggravate drivers more and you could start seeing more road rage.’ Another resident said:
Don’t cross the bridge in dark hours—try crossing it in peak daylight hours—tolerate the smashes and the failure of traffic control lights. Apologise to your employer yet again for late attendance at work!

Another resident said:
I am sick and tired of the accidents, breakdowns, traffic-jams and near-misses that I come across and the road rages that I see. For 24 years that I have been a Redcliffe resident I am sick to death of the state government’s irresponsibility to our safety and livelihoods!

Another resident said:
This bridge is just plain dangerous and needs to be remedied. Think about it—head to head traffic on a narrow bridge with no carriageway division. Even worse—nowhere to go and nowhere to manoeuvre in the event of a potential collision.

Another resident said:
Thirty years is a long time to be told no, after all the promises, Mr Beattie!
I urge the two state members to do something about this. I have done my best as a federal member to get funding for the Bruce Highway. Please use some of that GST money that we bestow on Queensland so generously to do something for the people of Redcliffe and solve this terrible bridge problem. It is a nightmare. It is an outrage for the people of Redcliffe to have to put up with such a terrible bridge that is the cause of many accidents and much road rage. They deserve far better than this, and they do not deserve to be fobbed off. *(Time expired)*

Foreign Affairs: Taiwan

Mr LEO McLEAY (Watson) (12.03 p.m.)—Today I would like to raise the issue of the talking-up of tensions across the Taiwan Strait. There seems to be a view around at present, pressed by a number of lobbies, that all of a sudden there is a big issue across the Taiwan Strait regarding whether Taiwan is seeking independence. It was part of the election campaign in Taiwan, where one party said that President Chen could not be trusted because he was in favour of independence for Taiwan. This was echoed by the PRC. There has been a lot in the press here and a lot being privately said here in Australia by representatives of the PRC that talks about independence in Taiwan could cause not only cross-strait tension but also possibly open warfare.

It is important to look at the facts. Has President Chen said that Taiwan wants independence? Is there a very strong lobby in Taiwan for independence? Does the Taiwanese government recognise that independence is not the way to go? I think the reality is that, while there was a lot of hype during the election campaign in Taiwan, President Chen has made it clear since the election that Taiwan is not seeking to take a strong independent position. President Chen has said that there is a need to upgrade the constitution and to make significant changes in public administration in Taiwan. That is probably long overdue. Taiwan has a modern economy but it does not have, in some areas, a modern enough public administration to back...
that up. I think it is very clear from listening to people in Taiwan and from talking to Taiwanese officials that there is not any program for Taiwan to claim independence.

While at present the world seems to have its eye on the Middle East, I do not think we are looking at this other very important area and important issue in our region, and I think Australia should take a lot more interest in this. Taiwan is one of our major trading partners, as is the PRC. Australia has a lot of business links with both sides of the Taiwan Strait. They are important links for us, and it is an important area for us to be across.

The idea that is being peddled at present that there is increased tension is just a fiction, and it is a fiction that we here in Australia should take a fair amount of interest in. If there is a predisposition to make this an issue which could cause the problems of war in the Taiwan Strait, that would be very detrimental to Australia. But it is a bit of a phoney issue because the Taiwanese government, President Chen and the vast majority of the people in Taiwan are happy with the status quo. They are getting along with their lives and their business and they are not pressing this independence line.

We should be aware that Taiwan has now had two very successful proper elections. Taiwan is now pretty much a very well developed democracy. The Taiwanese people have found themselves being able to choose their own government and their own representatives in parliament and they want to modernise their own public administration and constitutional structures. But in that desire there is not a desire for full independence. That has been made clear both by the Taiwan government and the people of Taiwan.

Mr King—Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to ask the honourable member a question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Corcoran)—Is the member for Watson prepared to accept the intervention?

Mr LEO McLEAY—I am sure that the member for Wentworth might rise and echo my remarks shortly. (Time expired)

Environment

Miss JACKIE KELLY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (12.09 a.m.)—I would like to read into Hansard a speech written by two work experience students who have been with me this week. Harriett Bateman and Anna Leacock, who are present in the chamber, have been working with me this week. They wrote this speech, and the issues raised are of personal interest to them. I thought the chamber would appreciate hearing the concerns of two young Australians. The speech reads:

Due to the climate change and fluctuating weather patterns, many people are relying on their good old reverse cycle air conditioners to help them out; unaware that it is destroying our country’s natural resources. This isn’t just happening in my electoral area, but all across Australia, from the coast to the red centre, people are misusing electricity because of minimal environmental standards promoted by the State Governments and Municipal Councils. Most Australians don’t realise that over 90% of their electricity is generated by burning coal.

If the Federal Government of the Commonwealth of Australia promoted building codes like water-saver systems, better insulation of houses, planting of natural and appropriate vegetation and encouraged the use of solar energy technology, this would greatly reduce emissions and lift the current standard of unsatisfactory building codes.

Councils have an important role in educating residential and industrial areas within their municipal-ity about the benefits and issues regarding “Green Power”.

MAIN COMMITTEE
However, the State Governments should also aim to monitor the commercial industries over-use of electrical power and water wastage. If the state set a level of environmentally beneficial building codes which all builders, architects and engineers of commercial and residential buildings had to comply with, this would reduce the need for non eco-friendly devices. The councils could then regulate further restrictions if it was deemed necessary for their area.

The NSW State Premier, Bob Carr, introduced water restrictions on October 1, 2003, and this is obviously a positive step towards saving our natural resources.

However, the watering of gardens and lawns accounts for only 27.3% of household water usage, leaving 72.7% unaffected by the restrictions. Mr Carr’s mandatory water restrictions fail to apply to motor radiator repair workshops which waste 100 litres of clean water to flush car radiators; or poultry production plants which squander 35 litres of water per bird per minute. Mr Carr’s government seems to have no problem with this clear exploitation and abuse of our state’s water resources by the industrial community but puts the foot down when people try to keep their gardens green and destroy the typical elderly Australian past-time of lawn maintenance.

All three levels of Government need to implement laws and restrictions on abuse of water and electricity. But Sydney City Council wastes thousands of litres of water by pressure hosing pavements in the dry city of Sydney.

The NSW State Government leaves the burden to the Municipal Councils which have neither the resources nor the budget to implement the laws which could prolong the life of our country’s natural resources.

Together, the Municipal Councils, State and Federal Governments need to support the Australian renewable energy industry to reduce our country’s greenhouse gas impact and at the same time raising awareness about the issues in the public.

I congratulate Harriet Bateman and Anna Leacock on their work. I distance myself from the remarks about the ‘typical elderly Australian pastime’ of lawn maintenance, and I did want to withdraw that remark as being politically incorrect. I suppose to two year 10 students even I seem elderly in terms of my attention to my garden and my interest in gardening, which has obviously come to a halt with the current water restrictions. Harriet and Anna have been a delight and a pleasure to have around, and they are a credit to their school. I really have enjoyed having them this week. I should not say this in case their teachers read this speech, but I introduced them to Alexander Downer—and I asked them to get some questions ready to ask because they are both interested in a career in the foreign service. They did not do that; they got terribly flustered and did not manage to ask any questions. Then I said, ‘Let’s introduce you to the Prime Minister and you can ask him some questions.’ Again, they failed to ask any questions. But I am sure that, as they gain the confidence of age, they will get that confidence to nail our political leaders on issues that are important to them and go on to make a great contribution to our society and the great democratic country that is Australia. Congratulations to Anna and Harriet.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Corcoran)—Before I call the next speaker, I would like to add my congratulations on a well-written speech.

Wentworth Electorate: Arts and Sport

Mr KING (Wentworth) (12.14 p.m.)—I rise today to speak about the superb and wonderful contributions to the arts and to Australian sport made by thousands of people in my electorate of Wentworth in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. I particularly want to address, in a gen-
eral way, that contribution and to then make mention of some of the contributions and grants that have been awarded over the last three years or so.

The arts community in my electorate is probably the most vibrant of any in the country. It includes playwrights, film stars, painters, poets, actors and people of all description within the film industry—located, as it is, adjacent to the Fox Studios. My electorate includes the seaside suburb of Bronte and the suburb of Paddington, in particular, areas where people who love the arts and who are aesthetes, as it were, love to live and gather.

These people make a wonderful contribution to my electorate and to our whole country. Over the last three years, the period for which it has been my privilege to represent this community, there have been some extraordinary contributions by a wide range of people. I have had the privilege of working with people such as Chris Haywood, one of the leaders in the arts community in my area and an actor. We worked on a project to ensure that local people in the area had the opportunity to make a contribution on issues concerning culture in the US free trade agreement. Chris Haywood led a delegation to my office and I then arranged meetings with the Minister for the Arts and Sport, Rod Kemp, who made himself available, as well as then Minister Alston and Minister Vaile. That was an important opportunity for the arts community in my area to have input. I am not suggesting that all of their suggestions were taken up, because there are some concerns remaining about the cultural aspects of the US free trade agreement. I want to congratulate the arts community in my electorate on their contribution not just on the stage or on the page but also on policy development in that way and elsewhere.

I will mention before I go to the sporting community, in the limited time I have available, a suggestion from the arts community that division 10BA of the Income Tax Assessment Act—which was introduced, interestingly enough, by then Treasurer Howard as a 150 per cent deduction in relation to helping the Australian film industry and which was reduced to 100 per cent, so, really, just a tax deductible expense, during the Hawke years—really ought to be reintroduced, to give our film industry a fair go. They really do need a proper fillip to get themselves back on the road, because at the moment the levels of training of crews are falling off, so that offshore industries are not being able to access sufficient Australian skills. We are going to lose work to New Zealand and other places unless we act now.

I also want to refer to the contribution by the sports men and women of the electorate of Wentworth. The other day I held the Commonwealth sporting excellence awards in my electorate, down at the famous Bondi Icebergs Club. There some 54 sports men and women in my electorate were congratulated. Nick Farr-Jones, the former Australian Wallabies captain, handed out the awards. It was a terrific day. The Australian men’s winter open relay team from the Bondi Icebergs won the Australian championships. The Eastern Suburbs Cricket Club, which won the New South Wales competition, the Sydney competition and the one-day competition, were appropriately recognised, as were the Cranbrook School sailing team, which won the Australian junior championships, and a number of other wonderful sporting men and women too numerous to name in my address now. I want to recognise that contribution of excellence and also the contribution of the ordinary people across my electorate who swim daily, who run daily, who are part of this wonderful surge of sporting contribution, who are athletic and who love the sport of our country and make it as great as it is. (Time expired)
Aviation: Bankstown Airport

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (12.19 p.m.)—by leave—I return to the question of the master plan for Bankstown Airport and some of the critical things that are not being done. The very first thing that has not been done by the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Prime Minister or anyone else in this government is ruling out, now and into the future, the use of Bankstown Airport by 717s, 737s, 747s or any of those aircraft that are in category 4C and larger. The people in Bankstown know about this issue, and 6,000 turned up to Bankstown Paceway on one day to protest against the decision taken by the federal coalition government on 13 December 2000 to load up Bankstown Airport as the second airport for Sydney, to make it the overflow airport for Sydney, to make it the regional transport airport for Sydney. That was their decision of 13 December 2000.

At the time, I said that they were completely and utterly crazy. They obviously did not understand the interoperability between Bankstown Airport and Kingsford Smith airport. The east-west runway at Kingsford Smith airport operates in such a manner that you cannot run jet or prop-jet activity out of Bankstown Airport at any greater level than 12 per hour. There is a provision—increased in 1998 by the minister for transport—that, where there is a conflict between Kingsford Smith airport and Bankstown Airport, Richmond Airport or any other airport in the Sydney basin, Kingsford Smith airport has priority. They spent months trying to work out a way to turn Bankstown Airport into effectively Sydney’s second airport. Although they put Badgerys Creek on the backburner, they wanted a way in which to elevate Bankstown Airport so as to get regional traffic placed there and to run more jets in and out of Kingsford Smith airport, thereby letting Sydney Airport Corporation earn a lot more money. Since Max Moore-Wilton has gone from the Prime Minister’s office to running Sydney Airport Corporation, the vested interest of that corporation in trying to maintain and expand their activities has been extended.

The people who have taken up the lease on Bankstown Airport say that one of their planning priorities is for Bankstown Airport not to become Sydney’s second airport. If that is the case, that should be not just a suggestion; it should be written into this master plan. If that is the case, they should not just say in the master plan, ‘We’re not making any planning decisions in relation to code 4C aircraft’—that is, 717s, 737s and above—‘or doing any analysis of that, because we don’t think we’ll ever use it.’ They have said that the three runways at Bankstown Airport are important. However, they put the argument that they need to extend the principal runway by 220 metres and to strengthen the runway and the associated taxiways so that, instead of taking the 20-tonne loads that they currently take, they would be able to take 50-tonne loads. Where in these provisions do they say that they want to run regular passenger transport in and out of Bankstown Airport?

They say that there would only be 12 flights a day on that 50-tonne limit. When they say that, they know as well as I do that you can run 12 an hour, not 12 a day. They also know that they can apply to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services once they have established those kinds of operations to say, ‘We have a runway here which has the capacity to take larger aircraft. We have established usage, because we pinched a whole lot of activity from Kingsford Smith airport. We think we should be able to do more than this. We think we have a problem in the protection that is currently around Bankstown Airport.’ Because of the general aviation operations and the ceiling levels involved, you do not run the same kinds of opera-
tions that you do at Kingsford Smith airport. So they can apply to the minister to seek permission to run more than 12 jet and prop-jet flights a day in and out of Bankstown Airport.

This master plan should have been open, above board, direct and transparent. It should not have hidden clauses that would dupe the people of Bankstown, but it does. That is why I totally reject the fundamental propositions in the master plan. I reject the notion that regular passenger transport services should be incorporated into Bankstown Airport operations. The minister needs to reject this when it gets to him, and the people of Bankstown need to reject it in the 90-day period. (Time expired)

Aviation: Second Sydney Airport

Environment: Water

Miss Jackie Kell y (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (12.24 p.m.)—In response to the last speaker, I want to say for the record that the Australian federal government, headed by John Howard, has no plan for a second airport for Sydney. It has been quite clearly stated that Sydney will not run out of airspace for the next 30 years. The only political party considering a second airport for Sydney is the Australian Labor Party. It is considering Wilton but, when that falls over in the EIS, it will look at Richmond and it will look at Bankstown. It will look everywhere to put the second airport somewhere. Our policy is that there is no requirement for a second airport for Sydney—case closed. For 20 years people have been beating on government doors saying, ‘We’re going to run out of air slots for next year.’ I imagine that, by 2034, there will still be another 30 years of life at Mascot.

There has been all the hoopla over that piece of infrastructure, but you should look at another key part of New South Wales infrastructure, and that is water. We are going to run out of water in Sydney next year if it does not rain this summer—and there is no reason it should. My local churches have a two per cent regular attendance at church. So if Australia is praying for rain, we are relying on too few Australians to do too much. Without rain, we will run out of water this time next year. Frank Sartor’s water restrictions, which have been in since last year, have done nothing to curb the draining of our dams and Sydney’s water reserves.

Sydney’s current water reserves were built to cater for a city of four million people. We now have 4½ million people. On Craig Knowles’s own estimates, there will be 7.5 million people in Sydney by 2050. We urgently need to effectively double Sydney’s water reserves—or I think we will have to call in the national guard to restore civic order in Sydney when we run out of water. If there is no water, how long have you got before there is chaos? Three days? You can go seven days without food but only three days without water. It is absolutely disgraceful, poor planning. Here we have the opposition going on about an airport 30 years from now when we are talking about running out of water—

Mr King interjecting—

Miss Jackie Kell y—That is right. The ALP is talking about an airport now. We are not talking about any need for an airport for 30 years, by which stage it will be another 30 years. We are talking about running out of water next year. In Western Australia, with a proper government strategy, they are guaranteed two days a week of watering of household gardens. That is guaranteed by their current water policy. On the other hand, Bob Carr has basically targeted residential users and household water. The watering of gardens and lawns accounts
for only 27.3 per cent of household water. I will read you a letter to Frank Sartor written by the New South Wales Turf Growers Association’s CEO, Don Ainsworth. Mr Ainsworth says:

According to Sydney Water figures for 2002/03 households use around 53.3% with outdoor water accounting for around 27.3% of all domestic water use. Nursery industry research shows that over 70% of people were already using hoses to water their gardens. So the current restrictions are only targeting 30% of 27.3% of 53.3%, or less than 5% of household water use. So it is hardly surprising that dam levels continue to fall despite mandatory restrictions become mandatory water restrictions are targeting less than 5% of household water use.

What perhaps angers me most is that neither Sydney Water nor the Minister are capable of explaining why the banning of sprinklers is necessary when an averaged sized radiator repair workshop is allowed to waste on average 100 litres of water when flushing a normal car radiator, or when poultry farmers use 35 litres per minute per bird in a typical processing procedure. Furthermore, there appears to be no scientific evidence to substantiate the claim that a properly controlled sprinkler irrigation is less efficient than drip irrigation, and no scientific evidence to substantiate watering gardens and lawns at 8.00am in the morning is more efficient than watering at 10.30am.

I will rise to say more on this issue later. (Time expired)

**Military Detention: Australian Citizens**

**Mr KING (Wentworth) (12.30 p.m.)**—I rise to raise some points concerning prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and the two Australian prisoners, Hicks and Habib, in particular. It is not well known, but there are two formal inquiries under way in the United States at the moment into prisoner abuses in US prison camps in Iraq, the United States and Guantanamo Bay. The first is by the inspector-general of the navy and the second is by the detainee group within the Department of Defense of the United States government. Those formal inquiries are important because they are probably the most sensible and reasonable basis on which information about possible prisoner abuse can be obtained.

In several Australian newspapers today, a detailed report was published and became available to most Australians concerning claims by English prisoners at Guantanamo Bay regarding the torture of, amongst others, those two Australian prisoners, who are our fellow citizens. The fact that they may have committed gross crimes and even treasonous offences against this country—although it is not proven at this stage and, in the case of one, not even alleged—does not mean that they are stripped of the rights of every Australian person to freedom from abuse and the protections that international conventions and the laws of this country give them, as they give you and me. If we pick and choose when to apply those laws and conventions, we ourselves end up in a tyrannous state.

My suggestion to the government, which I have sent in writing to the minister today, is this: an Australian serving military officer with legal experience—that is, a person who is either a member of the legal branch of the Department of Defence or, as the member for Lindsay herself once was and maybe still is, a member of the military personnel with legal experience in the Department of Defence—be appointed to assist one of those two inquiries in the United States so that the Australian government and the Australian people have the confidence of knowing that the issues regarding prisoner abuse and possible convention breaches are addressed. That is important because there is at least one convention to which Australia is a party that the United States is not, although, in general terms, both countries are party to the relevant conventions relating to these matters.
The alternative is that the Australian government itself appoints its own inquiry, again with an appropriately qualified person with military experience and also legal experience to conduct such an inquiry. In that way, the Australian government can itself act and be confident and report to the Australian people that this issue has been properly addressed. Until now, it may not have been as serious as I am suggesting. But these reports from English prisoners and the claims that they have made are so extraordinary that they ought not to be and really cannot be ignored. That is why I have written to the minister, and I hope that he responds, either in the two ways that I have suggested or in some other way to assure the Australian people that such rights that those prisoners have to be free of abuse in incarceration are not infringed.

The only other thing I mention about this is that it is high time both these men were charged and brought to trial—not just a trial but a fair trial. It has been too long since they have been incarcerated without charge and, as Australian citizens, their trial ought to occur. I would like to see that occur in this country in the same way that the English prisoners who were in Guantanamo Bay have been repatriated and were considered under the laws of the United Kingdom for charging in that place. Those issues are important because they relate to the very issues and reasons why we went to war in Iraq and conducted the war against terrorism in the first place. (Time expired)

Aviation: Bankstown Airport

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (12.35 p.m.)—by leave—I take umbrage at the rather ill-informed and untargeted debate and discussion that came from the member for Lindsay previously. Given that she was a government minister, given that she is a parliamentary secretary, given that she is a resident of Sydney, given the proximity of where she lives to Badgerys Creek—the reserve second airport for Sydney—and given the centrality of the debate in relation to airports in Sydney, I would have expected a finer argument in relation to this master plan proposal at Bankstown airport, because it is not as though this has not arisen before.

The reason the member for Lindsay can comfortably argue that nothing is really going to happen in relation to Badgerys Creek at all—it is not an issue, it is not a question—is that the government, having pocketed it in reserve on the basis that Kingsford Smith would be able to deal with their aircraft needs for the next 20 years, have made this master plan an extension of the swiftie they tried to pull in December 2000. That is, they say that part of the way in which Kingsford Smith would be able to cope with increased usage in the future is to get regional and smaller aircraft out of Kingsford Smith to an overflow airport in Bankstown. They actually had a specific provision put in that said that the sale of that lease had to have some conditions. One was that the runway be extended. What is in the master plan? An extension of the runway. Another was that the runway be strengthened. What is in the master plan? That the runway is strengthened—to take not 20-tonne loads but 50-tonne loads. Another was that provision had to be made for 737 aircraft to land at Bankstown airport.

The only reason Minister Tuckey, in the absence of the minister for transport, announced that they were not going to insist on lengthening and strengthening the runway, on 737s being able to use Bankstown airport or on Bankstown becoming an overflow airport was that they finally caught up with the fact that, with the intersection of the east-west runway, Bankstown and class C airspace, you could not sensibly interoperate the two airports. That is the only thing that saved Bankstown and the surrounding areas—in which half a million people in Sydney live—from being turned into the jetway that this coalition government would have
imposed. Given the attitude in the debate expressed by the member for Lindsay, we can understand that nothing much has changed—Bankstown can be a dumping ground, and this master plan, if accepted by a coalition minister for transport and aviation, would impose on Bankstown the preconditions for the future expansion of the airport. It would impose on Bankstown regular passenger transport modes that have never been a regular feature at Bankstown airport. The history of this airport is general aviation usage.

The people who put the master plan forward, who want to make a big buck out of this proposal, who want to spend big money on lengthening and strengthening the runway, who want to put 100-seater aircraft into Bankstown without the controls in terms of airport security and who want an amount of money paid for every one of those people on those 100-seater aircraft—and the aircraft for this airport is in fact the BAe 146-300, which has an on-board capacity of 128 people—want to change the usage in Bankstown airport. They have picked up what the government said on 13 December 2000—the fact that you could have regular passenger transport services. They have said that that is the way they want to go. They want to establish a platform to dramatically change that usage.

I reject that proposal on my behalf and on behalf of the 82,500 constituents I have in Bankstown. The member for Banks has absolutely rejected that proposal. We have further demanded this from a Liberal government which will not sign off on it. All they have said is, ‘We’re not saying anything more about larger aircraft for Bankstown.’ Code 4C aircraft, 737s and above, should be written out of usage at Bankstown Airport now and forever. Code 3C aircraft—aircraft that currently only charter from the airport but do not have any licence to operate regular passenger transport—should be written out in terms of use as regular passenger transport. There is no need to extend the runway, and there is no provision for that in terms of freight, unless there are adequate protections for the people. In all the 151 pages of this master plan, there is not a single syllable about the impact it would have on people. (Time expired)

Aviation: Second Sydney Airport

Environment: Water

Miss JACKIE KELLY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (12.40 p.m.)—by leave—I reiterate for the member for Blaxland that the Sydney Airports Corporation has guaranteed that Sydney can take all regional aircraft, as it is currently doing. It will meet the current curfews—it will do all of this—within the existing arrangements. All regional passengers will be able to exit at Mascot, transfer to connecting flights and get around Australia. There is no need for a second airport. In the year 2030, the issue will be looked at again to see what infrastructure is required. Personally, I think the member for Blaxland would probably be better advising for a 2030 plan that Brisbane and Melbourne be the second airports for Sydney and that Canberra be the second regional airport. That is the logical solution. That arrangement has been put in place around the world. It has happened at Narita. As airports reach capacity, larger aircraft are employed from closer airports. International passengers will disembark in Brisbane and Melbourne, with domestic flights to Sydney on larger aircraft.

We can sit here and trade opinions on air movements for Sydney well past 1.30—we could do it until 2030—and still not be in a situation where we must come up with a solution for tomorrow. However, that is not the case with Sydney’s water usage. If there is no rain this
summer, we will be out of water by this time next year. In Sydney, we will go to turn our taps on and have a drink, and there will be no potable water. This is a serious, unbelievable situation that we are in. It happened in Joseph’s time. Surely everyone recalls Joseph and his coloured coat. His brother is thrown down a well, he is sold into slavery, he becomes a great prophet and he predicts seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. For seven years they did not have rain. It can happen. It does not have to rain this summer.

There are no pipes from the Hunter to replenish Sydney’s water resources. There is no dam in the Colo; there is no dam at Welcome Reef. There are not even any plans for an EIS on a dam there. There is no desalination plant under construction as there is is WA, and it has not even been looked at. There is no water, and we are about to run out. Frank Sartor’s solution is to beat up on gardeners when we have the entire commercial sector of Sydney absolutely abusing water.

This time next month, when Warragamba Dam gets below 40 per cent and we are into 39 per cent—when we go down to the thirties everyone starts panicking—Frank Sartor is going to go to stage 3 water restrictions, which are outrageous. I personally have already seen the loss of nearly 100 jobs in my electorate from these water restrictions. There are 20 at the Castlereagh nursery. There is John’s Garden Centre. All of my turf farms and nurseries are either closing down or laying people off. Across the industry, altogether in New South Wales 6,000 jobs have gone. When Frank Sartor goes to stage 3 restrictions, it will be even more devastating. He is not even willing to consider an inquiry or a better way of managing water, such as the one his good mate—of the same political colour—in WA can advise him of. Western Australia manages water in a far more appropriate manner—in a far more rational way that does not cost jobs and that does not have catastrophic effects on industries and residential users.

It is quite unbelievable that Frank Sartor continues with his current water restriction policy like a bull at a gate. It is draconian and it is totally unnecessary. There is a better way of managing this issue than just sticking with what his bureaucrats have. He should do a bit of work, get out in Australia, find out what the rest of Australia is doing and come up with a better plan for Sydney as put forward by the Turf Growers Association and by the Western Australian government and water users. Our commercial users are not being penalised—our commercial users for whom it is a tax deduction to implement devices that will save water. They are not being forced into that situation. (Time expired)

Aviation: Bankstown Airport

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (12.45 p.m.)—by leave—I thank the government side for giving me leave to speak. There is a clear and present danger in the city of Bankstown. That clear and present danger is that the master plan, which people have 90 days to comment on, will be decided upon by March of next year—well beyond the election, which I expect to be on 18 September. Whoever wins government will have to make a determination on the master plan agreed by the Bankstown Airport Corporation.

The Minister for Transport and Regional Services will have to make a determination on whether to accept or reject the master plan. The minister cannot make amendments to that plan. The originators of the ideas in relation to what will happen to Bankstown Airport have a 90-day period, based on the 1996 Airports Act, which Labor put into place. They have prepared all of the documentation in relation to this and argue that this is deep, full, extended and gives all the information required by the legislation. They are seeking comment and they are
seeking input. There is a decision making group set up by them—I think loaded with people who are supportive of what they have chosen to do here. They have to look at every one of the inputs, every one of the criticisms in relation to this and come up with a final master plan. This is a preliminary draft. What they have done has been inappropriate.

The member for Lindsay has misunderstood what I am saying here. The second Sydney airport issue is separable from this entirely. This is about what happens with the existing Bankstown Airport and its mode of operation. Do they stay the same as they have been at that airport historically since it was first put into use during World War II as a general aviation airport or do they dramatically change and, in dramatically changing, be allowed to run regular passenger transport out of it—both jet and nonjet? That activity has to come from somewhere. They will pull that activity out of Kingsford Smith airport. Why? Because they will be able to offer people currently operating out of Kingsford Smith a lower cost of operation competitively. The amount of money it costs them to run the airport is not as high. They will be able to pull those people out to operate out of Bankstown by offering them better conditions and a better cost structure. If they are able to build that and then compete against Kingsford Smith for that part of the market, more slot spaces open up for larger aircraft at Kingsford Smith, whether they are 747s, A300s or whatever.

That is not the critical point here. The critical point is that there is a master plan that has to be considered. The master plan has to be modified and then the final one presented to the federal minister for transport and aviation in December of this year. I am arguing about federal matters, not the state concerns and state matters that the member for Lindsay has been arguing about in relation to whether or not there will be potable water for Sydney. I know those are significant issues for all people who are living in Sydney, but it is another indication of a government that is transfixed by the campaigning basis of flogging state governments around Australia, dealing with state issues and not the issues that are at the core of their responsibility.

On the question of the federally owned Bankstown Airport land—it is still owned by the Commonwealth government; there is only a 99-year lease that has been put out on that—the decision-making authority for what happens at Bankstown Airport is the federal minister for transport and aviation. State people can have concerns about it, the local council can have concerns, but what is going to happen there in the next 20 years is simply a question of what the federal government will decide, undistracted by state issues. The key question that needs to be answered now is whether Bankstown will operate as it always has or will be transformed into an overflow airport. That is what the federal government sought to do and then backed off on, and we need to know what the new owners will seek to put into place in their stead. It will cost a lot of money to strengthen that runway and to extend it by 220 metres. I ask the minister for aviation to entirely rule out that lengthening, and the strengthening of that runway to take 50-tonne loads. Bankstown should run as it has always run and not be transformed into something that is a threat to the people of Bankstown. (Time expired)

Environment: Water

Miss Jackie Kelly (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (12.51 p.m.)—by leave—Bob Carr and his minister for utilities cannot go to stage 3 water restrictions in New South Wales as they are currently drafted. They need to be redrafted to allow
some survivability of our landscaping industries. The stage 3 water restrictions as currently drafted will squeeze another 20 per cent of savings from domestic gardeners. Basically that means banning all hosing of gardens and lawns. That is economically irresponsible in terms of wiping out more jobs from the industry. Currently the industry has lost over 6,000 jobs, which is 15 times more jobs than lost at Orange Grove. It is also leaving us with a brown and dusty city. In my area of Lindsay I have the highest asthma rate in Sydney. A key feature in our fight against Badgerys Creek was the particulate matter in the air in Western Sydney. With a dry and dusty city the particulate matter increases, with a corresponding increase in respiratory problems. Having a green city is a health issue as well as an aesthetic one.

Talking of infrastructure planning, there is some other poor planning occurring. The member for Blaxland says it is a case of a federal member getting up on a state matter. I am getting up because I live in this area and have to breathe in this area and I have to get to work and get to the shops in my area, and I am representing the local issues of people in my area as they are brought to me. Generally the federal government is doing extremely well on federal issues and most of the issues that people talk to me about are state ones, such as the incredible traffic jam on the M4 going to work. Most people fear this will become even more claustrophobic as more and more houses are built in the area without a corresponding number of jobs coming with that. That is why I am dedicated to an outcome, and I do have to work with state and local governments, of getting 5,000 jobs on the Army land at North Penrith.

The Army land at North Penrith is right at the Penrith railway station, and any urban planner will tell you that within 400 metres of a railhead, especially one like Penrith which is only an hour from the city by train, becomes a commuteable distance for using public transport to get to work. If you can get off the train and walk 400 metres to your job, that is an ideal place at which to locate your business. Yet in that area the Penrith City Council is planning houses. I know that what will happen is that as businesses get squeezed for rents on the south side of the train line they will find houses that they can utilise as home office or mixed use and they will squeeze themselves into this residential area within 400 metres of the train station and take advantage of poor council enforcement, because councils never enforce any of these zoning laws. I have got bulky goods zoned areas that are retailing, I have got all sorts of uses happening all across my electorate, and the only time council ever enforces anything is when a neighbour complains. There will be more and more businesses moving into this area in an ad hoc way and we will end up with a CBD that is ill planned.

If, with proper planning now, we build a bus-railhead, build a 2,400-space car park on the north side for commuters and free up parking on the south side, if we make interconnectivity underneath the rail line and look at buildings going over the vacant rail space, we can develop a CBD at the heart of Penrith which is a major attraction, which is liveable, which is a great place to work and which is sustainable, given the number of houses that we are having developed in our area according to the state government’s planning policies. Penrith City Council has to come up with 20,000 new home sites; that is an extraordinary ask. We are finding some on the ADI site, some in the Penrith Lakes area and some at the back of Glenmore Park. We will have an enormous churn of houses, and people are very concerned because we do not have the jobs to sustain the people who will live in them, so they will empty onto our roads, causing traffic jams for the locals. We are not used to paying for parking and we are not used to waiting for more than 10 minutes to move down a suburban road. These are the issues that
the state government needs to take a very serious line on. It needs to build infrastructure and make our built environment an environmentally friendly and liveable area. It is critical that members like me continue to kick the state and local governments so that they get on and do their job and represent the people that they were elected to represent.

**Aviation: Bankstown Airport**

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (12.56 p.m.)—by leave—I thank the government for allowing me to speak again. It is good to have some debate in this house of parliament. It is good to have some back-and-forth debate within the Main Committee chamber. There should be more of it here, and there should be more of it in the House itself, which is dominated by question time, in the public mind. We need a better interactive debate here between members battling it out, hand to hand, face to face, dealing with these fundamental issues.

Like the member for Lindsay, I live in Sydney. I understand the problems that occur when you have a large city with many transport needs and demands, and with that increasing over time. Fundamentally, what I have been talking about today is one aspect of that increased use, the potential problems generated by it and the fact that a federal government needs to fix it.

I have been concentrating on what is said in the draft master plan in relation to change of use and the introduction of regular public transport services. I will now quote from the master plan so that people can see that it is not just what I am saying; the argument is in the master plan. The plan says at page 105:

Studies have examined the airspace implications of potential RPT—regular public transport—service at Bankstown and possible air traffic conflicts arising from larger, more sophisticated aircraft that might be associated with scheduled passenger service. A February, 2001 Airservices Australia study concluded that—

and remember that this was two months after the government tried to load up Bankstown Airport as the overflow airport for Sydney. The quote from the study is as follows:

“The introduction of RPT operations to Bankstown will necessitate the expansion of controlled airspace around Bankstown, the introduction of Class C airspace traffic management procedures at Bankstown and the redesign of the Bankstown procedures for arrivals from the east (runway 29 CI (C) arrivals) and departures to the east (runway 1IC1 (C) departures). These new arrival and departure procedures will result in increased interaction with Sydney Airport operations.”

The plan goes back to its assessment of this situation:

Airservices Australia notes that the Bankstown CTR is currently designed to accommodate low to medium performance general aviation aircraft. Should larger, faster commercial passenger turbo propeller or turbo jet aircraft serve the airport in the future, airspace and air traffic management procedures will need to be carefully examined to minimise conflicts between the two airports.

That is a very significant paragraph. It tells us a great deal about what is intended here. The master plan continues:

More recently, Airservices noted in discussions with BAL—Bankstown Airport Ltd—

that at low levels of RPT operations, Class C airspace management procedures may only need to apply when the larger aircraft are present in the system, and the airport could otherwise continue to operate under GAAP—
that is, the general aviation airport procedures. This is laying the framework; they have had regular discussions about it. They would move to a different mode of operation, and they are saying that they could run those two together at a particular time. The next paragraph in this section on airspace protection says:

While a significant number of RPT operations could require more general application of Class C airspace for both arriving and departing aircraft, the number of RPT movements triggering such a change would likely need to exceed 12 or more per hour. BAL will continue to work with Airservices Australia to determine airspace and approach issues for RPT on a demand driven basis.

It is as clear as clear could be when you look at this. They are proposing this master plan and saying, ‘We want to run these aircraft out on a regular basis,’ with only 100 passengers even though the BAe146 will take 128. Why? You do not have to spend the money on airport security that you do at Kingsford Smith if you have 100 or fewer. They want to run them out, they say, at 12 operations per day—oh, yeah? They can go 12 an hour without changing the airspace management, and even have an intersection at 12 an hour. But they say here:

BAL will continue to work with Airservices Australia to determine airspace and approach issues for RPT on a demand driven basis.

And if the demand is for 12 services an hour and up, don’t you think they are going to apply to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services to do it? I say we should reject this out of hand until they come back with a sensible proposal. (Time expired)

Environment: Flora and Fauna Protection

Miss JACKIE KELLY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (1.01 p.m.)—by leave—May I congratulate the member for Blaxland. I know what it takes to fight for the best interests of your community and defeat an airport in your area, and I wish him well in his fight to get the best outcomes for his electorate. That is what the whole democratic and parliamentary process is about. For my part, my fight against an airport has been won, so I can be generous!

I rise to mention one other issue that grieves me, and that is the management plan for the 850 hectares that the federal government has preserved for an environmental park on the ADI site in my area. The management plan is unknown at this stage, but it was always my assumption that there would be a fence. I have done a lot of work with Warrawong sanctuary. I know exactly how they work; I have visited them north of Adelaide; I have examined this style of fence. Basically, it is a fence that is over six feet high and goes three feet into the ground, like the old rabbit-proof fence. It is electrified at the top. Three metres back from it you have another fence with signs on it saying, ‘Beware: electrified fence,’ and all that sort of thing—it is a double fence. The internal part of the fence is walked daily, and inside the fence there is usually a white hen or white duck that is basically the ‘canary down the mine’. If your spot- ters see some white feathers, then you figure that you have some feral cat or other animal in there preying on your native creatures and you can hunt it and exterminate it from your park.

In this way, the 850 hectares of environmental land on the ADI site can be rehabilitated to become quite a nature reserve. Bird life would come back; the feral cats will not attack the nests, and so it would become a nesting area. All of your small marsupials like your tiny possums, quolls and a variety of other creatures could be seen. I understand by a recent report that there are possibly koalas on the site. If there are not, they could be introduced into a safe environment where they are not going to attacked by urban cats, because the entire site is sur-
rounded by urban areas. I am not asking for people to give up their cats and dogs, but I do want the environmental area that I have fought so hard to preserve to be preserved and to be the leading-edge environmental display and tourism attraction that it can be and that I have always envisaged along the lines of Warrawong.

Warrawong is run by a private company, but our ADI ‘Warrawong’ sanctuary can be run by a community organisation such as the ADI RAG. There are various other structures. I would suggest that it not be run by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, because they really are not set up to run that model of environmental park. It is leading edge, it is visionary and I think we would have an excellent opportunity. I am very happy to work with the New South Wales government and the local councils and even look at federal funding for such a fence if the management plan goes that way. I thank the opposition for the opportunity to add those comments to today’s debate.

Main Committee adjourned at 1.05 p.m.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

**Education, Science and Training: Staffing**  
(Question No. 3548)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, upon notice, on 11 May 2004:

(1) What is the full list of groups, divisions, branches and other work units (Minister’s department.)

(2) How many full-time equivalent staff currently work in each work unit.

(3) In respect of each work unit, how many staff are (a) ongoing, and (b) non-ongoing, broad-banded classifications.

(4) What was the operating cost of each work unit for 2002-2003.

(5) What is the budgeted operating cost for (a) 2003-2004, and (b) 2004-2005.

Dr Nelson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) A full listing of the Department’s groups, divisions, branches and other work units is at Attachment 1.

(2) The full time equivalent staff currently working in each unit in the Department is at Attachment 1.

(3) The employment status of staff in terms of ongoing/non ongoing and broad-banded classifications is at Attachment 2. The data is provided down to unit level for the State Network. However, the data has been provided down to Group level only for the National Office of the Department. The reason for this is that the data requested is not readily available and it would require a significant diversion of resources to drill down to the requested level of detail for the National Office structures. It should be noted that DEST has only two broad-banded classifications: DEST Level 1 encompasses APS Levels 1 to 3 and DEST Level 2 encompasses APS Levels 4 and 5.

(4) The operating cost of each work unit for 2002-03 is detailed at Attachment 3. For the purpose of this response operating cost includes general administrative expenses and employee expenses. The operating costs do not include items such as property operating expenses, legal expenses, IT expenses and research and project expenses.

(5) The estimated budgeted operating cost of each work unit for 2003-04 and 2004-05 is at Attachment 4.

Attachment 1

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NOTE: Where there is a difference between the sum total of the Section FTE figures of a Branch and the corresponding Branch FTE figure, it should be assumed that the remaining FTE makes up a Branch Executive Unit which has not been established as separate unit in the structure.

Attachment 2

FULL TIME EQUIVALENT STAFF IN DEST (EMPLOYMENT STATUS)

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## QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

### ATTACHMENT 3

**ACTUAL DIRECT OPERATING COSTS IN 2002-03**

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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
**DEST GROUPS BY BRANCH**

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**DEST STATES & TERRITORY**

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**ATTACHMENT 4**

**ESTIMATED DIRECT OPERATING COSTS FOR 2003-04 AND 2004-05**

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**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**
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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Australian Defence Industries: Sale

Mr Price asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 13 May 2004:

(1) Further to the answer to my question without notice (Hansard, 11 May 2004, page 28140) and his subsequent letter to me, at the time of the execution of the ComLand Share Sale Agreement on 22 January 2004, was the size of the central park (the location of the sporting complex) on the ADI site less than 100 hectares; if so, what was its area.

(2) Is expanding the central park to 100 hectares dependent on excising land from the regional park; if so, how much land needs to be excised.

(3) Is excising land from the regional park dependent on state government approval; if so, has he written to the Premier of NSW; if not, why not.

(4) Does the above ComLand Share Sale Agreement stipulate that $10 million be spent on the park, as claimed by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, or $6 million.

(5) Does the $6 million include expenditure on roads and other infrastructure other than sporting facilities.

(6) In respect of the sporting facilities to be provided, (a) how many outdoor playing fields are planned and for which sports are they intended, (b) how many synthetic all-weather playing fields are planned and for which sports are they intended, (c) how long will the cycleway and walking trails be, (d) what facilities will be provided in the picnic and barbecue areas, and (e) what is the individual cost of each facility planned.
Mr Howard—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) At the time the ComLand Share Sale Agreement was executed on 22 January 2004, it was agreed that the size of the Central Park on the former ADI site at St Marys would be approximately 100 hectares. This has not changed.

(2) Consistent with the Minister for Finance and Administration’s announcement on 22 January 2004, it is intended that the Regional Park containing conservation areas listed on the Register of the National Estate will be approximately 850 hectares.

Central Park will be separately developed on land currently zoned as ‘Regional Park’ or ‘Regional Open Space’, which is not listed on the Register of the National Estate. Central Park has been designed to be compatible with the currently approved uses of the land in question and its facilities will complement the intended uses of the land.

(3) See answers to (1) and (2) above.

(4) Under the ComLand Share Sale Agreement, Lend Lease is required to provide certain facilities, the final cost of which will not be known until the stakeholder consultation and planning approval processes have been completed.

(5) See answer to (4) above.

(6) As I stated in my letter of 12 May 2004, it is intended that the facilities will include outdoor playing fields, a synthetic all weather field, tennis, netball and basketball courts, cycleways, walking trails, picnic and barbecue areas. The items of detail to which you refer will not be finalised until stakeholder consultations and planning approvals are complete.

Health: Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

(Question No. 3582)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 25 May 2004:

Further to the answer to question No. 2568 (Hansard, 10 February 2004, page 24250), will the evaluations of the Government’s $9 million media campaign titled “Here’s the prescription for a healthy Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS)” featuring Dr James Wright, be made available to the public before the federal election; if not why not.

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

No decision has been made yet on whether the evaluation of the PBS campaign would be publicly released. The evaluation continues to be of relevance for current Government purposes, including in the context of the Medicare campaign which incorporates information relating to the PBS. No advice is available on when the federal election is to be held.

Citizenship: Promotion Campaign

(Question No. 3597)

Mr Laurie Ferguson asked the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, upon notice, on 31 May 2004:

(1) Under what circumstances does the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs organise, and meet the cost of, public citizenship ceremonies as a means of promoting the value of citizenship.

(2) How many such ceremonies were organised by the department in (a) 2002-2003, and (b) 2003-2004 to date.

(3) In respect of each ceremony, (a) what was the (i) date, (ii) venue, (iii) federal electoral division, and (iv) total cost to the department, and (b) what were the names of all the Commonwealth and State Members of Parliament who were in attendance.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Mr Hardgrave—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) Promotion campaigns over recent years have been developed around citizenship ceremonies on or close to Australia Day, Australian Citizenship Day and Harmony Day. In addition, advantage is taken of opportunities which arise throughout the year and are assessed as being of value in promoting community awareness of the meaning and value of citizenship. Special ceremonies are often used as a means to promote citizenship. Considerable promotional value is derived, at no cost to the taxpayer, from media attention given to these events.

(2) (a) 42. (b) 55.

[Note: Data on this question is not held centrally. Information provided is drawn from manual examination of files held in State and Territory offices.]

(3) (a) (i)(ii)(iv)

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<tr>
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¹ National Launch of Australian Citizenship Day 2002 and Australian Citizenship Affirmation Products 2002
² National Australian Citizenship Day Ceremony 2002
³ Cost of flight and aircrew covered by Qantas
⁴ National Australian Citizenship Day Ceremony 2003
⁵ National Launch of Harmony Day 2004, which also involved a public citizenship ceremony. Costs covered by the Living in Harmony Section of the Department.
⁶ Largest citizenship ceremony involving 2,111 conferees

(iii) Federal electoral division is not a factor taken into consideration in determining venues for special citizenship ceremonies and is not, therefore, information kept by my Department.

(b) My Department sends invitations to public citizenship ceremonies in accordance with the Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code. Records are not kept of who actually attends.

[Note: Data on this question is not held centrally. Information provided is drawn from manual examination of files held in State and Territory offices.]

**Chifley Electorate: Child Support**

*(Question No. 3612)*

Mr Price asked the Minister representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, upon notice, on 2 June 2004:

1. How many (a) male, and (b) female clients of the Child Support Agency in (i) NSW, and (ii) the electoral division of Chifley have a Child Support Liability.

2. How many (a) male, and (b) female clients of the Child Support Agency in (i) NSW, and (ii) the electoral division of Chifley receive a Child Support Payment.
Mr Anthony—The Minister for Family and Community Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) As at end of December 2003 there were:
   (a) (i) 194,285 male payers* in NSW; (ii) 6,392 male payers* in the electorate of Chifley.
   (b) (i) 21,218 female payers* in NSW; (ii) 532 female payers* in the electorate of Chifley.
   Note: *payers have been assessed to pay child support but that does not mean all of them have actually met their child support obligation

(2) As at end of December 2003 there were:
   (a) (i) 20,972 male payees** in NSW; (ii) 449 male payees** in the electorate of Chifley.
   (b) (i) 192,544 female payees** in NSW; (ii) 5,791 female payees** in the electorate of Chifley.
   Note: **payees are those parents who are eligible to receive child support but that does not mean that all of them have actually received the child support to which they are entitled.

Drugs: Postinor-2
(Question No. 3613)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 June 2004:

(1) In respect of the sale without prescription of the drug Postinor-2, which contains the active ingredient levonorgestrel, is he aware of the article titled "Adverse reactions and emergency contraception" in The Lancet on 14 April 2001, which states that (a) several writers in the United Kingdom have remarked on the scarcity of safety data regarding the adverse reactions from use of the drug levonorgestrel, (b) 5% of women have a genetic susceptibility to breast and ovarian cancer and another 5% have a genetic susceptibility to thromoembolic disease, and (c) the relevant tests will not generally be done before a pharmacist supplies levonorgestrel to women who may have stopped taking daily hormones because they had adverse reactions.

(2) Can he explain how the women who take levonorgestrel without prescription will be protected against the potential side-effects of the drug.

(3) Is he able to say what scientific evidence his department relies on when deciding on the sale without prescription of products containing levonorgestrel; if not, when will he require the withdrawal from sale of Postinor-2 and, if he will not, why not.

(4) Can he explain how the precautionary principle applies to the supply without prescription of levonorgestrel to women; if not, why not.

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

(1) It is important to point out that The Lancet article referred to is not a peer-reviewed report of a clinical study but is a letter to the editor, expressing a single individual’s point of view.

(2) Women seeking to buy Postinor-2 for emergency contraception may be adequately assessed through the asking of a short series of questions by a doctor or a pharmacist.

(3) First, the initial availability of Postinor-2 in Australia on prescription was on the advice of the expert Australian Drug Evaluation Committee, which had available to it detailed independent evaluations prepared by the Therapeutic Goods Administration of a package of information submitted by the product’s sponsor. The package included reports of a number of clinical studies in women. Second, the change from ‘Prescription Only Medicine’ to ‘Pharmacist Only Medicine’ for Postinor-2 was a recommendation of the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee, which had at hand an evaluation of an additional submission submitted by the product’s sponsor.

(4) All medicines pose risks. The evaluation of new medicines is based on assessment of the benefits and risks of a medicine. Factors that are taken into account in this assessment include the proposed
Drugs: Postinor-2
(Question No. 3614)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 June 2004:

(1) In respect of the sale without prescription of the drug Postinor-2, which contains the active ingredient levonorgestrel, is he aware of the article by Professor Richards titled “An important drug interaction: an alternative mechanism” in the British Medical Journal volume 321, December 2000, which concluded that there is potential for serious harm which must be taken into account if levonorgestrel is to be supplied without prescription.

(2) Can he explain how the precautionary principle has been applied to consider the risks described by Professor Richards to women who purchase Postinor-2 without prescription and without undergoing a medical examination, and what measures has he taken to mitigate against the harm as identified by Professor Richards.

(3) When will the precautionary principle be applied to prevent the sale without prescription of Postinor-2.

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

(1) The primary purpose of the letter written by Dr Richards and Professor Aronson in the British Medical Journal Rapid Responses 22 December 2000, was to dispute the possible mechanism of an apparent interaction between levonorgestrel taken as emergency contraception and the anticoagulant drug warfarin. It is important to note that this interaction had been postulated by Ellison and colleagues on the basis of a single case report. Clinical manifestations of such an interaction have not otherwise been observed during clinical trials or other post-market experiences with Postinor-2. Furthermore, a more recent report by Gainer EE, Tremblay D and Ulmann A, In vitro studies, post-marketing data do not corroborate levonorgestrel-warfarin interaction; BMJ Rapid Responses 21 February 2003, states that “Therefore, we conclude that levonorgestrel emergency contraception presents minimal risk for patients who are fully anticoagulated with warfarin”.

(2) and (3) See answer to Question No. 3613 (4).

Drugs: Postinor-2
(Question No. 3615)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 June 2004:

(1) In respect of the sale without prescription of the drug Postinor-2, which contains the active ingredient levonorgestrel, is he aware of the article titled “Drug Points” in the British Medical Journal volume 321, December 2000, which states that women receiving warfarin treatment may be at risk of an interaction between warfarin and levonorgestrel if they are prescribed the progestogen only regimen because of its apparent safety.

(2) What procedures are in place for pharmacists to ensure that women who are currently taking warfarin treatment are not sold Postinor-2 or other levonorgestrel drugs without prescription.

(3) Are pharmacists medically competent to make decisions about the impact on women of the sale of Postinor-2 or levonorgestrel without prescription.

(4) Will he impose regulatory controls to ensure that the drug Postinor-2, and other drugs containing levonorgestrel, cannot be prescribed without prescription and before a full medical examination; if so, when; if not, why not.
Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) See answer to Question No. 3614 (1).

(2) The support materials provided to pharmacists by the distributor and by the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia both include a question about medication being taken. Furthermore, it would be reasonable to expect that any women of child-bearing potential who is anticoagulated with warfarin would be taking the drug under close medical supervision and would have been advised not to take any other medicines without specific advice from her doctor. It would seem highly unlikely that such a women would be seeking to purchase Postinor-2 from a pharmacist in the absence of that medical advice.

(3) The National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee (NDPSC) considers that pharmacists are professionally competent to make the necessary assessment and to provide appropriate advice to allow the safe and effective use of Postinor-2.

(4) I have no powers of control with respect to the access controls applied to the supply of medicines. These powers reside with the States and Territories. My powers in this area are limited to requiring the NDPSC to consider a matter and to report on its consideration.

Drugs: Postinor-2
(Question No. 3616)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 June 2004:

(1) In respect of the sale without prescription of the drug Postinor-2, which contains the active ingredient levonorgestrel, is he aware of the article titled “Emergency Contraception” in Archer Family Medicine, Volume 9, July 2000, which states that emergency contraception does not interrupt an established pregnancy and that women who obtain emergency contraception should undergo a pregnancy test first.

(2) Did his department consider this finding and can he explain how a pharmacist will determine whether a woman has an established pregnancy at the time of the supply without prescription of Postinor-2 or another drug containing levonorgestrel.

(3) Will he provide a copy of the evidence which supports the claim that emergency contraception drugs can prevent pregnancy by damaging the lining of the womb preventing the implantation of an embryo; if not, why not.

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

(1) The article states that “Women who obtain their EC in the physician’s office should first be tested for pregnancy”. There is, however, alternative published advice that pregnancy testing is not normally necessary when assessing a women seeking to purchase Postinor-2.

(2) An established pregnancy at the time of a request for supply of Postinor-2 can be excluded by the questioning of a women by a pharmacist or a doctor. Pharmacists are expected to exercise professional judgement and if there is doubt, it is open to them to refer the patient to a medical practitioner.

(3) The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) sought agreement from the sponsor of Postinor-2 in Australia to release details of their evidence, given that the TGA treats such material as Commercial-in-Confidence because of intellectual property and other commercial considerations. The sponsor requested that this information be retained by the TGA on a commercial-in-confidence basis.

Drugs: Postinor-2
(Question No. 3617)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 June 2004:
(1) Can he confirm that Clause 1.3 of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia’s Policy – Code of Conduct states that pharmacists must exercise professional judgment to prevent the supply of products likely to constitute an unacceptable hazard to health or the supply of unnecessary and/or excessive quantities of medicines and other products, particularly those which have a potential for abuse or dependency.

(2) Can he confirm that Clause 1.4 states that pharmacists must ensure that all reasonable care is taken when disposing of medicinal products and chemicals.

(3) Can he confirm that Clause 1.5 states that pharmacists shall accept responsibility for their own professional activities and for all activities undertaken under their direct supervision.

(4) Can he explain how pharmacists can protect themselves against the foreseeable and non-negligible risk of harm from the supply without prescription of Postinor-2 and other drugs containing levonorgestrel.

(5) Is he aware that there is authoritative medical opinion to the effect that Postinor-2 and other drugs containing levonorgestrel pose a serious risk to the user when supplied without prescription and a full medical examination and therefore constitute an unacceptable health hazard to women.

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

(1) (2) and (3) Yes.

(4) Pharmacists can assess any potential and foreseeable adverse effects of Postinor-2 by asking a series of questions before selling the product.

(5) The “authoritative medical opinion” referred to is not identified. In such circumstances, it is not possible to respond in detail. Such an opinion, however, is not shared by the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee and a number of overseas countries, including the UK and France, where levonorgestrel EC is available from a pharmacist without a prescription.

Drugs: Postinor-2
(Question No. 3645)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 16 June 2004:

(1) Further to the answer to question No. 2997 (Hansard, 31 March 2003, page 26637), has his department or the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee (NDPSC) relied on expert opinion to arrive at the definition of pregnancy; if so, who provided the expert opinion and what are their qualifications; if not, on what advice or information has his department or the NDPSC relied on to arrive at the definition of pregnancy.

(2) Can he explain why his department and the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee have accepted the definition of pregnancy they have adopted.

(3) What arguments were put in support of the definition of pregnancy which has been adopted by his department and the NDPSC.

(4) What was the source of the legal opinion referred to in part (2) of the answer to question No. 2997 and will he make the legal opinion available; if so, when; if not, why not.

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

(1) (2) and (3) The Department and the NDPSC have not relied on nor sought any expert opinion to arrive at the definition of pregnancy. Legal advice sought by the Department and the NDPSC was in relation to the questions of whether morning-after pills are abortifacients and the definition of restricted goods. The definition of pregnancy was considered in the Smeaton case (R (John Smeaton on Behalf of Society for the Protection of Unborn Children) v The Secretary of State for Health) in the UK High Court on 18 April 2002 by Munby J. The definition of pregnancy was considered in the context of the definition of miscarriage. The court in Smeaton’s case held that a par-
ticular morning after pill, was not, as a matter of law, able to bring about a miscarriage. The court held that “Pregnancy begins once the blastocyst has implanted in the endometrium and miscarriage is the termination of such a post-implantation pregnancy.”

(4) The sources of the legal opinion referred to in part (2) of the answer to question No. 2997 were the legal advice received from the Australian Government Solicitor on 30 May 1997, the legal advice received from Mr Henry Burmester QC, the Chief General Counsel of the Australian Government Solicitor on 31 May 2002 and the legal advice received from Mr Dennis Rose AM QC of Blake Dawson Waldron on 27 August 2002. The Department and the NDPSC would be willing to give the honourable member copies of the legal advice on an in-confidence basis.

National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee
(Question No. 3646)
Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 16 June 2004:
(1) Is he aware of the article by Kate Woods titled “Controversial Rescheduling Committee to be Scrapped” in the Medical Observer Weekly on 7 May 2004 which raised concerns about the lack of a prescribing clinician on the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee (NDPSC).
(2) Can he confirm that there is no prescribing clinician on the NDPSC; if so, will he explain why.

Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) Yes.
(2) There is not currently a practicing GP on the NDPSC. However, there are four registered medical practitioners, all who have prescribing rights, two of whom are in active clinical practice in their speciality.

Drugs: Postinor-2
(Question No. 3647)
Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 16 June 2004:
Further to the answer to question No. 2997 (Hansard, 31 March 2003, page 26637), is he able to say whether there is a relationship between Medipharm Pty Limited and Intensive Care Products Pty Limited and, if there is no relationship between the two companies, will he explain how the sponsor referred to in part (3) of his answer can be different from that named in the consumer medicine information pamphlet for Postinor-2.

Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
On 4 April 2003, Medipharm Pty Ltd advised the Therapeutic Goods Administration, in writing, that the name of the company had changed to Intensive Care Products Pty Ltd.

Drugs: Postinor-2
(Question No. 3648)
Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 16 June 2004:
(1) Further to the answer to question No. 2997 (Hansard, 31 March 2003, page 26637), what is the current poison classification or rating of Postinor-2.
(2) Was Postinor-2 classified as an S4 Poison at the time of the decision by the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee to permit the supply without prescription of Postinor-2.
(3) Does the packaging of Postinor-2 state on the exterior ‘Prescription Only Medicine’.

Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) The current poison classification of Postinor-2 is Schedule 3 of the Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Drugs and Poisons.

(2) Yes.

(3) No. As of 1 January 2004 the Postinor-2 packaging should include 'Pharmacist Only Medicine' as the signal heading. States and Territories, however, may have granted a temporary labelling exemption to allow for existing pharmacy stocks of Postinor-2 with the Schedule 4 packaging to be sold by pharmacists without prescription.

Health: Magnetic Resonance Imaging Machines

(Question No. 3667)

Ms George asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 22 June 2004:

Will he grant Wollongong Hospital a Medicare-funded MRI service; if not, why not.

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

On 9 July 2004, I announced an Invitation to Apply (ITA) process to allocate Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) eligibility to approximately 20 additional units.

These units are to be located in under-serviced areas (both metropolitan and regional) and in hospitals providing a relatively high number of private services. This process has been advertised widely and applications will close on 3 August 2004.

Although Wollongong was not identified as a priority area, the ITA process is open to other areas and hospitals that have comparable claims for MBS eligibility. Wollongong Hospital is able to apply for MBS eligibility in this context.

If there are insufficient applications from priority areas or if providers can make a compelling case, this will be taken into account when final decisions are made.