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

FEDERAL ELECTION: MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND

The SPEAKER (9.01 a.m.)—Yesterday my action in ruling out of order a question to the Deputy Prime Minister was queried. The question sought information concerning an alleged approach to the member for New England. It was out of order because it did not relate to a matter for which the Deputy Prime Minister was answerable to the House. My decision was consistent with the practice as outlined on page 526 of the 4th edition of House of Representatives Practice and with other precedents since that edition was published in 2001. There are a small number of precedents to the contrary, but I am very confident that my decision was consistent with the greater weight of practice.

A later question to the Deputy Prime Minister on a related matter was in order because it did seek information about a matter of administration on which the minister could be questioned.

PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE INCENTIVES AMENDMENT BILL 2004

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Minister for Health and Ageing) (9.02 a.m.)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill amends the Private Health Insurance Incentives Act 1998 and the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 to increase the private health insurance rebate from 30 per cent to 35 per cent for people aged 65 to 69 years and to 40 per cent for people aged 70 years and over.

Australia enjoys one of the best systems of health and hospital care in the world. The public and private sectors co-exist and complement each other, with the private hospital sector providing about half of all acute hospital procedures.

Over the last decade, the government has initiated a number of reforms to introduce greater balance between the private and public health sectors. For example, the government introduced the Medicare levy surcharge, private health insurance rebate and Lifetime Health Cover.

Older Australians have the greatest need to ensure their access to health care. The reality of ageing is that we are more likely to see the inside of a hospital in our older years than our younger ones.

This is why so many older Australians choose to have private health insurance.

This is a generation whose byword is self-reliance and whose commitment to private health insurance cover has helped to keep the whole system going.

The government believes self-reliance should be rewarded and that private health insurance should be even more accessible and affordable for older Australians. This is even more important for a generation of whom so many are pensioners or self-funded retirees on low to moderate incomes.

From 1 April 2005, for a typical couple or family policy, the higher rebates will reduce premiums for eligible policies by about $100 to $200 a year over and above the existing 30 per cent rebate.

Like the existing 30 per cent rebate, the higher rebates will be able to be claimed as premium reductions through private health insurance funds, as a direct payment from Medicare offices or as a tax offset in annual
income tax returns. The premium discount option is already taken by 95 per cent of premium payers, and it and the cash payment option are, of course, available for retirees who no longer have to pay income tax.

Again, as for the existing rebate, the higher rebates will be available for hospital cover, ancillary cover and combined cover.

The higher rebates will apply to individuals who meet the age thresholds and to couples and families where one or more of the persons meets these age thresholds.

The estimated cost of the higher rebates will be $445.5 million over four years.

The bill will also amend the definition of a veterans gold card for the purpose of Lifetime Health Cover. The amendment will ensure that Australians with a veterans gold card issued either under the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986 or the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 are not affected by the application of Lifetime Health Cover.

Mr Speaker, this bill implements a major coalition election commitment. It will help to ensure the continued strength of Australia’s public and private health systems.

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

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.

NATIONAL WATER COMMISSION BILL 2004

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Mr ANDERSON (Gwydir—Minister for Transport and Regional Services) (9.06 a.m.)—This is something that really deserves headlines. I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.
our water resources do not match the patterns of either our production or our urban settlements. Just over a quarter of the continent accounts for around 80 per cent of Australia’s total run-off—predominantly Tasmania and the northern parts of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. By contrast, the most intensively irrigated river basin—the Murray-Darling Basin—comprises nearly 14 per cent of Australia’s area but accounts for only six per cent of run-off.

Add to this picture the diverse nature of our water resources. As the preamble to the National Water Initiative puts it:

Australia’s water resources are highly variable, reflecting the range of climatic conditions and terrain nationally. In addition, the level of development in Australia’s water resources ranges from heavily regulated working rivers and groundwater resources, through to rivers and aquifers in almost pristine condition.

A further layer can be seen in the pattern of Australia’s water use. Agriculture uses around 70 per cent of total water used in Australia. It is important to note that farmers are of course not the end users of that water. Those who wear natural fibres and consume food—and that is all of us—are the final users of the water that farmers use. That ought to be remembered.

It is also relevant to make the point that Australian farmers using that 70 per cent of consumed water produce enough food and fibre—depending on how you cut the numbers up—for somewhere between 70 million and 90 million people, many of whom of course are not in Australia. By definition, there are only 20 million Australians, so a great deal of that product is exported. That water is used to feed and clothe us and many of our fellow human beings in other countries. It is also terribly important in an economic sense. At its heart lay very many of Australia’s jobs and much of our economic wellbeing.

Over and above that 70 per cent of water use, there is domestic consumption and industrial activity—important as well for people’s wellbeing and jobs. We are a nation of water lovers, despite our bush heritage, and water provides important amenity value to many Australians for recreation and tourism. Water also has inherent ecological value, and I am delighted that that is so widely acknowledged in Australia today. I also acknowledge its cultural value to some Indigenous communities.

Against this background, there are several factors converging in Australia now to place enormous pressure on some of our major water resources. These factors include: drought, our fast-growing cities, dryland salinity, continued growth in irrigated agriculture, and climate change. Moreover, we have an obligation to future generations of Australians to be wise stewards of those water resources which are not yet showing signs of stress or overuse (for example, those in Northern Australia).

Taken as a whole, this picture of Australia’s water resources simply underscores the need to improve our national effort in managing these resources, and that is why water reform remains so critical.

**National Water Initiative**

Turning to the National Water Initiative, of which I have to say I am immensely proud, let me say at the outset that the Australian government supports an effective National Water Commission because it is critical to driving continued reform of water management and water use in Australia.

Truly national water reform commenced—haltingly and, as I think it turned out to be, with some severe limitations—with the original COAG Water Reform Framework agreed by Commonwealth and
state governments in 1994. Governments have extended those commitments and raised them significantly by signing the National Water Initiative in June 2004. In particular, the establishment of investment certainty for water users was identified as being a fundamental requirement for the realisation of National Water Initiative objectives.

It is worth noting that for over a decade now the cause of national water reform has enjoyed strong bipartisan support at the federal and state political levels. I note the entry into the House at the last election—and indeed into the chamber this morning—of the member for Kingsford Smith, a man whom I pay tribute to who has a real interest in these matters. I look forward to constructive debate and interaction with him on these matters in the future.

This bill reflects a coalescing of the views of almost all stakeholders—irrigators, scientists and environmental groups—around the need to refresh the original COAG agenda through the National Water Initiative.

One of the things that environmentalists, scientists, farmers, bankers and government leaders have come to recognise in recent times is that, for a resource to be properly used, you need to attach an appropriate value to it and those who use these resources will use them much more wisely if they have a value. That implies a need for investment certainty based on a clear understanding of property rights in terms of what they are, how far they extend, what they are not and their limitations. Certainty is very important in this. To give a simple illustration: a farmer who wants to move from open flood irrigation—which is very wasteful of water, inefficient economically and environmentally unsatisfactory—to a much more high value production system using expensive drip irrigation technology will be thwarted in that objective if they cannot say to their banker that the investment is secure, because they cannot be sure that some government agency will not come along and remove the water before they have recovered their sunk costs. It is a point that needs to be made and it is vitally important that it is understood.

In my private life outside of this place I am a farmer, but I regard myself as an environmentalist as well. I am passionate about finding the right balance between environmental sustainability and the use of natural resources to feed and clothe people everywhere. They are important passions that I believe many Australians share. Getting that balance right is important, but you cannot expect farmers to be able to produce efficient, high-quality produce year in, year out unless they have clearly established ground rules and investment certainty.

Returning to the matter before us, the introduction today of the National Water Commission Bill 2004 indicates the government’s very strong commitment to getting on with the job. I know that the recently appointed CEO of the interim commission, Mr Ken Matthews, is already going through the process of meeting with state officials to update them on the establishment of the commission and indicate the partnership approach which he intends to bring to the commission’s operation. The government stands ready to receive from state and territory governments their nominations to fill their three commissioner positions, as agreed in the National Water Initiative. There will be seven commissioners in total.

The government’s intention is that the National Water Commission will be a key driver for national water reform. To achieve this, the bill assigns several key functions to the commission, including to:

• evaluate governments’ progress in implementing the outcomes, objectives and actions under the National Water Initia-
tive and report to COAG on their progress;
- conduct the scheduled 2005 assessment of commitments under the national competition policy water reforms, which was to have been undertaken by the National Competition Council; and
- undertake an initial stocktake of Australia’s water resources and water management arrangements.

**Australian Water Fund**

The Australian Water Fund is also an important part of this. The National Water Commission’s role in advancing water reform is not restricted to the functions I have just outlined. Importantly, the bill also assigns to the commission a central role in relation to the Australian Water Fund.

The government has pledged $2 billion over five years to establish the Australian Water Fund. This is in addition to the $200 million previously provided to recover water for the Living Murray Initiative—which is, of course, part of the $500 million package put together jointly with the relevant states—and significant resourcing for the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality. The significance of this decision is that there are now major additional national resources available to help advance the objectives and outcomes of the National Water Initiative.

In developing the fund, the government has recognised that progress needs to be made at several different levels; hence there are three quite distinct funding programs all aimed at achieving practical on-the-ground outcomes.

Firstly, $1.6 billion will be invested over five years in the Water Smart Australia Program to accelerate the uptake of smart technologies and practices in water use across Australia.

The government has identified a number of projects that would be funded subject to a number of conditions such as contributions from state governments and the private sector and provision of appropriate due diligence—in other words, evidence that projects are appropriate and viable. These projects include:

- securing the long-term future of South Australia’s water supply;
- assisting New South Wales and Victoria with structural adjustment for over-allocated ground water systems. We have a situation where farmers have done nothing wrong—they have used licence entitlements given to them by governments, in some cases for over many decades—and they are now expected to bear much of the cost of restoring balance to those systems. The community has benefited from the use of that water in terms of jobs, economic performance, food, fibre and all those things. There needs to be fairness in a reasonable apportionment of the bearing of the costs of restoring those systems to sustainability. That is the Australian way. But it is more than that. I think it is an incredibly important principle of justice and fairness;
- developing a viable Wimmera-Mallee pipeline project to replace the world’s largest open channel water supply system with a network of pipelines. That system, which covers a huge area of Victoria, loses each year through evaporation and seepage the equivalent of 100,000 Olympic swimming pools, not to mention the other environmental downsides of open channels. The Speaker is well aware of this. He has a passionate interest in it, as does the member for Mallee. They have both been very strong advocates of the need to do something about this; and
- investing in water savings and efficiency measures in the Macalister Irrigation
District to recover water for stressed rivers.

There are many other projects before us. I want to pay tribute to the Pratt Water Group. They have done a lot of work, with help from the state government and from us, in looking at efficiency savings in the Murrumbidgee River. There is a preliminary report out and a major report due in the next little while. We will look very closely at how we can progress that. Early indications are that very significant water savings can be made by the deployment of better technologies—water that can be used for a split between increased environmental flows and more efficient and reliable production.

Investment under the Australian Water Fund will be made on the basis that it is consistent with, and helps to achieve, the principles, outcomes and actions of the National Water Initiative and the Living Murray Initiative. State and territory governments which have signed up to, and are implementing, the NWI, as well as local authorities and private proponents, will be eligible to make bids.

The second program to be funded from the Australian Water Fund will see investment of $200 million in the Raising National Water Standards Program. The program will lift Australia’s national capacity to measure, monitor and manage water resources over the long term. Investment under this program will assist in achieving the outcomes of the NWI and will support projects such as a nationally consistent water accounting system. That is terribly important. We do not have a national system at the moment. We know surprisingly little about what water exists, where it is, who owns it and where it might be being transferred to. We also need to work with communities to conserve rivers with high environmental values.

Let me emphasise very strongly the following point about this. Some remarks by the globally known environmentalist David Suzuki were passed on to me recently, and I think they bear repeating in this place. This is something I feel very strongly about. He made the observation that, time and time again around the world, where they have been environmental issues, we have learnt qualitatively and quantitatively—I am paraphrasing, but that is effectively what he said—that the shortest, quickest and most effective way to solve an environmental problem is to consult with the people who live in the area, face the problem and are committed to that area. That is to say: exclude the people who are at the coalface of these issues at your peril; you will not get the solutions. Include them, work with them, develop information with them, consult them and ensure that they are treated fairly if changes have to be made and you will achieve the objectives that we are all after much more rapidly, much more efficiently and, I think, much more fairly.

I note that we have some water users in the gallery, and they would know exactly what I mean by that. Proper consultation is very important. Farmers are often in the firing line, but I have not met a responsible farmer yet who, if confronted with new information that goes to the heart of the sustainability of their operation, will not say: ‘This matters. I am a custodian of my land, my water and whatever I am using for future generations, and I will respond.’ But, if you bludgeon them from outside, if you purport to know all about their circumstances and set yourself up as an expert from arm’s length, from a capital city somewhere, and tell them what to do without first establishing agreement on the facts and on the parameters of the problem, they will fight you every inch of the way. That is normal human nature; of
course they will. So working with people becomes very important indeed.

I commit the government to consult properly, to work with people rather than against them and not to shirk the tough decisions when they have to be made. I sincerely hope that the state governments will join me in that attitude. I place on record again the fact that I think I have been able to work well with the state ministers, particularly those in New South Wales and Victoria who have faced particular difficulties in this area. Their cooperation to this point in time has helped us to achieve more than we would ever have achieved without that cooperation.

The commission will make recommendations on projects put forward under these programs of the fund for the government’s final decision. The commission will also administer these programs of the fund.

The third program is the Water Wise Communities program, which will invest $200 million over five years to promote a culture of wise water use in Australia. Everywhere I go in this country, urban Australians, country Australians and remote- and coastal-living Australians say to me: ‘We need to use our water wisely.’ People are passionate about it—they are interested in it—and I think that is tremendous. Let us capitalise on it. Let us take it forward. That is what the Water Wise Communities program is about. Community organisations will be provided with grants of up to $50,000 allocated on a competitive basis to deliver on-the-ground results that increase water use efficiency, improve river or ground water health or improve community education on water saving.

The Department of the Environment and Heritage, under the stewardship of my good friend and colleague Senator Ian Campbell from Western Australia, will pick this up with great enthusiasm and great competence. Senator Campbell will work in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, under Warren Truss.

The Australian government’s intention is that, by combining the reform evaluation role and the program delivery role, the National Water Commission will play a key and constructive part in improving water use and management in Australia.

National Water Commission

Lastly let me say something about the way in which the government expects the commission itself to operate.

As mentioned earlier, the bill allows for commissioners to be nominated by the Commonwealth and by the states and territories. The bill also requires the commissioners to act in the best interests of the commission—it certainly does not envisage a disparate set of commissioners each representing and advocating different sectoral or government interests. The cause of water reform needs to rise above that, and so does the commission. In the same way that our rivers do not respect state boundaries or even regional boundaries, the commission must ensure that it does not pay undue heed to sectoral, state based or regional differences. It must act in the interest of coherent national approaches to water management on this continent.

The bill also provides that the commission meets at least eight times per year, and with a full and ambitious work program.

By placing this body in the Prime Minister’s portfolio, the commission will be able to bring to water issues the profile and significance which that entails. The Prime Minister has identified water as one of his top personal priorities for this term of government. I think members will know that it has been absolutely a top personal priority for me.
The National Water Commission will be instrumental in ensuring that water issues in Australia continue to capture the public’s imagination and energy in working towards practical water solutions. The importance of water to securing Australia’s economic and environmental future demands no less.

I present the explanatory memorandum to this bill and regard it as a very proud moment.

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.

NEW INTERNATIONAL TAX ARRANGEMENTS (MANAGED FUNDS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2004

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer) (9.28 a.m.)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr Speaker, congratulations on your appointment. I wish you well in the position.

As this House was advised when a similar bill was introduced before the last election, only to lapse when the election was called, this bill continues the modernisation of Australia’s international tax regime which flows from the government’s review of international taxation.

Australia has a significant managed funds industry, sustained by strong economic performance, a highly educated work force, low-cost infrastructure, advanced regulatory systems and sophisticated financial markets. This bill focuses on Australian managed funds and making them more attractive to foreign investors by removing taxation impediments to further growth.

I note the strong business support for this bill. The business community has played a valuable and constructive role in helping develop the proposed legislation. This bill again demonstrates that the government has listened and been responsive to industry calls for specific tax reforms to remove distortions from the tax system and allow Australian businesses to grow.

Under current capital gains tax arrangements, nonresidents investing in assets through an Australian managed fund may be taxed more heavily than if they invested in the assets directly or through a foreign fund. Schedule 1 of the bill makes three changes to the income tax law to eliminate these distortions.

It amends the law to disregard a capital gain or capital loss made by a foreign resident from disposing of an interest in an Australian fixed trust, if the underlying assets of the trust are not Australian assets. A second amendment will disregard a capital gain made by a foreign resident in respect of the taxpayer’s interest in a fixed trust, if the gain ultimately relates to an asset of the trust which is not an Australian asset. In both cases, had the underlying asset been directly held by the foreign investor, Australian capital gains tax would not apply.

Reflecting the conduit principle of international taxation, foreign source income flowing through an Australian trust to nonresidents is not taxed in Australia. Nevertheless, under current arrangements when a trust interest is sold, previously distributed foreign source income is, on a delayed basis, subject to Australian capital gains taxation. On the other hand, nonresidents investing directly, or through an offshore managed fund, do not pay Australian capital gains tax in respect of the foreign source income. A third amendment will eliminate this distortion.
Schedule 2 amends the rules for determining the source of income derived by certain residents of treaty partner countries. The interaction of treaty source rules and other treaty rules relating to nonresident beneficiaries of income derived by business trusts operating in Australia has implications for the managed funds industry. This interaction may result in foreign source passive income derived by those foreign beneficiaries through an Australian trust being treated as sourced in Australia and therefore taxed in Australia.

For example, if a New Zealand resident invests in an Australian managed fund investing offshore, this interaction inappropriately exposes the New Zealand beneficiary to Australian tax on conduit income. The amendments ensure the domestic source rules rather than treaty source rules (which have a wider potential reach) apply in this case. The effect of this amendment will be to relieve the conduit income from Australian taxation.

The amendments will align the tax treatment of foreign residents investing in managed funds which derive income from sources outside Australia with the tax treatment that would apply if those foreign residents made such investments directly.

Schedule 3 to the bill contains three measures to finetune interest withholding tax arrangements to be consistent with recent developments in the tax law. The first measure in schedule 3 includes ‘debt interests’ in the range of financial instruments eligible for interest withholding tax exemption. The second treats as interest, for interest withholding tax purposes, payments of a non-capital nature on some upper tier 2 hybrid capital instruments issued by banks as interest.

Finally, the bill facilitates the transfer of additional assets and debts from Australian subsidiaries of foreign banks to their Australian branches without losing interest withholding tax exemptions.

Full details of the measures in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

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

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2004 MEASURES No. 6) BILL 2004

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer) (9.33 a.m.)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill makes amendments to the tax laws to implement a range of changes and improvements to Australia’s taxation system. Most of these amendments lapsed when parliament was prorogued, but the government is moving to bring them back as soon as possible to try to give more certainty to taxpayers waiting for these changes.

Firstly, the government is continuing with its roll-out of consolidations.

These measures give greater flexibility and certainty to consolidation membership and loss rules. The bill clarifies the consolidation cost setting rules with respect to finance leases, certain types of mining expenditure, and low value and software development pools. It also reduces compliance costs by relaxing the notice requirements under the inter-entity loss multiplication rules in some circumstances and allowing more flexibility in relation to some previously irrevocable elections. Generally, these amendments take effect from 1 July 2002, which is the commencement date of the consolidation regime.
Secondly, this bill ensures that copyright collecting societies are not taxed on income they collect on behalf of members.

Broadly, the bill will ensure that copyright collecting societies will be exempt from income tax on copyright income collected and held on behalf of members before it is distributed. At the same time, the law will further be amended to ensure that the income which is exempt at the society level is included in the assessable income of the members once it is received.

The third measure ensures the continuation of the implementation of the simplified imputation system. It covers anti-avoidance rules in relation to exempt entities that are eligible for a refund of imputation credits; and consequential amendments to replace references to the previous imputation system with references to the new system and to update the terminology for the new system.

Schedule 4 to this bill adds several institutions and funds to the list of specifically listed deductible gift recipients in the income tax law, including certain fire and emergency services bodies. It also creates a new general category of deductible gift recipient for government schools that provide special education for students with a permanent disability.

The fifth measure will extend the existing transitional rules in the debt/equity rules for at-call loans to 30 June 2005. This will mean that an at-call loan made to a company by a related party before 30 June 2005 (typically a loan by a small business owner to the business) will be treated as being on revenue account. The measure will give businesses more time to assess existing loans and adjust their arrangements if need be.

Schedule 6 extends the water facilities and land care tax concessions, currently available to primary producers and some rural businesses, to irrigators and rural water providers. As a result of these amendments, irrigators will be able to claim deductions for capital expenditure on water facilities over three years, and rural water providers will be eligible for immediate deductions on land care operations. The measure will assist irrigators to renew water supply infrastructure and enhance the efficiency of water delivery to primary producers and other users.

The next measure broadens the fringe benefits tax exemption for the costs associated with the purchase of a dwelling by an employee as a result of relocation for work purposes. Currently, the exemption is only available if, within the two-year time limit, and after the employee sells his or her old dwelling, the employee buys a new dwelling and the employer pays the incidental purchase costs. The exemption will be extended to cases where the new house is bought before the old one is sold.

Schedule 8 to this bill amends the capital gains tax law so that an administrator of a company, as well as a liquidator, can declare shares and other equity interests in a company to be worthless for capital gains tax purposes. The declaration permits taxpayers who hold those shares or other equity interests to claim a capital loss.

The next measure amends the goods and services tax law, to remove an anomaly that allows supplies of certain services relating to residential property in Australia to be GST free if the owner is not in Australia at the time of the supply, when the same supply would be taxable if the owner was in Australia. The measure gives the same GST treatment to both residents and nonresidents for these property-related services.

Schedule 10 amends the first child tax offset, or baby bonus, in relation to adoptive parents, to ensure that, in line with the government’s original intention, adoptive parents are not disadvantaged with respect to the baby bonus. The amendments will allow...
adoptive parents, once they become legally responsible for a child, to lodge a retrospective claim for the baby bonus to cover the period between commencing care of the child and being given legal responsibility for that child.

This bill will also amend the income tax law to alleviate the unintended tax consequences that arise when a life insurance company transfers some or all of its life insurance business to another life insurance company. The amendments respond to concerns raised by the life insurance industry and will ensure that taxation issues are not a barrier to transfers of life insurance business between life insurance companies.

In addition, there will be technical correction in the commencement provision applying to the franking deficit tax offset provisions for life insurance companies.

Full details of the measures in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

I commend this bill and present the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.

**TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (RETIREMENT VILLAGES) BILL 2004**

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer) (9.39 a.m.)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker Jenkins, I take the opportunity to again congratulate you on your reappointment.

This bill makes minor amendments to the A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999 to remove public uncertainty concerning the operation of this act in regard to retirement villages. The amendments confirm that the government’s policy concerning the goods and services tax treatment of retirement villages has not changed. The changes remove uncertainty surrounding a proposed Australian Taxation Office ruling that may have had the effect of changing the existing goods and services tax treatment for some retirement village residents.

The amendments in this bill clarify the law. They confirm that residents of serviced apartments in retirement villages are entitled to receive supplies of accommodation and a range of services GST free. This will be the case where residents require and receive daily living or nursing assistance. The serviced apartment amendments will apply from 1 July 2000 to protect the government’s policy intent and provide certainty for industry and aged residents.

The amendments also confirm that charities that operate retirement villages are able to supply accommodation, accommodation related services and meals to their residents GST free. The government’s amendments reaffirm the government’s commitment to the aged care industry and demonstrate that the government is responsive to industry concerns. The charitable retirement village amendments apply from the date this bill receives royal assent. This reflects that arrangements currently in place by charitable retirement villages are protected by the current Australian Taxation Office published view of the law.

Full details of the amendments in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

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

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.
TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (SMALL BUSINESS MEASURES) BILL 2004
First Reading

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

Second Reading

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer) (9.42 a.m.)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Treasurer announced a package of taxation measures in the 2004-05 budget aimed at reducing compliance costs for small business and providing greater flexibility to taxpayers in managing their affairs. The package included three initiatives aimed at reducing GST compliance costs for small businesses.

This bill, similar in its terms to the Indirect Tax Legislation Amendment (Small Business Measures) Bill 2004 which lapsed when parliament was prorogued for the last election, amends the GST law to give effect to these measures.

The first measure gives small businesses and nonprofit bodies that are voluntarily registered for the GST the option of reporting and paying GST on an annual basis. Businesses that take up this option will be able to prepare and lodge annual GST returns at the same time as they prepare their annual income tax returns. A business will make a single payment of any GST owing at the time it lodges its returns with the Commissioner of Taxation.

The second initiative gives businesses with an annual turnover of $2 million or less the option to make annual apportionments of input tax credits relating to acquisitions used partly for business, and partly for non-business, purposes. For most of the year, these businesses will disregard non-business use of most of their acquisitions or importations in determining the amount of input tax credit they can claim in their monthly or quarterly GST returns. They will then make a single adjustment after the end of the financial year. Businesses required to determine the extent of non-business use of acquisitions or importations for income tax return purposes will be able to use the same determination for GST purposes.

The third initiative further reduces compliance costs for small businesses by simplifying the election rules relating to the option to pay GST by instalments and to lodge an annual GST return. An eligible business will no longer be required to make and lodge an annual election with the Commissioner of Taxation. Once a valid election has been made it will remain in force until the business chooses to leave the instalment system or it is no longer eligible.

The annual lodgment and annual apportionment initiatives will apply from 1 October 2004 for entities with quarterly tax periods and 1 November 2004 for entities with monthly tax periods. The simplified GST instalment election initiative will apply from 1 July 2005.

Full details of the measures in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

I commend this bill and present the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (SUPERANNUATION REPORTING) BILL 2004
First Reading

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

Second Reading

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer) (9.45 a.m.)—I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill makes amendments to the Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992.

The Howard government has demonstrated its commitment to a superannuation system offering choice of fund, incentives to save and flexibility to assist people to retire when they are ready. For instance, under the co-contribution scheme—which the Labor Party promised to abolish at the last election—the government contributes $1.50 for every $1 of voluntary personal contributions, to a maximum of $1,500 for employees on incomes of up to $28,000. Unfortunately, the Labor Party saw fit to propose at the last election, and is yet to repudiate, a failed policy initiative which would rip $3.8 billion out of Australia’s future.

This bill demonstrates this government’s commitment to reducing compliance costs for employers. As announced in the Prime Minister’s statement titled Committed to Small Business on 6 July this year, we are removing the superannuation guarantee reporting requirement from the superannuation guarantee arrangements for all employers, not just small business employers. It is proposed that these amendments should take effect from 1 January 2005. Employees will still be provided with information on at least an annual basis from their superannuation fund and many will receive information more frequently on pay slips as required by various Australian workplace legislation provisions and awards.

Full details of the amendments in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

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

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND VETERANS’ AFFAIRS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (2004 ELECTION COMMITMENTS) BILL 2004

First Reading

Bill presented by Ms Ley, and read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms LEY (Farrer—Parliamentary Secretary (Children and Youth Affairs)) (9.52 a.m.)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill will amend the social security law, the family assistance law and the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986 to give effect to certain commitments made by the government during the 2004 election campaign. The amendments relate to self-funded retirees, older Australians and carers on income support, grandparents caring for children and certain disability pensioners.

The bill contains five major measures.

Firstly, the bill establishes a new payment, to be known as the seniors concession allowance, which will provide all holders of the Commonwealth seniors health card with a payment of $200 per year.

This payment recognises that most self-funded retirees do not receive concessions for energy, rates, water and sewerage, and motor vehicle registration from state and territory governments. It also recognises the contribution that this group has made in providing for their own retirement.

The payment will be made in two instalments, in December and June each year, to people who are eligible cardholders on 1 December and 1 June respectively. It will be indexed twice yearly, exempt from taxation and payable if the cardholder is temporarily absent from Australia for up to 13 weeks.
Transitional arrangements will be in place for the first payment of seniors concession allowance. Anyone who is eligible for a Commonwealth seniors health card in December 2004 will qualify for the December 2004 payment.

Secondly, the bill establishes a further new payment, to be known as the utilities allowance, which is payable to senior Australians of age pension age (or veteran pension age) who are in receipt of income support. The payment will help this group to pay regular household bills such as gas and electricity.

In general, the payment is $100 per year for singles and $50 per year for each member of a couple. It will be paid twice each year, following the pension indexation adjustments on 20 March and 20 September.

After the first payment, it will be indexed twice yearly. It will be exempt from taxation and will be payable if the recipient is temporarily absent from Australia for up to 13 weeks.

The taxation status and temporary absence rules for both payments are consistent with the treatment of a number of income support ancillary payments, and the standard compliance and debt recovery provisions will apply to the new payments.

The utilities allowance and seniors concession allowance will benefit over two million older Australians who have contributed, and continue to contribute, to Australia.

Thirdly, this bill will provide additional support for people providing care to an adult or a child with a disability—a group of people who perform a vital role in our community. This will be done by increasing the number of hours that carers can spend in work, training or study, from 20 to 25 hours per week, without losing qualification for carer payment. This will provide greater flexibility and more opportunities for carers to participate in the work force and for them to have more of a break from caring, without affecting their carer payment eligibility.

In recognition of the special needs of grandparents with the primary care of their grandchildren, this government waived, from 1 November 2004, the work, training and study test for access to child-care benefit. This gives eligible grandparents access to child-care benefit for up to 50 hours of approved child care a week.

This bill will now make child care more affordable for grandparent carers who are receiving income support, such as age pension or carer payment, by enabling them to have access to a special rate of child-care benefit. The special rate, provided for in this bill, will cover the full cost of child-care fees charged to eligible grandparents by approved child-care services.

Finally, the bill will provide for increased bereavement payments under the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986 in respect of disability pensioners who were receiving above general rate disability pension. Previously, the bereavement payment had been limited to 100 per cent of the general rate.

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

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.
That this bill be now read a second time.

The measures contained in the bill ensure that the real value of fortnightly payments of family tax benefit part A will be maintained.

Under the legislation before 1 July 2004, the family assistance safety net benchmark was 16.6 per cent of the combined pensioner couple rate for children under 13 and 21.6 per cent of the combined pensioner couple rate for children aged 13 to 15.

To ensure that the fortnightly payments of family tax benefit part A are not lower than the safety net benchmark, this bill includes amendments to maintain wage linked adjustments to fortnightly rates if the wage linked adjustments exceed the CPI indexed amounts. Fortnightly payment rates will be adjusted at exactly the same time as they were before the introduction of the family tax benefit part A supplement.

The real value of the supplement, which is paid as a lump sum once a year, is maintained through indexation to the CPI.

These amendments will deliver on the government’s commitment to ensure that the real value of family tax benefit is maintained in the future. They maintain the proportional parity of the fortnightly rate with the family assistance safety net benchmark while ensuring the family tax benefit part A supplement is indexed to the CPI. Through these amendments, the government is putting beyond any doubt that it is committed to ensuring that the real value of the substantially increased assistance is maintained. I commend the bill to the House and present the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mr Bevis) adjourned.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S SPEECH
Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 17 November, on motion by Mrs Markus.

That the address be agreed to.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (9.55 a.m.)—The Draft South East Queensland Regional Plan that I spoke of yesterday and other similar planning instruments focus particularly on infrastructure—not least the need for good planning and development and public policies, which lead to any region’s economic vitality. But, significantly, I believe these reports highlight the need for governments at all levels and of all political persuasions to tackle the big challenges before they become the big problems. Earlier we heard the Deputy Prime Minister talking about water infrastructure and water conservation and the important role that the federal government has to play in that sphere in Australia’s future. However, all the reports and proposals in the world are meaningless unless there is a will and a genuine desire to see them through, as is currently being done in Queensland through legislation. I believe that federal government also has a key role in a number of important ways.

Creating solutions to the nation’s infrastructure challenges requires a commitment of capital resources. Brisbane’s Liberal Lord Mayor, Campbell Newman, understands this only too well. He has already called on his federal colleagues twice, cap in hand, requesting that they open the purse strings so that he can see the fulfilment of his five tunnel plan. Whether one supports his ideas or not is irrelevant, I believe. What it does highlight as an issue, though, is that the federal government does have a role to play, even at a local level. But federal support by the government should not be characterised by any specific project in this instance; the government should be also supportive in the continued development of infrastructure efficiency and productivity.

In supporting the regions, the federal government should take a leadership role. I be-
lieve a new partnership—a new approach—to state and federal relations is required to adequately deal with the nation’s future infrastructure needs, as these issues transcend state borders and political differences. A good starting point would be the creation of a national infrastructure advisory council. Labor have proposed this for a number of years and we on this side of the House believe it would provide an effective mechanism to deal with regional development and nation building. This body would, for instance, prioritise projects which are needed to ensure the country’s physical and economic infrastructure is being developed in a coordinated and sensible way. A peak national body would also remove the instances of political pork-barrelling through its constitution of respected representatives from a broad cross-section of industries, government and the community.

Critics may argue that this type of organisation is unnecessary as infrastructure needs are already adequately being managed by state governments, local councils and several federal government departments. This may well be the case, but planning and development is still being conducted inefficiently and, in some instances, in an ad hoc fashion and certainly not from a national perspective. Just to put this view into context, it should be remembered that Australia has only just managed to standardise its rail gauges after more than a century of persevering with an anomaly of Federation.

I believe in the importance of a national approach to major infrastructure development and the need for a greater role for the Commonwealth. The quality of a community’s infrastructure in the end determines the quality of life for its people. Failure to provide world-class facilities means the government is failing its citizens. Even worse, the failure by the federal government to match the commitments by state governments diminishes opportunities and limits growth. Put simply, a better policy approach to the nation’s infrastructure is to encourage reform, to increase efficiency and productivity and to take a national view. This is the great nation building challenge that we all have for the next 20 years.

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge the efforts of a number of people from in and around Oxley. My election win in Oxley does not belong to me as an individual and it certainly would not have been possible without the efforts of hundreds of very hardworking local ALP branch members, dedicated supporters, volunteers and people from the community. I place a great deal of importance on the support that I get from community people who are active in the roles they play, as well as a number of local businesses supporters, organisations and, of course, my own campaign team and staff. Any election win is always shared with all these people.

I also want to acknowledge specifically my staff: Neville Conway, Armand von Stein and Rachael Atley. They do a tremendous job, well beyond the call of duty. They really do believe in Oxley, in the people and constituents of Oxley, and work very hard for their wellbeing. They were key players in my campaign; they are part of my success and they share it with me. I also particularly want to thank my broader campaign team—Brett McCreadie and all those people who volunteered on a daily basis. I am sure other members know what I am talking about: all those people who give up their time for free because they love what they do, they want to help and they want to be part of something. Their efforts are really appreciated and I thank them very much. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Order! Before I call the honourable member for Bonner, I remind the House that this is the member’s first speech, and I ask
the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (10.00 a.m.)—Every journey begins with a single step, and the first step in a journey that led to me standing here now was taken 82 years ago when my grandfather, Salvatore Vasta, stepped off the boat that brought him from the old world and walked onto Australian soil to start a new life. Salvatore, like many others who over two centuries came to our shores, always had a fervent belief that his family could achieve anything in this wonderful new land of opportunity. But even he would perhaps be surprised—I hope, pleasantly—to see his grandson standing here in this chamber, humbled by the honour and responsibility bestowed upon him by the citizens of our democracy.

It is with humility that I stand here before you today as the first member for the newly created seat of Bonner. This seat was named after a great Queenslander who also happened to be a great Liberal, Senator Neville Bonner. Senator Bonner was the first Aboriginal Australian elected to the federal parliament. During his 12 years in the Senate he was a conscientious parliamentarian, respected by both sides of politics. In his 16 years after leaving the Senate he was a much esteemed elder statesman of Australian public life. It is only fitting that his life and contribution to this country has now been so formally recognised and his name given to Queensland’s newest federal seat.

Neville Bonner’s widow, Heather Bonner, passed away recently, only a few days after the October federal election. I am told that she followed the vote counting in the seat of Bonner with great interest and, when the result eventually became clear, she told her loved ones that she could now be at peace, knowing that the people of Brisbane’s south-east had chosen a Liberal to represent them in the seat named after her late husband. It is an honour and a privilege to be entrusted by the people to be their voice and their representative in the federal parliament. I would like to thank them for choosing me to be that voice and that representative, and I promise that the voice of Bonner will be loud and clear, and the representation faithful and strong.

My family have been proud Australians for three generations. Always in that time they have worked hard, they have prayed hard and they have dreamed hard. And, as they built their futures in their new home, they also helped to build this country and make it the prosperous, decent, open and tolerant society it is today—a home to 20 million people, a dream home for millions more around the world, and for yet many more a beacon of hope and an example showing that people of all races, creeds and colours can live and work together and create a peaceful and successful future for their children.

My grandfathers and their families believed passionately in Australia, in the opportunities that Australia offered and the rewards she bestowed on those prepared to work hard, play fair and live right. They believed in the dream shared by all Australians—a better life and a better future for their children—and they lived that dream. My father’s father worked hard for almost 30 years in the cane fields of Northern Queensland to see his three sons go to university. One became a doctor, one became an engineer and the other became a lawyer who later on would sit on the bench as a Supreme Court judge. My mum’s dad arrived in Australia when he was 16 and, with sheer hard work and commitment, became a respected community leader and a well-known businessman in the Belmont district of Brisbane which I, his grandson, now have the honour of representing as part of the seat of Bonner.
My family always believed in the spirit of service and the importance of contributing back to the country what the country has given to us. My father, who has been in public life, faced a particularly difficult episode of undeserved adversity. He refused to be defeated by it and to this day continues his quest for justice for many of his fellow Queenslanders who often cannot afford it, including many Indigenous Australians. This public spirit also lives on amongst my brothers and sisters, whose work in the justice system, in the public service and in education contributes to making our country a safer and better place to live. I am proud to now follow in their footsteps.

It was through my work as a small business owner in Brisbane’s south-eastern suburbs that I first became involved in public life. The issue was a simple but important one: speeding on the road outside my business was putting pedestrians in danger. I started a petition and, with many signatures collected, I went to see the local government representative for the area, Councillor Michael Caltabiano. With his assistance the issue was resolved quite satisfactorily, to the local community’s benefit. This might not have been significant in the greater scheme of things, but it did show me that people matter and that with goodwill and people’s support things can be achieved for the greater good. It also inspired me to do more for my local community.

I have a passionate love for this country. It was what motivated me to join the Liberal Party, it was what motivated me to become a candidate in the election and it is what will motivate me as I represent the people of Bonner in the federal parliament. The new electorate of Bonner is an amalgamation of parts of three existing federal seats in Brisbane’s south-east suburbs: Moreton, Griffith and Bowman. The electorate stretches from Moreton Island and Wynnum in the north down through the suburbs of Tingalpa, Carindale, Holland Park West, Mount Gravatt and Wishart in the south. It is a part of Brisbane that has experienced massive growth in recent years. At present, more than 1,000 people are moving to south-east Queensland every week. Many of these people are choosing to live in Bonner.

This part of Brisbane has been my home for much of my life. As a local, I know the reasons more and more people are choosing to settle down and live there: it is a wonderful area for families, we have great local schools and community facilities, we have a thriving business sector and we are close to Brisbane’s greatest natural asset, Moreton Bay. Some people label Bonner as a mortgage belt electorate; others call it the bible belt. But one thing is for certain—the people of Bonner are a true representation of Middle Australia.

In one of his most important speeches, the founding father of the Liberal Party, Sir Robert Menzies, said that governments must not allow ordinary middle-class Australians to become forgotten people. These people are neither rich nor poor but they are the backbone of our great nation. They work quietly to pay off the family home and to send their children to a good school. They are the people who contribute the most in taxes but often get the least in return. Although I do not believe that we have social classes in Australia, I do believe that governments must govern for all Australians—not just for the unions, lobby groups and radical minorities.

I will work to ensure that my constituents do not become forgotten people, and my actions as the member for Bonner will be guided by my beliefs as a Liberal. I believe that the role of government is to remove obstacles so that people can be free to pursue their dreams and realise their potential. I be-
lieve that hard work and enterprise should be encouraged and rewarded. I believe that strong families make for strong communities and we must do everything possible to support them. I also believe that we should confront evil and encourage the spread of freedom and democracy throughout the world. These are not some highly sophisticated ideological concepts that only academics can understand and find appealing. These are simple yet powerful propositions that resonate right across Australia, from the heart of the sunburnt country to the outer suburbs of Brisbane. They certainly resonate in suburbs of Bonner like Mansfield, Murarrie, Mackenzie and Manly.

My conviction throughout the election campaign never wavered because I had an unshakeable belief in the Liberal Party and its ideals. As it happened, the people of Australia and of Bonner in particular also shared that belief and, having considered the record of the Howard government and its clear vision for the future, they returned the government for a historic fourth term. But the election result was much more than just a victory for the government; it was a victory for Middle Australia. It was a victory for ordinary Australian families. It was a sign that Australians knew the Liberal Party was the only party they could trust to put them first and it was a sign that they knew the leadership team of Prime Minister John Howard and Treasurer Peter Costello was the only team that could be trusted with their future and Australia’s future.

The residents of Bonner supported the Liberal Party because they knew what we stand for and they have seen the government’s record in office. They know the economy has grown to record levels, they know unemployment is at its lowest level in 27 years, they know the budget is in surplus and they know interest rates remain low. The people of Bonner also know that a strong economy is the basis for achieving all our national goals. It ensures higher living standards so that people can plan for the future with confidence. It allows us to help families with the cost of raising children. It allows us to invest more in schools, health, aged care and the environment. Most importantly, the residents of Bonner know that the strong position we are in as a nation did not occur by accident.

It is always an unenviable task to single out any group of people for special thanks, but I would like to acknowledge the dedicated group of supporters without whom I would not be standing in this place today. First, I want to thank my family. The support and encouragement of my family have made me the man I am today. I particularly want to acknowledge my father, Angelo, my mother, Raffaela, and my brother, Salvatore, who are present here today. While I cannot name them all individually, I would like to thank every Liberal Party branch member in the Bonner electorate for their tireless support during the campaign. I would particularly like to acknowledge the Upper Cavendish Road branch of the Liberal Party. It is not a big branch, but its members are some of the longest serving and most dedicated Liberals that I have ever met.

I would also like to pay special tribute to the late Arthur Scurr MBE, a much respected local community leader in Brisbane’s south side. He was a true gentleman, and his open-mindedness to new ideas, his commitment to the community and his tireless work will be missed by us all. His dear wife, Ailsa, also provided me with encouragement and gave me heart through difficult times. I thank the core members of my campaign team, Russell, Adrian and Mae, for being by my side throughout a tough campaign. I thank the Queensland Liberal state director, Geoff Greene, and the state president, Councillor Michael Caltabiano.
I thank my parliamentary colleagues Senator Brett Mason, Senator George Brandis and the Hon. Gary Hardgrave for their words of advice and encouragement. I thank Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson and the Hon. Julie Bishop for taking the time to visit Bonner during the election campaign. I wish to warmly congratulate my new colleague the honourable member for Bowman, Mr Andrew Laming, for his outstanding election victory.

I would also like to acknowledge at this point the Hon. Con Sciacca, the former member for Bowman and the Labor candidate for Bonner at the recent election. Con was not only a worthy and respected opponent but also a person who supported my family through tough times in the past and whose decency and friendship we will never forget.

Most importantly, I thank the people of Bonner for placing their trust in me and electing me as the first member for this new seat. My commitment to you is strong and simple: I will work with diligence, commitment and enthusiasm to justify your trust in me. I spoke before of my grandfather, Salvatore Vasta, who took the first step on the road that led me to this chamber. But this is not the end of the journey, merely the beginning of another one. As I embark on this new journey I hope that—just as my ancestors have, through their hard work, contributed to building this great nation—I too will be able to help to make the electorate of Bonner and Australia an even better place to live.

Mr Martin Ferguson (Batman) (10.16 a.m.)—Congratulations on your re-election, Mr Deputy Speaker Jenkins. I think it is fair to say that much has been written and said about the election result over the last five to six weeks. It is also fair to say that the opposition is facing a very challenging three years. For us as a party it is about three years of rebuilding, three years of working with the Australian people to gain trust and understanding of our policies and also, perhaps importantly, three years of keeping the Howard government accountable at a time when it has had more power than ever before. Whilst the election result was decisive for the government, it was also in many ways divisive for the Australian community. I believe very firmly that the campaign approaches of the two sides were in stark contrast with one another but reflected the different approaches that each side might be expected to take in government.

I argue rigorously that the Labor Party opposition ran a very positive campaign. We sought to focus on providing real opportunities for all Australians in an endeavour to make sure that if we succeeded at the polls it was understood that we would govern for the best interests of all Australians, that we would govern in the nation’s interests. Labor therefore went out of its way, over a long period, to develop very positive policies in areas such as health, education and tax, to name a few. The party was committed to looking after and respecting older Australians because we indeed owe those people a debt of gratitude. The opposition’s approach was aimed at improving the day-to-day lives of all Australians, not just a minority or some sections of the Australian community, and, in doing so, removing unnecessary cost burdens, running a responsible economic agenda while at the same time providing real social services and protecting the interests of future generations.

Alternatively, the record speaks for itself. The government ran hard on a campaign of scare tactics, with a huge amount of money spent on advertising on radio, on television and in the newspapers, and personal attacks and deliberate lies about the opposition’s policies. The coalition’s campaign, as we
appreciate, reflected their approach to government over the past 8½ years. It was overwhelmingly a negative campaign. Few people dispute that and it has been written about in the media often over recent weeks. The Howard government focussed on scaring the Australian people about key issues such as interest rates and terrorism.

I commend the member for Brand for the strong role he played in assisting the leader in neutralising the attack on the capacity of Labor in government to handle the terrorism debate. The government also sought to discredit Labor leader Mark Latham through personal attacks and smear campaigns about not just him but also his extended family. The Howard government turned its focus away from where it should have been—that is, a debate about the government’s record over the past 8½ years and what it would do in government if it were lucky enough, as it proved to be, to win the election on 9 October.

I think it is fair to debate the negative way in which the coalition has governed Australia since 1996 as against the spotlight by the government on the alleged inexperience of Labor leader, Mark Latham. It meant that on 9 October the Australian people were conned—they were given a false impression—to vote for what they thought was a government that would keep interest rates low, at a time when personal debt is at an all-time high, rather than voting to remove a government that continues to be dishonest with the electorate. The outcome from this election is sad for the future of the Australian community because it is a clear acceptance by the Australian community that politicians simply do not tell the truth.

All of us in this parliament have a responsibility to demonstrate to the Australian people that truth in government is attainable—and under Labor it will be delivered. As a nation Australia should settle for nothing less. Therefore, today in the address-in-reply I would like to focus on some of the positive policies pursued by Labor in the lead-up to the last election and the positive policies that we will seek to further develop and improve on in the lead-up to the next election. These policies would have brought significant benefits to all Australians rather than a group of sectional interests which the Howard government panders to.

The Howard government, as we all appreciate, has run out of positive ideas and a new agenda. Its focus over the next three years will be to deliver the many negative and divisive policies that it has been unable to get through the Senate over recent years such as policies on industrial relations, its attacks on Medicare and the full sale of Telstra. I wait to see how ‘cocky corner’, the National Party representatives in this House, handle the debate on Telstra and a commitment to proper services and improvements in rural, remote and regional Australia. For fresh ideas, the record also shows that the coalition will look, as it has in the past, to Labor’s positive policy proposals.

In relation to economic credibility I also note that in the lead-up to the election the opposition went out of its way to produce significant savings in the area of misuse of hard-won taxpayers’ dollars by the government of the day. I dare to suggest that some of those savings will now be picked up by the government to help pay for some of the promises made without proper financial consideration by the Howard government during the campaign, especially by the Prime Minister at the coalition’s election policy launch in Brisbane.

This also demonstrates that Australia needs a positive agenda. It will be the opposition’s job—the Labor Party’s job—over the next three years to ensure that the govern-
ment delivers reforms that bring day-to-day benefits to the Australian community—to all Australians not just some Australians. Labor’s priorities speak for themselves. They include health, education, training and family-focused policies such as child care, tax relief and improvements on the environmental front. It is through these policies that Labor aims to deliver benefits to Australian families. I will return to this debate in the light of the election of a Family First member to the Senate, who will take office from 1 July 2005.

Labor’s policies had one clear objective: to relieve the significant financial pressure on families that has emerged under the Howard government, with the cost of purchasing a house being unattainable for many Australians or significantly stretching their scarce financial resources. This is the case today, with a huge growth in personal debt since March 1996. What we are about is not just improving the circumstances of families but also improving the quality of life in towns and suburbs across Australia—not only in metropolitan Australia but also in rural, remote and regional Australia.

I now move on to the all-important issue of health. Labor squarely believes in a universal health system that provides high-quality health care for all Australians, not just those privileged enough to be able to afford it. Labor does not want Australia to adopt a two-tier health care system. No-one should ever need to choose between feeding themselves or their family and seeking proper medical attention or dental care. The opposition wants to save Medicare before it is too late and it will remain a major policy agenda for us during the 41st Parliament. We want to see a return to bulk-billing doctors. Unfortunately, since the election we have already seen that doctor’s fees have gone up, so it is even more expensive for families to look after their health and that of their extended families.

We correctly sought to implement the Medicare Gold Card, which is about free medical care for people over 75—the older Australians who actually built Australia and who created the opportunities that we now enjoy as a community. The facts show that over the past decade admissions for people over 75 have almost doubled. Medicare Gold was simple. It would have allowed a federal Labor government to link primary care, hospitals and aged care to provide a more holistic approach to health care for older Australians. This policy would have broken down the barriers between the Commonwealth and the states. It would have forced cooperation in the public and private sectors by not treating one as the enemy of the other, thereby delivering benefits to older Australians, their families and the wider community through reduced private health insurance premiums and further taking pressure of families in meeting the costs of everyday life.

I now move on to education, which is of fundamental importance to the future of Australia as a nation. We must educate ourselves and especially create opportunities for our young people. Labor believe that education and skills development is a passport to opportunity in life. We have always argued that. It has been one of our primary planks in policy development throughout our history. Labor therefore argue that we have to bring fairness back into our education system. Over the past 8½ years, the record shows that the coalition has systematically introduced a two-tier education system not only in our schools and universities but also in the apprenticeship system. The opposition believe that everyone, irrespective of where they are born or the nature of their family circumstances, should have access to a high-quality, affordable education system. I think
it is something that we as a community should all believe in.

Let us consider now the university system. Under the Howard government our university system has been eroded to a point where, at this moment, at least 45 full degrees offered by Australian universities cost in excess of $100,000. That is beyond the capacity of most Australians. At this particular point it is hard enough for families to support their children through universities, because more and more children are living at home yet also have to confront the added costs of HECS under the Howard government. Labor’s policy was about opening up the system, about abolishing full fee degrees with the aim of keeping universities affordable for all Australians, not just the privileged minority of the wealthy.

Labor also promised—and this is exceptionally important—to create an additional 20,000 new university places every year by 2008-09, including in key professional areas that challenge us in terms of shortages of skills at the moment, such as nursing, teacher education and medicine, which also fitted in with Labor priorities on the health and education fronts. It is no good just having policies. You also need to have the trained personnel to deliver those policies; hence our commitment to opening up additional university places to overcome the shortages that exist in nursing, teacher education and medicine. We would have reduced HECS fees for science and maths students by at least $1,600 per annum, which was about getting those teachers back into our schooling system.

With the assistance of the shadow minister, Jenny Macklin, we also developed a funding package aimed at bringing fairness and equity into the public school system in Australia. Labor sought to establish a national schools standard. Why should we not have a national schools standard? It is something we all seek to attain in every school around Australia. That national standard was about lifting the standard of education in all schools, thereby ensuring that all schools would become high-achieving schools rather than just a select minority of schools in Australia. Under our plan, 6,900 government schools and 2,500 non-government schools would have been better off while only 67 elite high-fee schools would have had funding reduced.

I believe that the issue of skills is going to be central to the economic debate in Australia over the next five to 10 years. The shortage of skilled people in Australia is now a cost to business in Australia. It is going to have an impact on the rate of inflation and on our capacity to get investment to develop Australia and to create additional jobs. We have a major skills shortage, and it is about time the Howard government fronted up to the fact that in key trades and industries we are going backwards on the skills front.

Labor has a policy of creating some 36,000 new vocational education and training places each year and paying TAFE fees for secondary students who want to get a vocational qualification whilst at school. The Howard government’s alternative is the creation of technical colleges. We all support the need for additional apprenticeships, but life is about cooperation, and you have to work with the state and territory governments. The Howard government should have been working with the state and territory TAFE systems instead of creating divisions, delivering unnecessary bureaucratic red tape and going out of its way to create further complications.

I go to the question of tax and families. The Howard government’s tax policy was aimed at a minority of Australians: those earning in excess of $52,000 per year. In my electorate of Batman in the northern suburbs
of Melbourne, that meant that over 90 per cent of my constituents would not have received a tax cut under the Howard government policies. Labor’s tax and family policy was about two issues. Firstly, it was about giving relief to the four out of five taxpayers who had been passed over by the Howard government. Secondly, it was about overcoming the skills shortage in Australia.

On the industrial relations front, the Howard government believes that, in order to enlarge the Australian work force, we need to make it easier for employers to sack workers. I think that the heart of the debate is about attracting workers back to the work force, and that is about restoring incentives in the social security and tax systems and introducing two tax-free thresholds for eligible families. If people want a debate about what we have to do on the labour market front over the next three years, let us focus on the need to invest in schooling, higher education and TAFE. We should also focus on the disincentives that exist in the tax system and the social security system which fail to encourage people to go back to the work force. The period from 1983 to 1996 was the first time since 1945—when the unemployment system was introduced in Australia—that that debate was confronted. For decades under the Menzies government, there was a passive unemployment system without proper consideration of the need to get people back into the work force. It is interesting to note that the huge growth in work force participation over recent decades occurred during the period 1983 to 1996, with a huge growth in female participation and the need to fund family-friendly workplace activities and important considerations such as child care.

The issue of religion in the political debate was, I think, an unnecessary emergence of a filthy, divisive debate which was in many ways not fostered by the emergence of the Family First Party but encouraged by some sections of the coalition government. Since the election we have seen the fine line further blurred with the push by ultraconservative members of the government to limit women’s access to publicly funded abortion services. Interestingly, the issue was not presented to the Australian people in the lead-up to the election. At no stage during the election campaign did the Minister for Health and Ageing, Mr Abbott, profess to know more about women’s health issues than women and their doctors. For Mr Abbott, this is a moral issue. It has been put on the table as a result of the government having unprecedented control. It is an attempt to control women for moral reasons in the eyes of some people in the Howard government. It is an attempt to say, in essence, that women with the financial means to pay for it themselves should have access to safe health services but women with fewer financial means should not. It is about turning the clock back to the 1930s and 1940s. I simply say that the proposals by the minister for health are out of order and that, frankly, he should butt out of women’s health issues. It is about choice. Women do not go out of their way to actually want an abortion. There are far greater complications—as would be suggested by the minister for health.

Moving to the Family First debate, I say that if you want to debate family policies then you need to concentrate not on whether a person is perceived to be a Christian or not but on policies such as health, education and tax. That is about trying to work out how to make it easier for families to operate and survive in the tough financial world of Australia in the 21st century with huge growth in personal debt. I object to the suggestion by the Family First senator elect that it is the first time there has been a family-friendly party in the houses of the Commonwealth parliament. All parties seek to do what they believe is in the best interests of all families,
but the debate is broader than one which is about whether a person is a Christian or not. I am outraged by the whisper campaign by the Howard government in the seat of Greenway with respect to the Labor candidate, Mr Eddie Husic, and the doorknocking campaign suggesting that he was not a Christian because he was born the son of Muslims. Surely Australia is entitled to a more constructive, honest debate than that filthy debate pursued by the Howard government in the seat of Greenway. (Time expired)

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (10.36 a.m.)—I begin, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, by congratulating you on your re-election—one of the few from the endangered species of Labor Party members in the state of Tasmania. I am pleased and honoured to rise in this new parliament today—the 41st Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia—to express my strong support for the Howard government’s plans and policies for the three years ahead and to speak of my priorities as a local member, as the re-elected federal member for the seat of Ryan in Queensland. At the outset, I extend my congratulations to all those who are coming to the parliament for the first time. I congratulate those who have presented speeches for the first time on some wonderful speeches and some very strong personal stories therein.

It is incumbent upon me to thank the people of Ryan for re-electing me as their local federal member. It is a great honour. It is an honour that I do not take lightly, and it is a privilege to have been returned as the sitting Liberal member with an increased primary vote of over six per cent and an overall vote of over 60 per cent. As I said in my maiden speech to the parliament almost three years ago, I consider my election to the Commonwealth parliament as a very deep honour. It is a particular honour because I am, I guess, one of the younger members of the parliament and because I am an Australian that was not born in this country but came to this country as a young boy. I say to the people of Ryan that it is a privilege I do not take for granted and I will continue to work very hard not only for those who subscribe very strongly to the views, philosophies and policies of the Howard government but also for those who did not vote for me. I will be a representative for all the people of Ryan.

In the election, I campaigned very much on my plans for the local community, and I look forward to continuing to deliver those plans and continuing to create more opportunities for the people of Ryan: small business, local community groups, all residents and, in particular, the young people of Ryan. One of the great pleasures of a local member is the opportunity to meet the full spectrum of the Australian community, from young kids at schools to those in retirement homes, those in businesses and those who do great work for our community.

The election result on 9 October was a truly historic one for the government. The parliament represents the voice of the Australian people. In our democratic system the people of Australia, I think overwhelmingly, decided that their interests were best served by the return of the Howard government. Listening to the speeches of the new members and looking around the chamber in the last few days, I note that the parliament is as diverse and as rich as the tapestry of the nation that we collectively represent. Those who have come to this parliament come from all walks of life. They come from all parts of this country. They come from successful businesses and high networks and they come here from careers in the police force, academia and many other spheres of professional life.

Those of us who stand for parliament and for political office—whether or not we are successful—owe a great deal of gratitude to
those who contribute to our campaigns. I want to take this opportunity in my speech on the address-in-reply to express in the parliament my very deepest thanks to all those who have made my campaign in Ryan successful—those in the Liberal Party, the volunteers, supporters, friends and family who gave so much of their time to making our campaign very successful. I want to express in the parliament my very special thanks. It would not have been a successful campaign without the great deal of investment in time that they awarded to the Liberal Party and to me as the local candidate.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Ryan campaign chairman, Mr Phil Williams, and his wife, Brenda Williams; the campaign director, Talena Elson; the campaign coordinator, Bernie Mack; my campaign manager, Shona Leppanen-Gibson; my campaign treasurer, Garth Wong; and volunteer coordinator, Mr Barrie Middleton. They are fine Australians who have a great love of democracy and a great love of the Liberal Party and what we can do in government for the people of Australia and of course for the people of Ryan.

It is important for me to make special mention of the booth captains who showed great dedication on election day. They get up very early in the morning and do the hard work before the rest of us get up, and they deserve the full thanks of all of us on this side of the parliament who were re-elected. It is also important for me to acknowledge two special members of the Ryan FEC. They are two exceptional Liberals: Jimmy Smith and David Gowen. They are two Australians who I think represent Australia in so many ways. In their lives, these Australians have done so much for our country in their work and now in their retirement they are heavily engaged in the community and also in supporting the Liberal Party in Ryan.

The Prime Minister’s strong leadership since taking office in 1996 has ensured that our nation remains respected internationally and secure domestically. The Treasurer’s superb stewardship of the national economy has meant that millions of Australians have been able to enjoy the benefits of a strong and growing economy—well-paid jobs and bright futures. The budget is in surplus. The national debt, so appallingly left to the incoming coalition government in 1996—$96 billion of national debt—continues to be paid off by this government so that future generations of Australians can look forward to an unencumbered future, a future without Labor’s debt. That is one reason that so many people voted for the government.

Now, as the Howard government approaches its fourth term in government with a majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, we will be able to advance the reforms that have been so frustrated in the Senate by the opposition and the minor parties. The strong result at the last election has given the government a mandate to march forward with important and vital reforms—reforms that will make a difference to this country’s national economic life. It is important that we do see this as a mandate. As a member of the government, as a sitting Liberal member, I want to confirm that that is how I view the election of the Howard government. In a democracy, parties are elected to make decisions on behalf of the country. That is our system of government. We have been elected by the people. We have a commission, we have a trust, to carry out the policies and the philosophies which guide this party.

That is why so many people are involved in the Liberal Party. They not only support their local members but also have a strong and abiding faith in the philosophy of liberalism, which of course very strongly includes a belief in the unlimited potential of the indi-
individual—the belief that an individual can achieve so much; that an individual can overcome obstacles and do great things without the heavy hand of a bureaucracy and governments.

For me as the local federal member for Ryan, one of the key areas that I wish to focus on will be the area of small business. For Ryan businesses, some of the most important reforms on the agenda for the government are those relating to workplace relations—issues that are impacting very strongly on Australia’s small business sector. In Australia we have over 1.1 million small businesses that play a crucial role in this country’s economy. They employ over 3.3 million Australians and account for nearly 50 per cent of all jobs in the private sector. Businesses are not only about giving people jobs; they are also about human dignity. They are about giving people an opportunity to pursue goals and interests. They represent a vehicle in which people can contribute to a strong and vibrant community. That is why small businesses are all so important.

The Howard government’s aim has always been to create the most flexible and dynamic workplace relations system possible to support our entrepreneurs and small businesses. I am delighted that the Governor-General spoke in his opening remarks to the parliament about the importance of entrepreneurship and about this government creating a culture of entrepreneurship.

Since its election, the Howard government has initiated crucial workplace reforms that have made vast differences to the conditions of employers and employees. Nationally, the unemployment rate has fallen to 5.3 per cent, and it continues to fall. It is now at its lowest level in more than a quarter of a century. The last time the unemployment rate was lower was in February 1977—decades ago. We have higher productivity growth which has meant increased real wages. Real wages for full-time workers are now more than 13 per cent higher than when Labor was in government. Strikes are at their lowest level since records were first kept in the early part of the 20th century. Businesses and workers are benefiting from these conditions and contributing to Australia’s strong economic performance.

Clearly, there is more to be done. I want to strongly encourage small and medium sized businesses to look at opportunities for exports. The government’s $30 million support over four years in terms of the export management development grants will, I think, be an important part of helping small and medium sized businesses export to the world. I was pleased to hear in this morning’s news that on 1 January 2005 the US-Australia free trade agreement will come into force. This is good for business and good for Australia because it will continue to ensure the strong growth of the national economy.

Workplace reforms must focus on simplifying, and producing a better balance for, the dismissal rights and obligations of employers and employees, and, as I said, particularly for small businesses. With the strong connection and contact I have with local small businesses in Ryan, I am continually reminded how important it is that the government push ahead with vital reforms to unfair dismissal laws. These reforms will ensure that the small business sector continues to thrive and prosper. Changes must be made to take the unfair dismissal laws burden off the back of small businesses and protect them from redundancy payments. We have to ensure that our industrious and creative small business operators can get on with the job of growing their businesses. Their business is business. Their business is to employ more Australians and add to the national wealth of this country.
During the election campaign, the Howard government pledged to commit $2 million to establish a pilot program focusing on providing small businesses with access to mediation services as a low-cost and informal alternative to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. I think this is an example of why the Australian people have re-elected the Howard government. It is an example of a party in this parliament coming up with ideas, policies and initiatives that actually make a difference to people and businesses in the community.

In this 41st Parliament, I encourage the opposition to come up with ideas, initiatives and policies and rid themselves of the trend of personal abuse that seemed to be a hallmark of the Labor Party in the 40th Parliament. There is no place in Australian political life for personal abuse, and I think the Australian people would be delighted if both sides of parliament, all members of parliament, abstained from engaging in commentary of a personal nature against other members of parliament. It is time we acknowledged that this parliament is the place for ideas, for robust exchange of thoughts, a place where we can debate the important issues that affect the country. We should not be afraid of doing that with all the enthusiasm and rigour that guide our philosophies and our parties, but, at the same time, there is ample opportunity for us to do that in the spirit of democracy, in the spirit of what we are here for, which is to make this country better and make the lives of Australians the length and breadth of this country that much stronger and prosperous.

Disputes in the workplace are costly for small business. I think the program I have just referred to would go a long way towards a low-cost and less adversarial method of dispute resolution. In Ryan, we have over 5,000 small businesses. In my second term as a local member I look forward to continuing to meet small business operators and engaging with them about some of the important issues they face.

As I have just alluded to, I have always believed that when businesses prosper the whole community prospers. When businesses flourish they employ more people, providing jobs for local residents and increasing the number of services that can be provided to a community’s schools, charities and worthwhile causes. Many small businesses contribute in terms of sponsorship and fundraising for local communities. That is certainly the case in the Ryan electorate.

The Ryan electorate is a very special place. The Brisbane River meanders through the electorate’s suburbs of Toowong, St Lucia, Indooroopilly, Kenmore, Chapel Hill, Mount Ommaney and Jindalee and makes it a very special place. It is an enlarged electorate that takes in suburbs that were formerly part of the federal seat of Blair, from the breathtaking Mount Nebo to Lake Manchester and the Brisbane Forest Park. There are many green and relaxing parks scattered throughout the Ryan electorate. I have had the pleasure of living in the Ryan electorate for almost 25 years. I say to the people of Ryan that I will continue to work hard, consistent with someone who has lived in the local community for almost a quarter of a century.

One of the special honours bestowed upon me in my first term representing the people of Ryan in the parliament was to be invited to be patron of the Moggill Koala Hospital. I am delighted to have received a letter from the Moggill Koala Hospital asking me if I will continue in that role and continue my support for them. They are a terrific organisation, and I will certainly accept with great pleasure their kind invitation. It is important that all of us in the parliament acknowledge the importance of local communities and
what local individuals do to support the environment.

One of my key priorities over the next three years is to secure more funding for the Envirofund and Green Corps projects in the electorate of Ryan. These are the kinds of substantial projects that make a true difference to our communities. In Ryan, we have had four local Green Corps programs delivered through Greening Australia, at Pullenvale and at Kenmore, and I have been pleased to attend all the launches and all the graduation ceremonies of these projects. I am always impressed with the young people who are engaged in that and the great work that they do. They make a real difference to the community in Ryan, and I know from attending the graduation ceremonies the benefits and the skills that the young people acquire. Next year I will be sponsoring four participants from two Green Corps projects to come to Canberra to meet with the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator the Hon. Ian Campbell, to advise him on their experiences, to promote the program and to outline how important funding for those programs is for the people of Ryan.

Education is, of course, a very strong national policy issue and in the Ryan electorate the University of Queensland is based at St Lucia. I want to pledge to those who attend this university and those who work there my strong support for its funding. It is a university that attracts an enormous amount of funds from the Howard government—and so it should, because it is one of the premier institutions of higher learning in this country. It was recently voted one of the top 50 universities in the world and it has been at the forefront of excellence in higher education.

At the same time, I want to place very strongly in the Hansard my absolute support for the government’s intention to do something about compulsory student unionism. I am not going to stand aside and allow the student body of a campus to use funds from students to campaign politically. This is not their place; they should be engaged in the worthy cause of studying and achieving qualifications that will empower them in their lives ahead. I have been contacted in recent weeks by many students asking that the government continue their policy on voluntary student unionism. We will, I hope, legislate to ensure that students have a choice regarding university organisations and their right of freedom of association.

I am very proud of the achievements in the local Ryan community over the last three years. I am delighted to be back in the parliament as a member of the Howard government. I will continue to work very hard for the people of Ryan. I will continue to be a member who has enthusiasm and integrity. I will continue to represent their concerns, their interests and what is important to them in their national parliament. It is important for all members in this parliament to acknowledge that it is a great privilege to be in this place. Sometimes I think that can be forgotten, but as one of the younger members of the 41st Parliament I intend to ensure that the privilege that has been bestowed on me by the people of Ryan is not forgotten.

Some 40-odd per cent of the electorate of Ryan is made up of families with children. These are the Australians who count on me to represent them very strongly in the parliament—to talk about schools and education, to talk about businesses and to talk about the environment because that is what is important to them. I look forward, with my colleagues, to governing in the interests of this country. I think the government has a wonderful opportunity in this 41st Parliament to do some special things for this country that will advance the national agenda and ensure that, decades hence, Australians will
look back on this parliament as a historic one that was able to do great things in the life of this country.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Order! Before I call the honourable member for Adelaide, I remind the House that this is the member’s first speech and I ask the House to extend to her the usual courtesies.

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (10.56 a.m.)—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am honoured by the opportunity to stand here today as the member for Adelaide and make my first speech. I would like to thank the people of Adelaide for the faith that they have placed in me and I give them my firm commitment that I will work hard for them, listen to their views and do all in my power to give them the strong voice that they deserve in this parliament.

From the outset I would like to acknowledge the former member for Adelaide, Trish Worth. Trish and I are obviously from opposite sides of politics, and we certainly shared some spirited debates throughout the campaign. But I would like to acknowledge and thank her for both her contribution to the people of Adelaide over the past 11 years and her helpful and gracious handover. Trish Worth was highly respected by many, both here in the parliament and in the electorate. I wish her all the very best in her future endeavours.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions made by my fellow South Australians the former members for Bonython and Kingston. Martyn Evans and David Cox both made valuable contributions in their respective electorates, in this parliament and within the Australian Labor Party. Knowing both of these men, I have little doubt that they will continue to play a positive role in the Australian community in whatever avenues they choose to pursue.

It is a huge honour and responsibility to represent a constituency in the national parliament. I stand here particularly proud to be representing the electorate of Adelaide. Adelaide is a wonderful and diverse electorate, covering the city centre, some of our most affluent suburbs and some of the areas where many families are struggling the most. As a result of these dynamics, I stand here today representing a wonderfully diverse community who have a wide range of opinions on many issues. I am humbled by the opportunity to be their representative in this House.

I would like to make clear what I see as my role within this parliament. Some seem under the impression that, as the youngest woman to be elected to this House, it is my principal role to speak for the under 30s. I am afraid that these people may be disappointed. I have no intention of claiming to be the voice of youth. Instead, I intend to represent all those within the seat of Adelaide, regardless of their age, their race, their gender or their wealth. It is clear to me that people of my generation are facing a range of new challenges which this parliament needs to recognise and address in its decision making. I hope that my experiences with these emerging issues will enable me to add something to our debate and to our understandings. Also, I strongly believe in the importance of this parliament being compiled of a broad range of members that bring with them vast experiences and backgrounds.

The issues which I would like to speak on today are those which drew me to the Australian Labor Party, those which I believe that this parliament must address and those which encouraged my decision to stand for election. Whilst I will try to not give my entire life story, as my views on these issues have largely been formed by personal experience I hope you will excuse my indulgence in straying occasionally from the subject.
I have always been influenced by my wonderful family and the values that they instilled in me. While I did not recognise it at the time—and, I am sure, nor did they—it was these values which later led me to join the Labor Party. I would like to thank my family for both teaching me these lessons and giving me their unending support. For this I would particularly like to thank my remarkable mother, Ros, and my big brother, Matt, and acknowledge their presence, along with my mother’s husband, Barry, in the gallery today.

I would also like to acknowledge my late father, Chris Ellis. My father was an especially strong role model for me and he taught me many valuable lessons which I will always hold dear. It was he who taught me that everybody deserves a fair go. He emphasised that rather than complaining too much about the hand that you had been dealt in life there was far more value in working hard to overcome adversity. I particularly remember an occasion when my father found himself unemployed with little prospect of getting a job suitting his qualifications. He did not complain; he did not give up or sit back and wait for his fortunes to change. Instead, he took a job working nights in a factory and worked weekends in a nearby supermarket. There is nothing particularly unique about this story but the lessons it taught me are clear.

I was reminded of this spirit during the election campaign when I had the good fortune to meet a young man in my electorate called Anthony. Anthony works seven days a week running a small business and spends his nights doing shifts in a factory. He does not lead a life of extravagance but does this to get by, to put food on the table and to pay the bills. Anthony did not ask for any assistance, any handouts or any sympathy but he was hopeful of a Labor victory because he felt neglected and forgotten by the current government. There are many folk such as Anthony within my electorate. They may not complain with the loudest voices or protest in the streets but they are hardworking Australians who are bearing the brunt of the transition towards a complete user-pays society. These are the Australians who are hurt most by decreased bulk-billing rates, which restrict their access to and the availability of doctors. These are the Australians who are hurt most by soaring education costs, which increasingly place higher education out of their children’s reach. And these are the very Australians who did not benefit one cent from the government’s budget tax cuts.

I am well aware that the people of Adelaide voted for me because they recognised a need for a Labor government. While I share their deep disappointment that we did not deliver a victory, I do pledge to be a strong voice in continuing to fight on these issues and ideals.

I am clear on the need for a healthy economy to ensure that the Australian people have access to the services and opportunities which they deserve. Before entering this parliament, I worked for the South Australian Deputy Premier and Treasurer, Kevin Foley. In my view, the performance of the South Australian economy and the state Labor government is an ideal example of how Labor governments can responsibly run an economy. They have successfully turned around our state’s economic fortunes with the delivery of budget surpluses, solid economic growth and record levels of employment, while delivering increased services in the areas of health, education and law and order. This hard work has not been overlooked, with both major international ratings agencies, Moody’s and Standard and Poor’s, recently awarding the state a AAA credit rating. Of particular significance, I feel, is the manner in which they have achieved this. I reject the notion put forward by the federal government that we must strengthen our
economy by making workers cheaper to hire and easier to sack. I would instead argue that our future economic growth lies in job creation; in creating a business climate that encourages private investment and entrepreneurship.

I also believe that the future of the River Murray is a vital issue which this parliament must address. We must address this now while we still have a chance. I had the good fortune to spend much of my childhood growing up alongside the river’s banks in Mannum in country South Australia. Like most South Australians, I have long recognised the importance of this mighty river. However, one should not need to live on the riverside or even in the state of the river’s mouth to recognise the urgency of the plight of the Murray. The continued neglect of this river is a huge and urgent environmental issue facing us now. But it is also far more than this. If we fail to address this serious issue, the death of the Murray will be both environmentally and economically disastrous.

The overall estimated annual costs salinity has on infrastructure, our agriculture and environment are substantial. Declining river water quality, loss of productive land, damage to roads and buildings, damage to conservation reserves and vegetation and an increased risk of flooding are all dire consequences we face should we fail to appropriately address this problem. I urge this government to have the will and the courage to sensibly address this pressing issue and not engage in politicking and buck-passing with our state governments. I urge this parliament to pursue our economic development responsibly and to address the River Murray’s plight urgently, but I would also like today to speak on some issues which may not be as tangible and may not seem as significant in the short term but that I believe are of critical importance.

I am here today because I believe in the political process. I believe that politics and the parliamentary process have the power to change people’s lives for the better. However, in order for this to be true we must respect and maintain the integrity of our political system. Many have noted the level of cynicism towards politics within the Australian community. I have encountered this on countless occasions within my electorate. People have repeatedly expressed despondency that they do not feel any faith in the parliament’s decisions or indeed have any confidence in the accuracy of the information they are given by their political leaders. This issue is frightening. Our democratic ideals are reliant on an honest and open relationship with the constituency. Further to this, I believe that we must make an active effort to build and respect this relationship. I plan to concentrate on getting amongst the people of Adelaide, seeking out their views and engaging them within the system. The Australian people deserve to have faith in us.

To be honest, I never dreamt that I would one day be standing in this place delivering my first speech. It was never an early ambition of mine to be a politician. What set me on my journey and what brings me here today is the feeling that this government is taking something more valuable than I am willing to give. I have always been and remain today a very proud Australian. I feel truly blessed to be living in the greatest country in the world. It has always struck me that, while citizens in so many countries abroad bask in national identities which have been forged over hundreds of years, our nation’s narrative is in its early stages and many of its chapters are yet to be written. This is an exciting opportunity for all of us, as well as being a heavy responsibility.

I believe that the federal government has a role to play in setting the nation’s long-term direction and providing a vision for us to
work towards. I have the highest respect for our war veterans and the sacrifices that they have made for us all. At a time when our nation was in its infancy, Australian men and women displayed the characteristics of mateship, courage and a deep regard for each other. They did not realise this at the time but they went a long way in shaping our nation’s identity, an identity that Australians are proud to embrace today. We must continue to build on this legacy and energetically pursue a fairer, stronger and more united nation.

It was a great privilege for me to attend a Remembrance Day service last Thursday at the Enfield RSL. I witnessed war veterans and children from the Enfield and Gepps Cross primary schools observing together a moment in our history and hoping together for a peaceful future. I believe we must aspire to a peaceful future which is built on unity and egalitarianism. We must ensure that all Australians share in our prosperity and access our opportunities. I believe we must prioritise reconciliation with our indigenous community, embrace the diversity of our multicultural society and place confidence in our nation to be a strong and independent republic.

Whilst our visions may differ slightly, a long-term direction and pursuit of these ideals is worth fighting for, and ultimately I believe it is only the Labor Party that will put up this fight. For Labor supporters who are demoralised at present, I remind them of the words of a great Labor icon Ben Chifley who, in 1951, three days prior to his death, stated:

You have to be quite clear about what you believe in, whether popular or unpopular, and you have to fight for it ... if I think a thing is worth fighting for, no matter what the penalty may be, I will fight for the right, and truth and justice will always prevail.

Our goal is indeed worthy, and it is an honour to have the opportunity to pursue it here.

Each member of this parliament would have no doubt travelled vastly different paths to arrive here and set different goals to achieve. One thing that we all have in common is that we did not make it here alone. I am well aware that I would not be here today were it not for the support and encouragement of many. I would like to take the opportunity to thank just a few of those to whom I owe so much. I would like to begin by thanking a man whom I greatly respect and who joins us today in the gallery. The day that I started my first job as a checkout operator at the age of 15 I joined my first union, the South Australian SDA. Little did I know the major role and influence that its secretary, Don Farrell, would have on my life. Don has always fought hard for the interests of his members to get the very best for them in conditions and wages. I thank Don today, not just for his support of my candidacy and my campaign—but certainly for that also—but also for the inspiration, leadership and example that he sets. Similarly, I would like to express my gratitude to Alex Gallagher for his support of me and his service to many of my electors through the Transport Workers Union.

I owe so very much to the hardworking team who tirelessly worked on my campaign. The Labor Party is blessed to have so many volunteers who sacrifice large amounts of their personal time to pursue our common dreams. To the hundreds who volunteered on my campaign I express my heartfelt gratitude. I am not going to name them all. In particular I thank my campaign committee, led by my wonderfully talented campaign director, Nick Champion, who also joins us today. I thank Nick for the professional and effective manner in which he juggled his many responsibilities in the campaign and, whilst I may not have exactly thought it at the time, I thank him now for being such a slavedriver. Nick is a true asset to our party...
and our community, and I will return the fa-
vour and look forward to supporting him in
his future endeavours. I would also like to
thank Nimfa, Andrew, Brad, Sevi, Lindsay,
Tim and Bob for their hard work and Cathie
King for her long-term support and friend-
ship.

I received invaluable support from mem-
bers of the South Australian parliamentary
Labor Party. I thank them all—especially
those within my electorate. In particular, I
thank Premier Mike Rann, Tom Koutsan-
tonis, Michael Atkinson, Kevin Foley and
John Rau for their support. I am also grateful
for the support provided by Senators Kirk,
Buckland and Bolkus and would especially
like to acknowledge the role of our South
Australian Senator-elect, Annette Hurley. I
also thank the Leader of the Opposition, the
shadow ministry and the ALP National Se-
cretariat for their tireless work and invalu-
able support during the campaign.

I thank my family and my core group of
friends, who are like a second family to me. I
thank them for the support that they give and
the friendship that I cherish. In particular, I
pay tribute to Andrea and Stephen, who con-
tinually amaze me with their warmth, gener-
osity and support.

On many occasions over recent months I
have been accused of being young and ideal-
istic. To this, I plead guilty as charged. My
only hope is that one day I will be old and
idealistic and be able to look back on my
time in this place and think that, through
hard work for the people of Adelaide, I man-
ger to make a contribution that went some
way towards seeing a long-term vision for
our nation become closer to a reality.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley—Parliamentary
Secretary (Foreign Affairs and Trade))
(11.12 a.m.)—Mr Deputy Speaker Jenkins,
may I give a kind welcome and congratula-
tions to you on your genuinely merit based
appointment. I stand here today to respond to
the Governor-General’s opening speech to
the 41st Parliament. It is truly an honour to
be here representing the Dunkley electorate
and to be part of a government that has been
re-elected for a fourth term. That re-election
did not happen by chance; it happened as a
result of the outstanding national leadership
and excellent performance of the government
over the first three terms. That earned the
support of the electorate of Dunkley in num-
bers unparalleled in any other period of the
existence of the Dunkley electorate. But, at a
local level, my opportunity to represent this
community—an opportunity I am truly hum-
bled to be able to take up for a fourth time—
was made possible through action on the
ground supporting the leadership, direction,
optimism and hope for the future provided
by the Howard government.

I would like to acknowledge and recog-
nise the tireless work of a terrific campaign
team, the tireless and dedicated work of
many hundreds of volunteers and their un-
ending willingness to rise to the occasion and
the challenge that was before us—a historic
challenge to try and secure the Dunkley elec-
torate as part of the Howard government for
a fourth term. I would particularly like to pay
tribute to my dear friend and campaign direc-
tor, Greg Sugars, who puts his heart into eve-
rything he does. His vigour and direction
have been invaluable over a number of cam-
paigns, and I pay him great tribute. I also pay
great tribute to David Morris, Natalie Divola,
Raeleigh Speedie, Norm Branson, Bill Bea-
glehole, our very own local version of John
Howard, and all of those dedicated volun-
teers who gave so much of their time, energy,
hopes and abilities towards our shared pur-
pose of securing the re-election of the How-
ard government.

At a local level our contribution was to
win Dunkley, and it would be remiss and
certainly I would regret it greatly if I did not
pay tribute to the Dunkley electorate office team. To Noelene Warwick, Vincent Sheehy, Suzan Westlake, Shane Fairlie and Melody Rewakowski—they are a remarkable bunch of individuals who ensured that we gave the very best we had to offer for our community as part of our efforts to earn the electorate’s support for a fourth term.

The other thing that is worth mentioning is that the support needed to run election campaigns is quite considerable. A number of members have acknowledged that support, whether it be in the form of shoe leather, in the form of wise counsel and advice or in the form of assistance with resources in some of our campaign activities. Campaigns cannot run these days without the help of hundreds of volunteers. In acknowledging all of the people who volunteered and contributed to the Liberal campaign in the Dunkley electorate, I do run the risk of drawing out a number of particularly noteworthy individuals. Robert Lattimer is a remarkable individual who is always there giving all he has to offer whenever election campaigns come forward. Arthur Rankin, a remarkably resourceful individual, makes sure our visual presence in the electorate is excellent; his efforts are untiring and greatly appreciated. John Cato Smith, a dear personal friend, steps up to the plate whenever an election is on and creates an almost carnival atmosphere; he puts his considerable enthusiasm into the task of making sure his mate continues to have a job. To Susan and Emma Stevens—their contribution was outstanding.

I would also like to mention all of the partners, spouses and family members of not only the campaign team and my electorate staff but also all those who volunteered to make my re-election possible. At a family level, I would sincerely like to convey my enduring love, appreciation and respect for my wife, Kate, and her contribution. Many people in this place will learn that one of the most difficult roles any individual can have is to be a spouse of a member of parliament. We are very much public property and the demands on our time are very considerable. The reason we get involved in public life is that there is a sparkle in our eye and a fire in our belly. Our spouses will either share or tolerate that enthusiasm, or they will put up with it to the point they need to to maintain relationships and friendships. Many of the very exciting moments that being an elected representative provides include being able to assist individuals, families and communities to be all that they can be, which is a richly rewarding acknowledgment in its own right. It feeds our own enthusiasm and our endeavours, but it is something that many spouses may not experience first-hand. Those absolute positives that bring many of us to public life are perhaps somewhat diluted in the eyes and in the experiences of our spouses and our families—but they certainly do experience the downs when things are not going so well and perhaps there is criticism or some disenchantment about the work that their loved one is doing in the broader community.

So spouses: I pay a tribute to you all, and none is finer than my own sweetheart, Kate.

My children, Alex and Zoe, are very young. At four and six, they are probably far too young to know what elections are about. But they were there contributing. They were helping daddy do what he had to do and coming to activities. Even if it was just the joy they had being co-drivers in the campaign bus, they were enthusiastic. They are a constant reminder about why we are here—to make sure, for those little people who are going to inherit the country and our legacy from us, that we do our absolute best to ensure that this continues to be the finest country the globe has to offer.

It is that note of optimism that I think the Governor-General drew out very well in his speech. Not only did he acknowledge that it
is a huge responsibility and honour to be involved in the management of our national affairs but he also pointed to the special gifts that our country has and that have been bestowed upon us that we need to nurture and carry forward for future generations. It is that optimism, that world of delicious possibilities for our nation and our peoples, that brings me to public life. That is why, after four elections and some entertaining experiences, the sparkle in my eyes and the fire in my belly are undiminished. We have before us another term of government, the 41st Parliament, to continue to do the good work that was so recognised and rewarded by the electorates on polling day. But that is just the start of it.

My attitude is that was not an expression of love or admiration by the electorate but merely a rehiring of us. We have a job to do and, if we do that job well, we will be encouraged to continue doing it. It is nothing more than that—no instant fondness for a change of political party or people all of a sudden wanting to invite us to their sons’ and daughters’ 21st birthday parties. It is not an expression of fondness in that respect. No, we were elected to continue to work. The election represents our rehiring after some of us, including my colleague at the table, since 1996, continually reapplied ourselves and tried to show that we are handy to have around, that we make a contribution to the community and that those delicious possibilities that are there for all of us can be within reach of our communities. We need to recognise that is what happened, get on with the job and continue to earn that support and repay the commitment that the electorate has made to us by voting for us and to make sure that, on reflection, they see that as a wise decision.

I am fortunate because I live in one of the most delicious parts of this delicious world of opportunities, the Mornington Peninsular. It is a remarkable community. It is a place that offers all of the opportunities that you could hope for. It has the entire range of socioeconomic types and communities and those who visit the Dunkley electorate quickly appreciate the diversity that is there. But for us there are no ‘reserved’ signs up around future opportunities and prospects. Like all communities, we need to turn up, participate and reach out and grasp our share and then some of those delicious opportunities that I mentioned. That is why I guess at the heart of what we are trying to do in the Dunkley electorate is the building of those partnerships among the many hundreds of local citizens who have ideas about how our future could be better as a community, the community organisations and the volunteers who tirelessly put their time and effort into the wellbeing of our citizenry and also the local governments and other people who, quite rightly, have an important role to play in shaping our community, in helping with the discussion about the direction that we should be pursuing and then, frankly, putting their shoulder to the wheel. This needs work and it needs collaborative work, and one of the most practical things I feel I can bring to our electorate is the ability to bring partnerships together through a shared purpose that is in the interests of our community and to get on with the job and get things done. We need the positivity, the passion and the persistence that I refer to so often to help get that done, because opportunities just do not fall into our laps.

The setting, though, as the Governor-General outlined, is a positive one. These are extremely encouraging times. They are not perfect times but they are very encouraging. We look around at what is going on and that provides the context for our work. We have a strong, responsible and disciplined approach to economic management that, of itself, has some benefits, but the products of that eco-
conomic management are what we are working towards: strengthened jobs growth, opportunities for people to pursue their aspirations for the future, an interest rate and inflationary setting that is encouraging of endeavour and not of relying on cash to do work for you, families that can plan for the future with confidence, and acknowledgement that careful economic management provides the scope to invest in other activities and programs that benefit all Australians.

We have seen that in the Strengthening Medicare commitments. That is remarkably significant for my electorate, which is from 45 kilometres at the northern end to a little over 60 kilometres at the southern end away from the CBD of Melbourne. We have a task to not only contend with growing populations, more diverse communities, an ageing population in some sections and, in others, new families arriving in large numbers, but also to attract the skills, the professions and the services that are needed to support that growing demand. The area of health is probably the sharpest end of that challenge. We have a doctor shortage: we need a couple of dozen more doctors to keep pace with the demands of the growing community. So we need to be more clever in the way that we pursue health opportunities and services in our area.

I was pleased that the electorate recognised that, during the election, some of the opponents of the government were almost saying, ‘Don’t enhance Medicare; just leave it the way it is,’ and that there were calls to extend and defend Medicare from people who really wanted a hands-off-Medicare approach. Medicare needed to be reinvigorated. It needed some new tools to make sure we could attract doctors in areas of workforce shortage like our own. We recognise that where there is a shortage of doctors, as there is in my community, we need to provide added incentives to make sure that those most in need of the best that Medicare has to offer can actually obtain those things through increased rebates for bulk-billing for children and Commonwealth concession card holders and through the new safety net.

It has always bemused me that the Labor Party was absolutely critical of the Medicare safety net, yet when Labor introduced co-contributions for pharmaceuticals it introduced a safety net. The logic was clear at that time and the coalition supported it. Some people with chronic illnesses or health episodes that involved huge demands for pharmaceuticals, even with a modest contribution towards those pharmaceuticals, would feel the financial pinch of their condition. That logic seemed to make sense to everybody when it came to pharmaceutical benefits, but when the very same logic was used, recognising the very same set of circumstances and how health conditions can be more demanding on some people than on others, the Labor Party said a safety net was an outrage and a poor decision. It is that kind of intellectually incoherent policy argument that, thankfully, the electorate sees through and recognises that there is inconsistency and some need to think twice about what is being said to them. That kind of logic just does not stand up to any kind of analysis.

Then there is the boosting of aged-care services in my area—an important requirement. We were not only catching up, and have done so on the shortage of residential aged-care beds left to us by the former Labor government, we were actually increasing the number of facilities and services to respond to the growing needs of that target population, and that is an important issue in the Dunkley electorate. The work is crucial in making sure our schools, and the educational experiences that young people have, are actually preparing them for future work or further education and training opportunities. The government’s commitment to improving
standards and introducing a national values framework, to build on the good work of local schools and to increase the support for people trying to make a successful start in their careers, makes a lot of sense to the community that I represent. When we present these kinds of ideas and plans for our community, they are roundly endorsed.

The Scoresby Freeway will stand as a Labor political carcass. As I mentioned earlier, we need to make sure that we are not exporting our brightest people, who might be chasing jobs somewhere else, and we need to have the tools to attract the investment to make sure those delicious possibilities are there for our community. Part of that is adequate transport infrastructure. In the Greater Melbourne area, you look to the north and the west and you see an arterial ring-road driving investment, employment opportunities, improved living standards and housing for people. All we wanted in the south-east and the east was the same thing. Labor had promised it and not delivered it, and that was a particularly significant issue during the election campaign because a toll-free Scoresby Freeway would support future opportunities to our area.

The Labor Party in Victoria is partially right when it says that even a tolled freeway will have some benefits. That is right because there will be a lot of money spent building it and that will generate activity, but what cannot be avoided is the simple, undisputed fact that the imposition of tolls is going to reduce to one-fifth the community benefits of that project. Clearly, that is not in our best interests and we need to continue to make that point.

Further down the peninsula, though, we have to look at how to ensure that the landscape values remain—that the ‘wind in the hair’ experience that the Mornington Peninsula offers is viable and available to future generations. I continue to work on a concept called ‘provincial peninsula’. It is a strategy to promote the region’s quality regional produce. The primary industries in our area represent the viable, economically sustainable face of broadacre farming. We need to make sure that that farming activity pays the bills so that we can keep those broadacre properties that give the peninsula much of its character. That will boost economic opportuni-
ties, enhance the visitor’s experience and also preserve those rural landscape values.

I am very keen on, and have already commenced working on, a one-stop integrated family, relationships, mediation and children’s contact centre, very much in keeping with the discussion paper recently released by the Attorney-General to help strengthen families, promote positive parenting and support relationships pre and post separation.

I am keen to work to secure funding for our community to be the southern solar city under the solar cities initiative that the Howard government has outlined. Photovoltaic solar energy production is something that people immediately recognise as making sense in some of the warmer climates of our country; they are equally valid, and that needs to be demonstrated, in some of the temperate areas of our continent, and I am looking to pursue that in the Dunkley community.

In closing I say that the opportunity to support the community that I have been part of for more than three decades and to support the citizens within it—to assist them, nurture their opportunities and be of service to them—puts a lot of spring in my step. I bounce out of bed every day, excited and optimistic about the opportunity to support my local community. The Prime Minister’s faith in appointing me to the outer ministry is a chance to extend that enthusiasm into supporting our regional neighbours. Two-thirds of the world’s poor people live in the Asia-Pacific region; it is rightly the focus of our aid program. I am very upbeat about making a contribution there, as well as opening up trade through promotion to expand job and economic opportunities for local citizens and local companies here.

Debate (on motion by Mr Abbott) adjourned.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.33 a.m.)—I move:

That the House, at its rising, adjourn until Monday, 29 November, at 12.30 p.m., unless the Speaker or, in the event of the Speaker being unavailable, the Deputy Speaker fixes an alternative day or hour for the meeting.

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.33 a.m.)—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the order of business for the sitting on Monday, 29 November 2004 being as follows, unless otherwise ordered:

(1) Notices and orders of the day, government business (excluding Grievance debate), (to be interrupted at 1.45 p.m. in order that Members’ statements can be called on):

Provided that:

(a) if a division is in progress at the time fixed for interruption, the division shall be completed and the result announced; and

(b) the Speaker shall fix the time for the resumption of debate on any business under discussion and not disposed of at the time of interruption.

(2) Members’ statements (at 1.45 p.m.).

(3) Questions without notice (at 2 p.m.).

(4) Presentation of petitions.

(5) Notices and orders of the day, government business (excluding Grievance debate), for one hour:

Provided that:

(a) if a division is in progress at the time fixed for interruption, the division shall be completed and the result announced; and

(b) the Speaker shall fix the time for the resumption of debate on any business un-
der discussion and not disposed of at the time of interruption.

(6) Grievance debate (to continue for 1 hour and 20 minutes).

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

Question agreed to.

STANDING ORDERS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.34 a.m.)—I move:

That, unless otherwise ordered, the following amendment to the standing orders be made:

Omit Standing order 215 and substitute the following standing order

215 General purpose standing committees

(a) The following general purpose standing committees shall be appointed:

(i) Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs;
(ii) Standing Committee on Health and Ageing;
(iii) Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry;
(iv) Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts;
(v) Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration;
(vi) Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training;
(vii) Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation;
(viii) Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage;
(ix) Standing Committee on Family and Human Services;
(x) Standing Committee on Industry and Resources;
(xi) Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs;
(xii) Standing Committee on Science and Innovation; and
(xiii) Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services.

(b) A committee appointed under paragraph (a) may inquire into and report on any matter referred to it by either the House or a Minister, including any pre-legislation proposal, bill, motion, petition, vote or expenditure, other financial matter, report or paper.

(c) A committee may make any inquiry it wishes to make into annual reports of government departments and authorities and reports of the Auditor-General tabled in the House. The following qualifications shall apply to these inquiries:

(i) Reports shall stand referred to committees under a schedule tabled by the Speaker to record the areas of responsibility of each committee.
(ii) The Speaker shall determine any question about responsibility for a report or part of a report.
(iii) The period during which an inquiry into an annual report may be started by a committee shall end on the day the next annual report of the department or authority is presented to the House.
(iv) If a committee intends to inquire into all or part of a report of the Auditor-General, the committee must notify the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit of its intention, in writing.

(d) Each committee appointed under paragraph (a) shall consist of 10 members: six government and four non-government Members. Each committee may supplement its membership by up to two members for a particular inquiry, with a maximum of one extra government and one extra non-government Member.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Australian Crime Commission

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.34 a.m.)—I move:

(1) That in accordance with section 54 of the Australian Crime Commission Act 2002,
matters relating to the powers and proceedings of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on
the Australian Crime Commission shall be as follows:

(a) That the committee consist of 10 members, 3 Members of the House of Repre-
sentatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 2 Members of the House of Representative
to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips or by any independent
Member, 2 Senators to be nominated by
the Leader of the Government in the
Senate, 2 Senators to be nominated by
the Leader of the Opposition in the
Senate and 1 Senator to be nominated
by any minority group or groups or in-
dependent Senator or independent
Senators.

(b) That every nomination of a member of
the committee be forthwith notified in
writing to the President of the Senate
and the Speaker of the House of Repre-
sentatives.

(c) That the committee elect a Government
member as its chair.

(d) That the committee elect a deputy chair
who shall act as chair of the committee
at any time when the chair is not pre-
sent at a meeting of the committee, and
at any time when the chair and deputy
chair are not present at a meeting of the
committee the members present shall
 elect another member to act as chair at
that meeting.

(e) That, in the event of an equality of vot-
ing, the chair, or the deputy chair when
acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(f) That 3 members of the committee con-
stitute a quorum of the committee, pro-
vided that in a deliberative meeting the
quorum shall include 1 Government
member of either House and 1 non-
Government member of either House.

(g) That the committee have power to ap-
point subcommittees consisting of 3 or
more of its members and to refer to any
subcommittee any matter which the
committee is empowered to examine.

(h) That the committee appoint the chair of
each subcommittee who shall have a
casting vote only and at any time when
the chair of a subcommittee is not pre-
sent at a meeting of the subcommittee
the members of the subcommittee pre-
sent shall elect another member of that
subcommittee to act as chair at that
meeting.

(i) That the quorum of a subcommittee be
2 members of that subcommittee, pro-
vided that in a deliberative meeting the
quorum shall comprise 1 Government
member of either House and 1 non-
Government member of either House.

(j) That members of the committee who
are not members of a subcommittee
may participate in the proceedings of
that subcommittee but shall not vote,
move any motion or be counted for the
purpose of a quorum.

(k) That the committee or any subcommit-
tee have power to call for witnesses to
attend and for documents to be pro-
duced.

(l) That the committee or any subcommit-
tee may conduct proceedings in any
place it sees fit.

(m) That a subcommittee have power to ad-
journ from time to time and to sit dur-
ing any adjournment of the Senate and
the House of Representatives.

(n) That the committee may report from
time to time.

(o) That the committee or any subcommit-
tee have power to consider and make
use of the evidence and records of the
Joint Committees on the National
Crime Authority and the Australian
Crime Commission appointed during
previous Parliaments.

(p) That, in carrying out its duties, the
committee or any subcommittee, ensure
that the operational methods and results
of investigations of law enforcement
agencies, as far as possible, be protected from disclosure where that would be against the public interest.

(q) That the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

(2) That a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

Question agreed to.

Corporations and Financial Services Committee

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.35 a.m.)—I move:

(1) That, in accordance with section 242 of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission Act 2001, matters relating to the powers and proceedings of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services shall be as follows:

(a) That the committee consist of 10 members, 3 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 2 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips or by any independent Member, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 Senator to be nominated by any minority groups or independent Senators.

(b) That every nomination of a member of the committee be forthwith notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

(c) That the committee elect a member nominated by the Government Whips or the Leader of the Government in the Senate as its chair.

(d) That the committee elect a deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee, and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting.

(e) That, in the event of the votes on a question before the committee being equally divided, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(f) That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(g) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine.

(h) That the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only, and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of a subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting.

(i) That the quorum of a subcommittee be 2 members of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall comprise 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(j) That members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the proceedings of that subcommittee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum.

(k) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced.
(l) That the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit.

(m) That a subcommittee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

(n) That the committee may report from time to time.

(o) That the committee have power to consider and make use of the evidence and records of the Joint Committees on Corporations and Financial Services and Corporations and Securities appointed during previous Parliaments.

(p) That the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

(2) That a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

Question agreed to.

Electoral Matters Committee

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.35 a.m.)—I move:

(1) That a Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters be appointed to inquire into and report on matters relating to electoral laws and practices and their administration as may be referred to it by either House of the Parliament or a Minister.

(2) Annual reports of government departments and authorities tabled in the House shall stand referred to the committee for any inquiry the committee may wish to make. Reports shall stand referred to the committee in accordance with a schedule tabled by the Speaker to record the areas of responsibility of each committee, provided that:

(a) any question concerning responsibility for a report or a part of a report shall be determined by the Speaker; and

(b) the period during which an inquiry concerning an annual report may be commenced by a committee shall end on the day on which the next annual report of that Department or authority is presented to the House.

(3) That the committee consist of 10 members, 3 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 2 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips or by any independent Member, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 Senator to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators.

(4) That every nomination of a member of the committee be forthwith notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

(5) That the members of the committee hold office as a joint standing committee until the House of Representatives is dissolved or expires by effluxion of time.

(6) That the committee elect a Government member as its chair.

(7) That the committee elect a deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee, and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting.

(8) That, in the event of an equality of voting, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(9) That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(10) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee...
any matter which the committee is empowered to examine.

(11) That the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of the subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting.

(12) That the quorum of a subcommittee be 2 members of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall comprise 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(13) That members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the proceedings of that subcommittee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum.

(14) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced.

(15) That the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings in any place it sees fit.

(16) That a subcommittee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

(17) That the committee may report from time to time.

(18) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to consider and make use of:

(a) submissions lodged with the Clerk of the Senate in response to public advertisements placed in accordance with the resolution of the Senate of 26 November 1981 relating to a proposed Joint Select Committee on the Electoral System, and

(b) the evidence and records of the Joint Committees on Electoral Reform and Electoral Matters appointed during previous Parliaments.

(19) That the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

(20) That a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

Question agreed to.

**Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee**

**Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.35 a.m.)—** I move:

(1) (a) That a Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade be appointed to consider and report on such matters relating to foreign affairs, defence and trade as may be referred to it by:

(i) either House of the Parliament;
(ii) the Minister for Foreign Affairs;
(iii) the Minister for Defence; or
(iv) the Minister for Trade.

(b) Annual reports of government departments and authorities tabled in the House shall stand referred to the committee for any inquiry the committee may wish to make. Reports shall stand referred to the committee in accordance with a schedule tabled by the Speaker to record the areas of responsibility of each committee, provided that:

(i) any question concerning responsibility for a report or a part of a report shall be determined by the Speaker; and

(ii) the period during which an inquiry concerning an annual report may be commenced by a committee shall end on the day on which the next annual report of that Department or authority is presented to the House.

(2) That the committee consist of 32 members, 12 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 8 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips or by any independent Mem-
ber, 5 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 5 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 2 Senators to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators.

(3) That every nomination of a member of the committee be forthwith notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

(4) That the members of the committee hold office as a joint committee until the House of Representatives is dissolved or expires by effluxion of time.

(5) That the committee elect a Government member as its chair.

(6) That the committee elect a deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting.

(7) That in the event of an equality of voting, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(8) That 6 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(9) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine.

(10) That, in addition to the members appointed pursuant to paragraph (9), the chair and deputy chair of the committee be ex officio members of each subcommittee appointed.

(11) That the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only, and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of the subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting.

(12) That the quorum of a subcommittee be 2 members of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall comprise 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(13) That members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the proceedings of that subcommittee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum.

(14) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced.

(15) That the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit.

(16) That a subcommittee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

(17) That the committee may report from time to time.

(18) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to consider and make use of the evidence and records of the Joint Committees on Foreign Affairs and Defence and Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade appointed during previous Parliaments.

(19) That the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

(20) That a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

Question agreed to.

Migration Committee

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.35 a.m.)—I move:
(1) (a) That a Joint Standing Committee on Migration be appointed to inquire into and report upon:

(i) regulations made or proposed to be made under the Migration Act 1958;

(ii) proposed changes to the Migration Act 1958 and any related acts; and

(iii) such other matters relating to migration as may be referred to it by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

(b) Annual reports of government departments and authorities tabled in the House shall stand referred to the committee for any inquiry the committee may wish to make. Reports shall stand referred to the committee in accordance with a schedule tabled by the Speaker to record the areas of responsibility of each committee, provided that:

(i) any question concerning responsibility for a report or a part of a report shall be determined by the Speaker; and

(ii) the period during which an inquiry concerning an annual report may be commenced by a committee shall end on the day on which the next annual report of that Department or authority is presented to the House.

(2) That the committee consist of 10 members, 3 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 3 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips or by any independent Member, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 1 Senator to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 Senator to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators.

(3) That every nomination of a member of the committee be forthwith notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

(4) That the members of the committee hold office as a joint standing committee until the House of Representatives is dissolved or expires by effluxion of time.

(5) That the committee elect a Government member as its chair.

(6) That the committee elect a deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee, and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting.

(7) That, in the event of an equality of voting, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(8) That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(9) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine.

(10) That the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of the subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting.

(11) That the quorum of a subcommittee be 2 members of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall comprise 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(12) That members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the public proceedings of that subcommit-
tee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum.

(13) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced.

(14) That the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit.

(15) That the committee may report from time to time.

(16) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to consider and make use of the evidence and records of the Joint Committees on Migration Regulations and the Joint Standing Committees on Migration appointed in previous Parliaments.

(17) That the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

(18) That a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

Question agreed to.

National Capital and External Territories Committee

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.36 a.m.)—I move:

(1) That a Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories be appointed to inquire into and report on:

(a) matters coming within the terms of section 5 of the Parliament Act 1974 as may be referred to it by:

(i) either House of the Parliament; or

(ii) the Minister responsible for administering the Parliament Act 1974; or

(iii) the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives;

(b) such other matters relating to the parliamentary zone as may be referred to it by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives;

(c) such amendments to the National Capital Plan as are referred to it by a Minister responsible for administering the Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988;

(d) such other matters relating to the National Capital as may be referred to it by:

(i) either House of the Parliament; or

(ii) the Minister responsible for administering the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988; and

(e) such matters relating to Australia’s territories as may be referred to it by:

(i) either House of the Parliament; or

(ii) the Minister responsible for the administration of the Territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands; the Territory of Christmas Island; the Coral Sea Islands Territory; the Territory of Ashmore and Cartier Islands; the Australian Antarctic Territory, and the Territory of Heard Island and McDonald Islands, and of Commonwealth responsibilities on Norfolk Island.

(2) Annual reports of government departments and authorities tabled in the House shall stand referred to the committee for any inquiry the committee may wish to make. Reports shall stand referred to the committee in accordance with a schedule tabled by the Speaker to record the areas of responsibility of each committee, provided that:

(a) any question concerning responsibility for a report or a part of a report shall be determined by the Speaker; and

(b) the period during which an inquiry concerning an annual report may be commenced by a committee shall end on the day on which the next annual report of that Department or authority is presented to the House.

(3) That the committee consist of 12 members, the Deputy Speaker, 3 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the
Government Whip or Whips, 2 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips or by any independent Member, the Deputy President and Chairman of Committees, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 Senator to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators.

(4) That every nomination of a member of the committee be forthwith notified in writing to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate.

(5) That the members of the committee hold office as a joint standing committee until the House of Representatives is dissolved or expires by effluxion of time.

(6) That the committee elect a Government member as its chair.

(7) That the committee elect a deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee, and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting.

(8) That, in the event of an equality of voting, the chair or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(9) That 3 members of the committee (of whom one is the Deputy President or the Deputy Speaker when matters affecting the parliamentary zone are under consideration) constitute a quorum of the committee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(10) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine.

(11) That the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of the subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting.

(12) That the quorum of a subcommittee be 2 members of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall comprise 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(13) That members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the public proceedings of that subcommittee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum.

(14) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced.

(15) That the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit.

(16) That a subcommittee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

(17) That the committee may report from time to time.

(18) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to consider and make use of the evidence and records of the Joint Standing Committees on the National Capital and External Territories, the Joint Committees on the Australian Capital Territory, the Joint Standing Committees on the New Parliament House, the Joint Standing Committee on the Parliamentary Zone and the Joint Committee on the National Capital appointed during previous Parliaments and of the House of Representatives and Senate Standing Committees on Transport, Communications and Infrastructure when sitting as a joint committee on matters relating to the Australian Capital Territory.

(19) That the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the
standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

(20) That a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

Question agreed to.

Native Title and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Fund Committee

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.37 a.m.)—I move:

(1) That, in accordance with section 205 of the Native Title Act 1993, matters relating to the powers and proceedings of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Native Title and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Fund shall be as follows:

(a) That the committee consist of 10 members, 3 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 2 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips or by any independent Member, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 Senator to be nominated by any minority groups or independent Senators.

(b) That every nomination of a member of the committee be forthwith notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

(c) That the committee elect a Government member as its chair.

(d) That the committee elect a deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee, and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting.

(e) That, in the event of the votes on a question before the committee being equally divided, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(f) That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(g) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine.

(h) That the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only, and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of a subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting.

(i) That the quorum of a subcommittee be 2 members of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall comprise 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(j) That members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the proceedings of that subcommittee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum.

(k) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced.

(l) That the committee have power to examine and report on such annual and related reports as may be referred to it by the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House of Representatives.
(m) That the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit.

(n) That a subcommittee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

(o) That the committee may report from time to time.

(p) That the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

(2) That a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly

Question agreed to.

Treaties Committee

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.37 a.m.)—I move:

(1) That a Joint Standing Committee on Treaties be appointed to inquire into and report upon:

(a) matters arising from treaties and related National Interest Analyses and proposed treaty actions presented or deemed to be presented to the Parliament;

(b) any question relating to a treaty or other international instrument, whether or not negotiated to completion, referred to the committee by:

(i) either House of the Parliament, or

(ii) a Minister; and

(c) such other matters as may be referred to the committee by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and on such conditions as the Minister may prescribe.

(2) That the committee consist of 16 members, 6 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 3 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips or by any independent Member, 3 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 3 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 Senator to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators.

(3) That every nomination of a member of the committee be forthwith notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

(4) That the members of the committee hold office as a joint committee until the House of Representatives is dissolved or expires by effluxion of time.

(5) That the committee elect a Government member as its chair.

(6) That the committee elect a non-Government member as its deputy chair to act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting.

(7) That in the event of an equality of voting, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(8) That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(9) That the committee have power to appoint not more than 3 subcommittees each consisting of 3 or more of its members, and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine.

(10) That, in addition to the members appointed pursuant to paragraph (9), the chair and deputy chair of the committee be ex officio members of each subcommittee appointed.

(11) That the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only, and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of the subcommittee the members of the sub-
committee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting.

(12) That the quorum of a subcommittee be 2 members of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(13) That members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the proceedings of that subcommittee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum.

(14) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced.

(15) That the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit.

(16) That a subcommittee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

(17) That the committee may report from time to time.

(18) That the committee have power to consider and make use of the evidence and records of the Joint Standing Committees on Treaties appointed during previous Parliaments.

(19) That the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

(20) That a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

Question agreed to.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S SPEECH
Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed.

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (11.37 a.m.)—I would like to raise a number of issues in relation to the address-in-reply. I thank the Governor-General for his attendance in this place the other day. I congratulate all the members of parliament who were re-elected and, particularly, the newcomers to this place. Having served in another place, the New South Wales state parliament, for 10 years, I can say with some degree of comparison that this is a more friendly place to be, even though some of last night’s happenings might not have indicated the friendship—

Mr Murphy—Warm, perhaps.

Mr WINDSOR—the warm friendship—that we share. It is great to see people prepared to nominate for the political process and have a go. I think the maiden speeches have reflected very well on all the people that I have heard so far, irrespective of which side of politics they come from. I think what the new members are really saying is that they come from the electorates that they represent and they are proud to be here and represent those people.

I also congratulate the new Speaker on his appointment. Obviously I did not have a vote in the Liberal Party rooms in relation to that but I was hoping that David Hawker would receive the nomination. I think, because of his nature and character, that he will gain the respect of all of us in this chamber. I have a personal regard and respect for him and I wish him well. I also pay my compliments to the former Speaker, the Hon. Neil Andrew. Having served under a number of speakers in two parliaments, I can say without a doubt—and I have said it before in his presence—that in my view he was a very good and, in the main, very fair Speaker. I hope that the new Speaker carries on in that vein.

I would also like to thank the people of New England for my re-election. I was very pleased with the swing towards me that occurred in the election campaign. It was a fairly hard fought campaign. All the other candidates—and I do congratulate them—
were very good in their personal demeanours and their conduct towards each other. It was probably the most friendly campaign at a candidate level that I have had. A lot that was not friendly went on behind walls and doors from time to time, but I congratulate all the candidates that stood and thank the electorate for the endorsement that they gave me.

I think my seat received the highest swing of any seat in Australia. I am very pleased about that and congratulate my campaign committee and the many people who have helped throughout the years, particularly my staff. I do not think people recognise the work that our staff and office people put into our presence in this place. I would like to recognise my staff and thank them for the way they have represented their community. One of the things that I am proudest of about my staff is that they deal with everybody that comes through the door without prejudgment of who is right and who is wrong or of whether people are likely to have voted for me at the last election, and people do not get different treatment if they come from a certain station in life. You cannot buy that; you cannot employ people to do that, it has to be part of their nature. I have been very lucky to have had very caring staff who have been genuinely concerned for the people within the electorate.

Mr Deputy Speaker Wilkie, as you would be aware I spoke last night in the adjournment debate on an issue of alleged bribery in relation to my candidature for re-election in the seat of New England. Only having five minutes last night, I was fairly rushed to get some of the factual detail before the parliament. I would like to complete a few comments on that issue.

I note with interest that in the media this morning some degree of attention was being paid to the players involved in the allegation. I would like to point out, and I am sorry that I did not have the time to do it last night, that a man at the centre of this debate—and I think there are many media people in Tamworth at the moment looking for this gentleman—is a very well regarded businessperson in Tamworth. I refer to Mr Greg Maguire. Greg has been a prime mover in a lot of very positive things in our region. He is a lateral thinker, he is a doer and he has worked very hard in promoting the concept of the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre, which I spoke about last night. I would like to congratulate him on his efforts for the centre, which have drawn together a number of players. In other circumstances, these people probably would not have come together. That is why I spent some time last night talking about the funding and promotion of the equine centre and about the people who were involved on the board as being central to the meeting that took place in Mr Maguire’s office essentially about me but also about the planning and funding arrangements for the centre.

It is my view that Mr Maguire is the victim of an approach from Mr Anderson and Senator Macdonald and that he, like me, was not aware that he was actually contravening, or potentially contravening, the Commonwealth Electoral Act. I would like to place on record my support for Greg Maguire and to say to the media that, even though this man is in the spotlight at the moment because of the structure of the Commonwealth Electoral Act, in my view he has committed no sin. I think it would be a great travesty of justice if the real villains in this case—the ones who are the architects of the message—were allowed to flutter off into the sunset rather than the messenger.

Mr Maguire has delivered a message to me in the company of two other witnesses. I have absolutely no reason to disbelieve Greg Maguire. I have had a lot to do with him over many years and I have a very high regard for
the man. I have every confidence that what he said to the three of us on that particular day, 19 May, was as he understood the meeting that he had had with Senator Macdonald; the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson; and a dark-haired woman, whom the Deputy Prime Minister has now identified as Wendy Armstrong and as being present at that meeting.

There is some conjecture over the date of the meeting between Mr Anderson, Senator Macdonald and Wendy Armstrong, who I believe was there for a portion of that meeting, and Mr Maguire. I would like to spend a little bit of time on that particular issue. There is no denial that that meeting took place. It was my understanding, through the commentary that Mr Maguire was giving to me, that the meeting had taken place the night before. The Deputy Prime Minister has suggested that it took place some nights before the particular date that I nominated in my speech last night.

The Deputy Prime Minister has spent a lot of time in my electorate, particularly during that part of the process. When it became public that I had made some comment about an intermediary approaching me with an inducement, it was quite odd how both the Deputy Prime Minister and Senator Macdonald seemed to drift back into the woodwork in terms of having a role in the election campaign in New England. They drifted off to Kennedy and other places in the Far North, which indicates to me again that they were very well aware of what was actually going on. If the Federal Police were doing their job correctly they would be able to ascertain through a whole range of vehicles the players, the process and the times and dates on which this occurred.

I was interested to hear last night—or it might have been in today’s press—that the dark-haired woman that I referred to and that Greg Maguire referred to, because he could not remember her name, has been identified as Wendy Armstrong. As I am sure all of us know, she does have very dark hair. At that particular time I assumed it was her but I was not certain. I am now certain. I believe, and it could be verified through travel and accommodation records, that they were accommodated at the Quality Powerhouse Hotel and that the meeting took place in the Powerhouse Motorcycle Museum, which is a beautiful building that Greg Maguire has constructed and in which he has his office. I have had many meetings with him there on a whole range of issues. I believe that that meeting took place for something like four or five hours. That is what I was told by Mr Maguire.

I was interested that the Deputy Prime Minister actually mentioned Wendy Armstrong, because I think what we are going to see is a little bit of play in terms of her presence in the room. The Deputy Prime Minister might like to flesh it out in question time today, but my belief is that Wendy Armstrong was in that meeting for some period of time until—

Mr Abbott—Give us your evidence.

Mr WINDSOR—The Federal Police have that evidence. My belief is that Wendy Armstrong was in that meeting for some period of time until Mr Anderson and Senator Macdonald asked her to leave the room. It was after she had left the room that the detail of the deal was discussed. So Mr Anderson should not be running red herrings that a member of staff was in the room. She denies any of the Windsor allegations because she can quite correctly do that: she was there for part of the meeting but she was not there for the portion of the meeting where the arrangement was struck with Mr Maguire to ask me the questions, to see if I was interested in some career outside politics, to ask
me what it would take to get me to vacate the seat. I bring those points of interest to the parliament and note that the Deputy Prime Minister has confirmed that a meeting did take place with those players in a particular room. To give people a great understanding of this matter, I would like to spend a little time on the history of it, because there are some questions about why I did not raise it at the time.

This came about through a conversation I had with a Sunday Telegraph journalist called Tony Vermeer. I was sitting outside on a stool in Tenterfield, when I got a phone call. I was asked, ‘What if there was a hung parliament? What would you do? Have you been offered the Speaker’s job? Would you accept it?’ I said, ‘No and no, I am not interested.’ The Minister for Health and Ageing seems to think that is quite funny. The conversation that developed was about how I had been in a hung parliament before and about the numbers of offers that were made from day one, from the Sunday after I was elected.

Over that period of four years there were offers to join parties, to become a minister and to do a whole range of other things. This general discussion was about some of the things that had happened in those early years. I also said that in 1998 the Prime Minister sent Senator Bill Heffernan to Tamworth on two occasions. I am not condemning Bill Heffernan; I like Bill but I know that some of us in here do not. ‘The bosses ask: “Would you be willing to run as a Liberal in the 1998 election?”’ On those two occasions I thanked him for his interest, said that I was not interested and that if I ever contemplated running for the federal seat I would do it as an Independent, because I believe I can be more faithful to my people.

In the conversation with Tony Vermeer I mentioned that only a few months ago I had been approached by an intermediary who offered me an inducement to vacate the premises. Tony Vermeer wrote an article in the Sunday paper about a hung parliament. There were about three lines in there that mentioned this intermediary and an approach that had taken place some months prior. When the story broke and when people asked, ‘Why wasn’t this mentioned? Why didn’t you do it straightaway?’ I said my view was—as it was in that room with Greg Maguire and the witnesses Stephen Hall and Helen Tickle—that this was an act of political stupidity and desperation. I used an expletive about the introduction by Greg Maguire, who was passing on the message, and he said, ‘Mate, I know, but I have been asked to pass on the message.’

I left that meeting more concerned about the equine centre than Anderson’s and MacDonald’s stupidity, but when I was in a discussion with Tony Vermeer and these issues came up about approaches, inducements et cetera, I mentioned them in passing. When the Labor Party—and, I think, the Liberal Party—referred it to the Electoral Commission and I was asked whether something like that had happened, I was not going to lie and say it had not. The easy way for me would have been—and it would protect Greg Maguire, who is in the spotlight now—to lie about the meeting, but I was not going to lie. I did not like doing it. One of the reasons I have been reluctant to name the names is that there are people who are going to be damaged by this who should not be—and the people who should be damaged will most probably be able to fly away and hide behind the Chinese wall of an intermediary. I do not think that is fair and I do not think that is what this parliament would indicate as fair to an individual.

So I would say to the press: ‘Be fair to Greg Maguire because he is the inadvertent and innocent victim in a process where he
has been put up to delivering a message in full knowledge that the political players could distance themselves from the impact. And that is what is being played out in this particular stadium at the moment.

I would also like to place on record that I do not believe the Prime Minister had any knowledge of this. I would be very surprised. I would support the Prime Minister—and I did at the time. I made the point in an interview on Sky Channel that I did not believe the Prime Minister had any knowledge. I think maybe he did a few days later, because his demeanour about me naming names changed quite dramatically. He called on me to name names and then stopped dramatically.

I am proud that we have a parliament where people can actually raise these issues. This is an issue that will potentially damage some people. It is not about trying to gain political heads, but it is about representing what actually happened. I know the truth; I know what happened. There were witnesses there who know what happened, and I hope that all the players in this will, over the next few days, consider their positions and tell the truth on this matter.

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage) (11.57 a.m.)—When I first spoke in this House three years ago, I made the point that the story of Australia is the story of a thousand communities and that it plays out in both directions that these communities are able to carry on their work because there is a national structure and a national environment which allows them to do so. Australia as a whole and as a country, functions, achieves, thrives and succeeds because of the combination of the work of people at each of the community levels. Almost exactly three years later, in this address-in-reply, I am able to reflect that I believe that the comments I made then are stronger now than they were at that time. The interrelationship between the two levels—the national infrastructure provides the opportunity and the environment for community groups and individuals to carry on their lives—is absolutely critical. It is also critical that there is also a dialogue in the other direction. Australia is the sum of its parts.

In this speech I would like to look at the coming three years and to identify two things which I believe are critical to the health both of my electorate of Flinders and of Australia as a whole. What I would like to do is, firstly, to set out the priority projects in health, in education, in environment, in roads, in jobs and in community for the electorate of Flinders and, secondly, to look at three areas of national focus which I believe are critical and on which I would like to focus in the coming three years—in particular water, employment and national security.

In looking at the electorate of Flinders, I note first of all that we have seen a dramatic drop in unemployment over the last three years and over the last 8½ years. Thousands of families have benefited from the employment which has been generated during the life of the Howard-Costello government, and that means, firstly, the dignity which comes from work and, secondly, the ability for families to meet their own material needs. Those things are fundamental to everything that has happened in Australia and fundamental to the changes in the electorate of Flinders.

In looking at the priority projects on which I wish to work with the community at the environmental level, the area of which I am proudest to see the work of the community, and in which I have been able to play a small role over the last three years, is the progress that has been made in cleaning up Gunnamatta Beach. The Clean Ocean Foun-
dation came to me before I was fortunate enough to be elected to Flinders and talked to me about the problems at Gunnamatta Beach: the fact that 150 gigalitres—150 billion litres—of waste water flows out at Gunnamatta Beach on the southern end of the Mornington Peninsula every year. That water is environmentally destructive, it poses health risks, and it is a waste of a valuable resource. That developed in me a belief that this was a project which needed to be addressed, and it is a problem which has to be addressed also at a national level. The commitment remains absolutely clear: we need to work to close the outfall of Gunnamatta Beach and use that as a model for reuse and recycling of water around Australia. We are working towards the ending of ocean outfalls around Australia by the year 2025, and to achieve that we have an Australian Water Fund.

On that front, we have in place a legitimate, viable plan which involves federal and state cooperation for the reuse of the water which currently travels from Carum Downs from the Eastern Treatment Plant, down the pipe and out at Gunnamatta Beach. That plan involves using that recycled water in the Latrobe Valley, for industrial purposes, in place of the freshwater currently coming from the Thomson, Latrobe and Gippsland systems which is drawing from the rivers and sucking them dry. We put this project to the state last year, and I am very pleased to say that it is a good example of cooperation. There is a lot more to be done, but we have established an Australian Water Fund with $2 billion all up, and $1.6 billion specifically for major national water infrastructure projects. I urge the state government to make the Eastern Treatment Plant to the Latrobe Valley water recycling project a priority. In turn, I would commit to work with them to achieve a great outcome for the Thomson-Latrobe-Gippsland area, for Gunnamatta Beach and for Melbourne as a whole. It would be a tremendous example and a tremendous way forward.

A second environmental project that I want to work on is to make sure that we protect Port Phillip Bay. There are proposals ahead, there are serious doubts and questions about the dredging and the spoil, and we have to protect the bay. A third project is a very simple one, and that is the completion of the Bahnarring to Bittern bike track. That has a big impact for residents in Balnarring and Bittern, and it is part of a broader approach to continue the bike track for the Mornington Peninsula. I want to commit to this project, and we have already offered federal resources to the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council through either Work for the Dole or Green Corps. It would be a great example of cooperation between the council, the community and the federal government. I believe that the go-ahead is there, and I would be delighted to assist in any way possible.

At Point Nepean, all of the land will be preserved as parkland, which is a tremendous outcome—and there is more to be done. This last weekend we saw the opening of Police Point as a council park, as a result of great work from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council. Under the Point Nepean Community Trust the land is preserved and the buildings are used for marine education. There is a total of $25 million of Commonwealth and philanthropic funding to be used for marine education, for the creation of a national centre for marine and coastal conservation, for heritage use—Indigenous and European—and for respite care for children and for the families of disabled children. That is a tremendous example of community use, with no commercial development, and it will survive us all so that, 100 years from now, we will have a combination of marine biology
and community use in an area which is absolutely beautiful.

I also urge the state government to accept, in a cooperative way, the 204 hectares, to be included in the national park, which we have offered to transfer to them today. That offer was made prior to the last federal election, it remains on the table, and we look forward to their accepting it. It comes with a Commonwealth commitment to clean up any unexploded ordnance, and it comes with a Commonwealth commitment to contribute an additional $2 million for revegetation and land remediation.

On the Western Port site, a very important project is to protect against the silting of Western Port with run-off which affects the seagrass, which in turn affects the lower level marine biology of Western Port, which in turn affects the higher level marine biology. That is a major project on which the cooperation of federal, state and local catchment management authorities is needed.

Turning from the environment, I want to look at some of the health challenges within the electorate of Flinders. One of the challenges has been to bring in more doctors. It is an outer metropolitan area and a rural and regional area. What we have done so far is to have the area included in the outer metropolitan zone, which provides an incentive for doctors to come to the area and provides additional incentives for bulk-billing doctors. But we do need more doctors. We have had new doctors come to Lang Lang, Pearcedale, Somerville, Koo Wee Rup and Sorrento, but part of my task is to work with the local doctors and the local community to bring more doctors to Hastings and Rosebud. We are already working on getting doctors for both of those towns, but there is no doubt that it is a challenge. I would like to congratulate Dr Peter Keilor from Hastings, who is working on bringing in additional doctors from overseas to help bolster the practice and to help provide opportunities for local residents.

We have had a record number of aged care places either opened or allocated—over 600—but more are needed, particularly in the town of Koo Wee Rup. The Koo Wee Rup Health Service, under Terrona Ramsay and Garry King, are keen to have additional aged care places but, unfortunately, because of the structure they have of being a state owned enterprise, the state will not allow them to apply for Commonwealth funded beds. I urge the state to allow them to apply for Commonwealth funded beds, and I will do everything I can to support and encourage that process.

In addition, we need to work to get doctors in Tooradin and the coastal villages and to get a pharmacy or, at the very least, a pharmacy outlet in Tooradin. We are fortunate that we have a pharmacy opening in Flinders. That is a good result. The local community, particularly the folks from the newsagency, worked very well on that and it was a very good outcome for the town.

Another health objective that we have for the electorate is to work towards additional child-care places for a common aged, child-care and maternal care facility in Koo Wee Rup. That would be a great outcome for a town which is growing and which has people who represent the full socioeconomic spectrum. That is part of my agenda for the coming three years.

In talking about health objectives, there is one last thing that I want to mention, and that is protecting Warley Hospital. Warley Hospital is a bush nursing hospital on Phillip Island. It has serviced the people of Bass Coast for decades in a tremendous way. The hospital is under threat. It receives over $1.5 million from the federal government to assist with aged care places and it has an additional $1.5 million per annum pledge from the fed-
eral government. But, unfortunately, it receives a very minor amount—just over $100,000 a year—from the state government. Its emergency services, which service people from throughout Victoria, are under threat. We need to work on that front. The state needs to commit additional funding. If it brings it up to just a 10th of the annual funding that the Commonwealth provides, or has pledged to provide, for Warley, that would guarantee the future of Warley Hospital’s emergency services.

At the community level, there are some simple things that we need. Both Rosebud and Phillip Island need an aquatic centre. One of my commitments is to work in cooperation with the local community, the local council and the state towards an aquatic centre for Rosebud and Phillip Island. I am working on both of those fronts. I cannot guarantee these projects, because ultimately they are locally determined, but I can commit and guarantee to fight for them in the same way that we did for a park at Point Nepean and in the same way that we did three years ago to achieve the same outcomes across the electorate. Other community facilities that I would like to work towards are a shared community facility in Safety Beach and the same in Red Hill. I believe those facilities are worthwhile projects, and I commit to work and fight with the local community to achieve them.

In terms of additional community services, I think it is very important that we work towards the Mornington Peninsula being included in the metropolitan transit zone. It is again something which is decided at the state level, but when I came into office I committed to try to fight for issues irrespective of whether they were federal, state or local, because the last thing that people want to hear is some excuse. So it is my obligation and commitment to fight towards having the Mornington Peninsula included in the metropolitan zone for public transport. Similarly, I commit to work towards additional police presence and a police station in Somerville. It is my long-term commitment to fight, to work, to convince, to cajole and to hopefully be successful on that front.

With regard to education within the electorate of Flinders, I want to focus on the idea of marine education. We have already had almost $10 million—$9.7 million—pledged for marine education and the creation of a national centre for marine and coastal conservation at Point Nepean. That will help students from throughout the Mornington Peninsula—primary, secondary and tertiary. I think that will be an outstanding addition to the educational life and the marine research capabilities not only of the peninsula but also of Victoria and Australia as a whole.

The other great educational task is the completion of the Somerville Secondary College. There is already over $2 million of Commonwealth funding pledged to this project. It is unfortunately a project that has been delayed by the state for a year—to 2006. We must get the project built but it must be done in a design which is acceptable to the community. We had a magnificent design which has been thrown out by the state. That design was acceptable to the community and it was path breaking. I would urge the state authorities to return to the original design, not to the 1960s concrete cinder block option which is now being proposed. I think that is a disappointment for everybody.

Finally, on the local front, there is a series of road projects that we need to work on. An upgrade to the Bentons Road intersection, with both the Moorooduc Highway and the Nepean Highway, is an important project. In addition to that, there is Commonwealth funding currently going in to upgrade Jetty Road in Rosebud, Melbourne Road through Rye and Red Hill Road—a project which, for
the people of the Hinterland of the Mornington Peninsula, is extremely important. I would also like to work towards making sure that we have duplication of the Bass Coast Highway throughout the Gippsland and Bass Coast areas.

Those are some of the critical projects. The last project, ensuring that the Oberon submarine tourist attraction on the Mornington Peninsula is completed, is about jobs. There have been many impediments, but there is a new chairperson to assist the Oberon association, a wonderful community group, and that is a great step forward. I believe this project will be completed and will become an iconic Australian project. I am very pleased to support all of those projects and other projects in the electorate of Flinders. What is great is that they come from people of the community.

At the federal level, my commitment over the next three years is to work towards the National Water Commission with the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell. I believe this is part of a recognition of our generational responsibility as a country. We have a 30-year responsibility to prepare Australia for the coming environmental challenges, none of them greater than water. What we have here is an enormous step towards establishing the infrastructure needs. It is not the solution, but it is a very important step. I believe that working towards the reuse of our grey water is extremely important. Mr Deputy Speaker Wilkie, I know from our previous discussions that this is a project you are personally committed to.

Similarly, I have a personal passion and commitment towards mature age employment, which I have inherited from working with my friend and neighbour the member for Dunkley. Particularly in our electorates, whose populations are older than the average Australian population, mature age employment is a great task and it is one on which we have to work and focus as a country. Whether it is projects such as the Green Reserve project or deeper, stronger projects, we have a great deal of work to do on that front. It is a national project but one which has an impact specifically on the electorate of Flinders and one on which I propose to spend a considerable amount of time over the coming three years.

In closing, the third national issue I want to mention is security. We have to recognise that our security environment is different in that there is now a group of people who are capable of acting with no compunction whatsoever in terms of the human consequences of terror activity. We have to galvanise ourselves and recognise that there is a task. But I want to lay this on the table: that task has to involve not just the defensive work but also the proactive work of education, development assistance, intelligence, security and democratisation—working to encourage more fully functioning societies so that ordinary people in areas where terrorism takes root have a stake in the outcomes for their country. If they have that, then the breeding grounds for terrorism are lessened. I think that is extremely important. I thank the House for the opportunity. (Time expired)

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (12.18 p.m.)—Mr Deputy Speaker Wilkie, I congratulate you on your re-election as member for Swan, an electorate you are very dedicated to, and on your re-election to the Speaker’s panel. I also congratulate you on being allowed to again sit beside me in this chamber as my benchmate, I think for the third time!

On Tuesday, when I was sworn in as a member of this parliament, like many other members I swore an oath on the Christian Bible. Like many other members of this par-
I consider myself to be a Christian. Like many members of this parliament, and like the great majority of Australians who also consider themselves to be Christians, I am not a regular churchgoer. I attend church services as well as celebrations such as baptisms and weddings. I also attend occasions at Buddhist temples and Islamic mosques in my electorate. Like the great majority of Australians, when it comes to filling in my census form I indicate a Christian religion—in my case, Roman Catholicism.

But these days religion is no longer what it used to be. There was a time when, among a group of friends, you would agree not to talk about two things: politics and religion. Too many broken friendships and the occasional broken nose made those subjects taboo among friends. That is not to say that religion and politics were not connected. It was always accepted that Labor Party branch meetings were held after mass on Sundays, and the Church of England, as it was then known, was referred to as ‘the Liberal Party at prayer’. The ‘them and us’ of politics and religion were two opposing teams.

Thankfully, much of the nonsense of those religious divides is behind us. Only in places like Northern Ireland does that sectarian stupidity continue to exist. But in its place there has emerged an equally poisonous split. Instead of a population which broadly defines itself as Christian and maintains a broad set of values, we now have groups which claim to hold the copyright to the Christian label and assert that they alone are the arbiters of so-called Christian values.

When we had two competing groups, a level of tolerance was necessary. You could agree to disagree or, as I said earlier, you could agree not to discuss religion at all. But now that we appear to have privatised Christianity and to have issued licences for some groups to have the exclusive right to call themselves Christians, we now have a split between those insiders and the great majority who may call themselves Christian but do not have the registered trademark and so cannot really call themselves Christians.

That would be fair enough if all it meant was that those monopoly insider Christians went off on their own and did not bother the rest of us. But when those insider Christians enter the world of politics then we must consider their message in a different way. It is one thing to lay down the rules for the card-carrying members of the church, but it is something else when they want to apply the same rules to every citizen in the country, and this is where their message gets mixed up. For the insiders, Australia is a Christian country because the majority of its citizens describe themselves as Christians. But do those citizens describe themselves as Christians because they follow certain teachings? I do not think so. They describe themselves as Christians in a very general sense. They celebrate Christmas and observe Easter—if only by taking a holiday—and they think of themselves as Christians.

For those insiders to lay claim to this silent majority and assume that their so-called Christian values are the norm is false. It would be the same as assuming that the great majority of women who describe themselves as Catholic—as I do—follow the church’s teachings on birth control. It is equally false for similar groups to project what they would call ‘family values’ onto the whole population. As a society we have many shared values. We take those values from many sources, and many of those values are drawn from or are the same as what some would describe as Christian values. But in the past 200 years Christian values have been used to justify everything from slavery to genocide.

The biggest mistake we could make, however, would be to assume that non-
Christians, and the Christians of convenience as well, exist in a value-free world, a moral 
vacuum. In a recent address the Catholic 
Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, 
spoke of this as secular democracy and ad-
vocated an alternative Christian democracy 
which he called ‘democratic personalism’. 
Pell’s democratic personalism is his response 
to secular or religious humanism. But you 
could hardly describe democratic humanism 
as value free. In fact, it was the humanist 
defiance of religion and secular authority 
that gave birth to democracy and installed 
humanist values in the Universal Declaration 
of Human Rights. Cardinal Pell asks:
Does democracy need assisted reproductive tech-
nology ... and embryonic stem cell research? ... 
What would democracy look like if you took 
some of these things out of the picture? Would it 
cease to be democracy? Or would it actually be-
come more democratic?
I might ask Cardinal Pell if he believes these 
issues are not properly issues to be deter-
mined by us, as the elected representatives of 
the people of Australia. Or are they to be 
handed over to the self-appointed moral 
guardians of our society? And can those 
moral guardians speak with the voice of that 
great majority of nominal Christians?
I have greater faith in our process of de-
mocracy to ensure that the will of the Aus-
tralian people is reflected in their parliamentary 
representatives, so I welcome the entry of 
political parties like Family First. But let us 
get one thing clear right from the start: it 
might be a good marketing gimmick—a 
catchy name, something that you cannot ar-
gue with—but it does not give you a monop-
oloy on family policies. And when the party 
itself has such close affiliations with the As-
semblies of God church it cannot claim to 
broadly represent the interests of Australian 
families. Even the ‘Family First’ name was 
pinched from the New South Wales govern-
ment’s Department of Community Ser-
VICES—but then the name ‘One Nation’ was a 
Keating government program before it was 
ripped off.

As I have said, I welcome the entry of the 
Family First party, and it is fair for that party 
to set out its policies and to demand family 
impact statements, although I would like to 
ask whose family those impact statements 
are being aimed at. Families come in all 
shapes and sizes, not to mention colours, and 
even policies designed to be friendly to most 
families can discriminate against others. 
What concerns me most is that one group 
can claim to represent all families and to 
have a set of family values which fits all 
shapes and sizes. The reality is that family 
policies need to be tailored to address prob-
lems faced by individual families and that 
requires a broad approach not a neat pre-
scription taken off the shelf from another 
country or culture.

Take together the so-called moral and 
family issues. These and other areas of pol-
icy cannot be allowed to become the exclu-
sive property of the religious right. We can-
not accept the rewriting of history to suggest 
that the whole world fell apart following the 
introduction of the pill or rock-and-roll or 
Hollywood movies. We cannot accept that 
only the church can set moral standards, and 
we cannot accept parties with a narrow con-
cept of families claiming to represent the 
values of all families. That great majority of 
Australians who are not among the insiders 
cannot be dismissed as immoral and anti-
Christian. They are no more or less moral 
than those insiders. They have no less right 
to participate in the law making of this great 
country, and rather than accept the moral 
values of others they have the right to deter-
mine policy on moral issues in a rational 
way.

If I can borrow another political slogan or 
two, it is time to fight back. Instead of sur-
rendering our principles, it is time to stake our own claims to these areas of policy. For Labor members, that is a matter of framing our policies on the basis of the moral values that underpin them. That basis includes not only Christian values but also those of other religions, as well as humanist values. The principles and values that influence Labor policy were not formed in a moral vacuum but over time have been drawn from a range of influences. Nor are they the product of an elite few. Labor has always seen itself as a mass party, drawing membership and policy from the broader community. Labor is not owned by any sectional interest or limited by allegiance to one religious faith. As a secular party, it embraces all religious denominations. On issues where its elected representatives may have differences based on matters of conscience, members are free to vote according to their own views.

The emergence of religious parties or religious factions within parties poses a major problem for those who believe in a secular democracy. The humanist values of tolerance and respect for different religious views makes the religious right immune from criticism. The principle that the state should not interfere in religious matters places religious commentators out of bounds from lay critics. But the religious right has taken advantage of that immunity to enter public debate on a range of issues without fear of any fair public assessment of its position. As secular political parties have found, when you step into the political ring there is no quarter given or asked. But where do Christian or family values fit in a charter of budget honesty? When the religious right declares that it stands for those values, where are the cries of, ‘Where is the money coming from?’

It is interesting to note that following the re-election of the born-again Republican George Bush in the United States many people in the Democratic Party there are asking the same questions. A party founded on the principle of separation of church and state now finds this fundamental concept under threat. An expected outcome of the US election is that Antonin Scalia will be appointed as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Scalia’s views can be summed up in a speech he made three years ago in which he defined the state as Saint Paul defined it:

... the core of his message is that government ... derives its moral authority from God.

According to Scalia, this represents the consensus of Western thought until very recent times. He went on to say that the consensus has been upset by the emergence of democracy. I would have thought that the idea of the divine right of kings went out 200 years ago but it is obviously very much alive in the born-again Republican Party in the United States. Scalia’s views also have a lot in common with the views of Cardinal Pell, which I quoted earlier.

These views represent more than harmless statements by religious leaders. They are a call to arms to destroy secular democracy; the democracy that we speak of in a hand over the heart manner when we consider our most precious institution and the freedom that we possess as individuals to determine our individual and collective future. And we should not forget the freedom to practice the religion of our choice, because it is the separation of church and state that guarantees these freedoms.

Cardinal Pell asks this question:

Does democracy need assisted reproductive technology ... and embryonic stem cell research? ... Would it cease to be democracy? Or would it actually become more democratic?

The answer to that should be crystal clear. How can a society which gives up its right to decide on these issues be more democratic? But where was the criticism of such an anti-democratic statement? What are we afraid
of—the fires of inquisition? But you will not hear a word of criticism on talkback radio. No matter how anti-democratic the statements are, you will not hear a word of ridicule. At the same time, commentators regularly accuse so-called left wing teacher unions of preaching godless humanist values or elites are accused of being responsible for the assumed decline of civilised society. Only when the religious right is challenged to back up its claims, only when it is subject to the same criticism and ridicule that others face, will we have a fair political fight. It is time to take off the gloves and take the fight to those who hide behind religion.

But more importantly it is time for the political supporters of secular democracy to get off the soapbox and into the pulpit. It is time to preach the values of secular democracy, the values of Western and Eastern civilisation, the values of our Indigenous Australians, the values of religions and also the values of humanism. These values do not exclude meeting personal spiritual needs or social needs. They are not godless values; they are not artificial values. They are the values on which our society has been built. They are values that exist in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They exist in our Constitution. They are the values that exist in our Australian culture: the ideal of a fair go, of helping your mates, of supporting and giving aid to each other in times of disaster. These values are not chiselled in tablets of stone. I doubt that they exist in a single book. But they are recognisable as Australian values just the same.

The challenge for political parties in a secular democracy is to embrace these Australian values and to develop policies that reflect the values we all share. We have a rich and diverse culture and not all values are shared, but the values of tolerance and a fair go make us a successful and peaceful society. As centre left politicians struggle to come to terms with the forces of the Christian right, we must look closely at what our values are. We must develop confidence in our understanding of Australian society. We must project what we stand for against a backdrop of what we understand to be the values of Australian society. In that way we can better represent our society and provide true democratic government for our nation and for the Australian people.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wilkie)—Order! Before I call the honourable member for Kingston, I remind honourable members that this is his first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Mr RICHARDSON (Kingston) (12.36 p.m.)—I stand before you all today as a member of the 41st Parliament with a respect for and acknowledgment of those honourable members around me, especially within the Liberal-National coalition. I take this opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker Wilkie, to congratulate you and the other office-bearers in this House on your election. The recent federal election was not about Kym Richardson in the marginal seat of Kingston but, more importantly, about returning the Howard government to its rightful position to govern this magnificent land we call Australia. The faith shown in me by the residents within the Kingston electorate to represent the southern suburbs of Adelaide is a privilege and an honour, and I will not let them down.

They have voted for me to be a part of an experienced team led by the Prime Minister, John Howard, who has the integrity and courage to do what is right by the country and whose record economic growth since 1996 is unprecedented. On Tuesday, the Governor-General reported:

Australia has one of the strongest performing economies in the world. This is no accident. The government’s economic reforms have contributed
to significant increases in productivity. As a result, Australians have enjoyed solid growth, more jobs, falling unemployment, real wage increases, low inflation and interest rates...

The Prime Minister has been ably assisted in this and many other areas by significant support and direction from the Treasurer, Peter Costello. The government has been extremely fortunate—and will continue to be so—in having the support of the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, the front-bench and, if I may be parochial, in particular the South Australian contingent of Senator Nick Minchin, Mr Alexander Downer, Senator Robert Hill and Senator Amanda Vanstone. Yes, there are some areas which need addressing, but at the same time we should look also at the many and numerous achievements of the coalition government. It is for this reason that the majority of Australians in the recent election entrusted their support to the coalition members seated around me.

The Kingston voters and others who voted for members on this side of the House said: ‘Please represent us without fear or favour, from all walks of life, without prejudice for our nationality, the young, the old, the poor, business owners and industry, families and children, with a significant voice for our area.’ The voters have sent a clear message to continue to show the government’s prowess in leading, protecting, building and securing Australia’s future.

The Kingston electorate is positioned within the southern suburbs of Adelaide, with its northern border suburb of Hallett Cove incorporating the renowned conservation park, walking trails, and the cliff and foreshore cove areas. It extends east across to the suburb of Happy Valley, where our two boys attended the local primary school. It then runs parallel with the hills and along the coastline, taking in numerous excellent suburbs en route to the southernmost end incorporating Sellicks Beach on the coast and east to Willunga and McLaren Flat. It is one of the most diverse electorates, with a magnificent coastline and some of the best beaches in the state, encompassing agriculture and the winemakers and growers of the McLaren Vale region—renowned within the state, nationally and internationally—and the Fleurieu Peninsula incorporating the arts and tourism.

Many new estates are being developed, enabling young couples and families to achieve their dream of living in and owning their own home. There are small, medium and large businesses and industries which have provided the residents of the southern area with employment. There also exist opportunities for vision and an abundance of apprenticeships for young people. With the international setback for Mitsubishi affecting Lonsdale, the workers and their families were relieved by the cooperation shown between the South Australian state government and, in particular, the Commonwealth government with $45 million in funding from the structural adjustment fund. This will support and encourage local companies to expand and businesses from interstate to relocate to South Australia. A local company in Lonsdale, Fibrelogic, recently received $5.27 million under this program, which will allow its CEO to employ primarily redundant Mitsubishi workers in approximately 125 jobs and provide other benefits to local businesses.

The Kingston electorate is also unique in that low-, middle- and high-income earners are scattered throughout each and every suburb. It is acknowledged as being a safe place to live, work and do business. I have a true passion for the southern area, having lived and worked locally there for over 18 years. I intend to provide security and direction for the south by keeping a watchful eye on environment and heritage, coastal protection,
drugs and crime in the community. The recent initiative of the government to establish 24 Australian technical colleges, which will provide students with industry endorsed training to equip them for a career in the traditional trades, again shows the vision and opportunities this government is intending to provide. I look forward to lobbying Minister Hardgrave and fighting, possibly along with many of my other colleagues, for a technical college to be built in the southern area of Adelaide.

In the suburb of Aldinga and the surrounding area there is a real need to have additional policing numbers and a 24-hour policing service along with a second primary school and a high or independent school in the very near future. The same area requires an upgrade of its public transportation system, with perhaps an extension of the railway line from the Noarlunga interchange or a bus-monorail system to be purposely built to service the fast-growing population within the Seaford, Seaford Rise, Aldinga and Sellicks Beach areas. I will promote these and other concerns and issues of the electorate both locally and nationally.

I will be pushing for stronger legislation to protect children from predators involved in Internet child pornography and child sex abuse. In my former role as a police officer, I saw first-hand the unnecessary loss of young people’s lives on our roads, and I support moves to raise the driving licence age and to incorporate driver and passenger education within schools. This could also include a reduction in the engine capacity for young, inexperienced drivers. Along with my colleagues I intend to review such things as the infrastructure required for an ageing population, early intervention programs, the shortage of doctors in the southern area, essential child-care centres—including appropriate funding and incomes—and pensions and support payments.

We are fortunate within this electorate to have four Returned Services League clubs—McLaren Vale, Morphett Vale, Port Noarlunga/Christies Beach and Willunga. Now, more than ever, all Australians must take up the torch of remembrance and support those veterans and widows, to ensure the deeds of this generation and the generations that follow are honoured and remembered for all time.

The recent work being done by the Willunga Land Care Group and Green Corps is continuing to make a difference by revegetating and preventing further harm to local coastal areas and the hills area. I would also like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional land owners within the Kingston electorate—the Kuarna people. I admire the work of their elders and will provide assistance where I can.

I also acknowledge the commitment and service that both the City of Onkaparinga and the City of Marion deliver for our area. We have many child-care centres, kindergartens, primary and high schools and independent and Catholic schools, whose teachers and principals provide leadership and vital teaching for our young people during their most important years. These educators help our young children, enhancing their abilities and supporting their aspirations. Their service is recognised by me, by parents and by many others throughout the southern area. School communities within Kingston have enthusiastically welcomed the government’s recent announcement to provide access to direct funding for local schools’ infrastructure projects through an additional $1 billion commitment over the next four years.

To the voters who supported me, I will be a visible and accessible local federal member. To those who did not support me, I will work tirelessly to gain your confidence over
the next three years by bringing benefits to our whole community.

I bring life experience to the House with a realistic commonsense approach from 28 years of experience within the South Australian Police Force. I acknowledge the many and varied friends I made throughout my time within the force. I recommend it to any person contemplating a career with a difference and who wants to make a difference. My career included 13 years in the elite Star Force (Special Tasks and Rescue) where I was a sniper marksman, team operative and supervisor, search and rescue member, helicopter air crewman, physical training instructor and undertook close quarter protection roles for VIPs and royalty and antiterrorist training. I also bring to the service of my electorate experiences and roles within the Community Programs Section as a police youth officer, a Neighbourhood Watch police coordinator, a business liaison officer, in special operations and planning positions and through owning and operating my own Australian Rules Football accredited player manager/agent business.

As a football coach in and around the southern suburbs for the last 16 years with primary school teams, the Happy Valley Under 16s, A-grade teams in Southern League Football Association and the Glenelg Under 17s in the South Australian National Football League, I have provided advice and guidance and have counselled and motivated young people, young men, and made many friends of the families of these sporting persons.

I would not be standing before you today without the good fortune of meeting my loving wife, Karin, to whom I have been married for 24 years. Karin deserves the right to share this honoured position I now find myself in. She has always been there and has supported me through my own Australian Rules football playing and coaching days, which number many years, along with the shiftwork and the many trials a marriage and family bring. In our two sons, Jayce, now 20, and Matt, 19, again we are blessed.

My entry into the political arena would not have been possible if it were not for the endorsement of the members and senior executive of the South Australian Liberal Party. I will always remember their vision and belief in me. There are a number of key people for whom I wish to record my love, thanks and appreciation. Firstly to my mum, Maureen Noblet, re-married in 1978 to the late Gordon Noblet—I will always admire her strength and courage in raising three children under 18 in difficult circumstances.

I pay tribute to a South Australian Liberal State MP, Robert Brokenshire, and his family. He was the person who first spoke to me, some five years ago now, regarding a political career at the state or federal level. At first I declined and then 18 months ago I said ‘yes’. I lost a lot of hair during the campaign. From that time on, Robert mentored, encouraged, harassed—in the proper sense—and continually motivated me to win the honour of representing the Kingston electorate. I will be forever grateful to him, along with John Gunn, my campaign manager, Kaye Gaskin, Senator Grant Chapman, Wayne Mathew MP, Nathan Robinson, Sharon Nash and an unbelievable number of helpers and volunteers throughout the entire campaign and on polling day. To my mate Chris Freckleton and to Susan Jeanes and Graham Jaeschke, the state Liberal Party director—thanks for your guidance.

I previously mentioned volunteers who helped me during the campaign. I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the overwhelming number of individual volunteers, volunteer organisations and volunteers within incorporated bodies who help the community. Whether they provide assistance
directly to those in need or are associated with welfare groups, churches, the State Emergency Service, the Country Fire Service, Rotary, Lions, Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Noarlunga Volunteer Transport Board, Encounter Schoolies Volunteers, St. John’s, surf life saving clubs, Meals on Wheels or community groups, just to name a few—the list is endless—these people enrich and sustain our community not only throughout the Kingston electorate but in every electorate, every state and throughout Australia and overseas. You and I and the entire population should continually praise and recognise the work that is done, no matter how small or how large the commitment a volunteer makes, to ensure the outcome or aim of the person or group is achieved—for no reward or favour. We live in a very lucky country. Do not wait until National Volunteers’ Day to acknowledge the person next to you if she or he is one of these devoted people within your community.

To the residents of the southern suburbs of Adelaide in the Kingston electorate, I intend not to let the volunteers down. To those who supported me and to those who I intend to gain the confidence of, I will not let you down. I thank honourable members for the respect shown in listening to me today and for their representation of their electorates. I thank them also for their roles in the bigger picture of making Australia the most envied place in which to live, work, play and do business.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Ms HALL (Shortland) (12.53 p.m.)—I join with members on the other side of the House in congratulating the member for Kingston on his first speech. I find one of the really interesting aspects of a new parliament is listening to the new members give their first speeches and hearing about their diverse backgrounds and hearing them set out their hopes and aspirations for their time in parliament. Mr Deputy Speaker Hatton, I congratulate you on your elevation to the Speaker’s panel and I look forward to making many a speech with you sitting in the chair. Along with that, I ask that you pass on my congratulations to the Speaker. I put on record in the House my congratulations on his election as Speaker and also my congratulations to the deputy speakers. I promise to enthral them with my speeches during the life of this parliament and I am sure you will all do a wonderful job.

At the start of the parliament and after being re-elected, I think it is very important to thank the people who put you here. I thank the people of Shortland for their support. I really appreciate the trust that they have placed in me and I feel extremely honoured to support them in this parliament. I would like to thank my campaign team, particularly Don and Maggie Bowman, John Goverd, Paul Daly, Kevin McFadden and Bob Henderson, for the fine work that they did on my behalf during the election. I would like to thank my campaign director, the Hon. Peter Morris, for the time and hours that he put in and I would also like to thank my dedicated, wonderful staff, who put up with a lot from me—there is nothing that is too much trouble for them. I thank Kay, Jan, Chris, Clayton and Vicki for the many hours that they have put in at the office and for being prepared to do much more than they are asked. I thank my family for their support and I also thank my husband, Lindsay, whom yesterday the member for Chifley called ‘a saint’. I do not quite go along with that, but I thank him for the work that he puts into my campaigns and for the support that he gives me when I represent my constituents in this parliament. And I congratulate all the new members on their election and returning members on their re-election.
I would like to use this opportunity to remind the government that it has an obligation to govern for all Australians. That obligation extends to the people of Shortland electorate and does not stop with Liberal held electorates, marginal electorates—particularly those marginal Liberal electorates—or the government’s masters in big business. The Howard government has made an art of throwing money at marginal electorates, particularly marginal Liberal electorates, whilst totally ignoring similar needs in electorates such as Shortland. Over the time that I have been in this parliament, I have on many occasions been extremely disappointed with the response to the needs of the people of Shortland and the government’s failure to take into account issues that are extremely important to them.

One of the first acts of the Howard government in 1996 was to close the Medicare office at Belmont, which is in the heart of the Shortland electorate. Anyone who knows anything about Shortland would be very aware that it is quite spread out, has an elderly population, one Medicare office and one just outside the electorate that a number of Shortland residents use. I have made numerous representations to various health ministers in my time in this parliament and those representations have been ignored. I have submitted petitions, along with the previous member for Shortland, the Hon. Peter Morris, with in excess of 20,000 signatures, yet the government has chosen to ignore them.

During the last federal election campaign, we on this side of the House promised to reopen that Medicare office if elected to government. I call on the government now to listen to the people of Shortland and reopen that office. It is interesting that, during the election campaign, the government made a promise to open a new Medicare office in Tuggerah in the Dobell electorate whilst totally ignoring the people of Shortland. It is interesting that that Medicare office in Belmont was a busy office and the government chose to close it whilst leaving offices open in other areas that did not have the same workload.

Another issue that I would like to bring to the attention of the House is the Northlakes Family Centre, which is situated near Lake Munmorah. The Northlakes Family Centre provides a vital service to a very disadvantaged community. It actually helps some families in the area to survive. It has struggled for money. It has put in for funding from the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and been knocked back. The funding it has received has been through DOCS and Family First in New South Wales and it has just managed to keep its head above water. If that centre closes, people living in isolated communities and people who do not have family support or the support that they need will be severely disadvantaged.

It is interesting that, during the federal election, the government gave $135,000 to Warnervale for a family and community centre there whilst at the same time it rejected funding for the Northern Lakes Family Centre. I do not think that is good enough. I think that the people of Lake Munmorah and the surrounding areas deserve the support of the government. I return to my first statement that government must govern for all Australians, not just a few.

During the election campaign, the Labor Party promised to give money to the Energy Australia Stadium, a stadium that is most definitely in need of upgrading. It is the home of the Newcastle Knights. It is interesting that the federal government has rejected any offer of money to upgrade Energy Australia Stadium whilst on the other hand it is giving money to upgrade Penrith stadium, which just happens to be in the formerly marginal electorate of Lindsay.
Last week I was visited by the Swansea coastguard. They are desperately in need of upgrading their coastguard patrol centre, and I have suggested to them that they apply for funding through the Regional Partnerships program. We are working on putting that submission together and I encourage the government to view that very favourably, particularly when I look at two grants that have recently been approved—one to Nelsons Bay, the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol at Port Stephens; and the other to Point Clare’s Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol. The Royal Volunteer Coast Patrol at Swansea needs the support of the government. It is a vital key in the protection of our coastline and it is a vital facility used for the protection of people—that is, the boating fraternity and all those people that travel the coast and use Lake Macquarie.

I ask the government to note what I have said and to adopt a fair-handed approach. They are in government because they won the majority of electorates. They returned more members to this House, but in the Shortland electorate the people voted for me and they should not be ignored just because they voted for me. They need the same facilities and services as people who are in Liberal-held electorates, particularly Liberal marginal electorates. I urge the government to adopt a fair-handed approach to ensure that the people of Shortland are not forgotten.

I think Shortland electorate is a pretty special sort of place. It has a stunning environment. It is situated between a series of lakes and the coast and, without being prejudiced, I would have to say that it is the most beautiful electorate in the whole of Australia. Some significant issues face our electorate. I thought it might be interesting for the House for me to just touch on a few of the demographics of Shortland electorate. As I mentioned earlier, we are the tenth ‘oldest’ electorate; we have the tenth oldest population in Australia. We are an area that has a fairly low level of education. It is interesting to note that, in terms of those people whose highest level of education was year 10 or lower, Shortland electorate is ranked as being 145th. That means that we have a fairly low level of education within the area and a fairly low median income.

That brings me to the next issue that I would like to raise—education. The government talks a lot about parental choice. Within Shortland electorate over 80 per cent of children attend government schools. The parents in that area do not have the ability to choose to send their children to private schools because there are not private schools in that area. Also, I have pointed out the level of income of people living in Shortland electorate. Choice is only relevant to what you have to choose from and your disposable income. Therefore, I find it most disheartening that the federal government is treating the students of Shortland electorate as second-class students. This has both short- and long-term impacts. You will have more students leaving at year 10 or leaving before they reach year 10. They do not have the same life opportunities or choices. They do not have the same access to the skills and knowledge that you need for the global economy that exists today. In our global economy, knowledge and skills are the key to success. This government is designating the young people and students of Shortland to second-class choices. It is making choices unavailable to them whilst it is making them available to other students throughout the country. I do not think that is good enough. I think this government has to adopt a more even-handed approach and it has to fund public schools properly. Until it does that, the students of Shortland electorate are going to be disadvantaged. I hope that the government takes that on board.
Health is another area that is of great concern to the people of the Shortland electorate. There has been a drastic decline in bulk-billing in Shortland under this government. The last figure that was released was 51.3 per cent. That is down from almost 70 per cent. To be quite honest with you, that is just not good enough. We have an elderly population and a Medicare office that has closed, so not only are the doctors not bulk-billing but pensioners have to travel a long way to get a refund for visiting their doctor. There were a few doctors who started bulk-billing pensioners again after the government’s latest initiative, but guess what? Since the election they have stopped bulk-billing. Surprise, surprise!

The other issue is the shortage of doctors. Within the last two weeks we have lost two doctors in the Shortland electorate. We were already in a crisis. This is a very, very serious state of affairs which has been exacerbated by the government’s failure and actions in relation to training doctors. Once again it goes back to one of their initial decisions back in 1996 where they chose to restrict the number of GPs. Now the people of Shortland and other electorates are feeling it. Immediate action is needed—not just rhetoric, not just camouflage, not just cover-ups. We need action. We need the government to act and improve the situation for the people of the Shortland electorate. It is not good enough that people sometimes have to wait two weeks to see their doctor. I intend to bring this issue to the government’s attention time and time again during the life of this parliament.

In aged care, once again, we have enormous waiting lists for places in both high- and low-level care. We have a number of elderly people waiting inordinate amounts of time in our public hospitals for beds in residential care. Once again, that is a direct result of this government’s policies. The last budget increased the daily rate. We are still to find out whether the medium-level care that the government is talking about is going to attract bonds. We have residential care facilities that are reeling under red tape and bureaucracy, and we still have phantom beds by the hundreds. The government could resolve the issue of phantom beds if it were really to look at the planning strategy that it has in place. As to other issues relating to ageing, the government needs to ensure that increased research takes place so that as a nation we are prepared to deal with the issues surrounding ageing. We need some real action, not just rhetoric.

The government talks about being a family-friendly government. All I can say is that, as a member of parliament who has constituent after constituent coming into my office telling me about the problems that they have with debts, if that is family friendly I would hate to see a government that is not family friendly. It is not unusual to have a mother sitting there, with her children beside her, in tears because she has received a debt notice from Centrelink. I certainly hope that the new government department can do something to address this issue, along with the issue of the debts that many other Centrelink recipients are accumulating.

Workplace flexibility, Howard government style, means lower wages and poorer working conditions for workers in Australia. Our unemployment rate may be lower but casualisation of the work force is higher and people no longer have certainty in their jobs. The sale of Telstra is one of the planks of the Howard government’s promise to the Australian people. I hope that The Nationals members ensure that people in the country have the Telstra services that they deserve. I believe that they should hang their heads in shame. I think that the move to privatise Telstra will be disastrous for Australia.
The government, after July, will have control of the Senate, and that gives it an additional responsibility. It will have a responsibility to ensure that it is fair and equitable. That will be a new experience for the Howard government, which has spent its whole time in power demonising those people who do not support it. What really worries me is how this government will abuse its power.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hatton)—Order! Before I call the honourable member for Wakefield, I remind the House that this is the honourable member’s first speech. I ask that the House extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr FAWCETT (Wakefield) (1.13 p.m.)—Mr Deputy Speaker Hatton, as I rise I want to congratulate you on your election to your office. I would like to commence my parliamentary career by affirming that I am here by the goodwill of the people of Wakefield and by the grace of God. I want to acknowledge the honour bestowed on me to serve the communities of Wakefield and by the grace of God. I want to acknowledge the honour bestowed on me to serve the communities of Wakefield and, in a broader context, the communities of Australia as a member of the 41st Parliament.

My mission here is to serve purposes that are greater than my own. Being in this place, therefore, is not about my efforts or my aspirations alone. There are many people whom I would like to thank for their role in bringing me to this point in my life: those who have shaped me in my life’s journey so far, those people who have given of their wisdom and experience in the 11 short months since I joined the Liberal Party and last, but by no means least, the many people who have helped bring about the opportunity to serve as the member for Wakefield.

Foremost among those who have shaped me are my parents, Bob and Helen Fawcett. They have instilled in me lasting values, helped shape my character and work ethic and taught me the worth of faith and relationships. Friends from school, church and community groups have given me the freedom over many years to try, to fail and to succeed. They have encouraged me to strive for high standards but have had the grace to forgive in the times when I have failed to live up to them. I thank my many friends and colleagues in the Australian Defence Force, an organisation which for nearly 23 years has afforded me not only the means to serve Australia but many opportunities to grow in wisdom, skills and experience.

My political experience, however, is rather limited. The Prime Minister has often said that one of the strengths of the Liberal Party is its ability to attract candidates from a wide variety of non-political backgrounds. That is certainly the case for me. I believe I will be the first experimental test pilot ever to have the privilege of standing in this place. I am also the first in my family to join a political party since my grandfather joined the Kapunda branch of the Liberal Union in 1911. As a professional military officer, I chose to remain outside the party political system while in active full-time service.

As a political novice, I am therefore grateful to those who have given wise counsel as to some of the nuances and practicalities of political life. These people include Mrs Joan Young, my campaign manager in Wakefield, who is in the gallery today—I thank you, Joan—and who gave selflessly of her time to ensure that no detail was overlooked in the busyness of the last seven months of my full-time candidacy. To Senators Jeannie Ferris and Alan Ferguson: thank you for your tireless support and wise guidance. My thanks go to the Hon. John Dawkins MLC, to Mrs Helena Dawkins, President of the Wakefield FEC, and to Mr Ron Watts, who provided consistent support and encouragement.

Importantly, I wish to thank the previous member for Wakefield, the Hon. Neil An-
drew, who chose to embrace marginal seat campaigning with a passion. I thank him for the strong legacy that he left in Wakefield and for the wisdom he has imparted to me over many months. It has been a privilege to have worked so closely with him, and I wish Neil and Carolyn all the best in their retirement.

For the work to transform a campaign plan into victory, thanks must go to the members of the Liberal Party in the branches throughout Wakefield. These people worked over many months to form a strong team of volunteers who supported me in many practical ways and who worked tirelessly in their communities to help people understand that in this election, more than any other, their vote would really count. I wish also to thank the members of the Liberal Party in Grey who provided such strong support. Thank you, Barry.

My thanks extend also to the many federal and state members of parliament who gave willingly of their time to visit and support the campaign in Wakefield. Not least amongst these, thank you, Prime Minister, for your visits to Wakefield and, importantly, for the leadership you have shown across a broad range of issues, which has won the respect and support of many of the people of Wakefield.

Lastly, I wish to thank the people of Wakefield, who took every opportunity to inform me of both the problems and the achievements of their various communities. At the end of the day, it was the people of Wakefield who chose to put their trust in me to serve them as their representative in this place.

The seat of Wakefield was originally established in 1903. The seat was named after Edward Gibbon Wakefield, whose plan for the systematic colonisation of Western Australia and South Australia directed much of the settlement. A bit like grandfather’s axe, though, which has had a couple of heads and a few handles but is still known as grandfather’s axe, Wakefield has had a few boundary changes over time. The most recent redistribution fundamentally changed the nature of the seat from a rural seat to one that has a diverse range of communities from both metropolitan and rural areas. This is due to the inclusion of the old federal seat of Bonython, which was established in 1955—and which I note has only ever had Labor representation. I therefore welcome to Wakefield the ‘faithful remnant’: those members of the Liberal branch in Bonython who did not give up hope as they worked over many years to see this day.

At this point I also wish to acknowledge the many years of service provided to the people of Elizabeth by the previous member for Bonython, Mr Martyn Evans, in all three levels of government. Mr Evans’s reputation as a fair and decent man was borne out by his campaign for Wakefield and I wish him well in his future.

Wakefield now runs from Salisbury in the south to Clare and Hilltown in the north, from Port Wakefield in the west to Kapunda in the east. It takes in premium vineyards, broadacre farms, a vibrant horticultural sector, intensive piggeries, urban and industrial areas, coastal plains, valleys and hills. Wakefield has a large defence presence with the RAAF Base Edinburgh, the Port Wakefield proof range and the Defence Science and Technology Organisation, as well as a number of the larger defence industry players. It is also where I served 10 of my most satisfying years with the Australian Defence Force, culminating in an appointment as the commanding officer of the Royal Australian Air Force Aircraft Research and Development Unit.
Importantly from a personal perspective, Wakefield still includes the town of Kapunda, which was home to my family for over four generations as they worked in health care and agriculture. Kapunda was also home at some point to 31 members of various parliaments. Notably, among these was Sir Jenkin Coles, who spent 33 years in the South Australian parliament, 21 years of this as the Speaker. This appears to be somewhat of a tradition for Wakefield. But, Mr Speaker, I assure you that I am not looking at your chair—yet! The first member for Wakefield, Sir Frederick William Holder, I note was the Speaker, and a century later the Hon. Neil Andrew, the member for Wakefield, also became the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Mr Andrew, I am pleased to say, left under somewhat happier circumstances than Sir Frederick, who I believe collapsed and died in the chamber, so distressed was he at the behaviour of the members present. I trust we do not cause you a similar degree of angst, Mr Speaker!

While significant in political terms, the redistribution is but one small element in an environment of continuous change which is affecting society in Australia today. With change inevitably come challenges, and Wakefield is not exempt from this. Wakefield now stands as one of only four electorates in Australia with unemployment over 10 per cent—in fact, 14.1 per cent in the City of Playford. It has communities with intergenerational unemployment, and those on the land are exposed to the full range of risk factors associated with primary industry. There are social challenges for each of these communities, such as the decreasing scope of services in rural areas or the teachers in urban areas dealing with children who, for example, come to school with no breakfast or perhaps no support in early learning.

Despite those challenges Wakefield is also a place of great opportunity and achievement. Many of those opportunities were brought about because of the policies of this government over the last nine years. To highlight just a few, I mention the Clare and Gilbert valleys have seen significant growth and innovation in the wine and tourism industries, producing some of Australia’s best wines. There has even been innovation in the way we enjoy them. I am sure many of you have opened a few screw-tops on bottles this week, a contemporary trend that was actually started in the Clare and Gilbert valleys. Wakefield has also seen people work to regenerate their community in Salisbury North and Saddleworth, where community groups have worked together to bring about a rural transaction centre to return some of the services to their community.

The productivity of the northern Adelaide region—the cities of Gawler, Salisbury and Playford—accounts for over 70 per cent of the manufacturing output of South Australia, leading the nation’s manufacturing export growth. The industrial precinct, represented by Edinburgh Parks and Elizabeth West, is attracting significant investment by Australian and international firms such as Holden, Priority Engineering and Hirotech. The Virginia Horticultural Centre is another example of communities regenerating. This centre has been developed with the support of local communities to increase export to overseas markets, enable cooperation and coordination between growers and promote research and development of new techniques for an industry that is now worth over $70 million each year.

Another example is the City of Salisbury, now recognised as a world leader in the field of wetlands technology. Stormwater, for example, traditionally regarded as a problem or even a threat, is now harnessed and utilised by Salisbury in a series of wetlands which enhance the landscape and create habitat diversity. Importantly, this innovation is also
bringing real results. Previously 1.1 billion litres of water was being pumped from the Murray River to supply the Michell wool plant, among other users, but it now will stay in the Murray. Lastly, while looking at the successes of this region, I would like to mention Salisbury High School, a public high school under the leadership of principal Helen Paphitis. In the words of the Australian from November 2001:

Salisbury High has made a Cinderella-like transformation from a school considered a wasteland of South Australia’s youth to a place returning dreams to some of the nation’s most deprived teenagers.

To see that transformation bears testament to the effectiveness of the policies and the reforms that the education minister and this government have been bringing in over the last eight years.

As the newly elected member for Wakefield, what is my role in helping to return the dreams not only to our youth but also to families, small business owners, pensioners and those who are either caring for people with a disability or living with a disability of their own? What perspective do I bring to help facilitate positive outcomes to the challenges Australia faces in the next decade as we work to realise the dreams for our communities?

My perspective is shaped by a broad range of life experience. I have been blessed with the opportunity to see life in Australia from many perspectives, both within Australia and from abroad. I was born and raised in a country town and enjoyed the freedoms of outdoor play and activities that that afforded an Australian boy growing up in the 60s. As a youth I had the opportunity to live in Thailand and experience what it is like to be a stranger in a foreign land, coping with and adapting to different cultures and values.

Through a career in the ADF spanning over 22 years as an Army pilot, I was privileged to travel throughout Australia, living and working in the bush, our cities, the outback and in Papua New Guinea. I was posted overseas to live and work in the UK, Europe and the USA with counterparts from many countries of the world. Through these varied experiences I learned much about choice and much about the value of relationships. I have learned that people’s choices and attitudes play at least as large a part in the outcomes they seek as the circumstances which face them. This is true not only of enterprise, work or business but also, equally, of the relationships people enjoy.

In this context, I wish to just touch on a few of the areas covered by His Excellency the Governor-General in his address to the parliament this week: unemployment, welfare reform and families. The Governor-General rightly spoke of the achievements of this government which has seen unemployment fall to 27-year lows. While Wakefield has also seen increasing employment, as I said before, it remains one of the four seats in Australia where unemployment is over 10 per cent. People under 20 comprise over 33 per cent of the population in parts of Wakefield with correspondingly high levels of unemployment, yet this is an electorate that accounts for over 70 per cent of the manufacturing output of South Australia. Current investments by industry mean that the demand for a semiskilled and skilled workforce is already high and will continue to increase. I therefore welcome the initiatives announced by the government to provide additional support for the vocational education and training for students in years 11 and 12. I note that the ability to provide this training was one of the key success factors for Salisbury High School, which I mentioned earlier. Give the youth in Wakefield an opportunity and the mentoring to help
them to choose to take it up, and they will succeed.

I witnessed this first hand earlier this month when I attended the opening of the Playford ‘rage cage’—an outdoor sports structure which was built by local youth. Positive role models provided training in basic metal working and welding skills. The young people were held to high standards of participation and quality of their work and they responded. Not only did they deliver a great community facility but, importantly, eight of the 12 people who participated went on to take up apprenticeships. The young people and older workers of Wakefield have every potential to fill the bulk of the 2,700 jobs which industry estimate represents the current demand in Wakefield, as well as those forecast to be created.

There is a missing link, however, and that is access to schooling that values trade training and provides these people with the confidence to choose to train and work. I therefore welcome the initiatives and opportunities for older people to take up a trade. Along with the member for Kingston, I will also be making a priority of working to facilitate collaboration by industry, local government and community to support a tender for one of the 24 Australian technical colleges in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. Perhaps a split campus will be a good outcome. The role models and mentoring provided by a supportive school environment which values trade training will help these young people to make a choice to take the first step toward seeing their dreams fulfilled.

His Excellency also mentioned the need to address the high rate of welfare dependency in some parts of Australia. Again, Wakefield comes to the fore in this regard, particularly in some of the areas where single parent families make up over 22 per cent of homes. I have spent time listening to the leaders collective of the Peachey Belt, among other areas in Wakefield, who have highlighted the need for welfare reforms. They have told how people in their community want timely, compassionate help for those in need. They also recognise that, while many want to work, they have become dependent on welfare. Some do not see enough incentive while others lack the confidence or indeed skills to take the seemingly risky, uncertain move into the work force.

There is a need to reform and a need to balance the tension between creating the incentive to work and adequately caring for those who are unable to work. There is a need for a system which is less complex and represents a whole-of-government approach to overcome the dysfunctional interfaces between state and Australian government legislation. The vast majority of Australians believe in a fair go, but they want people to take the hand-up and not to choose to rely on the hand-out. I therefore welcome the government’s initiatives to look at a new department for better delivery of these areas. I look forward to working with this government and the people of Wakefield to further develop a compassionate welfare system which cares well for those who have little choice but provides incentive and material reward to those who are prepared to choose hard work and commitment.

There is a common thread running through these two issues, and that is the impact of breakdown in family relationships. These breakdowns can affect the confidence, ability and capacity of many youths and adults to move beyond their current circumstances. His Excellency spoke of the government’s plan for increased family support and reform to the areas of family law and child support. I welcome these initiatives given the high social and fiscal cost of relationship breakdown. I would propose, though, that Australia’s future rests on fur-
ther reform in this area. To use a simple analogy, we have become adept at funding increasingly complex and expensive rescue services for those who have fallen off the edge of the relational cliff. Why do we appear to have given up on the fence at the top of the cliff? Surely it would be cheaper and more effective to prevent some of the breakdown of relationships rather than to pick up the pieces.

I accept that the reality today is that, through circumstance or choice, many relationships do not finish up or indeed start as the ideal. Traditional wisdom would argue that the ideal is a husband and wife, married for life and providing consistent, loving care for their children. The increasing number of blended, single parent and separated families has led many to believe that it would be discriminatory to promote the traditional family model as something to be aspired to. But in my community work with families, I have spoken to many people who are in just these situations. It is they who so often describe their circumstances as less than ideal for a wide range of reasons.

I believe it is time that Australian society should once again be willing to provide a goal for young couples. While compassionately supporting relationships without discrimination, we should be prepared to actively promote the traditional model of the family as a desirable goal. We should explore ways to facilitate relationship coaching and establish mentoring relationships where required. This will go some way toward empowering people’s choices and attitudes to play a larger part in the outcomes they seek than the circumstances and pressures which so often defeat them. The family is a foundational element of our society and should be valued and promoted as such.

In conclusion, I wish to affirm my own family for their love, support and encouragement to take up this opportunity to serve the people of Wakefield. I recognise the need to balance my commitment to the people of Wakefield, who have put their trust in me, and to my family, who will still want me as a husband and dad long after my last election. An appropriate balance will not only sustain my marriage and my relationship with my children but also, I believe, enable me to be a more effective representative for the people of Wakefield. To my wife, Lorna, and my daughters, Alexandra and Emily, who are in the gallery today, thank you. You have my love always. To the people of Wakefield, both those who supported me and those who did not on this occasion, you have my commitment to serve you with diligence and integrity.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (1.34 p.m.)—This is my first speech in this place, at least for the 41st Parliament. The timing for me is very fortuitous. It is wonderful to see the Prime Minister in the chamber. One of the great things about first speeches is the way they draw both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition into the chamber on a more regular basis. That is not a criticism. They are both busy men, of course. But it is good to see them in the chamber listening to what the backbench has to say.

The timing is also fortuitous for me in this lead-up to question time because it gives me an opportunity to congratulate you again, Mr Speaker, on your rise to such high office. I wish you the very best in your endeavours. I congratulate Deputy Speakers Causley and Jenkins on their re-election. Best wishes also go to all members of the Speaker’s panel.

The other reason that the timing is fortuitous for me is that it gave me the opportunity to listen to the member for Wakefield. I congratulate him on his contribution as well as all of those other new members who have already made a contribution in this place. I have done my very best to listen to as many
as possible and all have been, in my view, excellent contributions.

The election that brought these new members to this place put them on a very steep learning curve. I am sure that many of them are learning that that is the case already. The first thing they will learn is that, at least for a little while, they become very small fish in a very big sea. Some will come out of that dilemma more quickly than others and some never will. But, regardless, I am sure they will enjoy their experience in this place. Unfortunately, the second thing they will learn is that this chamber plays an almost irrelevant role in the formulation of policy in this place. Rather, effectively it is little more than a rubber stamp for executive government in this country. This has always been a source of disappointment for me. I think that collectively, on both sides of the House, we should continue to strive to improve that situation and restore the power, influence and relevance of the House of Representatives chamber and, for that matter, the Senate chamber.

They will also quickly learn that the primary mechanism in this place for holding the executive to account—that is, of course, question time—is little more than a farce. Question time in the House of Representatives has become another driver of public cynicism towards the parliament. It is a great shame that interest in our most important institution continues to fall and that, in my view, support for our most important institution continues to be in decline. On a much happier front I believe those new members will find the committee system an effective tool as local members. Being a committee member is a rewarding experience and their best opportunity to become acquainted with members on the opposite side of the House. That was certainly my experience when I first came to this place some 8½ years ago, and I maintain some strong friendships across the chamber as a result of those experiences.

Much has been said about the election of 9 October and I do not want to use up too much of the limited time I have available dwelling on that result. But I do want to say a couple of things. First of all, as members of the opposition it is important for us to accept with grace the people’s verdict, and we certainly do so. But that should not prevent us from being a little bit angry about the government’s main campaign pitch being based on a lie. I note that the introductory remarks in the Governor-General’s speech on Tuesday included the following paragraph:

The government was re-elected on a platform that emphasised strong economic management, a determined role in world affairs, and faith in the capacity of Australians to exercise choice in their daily lives.

This, of course, is code for a much different statement, and I want to attempt to reinterpret it for the House. The government was re-elected on a platform of fear—fear of an interest rate rise and fear of losing the protection of the United States—and faith in the government’s ability to foster fear and insecurity in the Australian electorate.

We all know that the government had no basis on which to claim that the election of a Labor government would inevitably lead to an interest rate rise. Despite the fact that the nation’s leading economists rejected this claim by the Prime Minister and his government, the Prime Minister in particular continued to peddle his spin. This also applies to the government’s determination to develop the perception in the community, in the minds of the Australian people, that Labor’s very reasonable proposition that our troops in Iraq should come home sooner rather than later was somehow going to pose a threat to our most important alliance—that is, of course, our alliance and friendship with the United States. It is an alliance and a friend-
ship built by, more than anyone else, the Australian Labor Party. I make these points because they are relevant to the issue of the extent of the Howard government’s mandate—something we debated in this place during the matter of public importance debate yesterday.

There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that the government’s multimillion-dollar scare campaign on interest rates was a seminal determinant of the electoral outcome, and I am sure most people who are being honest with themselves in this place would agree with that contention. But this does not mean that the government has a mandate from the Australian people to pursue an ideologically based agenda which will inevitably divide rather than unite the nation.

At the forefront of this agenda is the government’s determination to push its obsession with further shifting the balance of our industrial relations system. If asked to nominate one single attitude which more than any other underpins the Australian character most would nominate the Australian belief in a fair go. Labor believes workplace based and flexible industrial laws are critical to productivity growth and Australia’s international competitiveness.

Mr Cadman—As long as the union controls it.

Mr FITZGIBBON—That is why we pioneered the enterprise based approach. That does not sound much like a union driven scheme to me, I say to the member for Mitchell. But maintaining a balance is also very important. We all know, the member for Mitchell included, that the parties to any industrial bargain are never equal. Individual coalminers in my electorate could never hope to bargain on a level playing field with the Rio Tintos and Xstratas of the world. The opportunity to redress this imbalance lies in the opportunity to collectively bargain. As Labor proved in the eighties and nineties, maintaining a balance is also crucial to maintaining industrial harmony. Productivity growth will not flow from an environment of conflict and division; rather, what will drive a system of economic growth and our growing affluence will be a highly skilled, high-wage work force working in harmony and with a common goal.

There is no doubt that our growing affluence as a nation is pushing people away from a dependence on collectivism. Collectivism is for many people a need of the past. Now more than ever we are promoting individuality and, of course, independence. This is also partly the reason why so many community based groups and service clubs like Apex and Rotary and even our churches are struggling—with some exceptions, I should say, with respect to churches—for membership and participation. In this post-Fordist industrial era, the relationship between employers and employees has changed and is changing and it must continue to evolve, and I agree that our industrial laws must continue to evolve with it. But in many cases collectivism will remain a necessary ingredient for workplace justice and, as a legislature, we should allow it to play its very important role.

Nor should the government claim to have a mandate on the sale of Telstra. Let me assure the House—and all rural and regional members in this place, regardless of their political persuasion, I am sure will agree—that telecommunications services in the bush are not up to scratch. We do not enjoy anything like the services of our city cousins. What creates and promotes the great irony in the claim that the government believes it can catch up before the sale is the very establishment of Telstra Country Wide. I want to do an unusual thing now: I want to give a big rap to my local Telstra Country Wide team, headed by a great guy by the name of Phil...
Lammert. They have done a fantastic job in improving Telstra services in my electorate. We are not there yet but certainly the gap has been closing. This is the irony: the gap is only closing because the government, in a determination to close the gap, was prepared to create Telstra Country Wide and throw money at it. It is only money, and good management, which will bring country services up to something anywhere near what our city cousins have.

Having made that point, I ask the simple question: what happens in the next round of technological improvement, when there is no Telstra Country Wide and there is no additional bucket of money to improve Telstra services in the bush? There will not be another Telstra Country Wide and there will not be another bucketful of money if Telstra is fully privatised, because the political imperative will have gone. When Telstra is privatised we will no longer be able to put pressure on the government as the majority owner. If there is no pressure on government, there is no Telstra Country Wide mark 2, mark 3 or mark 4 and there is no additional bucket of money. So let us not kid ourselves. There is only one way to ensure that Telstra services in the bush come close to keeping pace with the services enjoyed by those who live in our capital cities, and that is to keep Telstra in majority government hands.

I have now been a member of this place for almost nine years—this is my fourth election. I want to thank the people of my electorate for once again showing faith in me and re-electing me—not unanimously of course, as that would be a strange sort of democracy, but by a majority. I rededicate myself to working very hard as their local member and, on every occasion, putting the interest of the electorate first. On reflection, the electorate has changed quite a deal since I was elected to this place almost nine years ago, and I am sure that is the case for all members in this place. Fortunately some will have experienced positive economic growth and a large range of benefits, and some will have experienced a decline and may be doing things a little tougher than they were all those years ago.

In my first speech in this place I made the point that my electorate produces the lion’s share of the coal produced in New South Wales and, I think, almost half the energy produced in the state of New South Wales. Those points remain true today. The difference is that back then the coal industry was the largest employer, but these days we are producing twice as much coal with half as many people as we had 10 years ago. On that basis, over the past decade we have had an enormous shift in our economic base. Coal continues to play a major role and continues to be a very large employer, but in many senses a leading employer has given way to the services sector—in particular, wine, wine tourism and many associated businesses, including many in the small business sector.

Retail also continues to grow as a major employer. Our local CBDs are growing and rejuvenating themselves. In the southern part of the electorate, the Hunter Economic Zone promises to become the largest industrial park in New South Wales and will therefore bring a whole new range of employment opportunities and further diversify the electorate of Hunter. This substantial local economic growth is very welcome, but, as you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, with growth always come growing pains. The unemployment rate in parts of the electorate remains far too high and a massive skills gap, as we further diversify as an electorate, remains the greatest single hurdle to addressing the situation. Our physical infrastructure has not kept pace with demand. We have bottlenecks in our coal chain—the means by which we get our coal to the port
of Newcastle—and our roads infrastructure is hopelessly inadequate. Our local roads are experiencing gridlock as economic growth continues and moves ahead of infrastructure planning. Our highway planning and funding is hopelessly behind, exacerbating the problems on those local roads and, I must say, putting lives at risk—not only the lives of local residents but the lives of the very many thousands of people who travel through my electorate each day, usually from Sydney, up the New England Highway to the Queensland border.

One of the great solutions to that problem, of course, is the construction of what we know as the Kurri Corridor, or the F3 link between a town called Seahampton and another called Branxton—a road project which I thought was all but ready to be constructed when I was elected to this place nine years ago. It was almost there, but, very sadly, still not a sod has been turned. Now I see the Deputy Prime Minister entering into a political game with the New South Wales government. The Kurri Corridor is part of the national highway system and therefore is totally the responsibility of the Commonwealth.

It is now something like a $350 million project—a big-ticket item. So what did the Deputy Prime Minister do in his AusLink announcement last year? He offered $250 million for a $350 million project. What does that mean? It simply means that the highway cannot be constructed until the balance of that funding is found. Where is the political fix? Where does the Deputy Prime Minister look for that additional funding? He looks at the New South Wales government, an organisation he knows is simply not in a position to meet that demand for funding.

This is also true when we consider health infrastructure in my electorate. It is also true when we consider our educational infrastructure. While kids at the King’s School continue to enjoy the best sporting facilities in the country, kids in my electorate continue to sit in large classes in demountable buildings without airconditioning and without adequate access to broadband services. Some of our local hospitals are becoming no more than polyclinics. While I know that technology is largely driving the centralisation of our health services, it should never be an excuse to gut our local community services. At a time when we should be empowering local communities and bringing decisions about our local hospitals back to the people who understand the needs of our hospitals most, we continue to take those decisions further and further away.

I want to quickly make this point. The best way of addressing these issues is to deal with that major fault in our federation—that is, the continual buck shifting and blame shifting that takes place between federal and state governments. We in this place, notwithstanding political differences in other areas, should be working together, united, to deal with those issues posed by federation, to stop the buck shifting, so that in all our local communities we can return the dividend of efficiencies to our local people. (Time expired)

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (1.54 p.m.)—May I first congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, on your election as Deputy Speaker to the parliament for this term. Before I begin my discussion of the address-in-reply, I would like to reassure the member for Hunter, who expressed some concern over the esteem in which parliament is held these days. I was reading in the Sun-Herald of 14 November of a survey that was published—a wellbeing and security study. The study looked at the percentage of respondents who replied to the survey who had confidence in a range of institutions. I noted that charities were very well regarded by the...
community, with some 78 per cent of respondents in the year 2003 feeling they had confidence in charities. I am pleased to inform the member for Hunter that the standing of the federal government has improved substantially between 1998 and 2003. Back in 1998, only 21 per cent of respondents had some degree of confidence in the federal parliament. That has substantially increased to 38 per cent of the community. I thought I would put his fears to one side for a moment.

I would also like to address another issue that the member for Hunter raised. He indicated that the election was apparently, in his words, ‘won on a lie’. That is certainly not the case. The people of Australia are not gullible. They listened to the arguments that were put forward by both sides of parliament. It was the Leader of the Opposition who claimed that this was going to be a referendum on Medicare, and it was the Leader of the Opposition who neglected to address adequately the issues of the performance of Labor with regard to management of the economy.

I have to say that the people noted—with some good sense, I might add—that this government is a friend of Medicare, that this government has been supporting Medicare, that this government is best placed to manage our economy and that Labor has a proven track record of failure in economic management. It is believed by most people out there that the economy is an issue of major importance, and the opposition has a demonstrated track record of failure in economic management. I think that the election result quite clearly and accurately reflected a well-informed community making a judgment about a team which has a poor record of economic management.

It certainly was a great honour to be returned for my second term as member for Cowper. As members of parliament, we retain our seats at the pleasure of the electors, and I was delighted with the support that I received from the people of Cowper and the support that the government received in being returned to office. I would like to take the opportunity to thank my party, The Nationals, and the many members of our campaign team who worked so hard to ensure the re-election of the coalition government. Without the assistance of strong political parties—both the Liberal Party and The Nationals—and without the assistance of strong campaign teams, the coalition could not have achieved the success that it did in the last election.

As members of parliament we could not have achieved the success we achieved without the support of very important volunteers—the countless number of volunteers turning out right around the country, manning the polling booths and distributing material. I would particularly like to thank my campaign director, Glynne Tosh, a tireless worker for the National Party and a tireless worker for her local community. Also, I would like to thank my electorate council chairman, Lloyd Beeby, and his wife, Jackie, who put in endless hours during the election campaign and endless hours through the entire election year. I would also like to thank my good friends, Ross and Beth Donald, who were absolutely everywhere during the election campaign, manning polling booths, manning pre-polls and distributing material. Absolutely vital in my campaign, the Donalds did a simply marvellous job.

We had a great range of people involved in a number of activities throughout our election campaign. We had people doing letter-boxing, distributing some of the material and the policies of our government. I would like to thank Peter Roebuck and Gwen Hammerly for the great work that they did in distributing material throughout the election campaign. I would also like to thank Chris
Forsythe, Campbell Forsythe, Lorraine Monkhouse, Angus Leahy, Nicole Leahy, Joel Medland, Nathan Medland, Gus Glover, Marcia Lachlan, Betty Boland, Janine Reid, Mary Tarr, Harry Green, Anne-Maree Rosenburg and Helena Aldridge. We had plenty of support in the National Party from our members in Cowper. I would also like to thank John Sercombe, who is one of my National Party colleagues—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr HARTSUYKER—No relation!

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 p.m., the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 97. The debate may be resumed at a later hour. The member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr HOWARD (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (2.00 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I inform the House that the Treasurer will be absent from question time today. He is travelling to Berlin to attend the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors meeting. In his absence I will take leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

QUESTIONs WITHOUT NOTICE

Federal Election: Member for New England

Mr LATHAM (2.00 p.m.)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and acting Minister for Trade. At his meetings with Mr Greg Maguire prior to 19 May 2004, was the possibility of the member for New England pursuing a career outside parliament ever discussed? Were diplomatic and trade appointments mentioned in these discussions?

The SPEAKER—I regret to say to the Leader of the Opposition that I do not think that falls within the Deputy Prime Minister’s responsibility on his area of public administration.

Mr LATHAM—It is a question that is in the same framework as the question you allowed in order yesterday, Mr Speaker. I have asked it to the acting Minister for Trade about the offer of diplomatic and trade appointments in discussions that relate to Mr Anderson.

The SPEAKER—The question is in order. The Deputy Prime Minister and acting Minister for Trade.

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honourable member for his question. The answer is no and no.

Hassan, Mrs Margaret

Mr WAKELIN (2.01 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister inform the House about the fate of the CARE International worker Mrs Margaret Hassan?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the member for Grey for his question. I regret to have to say to the House that every indication now is that Mrs Margaret Hassan has been murdered by some terrorist group in Iraq. Her family and the British and Irish governments have concluded that she is dead. The body found in Fallujah appears to have been Margaret’s and the video of the execution of a Western woman appears, on all the available information, to have been genuine.

This crime is a particularly shocking one because of Margaret Hassan’s long commitment to helping the people of Iraq in an entirely political neutral fashion. She has worked in Iraq as an aid worker for more than 30 years and the last 12 as an employee of CARE Australia. Despite all of the hardships she endured over this period, she worked for the Iraqi people, for the poor and the children and the needy and the dispossessed of that country. She set a wonderful example of selfless commitment in a dangerous and very challenging environment and she rejected a number of offers to leave Iraq.
and to return to a safer environment. The fact that her murder has been mourned so feel-
ingly around the world not only shows her personal commitment and devotion to assist-
ing her fellow human beings but also re-
minds us very tragically of the wonderful work that aid workers do all around the world. I want to take this opportunity, prompted by very sad circumstances, to ap-
plaud the work of thousands of aid workers, including many thousands of young Austra-
lians, who undertake assistance and aid work overseas, often in very risky and very harsh circumstances.

The inhumanity of Margaret Hassan’s killers passes description. Such people are to be condemned without the slightest hesita-
tion or qualification. This latest example of cruelty and brutality reminds us again that there can be only one answer to terrorism, and that is the completely uncompromising and unconditional one.

One of the most heartening sights, if one can draw any heart or comfort from the events surrounding this outrage, was the sight of many Iraqis and obviously many people of moderate Islamic persuasion taking to the streets of Iraq with photographs of Margaret Hassan demonstrating for her re-
lease. That is a demonstration that the people who murdered her do not speak for the ordi-
nary people of Iraq, they do not speak for the ordinary people of the Islamic world and they do not speak for decent people any-
where in the world. On behalf of the gov-
ernment and the House, I extend to her fam-
ily and to her employers, CARE Australia, our very great sympathy and condolences at
this tragic, outrageous, despicable and inhu-
mane act.

Mr LATHAM (Werriwa—Leader of the
Opposition) (2.05 p.m.)—On indulgence, Mr Speaker, the opposition shares with the Prime Minister a sense of horror at the mur-
der of Margaret Hassan. She was an out-
standing humanitarian with 20 years work in the field, 12 years with CARE International. Our shadow minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Rudd, met with her in Baghdad last Novem-
ber and had first-hand experience of her hu-
manitarian values and great work in this area. These humanitarian workers are unsung heroes in Iraq. We share with the government our horror at the murder and we pass on our condolences to Margaret Hassan’s family.

Federal Election: Member for New
England

Mr LATHAM (2.06 p.m.)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and acting Minister for Trade. At any stage during his meetings with Mr Greg Maguire prior to 19 May—meetings where it is alleged trade ap-
pointments were considered—did the Deputy Prime Minister ask his adviser, Wendy Arm-
strong, to leave the room so that a sensitive political matter could be discussed? What was that matter?

Mr ANDERSON—No, I did not ask my adviser to leave the room because there was a sensitive matter to be discussed. The pur-
pose of the meeting, which was to discuss the equine centre, was concluded and Mr Maguire wanted to show me over his quite extraordinary collection of motorcycles, which is what he did, in that magnificent museum. To those of you who travel through Tamworth, I recommend that you stop and have a look at it.

Trade: Free Trade Agreement

Mr FORREST (2.07 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister inform the House of the cur-
rent status of discussions about the imple-
mentation of the Australia-US free trade agreement?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the honourable member for Mallee for that question. I am very pleased to confirm to the House that
formalities in relation to the agreement have now been completed. Notes have been exchanged and the United States-Australia free trade agreement will come into force as planned on 1 January 2005.

This is a very significant development for Australia’s long-term economic future. The benefits of this agreement are broad; they will grow as time goes by. For Australia it represents a once in a generation opportunity to link itself to the most powerful economy the world has ever seen. As the American economy inevitably grows over the years ahead Australia will share even more directly in the growth of that economy than would otherwise have been the case. It will provide unprecedented opportunities for Australia to integrate further with the United States. Independent economic analysis suggests that the free trade agreement with the United States will generate an annual $6 billion economic benefit after 10 years. Over the first 20 years, the aggregate GDP increase is expected to total almost $60 billion in today’s dollars. The agreement will see the creation of over 30,000 jobs, and over 97 per cent of Australian exports to the United States will be duty free from 1 July 2005.

This free trade agreement is the most important bilateral trade agreement this country has ever concluded. It represents the culmination of an enormous amount of work on both sides. In his absence—but, nonetheless, very genuinely—I record my thanks and the thanks of the entire government to Mark Vaile, the Minister for Trade, who has worked so very hard, and to all the people who negotiated on his behalf. It was not an easy task. All of these agreements involve a degree of give and take but, in the end, because of the immense goodwill that exists between our two nations and between the Bush administration and the Australian government it was possible to resolve difficulties. It really does represent a hugely significant day in the economic and trade history of this country and it will further underwrite the strength and resilience of and the opportunities and hope available to the Australian government, the Australian economy and the Australian people.

**Federal Election: Member for New England**

**Mr Latham** (2.10 p.m.)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Acting Minister for Trade. What contact did the Deputy Prime Minister or his office have with Mr Greg Maguire after 19 May this year? Did Mr Maguire report back on his meeting with the member for New England and the member’s rejection of diplomatic and trade appointments?

**Mr Anderson**—My diary shows that I met with him and others on 4 June at the National Cutting Horse Association of Australia’s 31st Futurity Show, at the Tamworth Showgrounds, and also on 21 September at the announcement of Tamworth’s National Equine and Livestock Centre. I have no recollection of him reporting back on any meeting, but he certainly did not comment on any inducements, because none were made. None were made or offered—directly or indirectly. They should not have been, they were not, and they would not have been. That really is the substance of the issue.

This matter has been the subject of an investigation by the Australian Federal Police. The AFP have not sought to interview Ms Armstrong, me or Senator Macdonald. I have to say—I make it very plain—that I believe I have nothing to answer for at all in this matter. I am not the sort of person who offers those sorts of inducements. I do not do it; I do not believe in it. I make the point that if there is something that I think is deeply regrettable in all of this it is that, given that there is a police investigation underway, the full, proper, decent and right thing to have
done would have been to have allowed that process to be completed.

**Education: School Facilities**

*Mrs MARKUS* (2.12 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Education, Science and Training. Would the minister inform the House of the government’s plan to directly assist parents in their efforts to improve facilities in their children’s schools?

*Dr NELSON*—I thank the member for Greenway for her question. I congratulate her on a magnificent election and an inspiring maiden speech. The member for Greenway will tell you that if you go to the Metella Road Public School, in Sydney’s west in her electorate, the P&C there headed by David Clark has raised $31,000 to aircondition the classrooms in the school. But the New South Wales Department of Education is refusing to provide $60,000 to the parents so they can plug the airconditioners into the power grid to get the airconditioning working. The member for Dobell will tell you that as soon as you get outside of your car outside the Tuggerawong Primary School the first thing you can smell is the toilet block, which desperately needs upgrading. The parents have been working flat out with the New South Wales Department of Education, who will not go up there and fix it.

Every member on this side if the House knows that right across Australia parents have had it up to here with constipated state education bureaucracies that are refusing to meet the priorities and needs of children and parents in Australian schools. In addition to the $1.1 billion that this government will provide over the next four years to state governments to support capital works in Australian state schools, this government will provide $700 million directly to Australian state schools. The principals, the school councils and the P&Cs are the organisations which know what the priorities are at a local level.

This government is determined to cut through the nonsense at the state education bureaucracy level. As far as the Labor Party is concerned, I see that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition told the *Australian* on 27 September this year in relation to this policy: “This policy is bureaucratic madness that places the onus on P&C treasurers.” I say to the Labor Party—who are obviously very slow learners—have a talk to the truckie who is the treasurer of the Metella Road Public School and he will tell you, ‘If this is bureaucratic madness, bring it on.’

**Federal Election: Member for New England**

*Mr LATHAM* (2.15 p.m.)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Acting Minister for Trade. Does the Deputy Prime Minister recall speaking to the member for New England in this chamber at the end of question time in the sitting fortnight following 19 May? Did the Deputy Prime Minister mention to the member for New England his contact and conversations with Mr Greg Maguire? How is this consistent with the Deputy Prime Minister’s claim yesterday in the House that he knew nothing about this matter, including inducements of trade and diplomatic jobs, until it became public in the election campaign in September?

*Mr ANDERSON*—Again, I thank the honourable member for his question. Yes, I was walking out of this place—I think it was probably during June on one of those 24 occasions when the House sat after this alleged bribery attempt was made, during which the member for New England, of course if he had been so concerned about these matters, could have raised them under parliamentary privilege—and on the way out he motioned me over and said, ‘I understand you might want to talk to me.’ I said: ‘No. What? I
don’t know anything about it.’ I have no un-
derstanding whatsoever as to why he thought
I might want to talk to him about it. I still
don’t. I said to him: ‘No. If I want to talk to
you at some point in the future, I’ll get in
contact.’

Workplace Relations: Australian
Workplace Agreements

Mr SOMLYAY (2.16 p.m.)—My ques-
tion is addressed to the Minister for Em-
ployment and Workplace Relations. Would
the minister update the House on the take-up
of Australian workplace agreements in the
work force and how Australian workers have
benefited from these agreements?

Mr ANDREWS—I thank the member for
Fairfax for his question. I can report to him
and to honourable members that October was
a record month for the approval of individual
Australian workplace agreements. In Octo-
ber, 24,810 AWAs were filed and 22,749
AWAs were approved—a record for a single
month. Indeed, over the last three months
there has been a record number of AWAs
approved: some 51,980 over that period of
time. That amounts to a total of 569,364 Aus-
tralian workplace agreements which have
been approved since their introduction in
1997. As I said yesterday to the House,
workers on Australian workplace agreements
earn on average 29 per cent more than those
on certified agreements and, significantly ,
women are earning on average 32 per cent
more than those on collective agreements.

I recently attended the signing of the
500,000th Australian workplace agreement at
the firm of MiniMovers in Brisbane.

Mr Howard—Great place. I’ve been
there.

Mr ANDREWS—I know that the Prime
Minister visited MiniMovers recently. This is
a great success story for the business and for
the employees. Through the use of Australian
workplace agreements, MiniMovers has been
able to increase its productivity and, in doing
that, it has put its workers under Australian
workplace agreements on better terms and
conditions. So it is a win for the firm and it is
a win for those employees at MiniMovers in
Queensland. AWAs are now part of the Aus-
tralian economy. They have been part of the
reason why more Australians are in work and
are being paid more at the present time.

I note that there was a very interesting ar-
ticle in the Age this morning, written by one
Mr Rod Cameron. Mr Rod Cameron, of
course, is well known to members opposite. I
think it can be rightfully claimed that Mr
Cameron has been the most successful poll-
ster for the Australian Labor Party. I com-
mend this article to all members of the
House. Mr Cameron, amongst other things,
said:
The attack on AWAs—
by the Australia Labor Party—
was ... misguided.

He described the Australian Labor Party’s
industrial relations policy as:
...backward-looking and totally out of step with
community and workforce trends.
I commend this article to all members of the
House, but particularly to those opposite and
to the Leader of the Opposition.

Federal Election: Member for New
England

Ms GILLARD (2.20 p.m.)—My question
is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Acting
Minister for Trade. Earlier this year, did the
Deputy Prime Minister discuss with Senator
Sandy Macdonald a National Party strategy
for winning the seat of New England by of-
fering the local member inducements, such
as diplomatic and trade appointments, in re-
turn for the member not recontesting the
2004 election?

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honour-
able member for her question. I think it
would be highly surprising if I did not dis-
cuss with Senator Macdonald strategies for
winning back the seat of New England. I
make the point that I respect entirely the
right of the voters to determine who is the
member for New England in the final analy-
sis. It would be highly surprising, given that
he was the campaign coordinator up there. It
is the seat next door to me, and I would have
loved to have had it back here, adding to the
voice within the government for country
Australia. But did I suggest to Senator Mac-
donald that we ought to try and find the
member for New England a posting? Let me
be absolutely frank: as I said during the cam-
paign, I do not believe the member for New
England would make a suitable diplomat
overseas in the first place. In the second
place, it would have been corrupt and wrong,
and I would not have done it.

Health Insurance

Mr LINDSAY (2.21 p.m.)—My question
is addressed to the Minister for Health and
Ageing. Would the minister update the
House on the latest trends in private health
insurance membership? Why is it important
to have a strong private health insurance sec-
tor in Australia?

Mr ABBOTT—I very much thank the
member for Herbert for his question. I note
that his margin has just gone up from 1.5 per
cent to 6.2 per cent. If the opposition keeps
carrying on like this, it will go up more at the
next election. Let me inform the House that
this government clearly understands that you
cannot have a strong Medicare system unless
it is complemented by a strong private health
insurance system. Fifty-six per cent of all
surgery now takes place in private hospitals,
and every private hospital patient takes pres-
sure off public hospital waiting lists.

Thanks to the policies of this government,
nealy nine million Australians now have the
choice and the security that private health
insurance provides, including one million
Australians earning less than $20,000 a year.
Back in 1996, private health insurance cov-
ervation was at about 30 per cent and falling.
Now, thanks to this government, it is 43 per
cent and stable. I can inform the House that
in the September quarter 42,000 extra Aus-
tralians were covered by private health in-
surance, including 17,000 people aged under
30. While private health insurance continues
to expand thanks to the policies of this gov-
ernment, the attitude of the Leader of the Opposi-
tion is that the private health insurance rebate is the maddest piece of public
policy ever to come through this parliament.
It is attitudes like this which guarantee that
nine million Australians will continue to
know that you just cannot trust Labor with
health policy.

Federal Election: Member for New
England

Mr LATHAM (2.24 p.m.)—My question
is to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Min-
ister for Transport and Regional Services. I
draw his attention to his obligations for ethi-
cal behaviour under the ministerial code of
conduct. Why did the Deputy Prime Minister
make federal funding of the Equine and
Livestock Centre in Tamworth conditional
on the member for New England disassociat-
ing himself from the project and resigning
from the board? Hasn’t the Deputy Prime
Minister breached the code of conduct by
using his public office and public funds to
gain improper benefit for The Nationals at
the expense of the rights and representative
role of the member for New England?

Mr ANDERSON—I did not make it con-
ditional on those at all. I made it very plain
that the revised application, which followed
the earlier application that I had had inde-
pendently assessed and had been found to be
lacking, would be assessed on its merits. I
did make the request, of course, that the gov-
Environment: Murray-Darling River System

Mrs HULL (2.25 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Is the minister aware of a request from the Victorian government to delink the Living Murray initiative from the National Water Initiative? How might this request affect the Murray River and local irrigators in my electorate of Riverina?

Mr TRUSS—I share the honourable member for Riverina’s concerns about calls by the Victorian Minister for Water, Mr Thwaites, that the federal government should drop the linkage between the Living Murray initiative and the National Water Initiative. That of course is a matter of very serious concern. The two are intrinsically linked. The states in fact put at risk the entire Living Murray initiative by their petulant withdrawal from the National Water Initiative during the election campaign.

You simply cannot have a Living Murray initiative unless there is security to the water users to provide the water that is going to be required for this initiative. Indeed, you cannot give the environment the security of the water that is necessary to deliver the environmental outcomes. The Living Murray agreement itself in clause 6 of the preamble says:

Implementation of this Agreement will be dependent upon agreement by the Parties to the National Water Initiative Intergovernmental Agreement.

So the reality is clearly that the call by the states to drop this linkage is in clear breach of the Living Murray initiative, which was so enthusiastically received by all Australians, particularly those living in the Murray-Darling Basin. It is essential that these key environmental projects proceed. It is also essential that water users around Australia have the security of access that is so important to underpin investment and the security particularly of towns in rural and regional Australia.

Now that the election is out of the way, I hope that the states will think again about their petulant withdrawal from the National Water Initiative. It is vital. It is one of the most historic agreements that our country has ever experienced. It is a rare example of cooperation between the federal and state governments to achieve worthwhile events for our nation, and now the states are walking away from it to the great peril of many rural and regional communities and, of course, also to the loss of the potential environmental benefits that it was going to deliver.

Federal Election: Member for New England

Mr LATHAM (2.28 p.m.)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Transport and Regional Services. I refer him to the federal funding of the Equine and Livestock Centre in Tamworth. In his discussions with Mr Greg Maguire earlier this year, did the Deputy Prime Minister suggest that the project was more likely to receive funding if the member for New England disassociated himself from the project and resigned from the board, something that the member for New England subsequently did?

Mr ANDERSON—No, I did not. I made it very plain indeed that I wanted a proper merit based assessment of this process, free of politics, because it had not been free of politics in the past. It was assessed on the basis of merit and, like the New South Wales government, we found it worthy of support.

Superannuation: Contributions
Mrs May (2.29 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer. Would the minister advise the House of action taken by the government to boost retirement incomes? What support have these policies received from the community?

Mr Brough—I thank the member for McPherson for her question. The co-contribution scheme introduced by the Howard government is simply the single most important element in securing the nation’s retirement income into the future that has ever been introduced in this country. It means that low-paid Australians can add to their own superannuation by putting $1 in and getting $1.50 from the government to contribute. This is for low-income earners and contributions up to a $1,000. It is for incomes of up to $28,000, fading out through to $58,000. This is a very positive policy because it actually gives people an incentive to do something for themselves, which is a fundamental of Liberal/National governance.

I am asked by the member for McPherson how this has been embraced by the community. I would like to inform the House today of the comments of the Chief Executive Officer of HESTA—an industry fund basically for nurses and health workers, which is obviously a predominately female industry—Anne-Marie Corboy. In reporting that her fund had reported a 550 per cent increase in voluntary contributions in the June quarter, she said that this was largely due to the Howard government’s co-contribution—people putting in $1 and the government giving them $1.50.

What does that mean in real terms? It means that a low-income earner, someone on $25,000 contributing $1 a day out of their own income, will get $1.50 co-contribution. This means that, at the end of a 30-year working life, that person will have more than an additional one year’s annual salary—more than $27,600 for their retirement income so that they can have a better quality of life in retirement. Unionists such as Greg Combet and Bill Shorten are actually encouraging their members to use the co-contribution. As I said, the Chief Executive Officer of HESTA has reported how well it has been received by her members. In fact, Mr Swan, the now shadow Treasurer, had this to say in 1995:

In addition, the government will match dollar for dollar contributions paid by employees into their superannuation accounts. ... What could be a more concrete example of our determination to encourage savings rather than consumption?

In 1995 a co-contribution was seen by the now shadow Treasurer as the most positive thing you could do. So what did Labor do in the last election campaign? They said, ‘We’re going to get rid of it. We’re going to take it away. We’re going to remove more than $3 billion from Australia’s future savings and we’re going to put it into failed policy initiatives to try and win government.’ The only thing that failed was the Australian population’s understanding of and commitment to the Labor Party. They understood that this side of the House is providing an incentive for Australians to stand up and make provision for themselves, and they warmly welcomed it. Tomorrow, the Labor Party will meet in their caucus for a day. I strongly suggest that they look at their policy, repudiate it and go back to what the now shadow Treasurer had to say in 1995. This is a positive policy for Australians.

The Nationals

Mr Albanese (2.33 p.m.)—My question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Is the minister aware of comments made by National Party senator-elect Barnaby Joyce that he and The Nationals Senate leader, Ron Boswell, will try to reverse a ban on fishing in the Great Barrier Reef re-
region as a result of a preference deal concluded with the Fishing Party during the election? Is the minister aware that Senator Boswell has said he probably offered to review the fishing ban during preference discussions? Can the minister assure the House that no such deals were suggested or mooted in exchange for preferences? Can the minister guarantee there will be no reopening of the decision to ban recreational fishing in parts of the Great Barrier Reef region either in whole or in part?

Mr ANDERSON—I am not aware of the substance of those allegations. I will talk to Senator Macdonald. If there is any need for further advice, I will come back to you. This is pretty rich coming from the side that made it very plain that they just might have to accommodate the Greens and adopt some of their whacky policies and all that sort of stuff. What went on down in the Styx Valley, I might ask?

Health and Ageing: Aged Care

Mr GEORGIOU (2.34 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Ageing. Would the Minister advise the House of the government’s initiatives to give older Australians greater choice in meeting their care needs?

Ms JULIE BISHOP—I thank the member for Kooyong for his question and indeed agree with him that older Australians are entitled to choice in their health and care needs—how, when and where they receive it. The Australian government is committed to ensuring that older Australians do have more choice. A number of initiatives announced recently will give rise to greater choice, and I welcome the announcement about the private health insurance rebate of up to 35 per cent for people over the age of 65, and 40 per cent for people over the age of 70. I further welcome a recent announcement by the Prime Minister with regard to people living with dementia to provide them with more choices as to how and when they are cared for. Specifically, 2,000 new dementia-specific Extended Aged Care at Home packages have been announced at a cost of $127 million. I am also delighted that the Prime Minister has announced the government’s intention to make dementia a national health priority.

With regard to home care, the Australian government has allocated a further $148 million for respite care and financial support for carers so that older people needing care can remain at home with the support and love of their carers. These are the sorts of initiatives that are building on the government’s strong record of providing choice in aged care. In home and community care, where the government provides about $790 million a year, over 750,000 Australians are now receiving home and community care. With regard to community aged care packages, when we came to office only about 4,000 CAC packages were available. Today, there are 30,000. Indeed, the member for Kooyong might recall that, when we came to office in 1996, there was not one community aged care package available in his electorate. Today there are about 600 or 618 packages in the electorate of Kooyong. That is the story across the country.

In residential care, the government have committed record levels of funding—about $5 billion per year now—so that about 155,000 older Australians can receive quality care in a residential care setting of their choice. In addition to the $148 million that was announced during the election, funding for carers has increased fivefold since we came to government. Over $100 million is now allocated to the National Respite for Carers Program. The Labor Party’s answer to this was an unsustainable, unworkable policy called Medicare Gold—an attempt to nationalise health for the over-75s. It is not a policy that would work. I am surprised that anyone...
would still put their name to it. Meanwhile, our government are getting on with the job of realising our vision for a world-class system of care that is high quality, affordable and accessible and that meets the needs, preferences and choices of older Australians.

Federal Election: Member for New England

Mr ALBANESE (2.38 p.m.)—My question is again addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Minister, I refer to your previous answers where you stated to this House that you were unaware of allegations of discussions regarding Mr Maguire, and of discussions that had taken place between him, Senator Sandy Macdonald and the member for New England, and that inducements had been given, until that information was made public prior to the federal election campaign. I refer also to your previous answer in which you—

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Member for Grayndler, come to your question.

Mr ALBANESE—I refer to your answer in which you stated—

The SPEAKER—Would the member come to his question?

Mr ALBANESE—Yes.

Mr ALBANESE—I refer to your answer in which you stated that you were unaware of reports that The Nationals had engaged in preference negotiations with the Fishing Party—

The SPEAKER—Would the member come to his question.

Mr ALBANESE—regarding the Great Barrier Reef extension.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Would the member come to his question.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ALBANESE—Minister, given that this discussion was widely reported, including in the Australian on 26 October, how can you expect this House to believe that you were unaware of these discussions?

The SPEAKER—Would the member resume his seat. I rule that question out of order. That is a question that is suggesting its own answer.

Mr Latham—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: is it really an expectation that members of the opposition have to ask questions with the whole of the government benches yelling at them and are expected to have their questions in order? Is this what you mean by ‘firm and fair’? Fair to who? That certainly was not very fair to the member for Grayndler.

The SPEAKER—Would the Leader of the Opposition resume his seat. There is no point of order. I call the honourable member for Dobell.

Ms Gillard—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: can I suggest to you that the member for Grayndler be allowed to ask his question again? It was clearly in order. In this chamber the Deputy Prime Minister has said that he did not know something about a matter that was widely reported. We therefore have to be entitled to point to the public reporting of this matter, and that is what the question was about.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I will rule on the point of order. Would the member resume her seat, please. Twice I asked the member for Grayndler to come to his question and he did not, so I have now called the member for Dobell.
Ms Gillard—Mr Speaker, I have another point of order. My point of order relates to your obligation to keep this House in good order.

The SPEAKER—The member for Lalor will resume her seat and I will rule on the point of order.

Ms Gillard—The member for Grayndler found it difficult to come to the conclusion of his question because of persistent interjections on the other side—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume her seat. I will rule that out of order. I suggest to you, Member for Lalor, that when I have asked you to resume your seat you will resume your seat, then I can rule.

Mr Martin Ferguson—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My point of order goes to the fact that when the Manager of Opposition Business in the House was taking a point of order you freely allowed the government to interject in a most unruly way. When are you going to bring them to order in an even-handed fashion?

The SPEAKER—There is no point of order. Resume your seat.

Roads: Safety

Mr TICEHURST (2.42 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads. Would the minister update the House on actions the Australian government has taken to reduce road trauma?

Mr LLOYD—I thank my colleague the member for Dobell for his question on a matter that is of great concern to all honourable members in this House. Last year some 1,634 Australians were tragically killed on roads in Australia and over 10 times as many were seriously injured, devastating thousands of families throughout Australia.

Mr Crean interjecting—

Mr LLOYD—The Australian transport ministers have agreed on a target for reducing road deaths by some 40 per cent between 2001 and 2010. We must meet or even beat this target. Unfortunately, in recent months the downward trend in road deaths has stalled. Reducing road trauma has to be a partnership. We need to continue to improve our roads and, most importantly, to enforce higher standards of driver education for young people. I am totally committed to reducing road deaths and road trauma on Australian roads. The Australian government’s AusLink plan will be delivering the biggest—

Mr Crean interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Hotham is warned!

Mr LLOYD—Mr Speaker, this is an issue that is of vital importance to all members on this side—I am not sure about the other side—and it is something that I care passionately about. The AusLink plan will be delivering a national land transport program throughout Australia—some $12.5 billion, which is the equivalent of two Snowy Mountains schemes. It is an important project. The Australian government will work together with the states, territories and local governments to provide safer roads. A total of $1.2 billion will be spent on local government roads through our very popular Roads to Recovery program.

The Howard government’s black spot program does save lives. We have provided an additional $90 million to extend this program for another two years—a program that was scrapped by the Labor Party. The Deputy Prime Minister and I are both passionately committed to improving the skills of young drivers. We want a trial driver education scheme up and running as soon as possible. We have achieved a great deal in road safety. We will continue to take all practica-
bles steps to reduce road trauma, death and tragedy on Australian roads.

**Transport: Shipping**

**Mr STEPHEN SMITH (2.45 p.m.)**—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. I refer the Deputy Prime Minister to the comments yesterday of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Chairman, Mr Graeme Samuel, that the benefits of productivity improvements in the stevedoring sector:

... may be in danger of being exhausted leaving Patrick and P & O with a cosy duopoly and much higher rates of return than the average Australian company.

I also refer the Deputy Prime Minister to Mr Samuel’s comment that the opposition of Patrick’s Managing Director, Mr Chris Corrigan, to further competition in this sector is:

... akin to arguing that Australia should return to an era of ‘orderly marketing’ ...—

and that—

Such a retrograde step would come at great cost to Australian consumers, exporters, importers and ... the Australian economy ...

*Honourable members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! Will the member for Perth come to his question, please.

**Mr STEPHEN SMITH**—Does the minister endorse Mr Samuel’s analysis of Mr Corrigan’s position?

**Mr ANDERSON**—As I said in this place yesterday, lectures on waterfront improvements from the opposition are intriguing at best, and hypocritical and pretty pathetic at worst, I would have to say. I repeat the figures again, because they are worthy of mention. The more we can get them up, the better. With 39 or 40 inquiries between 1945 and 1996 into waterfront productivity in this country, there was no progress whatsoever, particularly during those 13 years of Labor. There was a lot of money to their mates—remember Mr Wran and the other assorted consultants?—but no progress on waterfront reform.

We have had 13 quarters now of performance in excess of the benchmark we set for a productivity improvement across our major ports. The ACCC has identified that, because we have a booming economy with rapidly rising imports and exports, emerging capacity constraints may be limiting the benefits that shippers will derive in the future from reforms. In those circumstances, the issue of capacity is something that the shippers should take up with the port managers—your mates in the states. How about you go and talk to them?

**Small Business**

**Mr CIOBO (2.47 p.m.)**—My question is addressed to the Minister for Small Business and Tourism. Would the minister inform the House how new government initiatives will benefit small business, including those in my electorate of Moncrieff?

**FRAN BAILEY**—I thank my colleague the member for Moncrieff for his question and for all of the support he gives to small business in his electorate. The Howard government have provided a very strong economic climate for small business to thrive in this country. We have provided a tremendous amount of assistance to small business, and we will build on that assistance in a number of ways.

We will reduce the tax burden for small business by introducing the 25 per cent entrepreneurs’ tax discount and enable 740,000 small businesses to have the option to lodge and pay their BAS on an annual basis. We will also reduce the red tape by establishing a $50 million regulation reduction incentive fund targeted at local government—that first level of government which is accessed by so many businesses when they are just starting...
up or they want to expand their businesses. We will also promote greater flexibility in the work force by reintroducing the unfair dismissal legislation and thereby giving small business the certainty to employ more people. We will also provide a greater deal of protection to small business by strengthening the Trade Practices Act and making it much easier for small business to collectively bargain with big business. This government has delivered so much for small business over the past 8½ years, and we will deliver even more in the future.

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

### MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

**Howard Government: Economic Policy**

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

The failure of the Howard Government to maintain fiscal discipline and pursue other policies to keep downward pressure on interest rates.

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 SWAN (Lilley) (2.51 p.m.)—**This MPI goes to the heart of the recent election campaign. It goes to the very heart of the lie that the coalition put to the Australian people. This Prime Minister and this Treasurer won the election promising that interest rates would never rise under the coalition. After producing record house prices and encouraging people to go further into debt, they said your mortgage would be safe with them. Yesterday, the Governor of the Reserve Bank blew the whistle on this lie. He made it very clear that interest rates were going to go up some time in the next 18 months. But he went further than that. He pointed to some substantial structural problems in the Australian economy: more and more Australians are getting further and further into debt. The situation now is that household debt is 150 per cent of household disposable income, and there is a clear warning in the RBA report about high levels of household debt, in that they are a threat to growth, a threat to prosperity and a threat to living standards. This is why the coalition’s recent $66 billion spending spree was so irresponsible, because it does have the potential to put upward pressure on interest rates.

We are going to hold this government accountable for their promise. We are going to watch this government like a hawk when it comes to interest rates. You can see the warnings in the recent reports—in the IMF report, in the Reserve Bank report, in the Access Economics report. They are reports which all members of this House should be familiar with and should be extremely concerned about. Every rise in interest rates, if that were to unfortunately come about, and every increase in the cost of the family home, if that were to unfortunately come about, will be a nail in the coffin of this coalition government because of the ironclad guarantee that they gave during the election campaign.

When this government got into political trouble at the beginning of this year they started pushing the cash out of the Treasury. They took that giant vacuum cleaner down to the Treasury and sucked the cash out. From budget time through to the election they sucked out $66 billion. Think about sucking out $66 billion: it was raining cash. The Treasurer and the Prime Minister were driving down the main streets of marginal electorates throwing $100 bills out the window—totally irresponsible! There was $66
billion of new spending announced this year, an average of $13 billion a month. Think about that: an average of $13 billion of new spending a month from the budget to election day, and $6 billion of it came in 60 mad minutes in the coalition policy launch.

This was unprecedented. I would like to explain it in simple terms for members opposite, who do not really understand the potential consequences of it. They do not understand what a threat this is to Australia’s growth, prosperity and family living standards. Normally, in non-election years, this government commits something like $4 billion of new spending. This year it committed 13 times that amount. If you have a look at the graph I am holding, you can see the spending increases that have come in election years. In 1998 there was a big spike and then it went down again. In 2001 there was a big spike. But in 2004 there was an absolutely massive explosion of expenditure. This was reckless expenditure, which is going to put unnecessary upward pressure on interest rates. When you look at the Reserve Bank report and you come to grips with the fact that debt is 150 per cent of disposable household income, a very small rise in interest rates can have a tremendous impact on the living standards of Australian families.

We all know that John Howard is shameless. This graph shows just how shameless John Howard is—how he will put the money out at election time and how he did it in an unprecedented way in this election year. In this election he really had the nerve of a burglar. He was out there stealing unprecedented amounts of money. There he was, the day that he spent $6 billion at his policy launch—$100 million a minute—standing up and spraying cash everywhere. And do you remember the sign that was on the front of the lectern? It said, ‘Keeping interest rates low’—as he spent $6 billion! This is sort of like someone in a Salvation Army uniform going on a three-month bender, wandering around the streets and hoping no-one will notice. This was absolutely unbelievable. And just when you thought the coalition had spent enough, they were out there spending more—the spending spree continued past the policy launch.

I do not know whether anyone is familiar with Monty Python’s The Meaning of Life and Mr Creosote. There is that great scene in the movie where he sits down, eats himself to death and then explodes. That is what happened during the Prime Minister’s policy launch. We all saw what happened but now we know how it happened, because we have the account of Pamela Williams. If you read the article of 13 October by Pamela Williams you realise that it is the official version by Peter Costello, not John Howard. This is what it says:

Howard had discussed with the campaign head office a menu of possible policies. The general view was that he would choose two or three items from the list. But in the end he used them all.

He had ... four main courses and ... three desserts, as one stunned Liberal said.

He exploded at the end of the policy launch, just like Mr Creosote. Since the election campaign we have seen the record of what this means from statutory bodies that are responsible for managing the Australian economy and have the task of preserving family living standards in this country and ensuring that they are not eaten away by rising interest rates. The most recent of these was yesterday’s report from the Governor of the Reserve Bank. What did he really say in that report? Apart from talking about the very high levels of household debt and the lax lending practices of banks and mortgage brokers, he said something even more important—something that is very significant for a central banker to say. He said that monetary policy has its limits and that when there are great challenges to an economy other ele-
ments of public policy have to carry the weight. What he was really saying was that in the face of this spending spree—this explosion of money that has been put out into the Australian community—he was powerless to do too much more in terms of monetary policy. He was saying, in the face of the government doing this, that this could mean a rise in interest rates in the long term and that if the government did not want that they would have to do something else in fiscal policy. He was saying to the government, ‘You may be forced to repudiate some of your election commitments.’

That takes us to the most significant thing that has happened since the election. Four days after the election the Treasurer came out and said: ‘Oh, I’ve been mistaken. I got it all wrong. Those growth forecasts that we put out in PEFO—the estimates that we all worked on to try and fund our promises for the election—were too optimistic. I don’t really agree with them anymore. We might therefore have to walk away from some of these commitments.’ This is what the Treasurer said on the 7.30 Report:

Well, I think the Treasury forecasts are pretty optimistic.

I will make that quite clear.

They assume uninterrupted growth for the next four years.

That’s the Treasury forecast, by the way, not mine.

So after the election, as we were still counting the votes in Hindmarsh and other seats around this country, he came out and admitted that he had fibbed to the Australian people during the election campaign about something that is absolutely fundamental to family living standards and keeping downward pressure on interest rates. In effect, he has admitted that the government’s irresponsible spending spree is going to put upward pressure on interest rates at a time when we face other big challenges in terms of the fundamental structure of our economy.

There is more than that when we look at the other reports. Let us go to the IMF report. This is where everyone in this chamber should be very concerned. The IMF has pointed to the fact that this government is running down future surpluses precisely at the time we need to be investing in a higher-productivity, higher-growth economy and that, because of its spending spree, we have weakened our capacity to do that, to grow and to increase family living standards into the future.

While I am on the IMF report, I might just talk about another porky that the Treasurer has been telling. You might recall seeing the Treasurer on TV the day the report came out. I am rarely surprised by the Treasurer, but on this day I was. He stood up there and said with a straight face that we had just been through nine uninterrupted years of economic growth. I do not know what happened to the other five. Where were they? This Treasurer will go to any length, tell any porky and distort any fact that gives any credit to the Australian Labor Party for the current health of the Australian economy and he obscures the failure of his government to invest in the future, in education and infrastructure, and do something about our exports and our research and development.

He has a major problem on his hands. When you read the IMF report, the Reserve Bank report and the report from Access Economics, you understand that this country does face significant problems. They are problems that I hope we overcome. I hope the worst-case scenarios do not eventuate. But all of these reports are now ringing an alarm bell. They are saying that this country has to make the necessary investments for the growth economy of tomorrow, not just of today. I think this was summarised pretty
accurately in the Budget Monitor from Access Economics. Access Economics has pointed to the risk that the surge may slip away too fast. It says:

If we are right, and if recent spending has done little to further future growth, then Australian policy makers have muffed a last chance to cement our current prosperity for some time.

What a damning indictment to be put on a government, barely two months from an election where they assured all of the Australian people that their living standards were secure, interest rates were not going to go up and they could confidently think ahead and embrace the future! We need a government that will embrace the future, take these challenges on board and look at them in a realistic way.

Labor took a different approach to the government when it came to campaign spending. Labor actually funded its promises with budget savings, and 85 per cent of Labor’s spending commitments were paid for with savings totalling $28.4 billion across the forward estimates. These savings were independently verified by Treasury and would have allowed Labor to deliver $3.5 billion in larger surpluses across the forward estimates—that is, $3.5 billion more than the coalition. Labor’s net spending relative to PEFO was $5.2 billion compared to the coalition’s net $8.8 billion. We did put forward a responsible approach but we lost. We are going to continue to argue for the need for this country to have a tight budget policy so that we can invest in future growth in the economy of tomorrow by meeting skill shortages, boosting productivity and competitiveness, ending financial disincentives and poverty traps and reforming economic institutions to foster enterprise flexibility.

The first duty of an opposition is to keep the government honest. Honest opposition is far better than timid opposition. We intend to be the interest rate hawks in this parliament. We are going to keep an eye on everything that the government do. We are going to hold them accountable to the Australian people for their actions. If their irresponsible spending spree does unfortunately produce rises in interest rates then we are going to nail them in this parliament for their irresponsibility and short-termism. What this government produced in this campaign, whether it was in family payments, education, health or research and development, was a whole lot of short-term vote-buying exercises which hinder the capacity to invest in the future growth of this economy. That is the task for us in this parliament in this term: we will keep the government honest. Secondly, we will develop alternative policies. In doing that we will not walk away from our principles. But we will look at our policies again and find a better way forward. We will be guided by what is good for the economy tomorrow, not just today. That is the job of a vigorous opposition and that is what we will pursue in this House.

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer) (3.05 p.m.)—It is a bit rich: here we are in the first sitting week after the government has been elected and we have this matter of public importance from the Six-hundred Dollar Man, the man who cannot tell whether $600 is real when it is in the hands of the families of the electorates of Swan, Lilley, Longman or anywhere else. He cannot tell. This is the bloke who was able to tell the Australian population that he was not sure whether they were better off annually or weekly and that it did not make any difference. This is the bloke who is not the first choice of the Labor Party and it is even doubtful that he is the second choice—he is the third choice for shadow Treasurer. Of course, the first choice was the member for Lalor. She had her credentials out there. She was the first in the

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Labor Party who actually came clean after the election and said that $600 is real money. I can tell you that the families of Longman think it is real. On 1 November, which I think was probably the day after the member for Lilley was made shadow Treasurer, the member for Lalor said:

I think we’ve got to be frank and say there were a lot of people who received $1200 or $1800 ... in a lump sum and they were pretty keen to keep it, and they identified needing to vote for the Howard Government as the way of keeping it.

She is right. The member for Lalor is right. The fact is, as many Australian families understood, the only way they were going to be able to keep their $600 family payments was to vote for the coalition, and they did. But the whole time the member for Lilley, the now shadow Treasurer, the man who is out here trying to enunciate a position of economic credibility, kept saying to people: ‘It’s not real. You’re not going to be able to spend it.’ Some spent it, but many have actually put it in the bank and saved it for the future. Some of them are probably going to reinvest that money in their superannuation and get a co-contribution of $1.50 and increase the amount of money they have to spend on their retirement in the future. But, of course, these are not things that the Six-hundred Dollar Man finds palatable.

Let us go to the core of his new campaign to try and derail what is a very strong economy, which is by saying that this government have spent a large sum of money which we cannot afford. According to the Labor Party’s own policy documents, the Labor Party committed to gross spending of $39.5 billion and claimed savings of $30.1 billion. We will come to the elasticity of the $30.1 billion in a moment, but that resulted in a net spend of $9.4 billion. On top of that, the opposition have supported every spending measure that the government proposed and put in place in the last budget, so they are not taking away any of the tax initiatives or any of the other spending measures that we have put up in the 2004-05 budget. So the Labor Party committed to, in their own terms, a net spend of $9.4 billion. The coalition committed to spend—and will fully fulfil our commitments—in the order of $8 billion, which is not the outrageous figure that the shadow Treasurer bandies around recklessly.

That is typical of what the shadow Treasurer does. He is very quick to pull a line. He does not care how far from the truth it is. He thinks that if you say it often enough then maybe someone will believe it sooner or later. The fact is that the Six-hundred Dollar Man, the member for Lilley, is wrong. The fact is that the Labor Party were willing to spend $9.4 billion net in their own terms, and the Howard government committed $8 billion during the campaign. If the Six-hundred Dollar Man is so committed to financial responsibility then the fundamental question goes to why the Labor Party was not prepared to put forward one full policy for assessment as part of the Charter of Budget Honesty by the Department of Finance and Administration within the time line. Instead of committing themselves to the responsibility of having a true independent audit of their figures by giving them to the department of finance, which is required by government, Labor did not present one policy on time.

In fact, prior to the budget, the member for Werriwa—who is always talking about reading to kids—decided that he would promise that every ALP policy would be audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers. That simply did not happen. How do we know? Because PricewaterhouseCoopers had to tell us that they were never asked to do that. They were basically asked to add up the columns to see whether they came to the figures at the bottom. They got their calculators out and said, ‘Yes, the figures you’ve given us add up to the numbers that you’ve got at the bot-
tom.’ But did they look at any of the underlying assumptions? No. Were they asked to by the Labor Party? No. Why? Because those underlying assumptions were not just fanciful, they were ridiculous in the extreme—as can be proven.

Prior to the election, the Labor Party did not submit one policy within the five working days. The Medicare Gold policy—fool’s gold, as it is now widely understood to be—was found to have a costing hole of $726.2 million over four years. This was not found by the Liberal Party, the National Party—not even PricewaterhouseCoopers. This was found by the independent department of finance. It is no wonder that the Labor Party did not want to put all their figures forward to the department of finance. They were robbery. We have a bloke who sits here today and says, ‘We want to have financial responsibility.’ The reality is that their policies were unfunded. They were not costed by the department of finance because they did not have the responsibility in opposition to do so. God help us if you ever have the responsibility in government!

It is interesting, because the Labor Party failed to put 20 policies to the department of finance. Their divisive schools policy, costing $852.6 million, was not given to the department of finance. Their Defence policy—at such a critical time to this nation, and with a value of $500 million—was not given to the department of finance. Their policy on water and saving the Murray—such fundamental issues for the future and wellbeing of this country—were not provided to the department of finance. None of the myriad new tax increases under the Labor—such things as the super surcharge, savings on the mining tax, increases in TCF and PMV tariffs, increases in the cigarette excise, increases in the passenger movement charges, increases in the cost of business visas—were provided to the department of finance.

How can you have any credibility when you come into this place and lecture a government that has actually reduced the Labor Party’s debt, a debt which they foisted upon the next generation to pay for their failed policies in 1995, 1994, 1993, 1992—and in 1991 when, of course, we had the recession we had to have? How can they have any credibility when they come in here with such comments? These numbers that we are talking about today are important because they go to whether or not you have a responsible government. We do not just talk about it, we do not just have words—we actually have actions. We back up our actions with facts. The facts and our deliverables are there for all to see: more Australians in jobs, more Australians being paid more, fewer people on welfare, interest rates at almost all-time lows, unemployment rates at the lowest recorded since quarterly figures came in. We have stable inflation and we have consumer and business confidence growing because there is a government that backs up its words with actions. So when you come to figures, the member for Swan has always thought that a great set of numbers—

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

Mr BROUGHH—My apologies. I would hate to defame the member for Swan. The member for Lilley, the shadow Treasurer, always thought that a great set of numbers were the numbers that you had when you were going to roll your leader, and that is what has always been important to him. That is probably what exercised more of his time in the lead-up to the election than thinking about anything positive. No wonder he thought $600 in the hands of Australian families was not real. I can tell you that they think it is real. The day that you work that out—
The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The minister will address his comments through the chair.

Mr BROUGH—When the member for Lilley recognises that—and tomorrow is the chance, when the caucus gets together to do a bit of soul-searching—he can go through this and say: ‘Listen, one of the first things we’ve got to understand is that the $600 family payment per child is real, and we really do need to openly and publicly repudiate our position there. Let’s not just slip it in in the dead of night with a bit of a press release.’ Remember that the member for Jagajaga was opposed to our rebate on private health insurance. There were 30-odd press releases absolutely opposed to it, and then, I think it was during the Olympics, it just slipped in: ‘We’re now supporting it.’ So we wait to see when the Six-hundred Dollar Man, the member for Lilley, the shadow Treasurer, repudiates his position after the pressure from the backbench—and maybe that will be after Dick has got over his problems that you will have tomorrow on trees.

There are some other challenges for the Labor Party. If they want to talk about fiscal responsibility they are going to have lots of opportunities over the next few weeks. The way you grow an economy, the way you get more Australians into jobs and off welfare, and the way you increase your tax base is to ensure there are more taxpayers because people are in jobs, and the way you do that is by freeing up the Workplace Relations Act. The Labor Party had a policy which was really ‘back to the future’—back to a centralised system and taking the responsibility out of the hands of individuals, because the Labor Party simply did not believe that individuals had the responsibility and the capacity to look after themselves. Well, the coalition think they do. What we are saying to the opposition—those who sit opposite, both here and in the other place—is that you will have numerous opportunities to not just speak the words but walk the talk. You will be able to come into this place and vote for or against measures which will grow the Australian economy and give people jobs. That is the real challenge. That will be the voice and the action that the business community wants to see from the Labor Party, to see what they really have learnt from the hiding they have just received. My doubt is that they have learnt anything at all.

The Labor Party talks about interest rates. It is a very important issue to the people of Longman, as I am sure it is to the people of the member for Lilley’s electorate as well. They do remember having an extra digit in front of their mortgage rates—not seven per cent but 17 per cent. So when the Labor Party comes in here and starts to lecture this government, when we have a record of consistently low interest rates, they wonder what planet the member for Lilley is on. They wonder what planet he is on when he starts talking about $600 not being real and they wonder what planet he is on when he says, ‘Weekly is different to annually, and you can actually be better off this way.’ This is a bloke who actually wants to run the treasury bench, who wants to be in charge of a massive economy of $800 billion, with a budget expenditure in the order of $200 billion.

Which policies tomorrow, during the navel-gazing in the caucus, will the Labor Party repudiate? Will they repudiate stealing from the future—$3.8 billion from our future in the form of superannuation? They got rid of the super co-contribution, which allowed low-paid Australians to be able to put $1 away and get $1.50 from their fellow taxpayers to build for their own future. What a great incentive and what a fantastic policy—one that was acknowledged in 1995 by the member for Lilley as being one of the most positive things you could do. The reality is that today he repudiates that. Why? Because he is a man of political expediency.
He is a man who is nothing more than a machine politician. He is one of those who came from Queensland politics, up there with the Labor Party as a machine man. In an article written in the Sydney Morning Herald on 12 June last year, Mark Latham said he did not want machine men like Wayne Swan and Stephen Smith. Why? He said it was because:

The new divide is between true believers who want modern Labor to stand up and fight for our policy beliefs and the machine men—such as the member for Lilley—with their over-reliance on polls, spin doctors … and a command-and-control system of politics.

That is not what he is after, he said. So you have to ask yourself: why did he finally capitulate to others and put the member for Lilley in charge of fundamentally the most important shadow ministry, Treasury, when he had the member for Lalor there, who recognised what a $600 value is, who obviously felt that she could do a good job? But, no, she was wiped out.

Factionalism is alive and well in the Labor Party, there is no doubt about that. The Right obviously had to have its say, its moment in the sun, and now here we have the member for Lilley trying to build some credentials on a lie. That is pretty much the way he has always run his political life. The business community is not going to wear it, the Australian community did not wear it at the last election, and until they start to talk the talk—

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (3.20 p.m.)—I know it is the first week back and we have all been in party mood, and I expect the government should enjoy it, but occasionally—

Mr Brough—Why would you get a party?

Ms BURKE—I said the government should enjoy it. You should listen occasionally—it would help. I do know that the minister has been attempting to be humorous, but it has failed dismally. However, at least he could have read what the MPI is actually about these things, and listened and learnt occasionally. The Prime Minister started the election saying, ‘Who do you trust?’ I thought that was a fairly brave move. I listened to him and he kept saying, ‘Who do you trust?’ This is the man who had misled the Australian public time and time again; the man who said there were weapons of mass destruction; the man who said there were children overboard; the man who had said, ‘Never, ever a GST’; the man who had said, again and yet again, things that we now know to be untruths.

Yet he went into this election saying, ‘Who do you trust?’ and he scared voters—terrified them—into believing that the Labor Party would raise interest rates. Somehow, miraculously, we are in charge of interest rates; we are the ones who control them! Those of us who actually listen and learn and read papers—and the Deputy Prime Minister should be schooled to read papers so that he

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knows what is going on with his own mem-
bership—know it is the Governor of the Re-
serve Bank who sets interest rates. He sets
interest rates on the basis of the current
stimulus, the current economic setting in this
country. At the moment we have a very good
economic setting; there is no disputing it.
But it is all built on the back of consumption;
it is all built on the back of that plastic fan-
tastic, the credit card: get it out, whip it on.

We are all spending 2.5 per cent more than we
earn. Let me repeat that. Each month,
most of us are spending 2.5 per cent more
than we earn. It is all going on that wonder-
ful credit card: ker-ching, ker-ching, ker-
ching! My daughter has the impression that
money comes in plastic credit cards, because
occasionally when I say, ‘Mummy can’t af-
ford that,’ she says, ‘But you’ve got those
things in your wallet, Mummy.’ Everybody is
thinking we can all put it on the plastic. It
will be on the plastic and somehow, miracu-
lessly, we are going to find how to pay it off.
That is what this government has led every-
one to believe. They have promised $66 bil-
lion since last May. That is an awful lot of
money. I have been into the vault of the Re-
serve Bank. I have held a billion-dollar gold
bar. It was pretty impressive. I tried to weigh
up how I could get it into the handbag, but I
could not manage to smuggle it out. I looked
at it and thought, ‘That is amazing!’

Mr Swan—You could have put it on the
card!

Ms Burke—I could have paid off the
plastic cards; I could have paid off one of the
mortgages. But $66 billion—can you com-
prehend what that means? Most people can-
not. And then in one afternoon they spent $6
billion. I sat and watched the press con-
ference with the Prime Minister doling out
money left, right and centre. Everybody was
getting some. I did not get any—but every-
body else seemed to be getting some. It was
not money to projects; it was one-off lump
sum payments: $600 per child, $100 to pen-
sioners, $1,000 to carers. GPs got an instan-
taneous pay rise. I wish I was a member of
that union. They seem to be brilliant at get-
ing instantaneous pay rises. It was all there.
It was given and given and given. It was an
obscene spend of money.

In this election, it was $11 billion. All that
will go back into the economy. It will be
pump priming going back into the economy.
It will be spent on the plastic fantastic, and
that is where the pressure will come onto
interest rates. Interest rates will have to go
up. The Governor of the Reserve Bank has
been signalling it. I do not blame him—
during an election period it would have been
a pretty gutsy move for the Governor of the
Reserve Bank to put up interest rates, but he
knows the stimulus is there. He knows that
the issues are there that must put pressure on
him in his role of keeping down inflation to
put up those interest rates. He knows it. He
has been signalling it for a long time.

The Governor of the Reserve Bank has
been out there trying to warn and pressure
the public into knowing that we are over-
spending, that we are overcapitalising on our
homes, that we have pumped this economy
so much that we have locked the majority of
young family members out of ever having
the Australian dream. Most young Australian
couples coming into the property market
now will probably never be able to afford
their own home. That is what this govern-
ment has done. If you are, luckily, inside the
market and you have your own home, you
are geared to the hilt.

Originally when people had to borrow
they had to spend about 20 per cent of their
income. When my parents bought their
house, they had to spend about 20 per cent of
their income. It crept up to 30 per cent of
their income. Now people are spending 40 to
50 per cent of their income to service their mortgages, to service their home loans. That is leaving them with 50 per cent of their income to pay their bills and to put food on the table. If the car breaks down, God help you, because there is no hope you are going to have some spare cash to get that car repaired. All that is going into your home loan. So, yes, you are terrified. If there is a marginal move in interest rates, it will come crashing down on those families who have borrowed to the hilt, who are geared to the hilt, who have no room to move.

These families are spending up to 40 per cent of their income on their mortgage, and then there is all the money they have spent on consumables. They have gone down to Harvey Norman and bought furniture for the entire house on hire-purchase. They have believed the stuff that says that you do not have to pay anything back for 12 months. They have forgotten that, in 12 months, you do have to pay it back and you have to pay it back with anywhere between 24 and 36 per cent interest. After the 12 months, they have a lovely house full of brand-new furniture and suddenly the man turns up and says, ‘I’d really like you to pay some of that back now.’ They cannot, and it gets repossessed. They stand in their beautiful house while their furniture is being repossessed.

I have had couples—with both members in full-time employment—come in to me, having to say, ‘We really need to know where the Salvos are with furniture, because all our stuff has just been repossessed. We’ve managed to hold onto the flat-screen TV’—which is a bit sad. They have managed to hold onto that and the DVD recorder, because that was a Christmas present. But the fridge has just gone and so has the washing machine—and they have four kids. These people are in full-time work, but they have bought the dream. They have accepted the dream, and the Prime Minister has scared them into believing that it is only this government who can preserve that dream. It is only this government who is trying to destroy it by pump priming this economy with false stimulus—false money that is not there, that was not needed.

It is not good policy. None of it was good policy. We are still going to have a crisis in aged care. There are no new aged care beds. We are still going to have a crisis in our public hospital system: there is no extra money back into our public hospitals. We are still having a crisis in dental care. In my electorate, in the City of Whitehorse, prior to this government coming in, we had got our dental waiting list down to six months. At six months it was still too long. It is now up to four years—four years to go in and get your teeth fixed. And my electorate is the leafy green suburbs of Melbourne. My seat is affluent in lots of respects. It has the highest rate of education in the country. I have a low rate of mortgages, because most people in my electorate have paid theirs off. You cannot buy into my electorate; you could not afford to buy most places in either Box Hill or Mount Waverley if you were a first home buyer. If you were able to, mum and dad probably helped you out.

The other reality is that those first home buyers have massive HECS debts. That is the other thing. Even the Governor of the Reserve Bank has pointed this out: to get new home owners in, you have to get rid of their overhanging debts. My younger brother is a lawyer. He earns quite good money. His wife is a fairly senior public servant. They had to get her parents to go guarantor on their loan, because they both had such massive HECS debts. The bank said to them, ‘It’s all well and good—your incomes are fine—but you have this massive debt.’ My little brother was slightly embarrassed turning up to his in-laws to say, ‘Would you mind going guaran-
tor on the mortgage? Otherwise we’re not going to get one. It was just embarrassing.

And this government is making it worse: billions and billions of dollars pumped in, for what? The Prime Minister’s record; nothing else. No other reason. He wants to be the longest serving PM. You cannot really outgo the one who has got the high watermark, but he is going to try his damnedest to be that longest serving PM. We are going to sit here and watch the poor Treasurer wilting a little, I think, because I do not see the PM going in any great hurry. He is liking his historic moment in the sun—but at what cost? I despair.

In some ways it is the best thing that could happen to the Labor Party if interest rates go up and things start coming crashing down, but do we really want that to happen to our people? Do we really want that to happen to people out there who will not be able to cope? Any slight move in interest rates and, because there is so much pressure on those people’s lives already, so much pressure on their ability to repay, it will just come crashing down. Access Economics, the IMF, the Reserve Bank and everybody have pointed this out. Every credible economic analyst has said this is not sustainable, it is bad politics and it is bad government. I condemn this government in their first week back for such lousy politics. (Time expired)

Mr PEARCE (Aston—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (3.31 p.m.)—I start by saying that if I were an Australian resident listening to the member for Chisholm I would feel somewhat victimised. I think the member for Chisholm has accused most Australians of doing almost everything in one form or another. Can I say how disappointing it is to be back in the 41st Parliament and on the second day of substantive business to find that the Australian Labor Party still have not got the message that they need to change the way that they do business. Here we are on the Thursday, the last day of the first week of sitting, and we have yet again another frivolous MPI from the Labor Party.

The Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer a short time ago highlighted to the House the nature of the member for Lilley, the shadow Treasurer. I want to expand on those remarks because before we get into the MPI it is important to understand who it is we are actually dealing with. Are we dealing with the member for Lilley, the shadow Treasurer, are we dealing with the rooster, or are we dealing with the machine man? He has been called all of those by his own party. We heard the Minister for Revenue quote from the article where it was reported that Mark Latham accused renegades Wayne Swan and Stephen Smith of being machine men. Mr Latham then went on to say that the great divide in Labor politics is no longer between the factions. He said:

The new divide is between the true believers who want modern Labor to stand up and fight for our policy beliefs and the machine men, with their over-reliance on polls, spin doctors, the daily media cycle and a command-and-control style of politics.

I can only presume that the member for Lilley has done this in order to try and pick up on the daily media cycle, to try and get some sort of story up in tonight’s media.

We on this side of the House understand why the Labor Party feel they need to be engaged in these sorts of tactics. We understand that for the last eight years they have completely ignored the economic priority that this country needs and deserves. All of a sudden they have got this new-found interest in economics. All of a sudden they realise that the economy is important to the Australian people. For years and years they have ignored it, and now they want us and they want the Australian public to believe that they have got this new-found sincere interest.
Let me refer to an article that was published in the *Australian* on 2 November titled ‘Swan admits mistakes on child payment tactic’. We have heard a lot about how in the campaign the Labor Party said that the coalition government’s $600 child payment was not real. The article says:

One of the architects of Labor’s tax policy and family policy has conceded some voters were turned off by the ALP’s dismissal of the Government’s $600 per child welfare payment as ‘not real’.

The article goes on to say that Mr Swan said he was determined to correct the policy’s mistakes while maintaining its principle. That is the problem: it is the Labor Party’s principles that are wrong, and they still do not understand that. Their principles are wrong, and that is what they need to change in order to be able to add value and to try and help make Australia a better place.

The MPI goes to the economy and it goes to areas such as interest rates. One of the best ways to talk on these types of matters is to look at the actual facts and figures. So let us take a few of the key parameters that we look at to measure the economic condition and climate of the nation. Let us look at the budget outcomes. In Labor’s case, it was nine deficits in 13 years and $74 billion in the red. Most importantly, $69 billion of those deficits was in the last five years alone—$69 billion in the last five years. Look at the coalition’s record. The 2004-05 budget delivers the government’s seventh surplus since 1996—$34 billion in the black since coming to office in 1996. We are the best performing economy amongst the OECD nations.

Let us look at net debt. Labor left $96 billion of net debt after racking up $65 billion over their last four years alone. People may not realise that Labor’s net debt peaked at 19.1 per cent of GDP. Since 1996 this government has reduced net debt from that $96 billion to around $23 billion, which is 2.9 per cent of GDP. So under Labor we were at 19.1 per cent of GDP and since 1996 we have worked hard, together with the Australian people, and reduced it to 2.9 per cent of GDP. That is important, but the most important thing is what that reduction actually delivers to the people of Australia. What is so important about reducing net debt is that, as a result of the coalition government’s efforts, we are now saving $5.5 billion on interest payments alone. That means that as a government we can spend an additional $5½ billion in education, in health, in aged care and all of the other key priorities that this government has.

Let us look at employment. Unemployment under Labor was at 8.2 per cent when Labor left office. As a matter of fact, the unemployment rate under Labor peaked at 10.9 per cent in 1992. Since the coalition government came to office—since 1996—we have created 1.4 million new jobs. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, it was reported just recently that the unemployment rate is now down to 5.3 per cent, which is the lowest level since February 1977, 27 years ago. It is 27 years since we have had unemployment in this country down to such a low level. Again, there is a contrast between the performance of this government and the terrible performance of the Australian Labor Party when they were last in office. Australians worry a lot about inflation. Let us look at that. Under Labor, it peaked at 11.1 per cent and averaged around 5.2 per cent under their 13 years in office. In our case, inflation is now around 2.3 per cent and averages 2.4 per cent.

One of the key economic drivers of this nation is, of course, home loan interest rates. When I first moved into my electorate of Aston, which was in the early 1990s, my wife and I bought our first home. I remember signing our mortgage contracts. When we
signed up in the early nineties, our mortgage interest rate was 16.75 per cent. I remember saying to my wife, ‘We will never be able to afford to do the grass or the garden or the lawn,’ for years and years, because interest rates were so high under the Labor government of this country. Business overdraft rates got above 21 per cent—they got to 21.75 per cent.

These are the types of issues that really affect the Australian people. In our case, the coalition have managed the economy to the state where home loan interest rates are now at record levels. As a matter of fact, on a home loan with an average mortgage interest rate people are saving around $957 each month on an average new mortgage. These are the types of variables that hit people and concern people: interest rates, inflation, the government’s debt, and the government’s ability to fund programs and priorities. As I mentioned earlier, the government have that ability now because we have managed the economy so well.

Here we are, in the national parliament, in the House of Representatives, with the Australian Labor Party, of all people, trying to tell us that we have not managed the economy and trying to tell us that all of a sudden—overnight—they actually care about the economy. In one way, I am very pleased to see that they have finally woken up to the fact that the economy is important to the Australian people. But, alas, I somehow feel that it will be short lived because, as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, the Australian Labor Party are not very good at being consistent in their approach.

In conclusion, Matt Price, in the Weekend Australian on Saturday, 30 October this year, summed up the position very well. He summed up how important the economy is to the Australian people. Let me read from that report. He wrote the report about a visit during the election to my electorate of Aston. Let me quote:

That day, while waiting for the PM to arrive, a couple of us wandered up the hill to canvass residents about the election. Some young mums, intrigued by the kerfuffle in their quiet cul-de-sac, required no cue to sing Howard’s praises. The overwhelming issue that would determine their votes? Interest rates, stupid.

I rest my case. (Time expired)

CUSTOMS AMENDMENT (THAILAND-AUSTRALIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION) BILL 2004

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT (THAILAND-AUSTRALIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION) BILL 2004

Returned from the Senate

Message received from the Senate returning the bills without amendment or request.

DOCUMENTS

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (3.41 p.m.)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (3.42 p.m.)—I note the comments of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer in relation to the importance of interest rates to the Australian community. I hark back to the comments of the member for Hunter, who claimed that the election was basically won on a lie—won on a scare campaign. Scare campaign is far from the truth. The fact is that the Australian people just did not trust the management ability of the Labor Party in relation to the national economy. In the Gov-
ernor-General’s address he gave a very good overview of the Howard-Anderson government’s forward agenda. He also noted the importance of economic management.

This government was elected for a fourth term with a mandate to deliver on our election commitments. It is an ambitious agenda, fundamental to which is keeping the economy strong, keeping Australia safe and secure, creating new employment opportunities and generally ensuring a prosperous Australia with high standards of living for all Australians. It is critical that we maintain a strong economy. Australia has one of the fastest growing and best performing economies in the OECD. Today, our economic fundamentals remain in excellent shape. The Australian people realised this at the ballot box. They know the importance of low interest rates, strong economic growth, low unemployment, and low inflation. It is certainly the case that we have a strong economy, which has allowed this government to deliver the sorts of services that the people of Australia need. This government has paid back $73 billion of Labor’s debt, which frees up in the order of $5 billion annually to provide the sorts of services that the people of Australia need—to spend on infrastructure, health and education.

It is no accident that the economy is performing well. It is no accident that we have additional funds available to spend on the services that Australians need. This has occurred because the Prime Minister and the Treasurer and their cabinet colleagues, as a ministry, have been prepared to take the tough decisions in the best interests of Australia. The IMF considers the outlook for Australia’s economy as most favourable, noting that ‘Australia continues to reap the benefits of sustained implementation of appropriate macroeconomic policies and structural reforms.’

A key factor in keeping our economy strong will be continued industrial relations reform. In the Governor-General’s speech, he said:

In its fourth term, the government will accelerate the reform of workplace relations ...

I believe this is vitally important. A more flexible and fairer industrial relations regime will help create more jobs, build on the jobs that have already been created and allow Australia’s 1.1 million small businesses who contribute greatly to Australia’s GDP to employ more people, knowing that issues such as unfair dismissal have been adequately dealt with by this parliament. Without the hindrance of the members opposite to impede the passing of this legislation, we can go forward and make a more favourable industrial relations regime to build more jobs and provide more prosperity for this country.

Small business makes an extremely large contribution to rural, regional and coastal Australia in electorates like Cowper which I represent. Anything we can do to make it easier for small business to employ people will further reduce our historically low unemployment. That is why I am very focused on the need to have the unfair dismissal legislation passed. I am very focused on further labour market reform. I know all the members on this side of the House are absolutely committed to that. I think that the opposition should realise that it is in the interests of our nation to ensure that industrial relations reforms continue. When we look across the chamber, we see an opposition that is in denial; an opposition that has certainly run out of puff, if I can coin a phrase; an opposition that has probably become comfortable on that side of the House; and an opposition that the people of Australia do not trust to manage the economy, do not trust to keep interest rates low and do not trust to generate jobs.
Another factor which will help even more Australians into work is reducing welfare dependence. We on this side of the House believe that the best form of welfare that we can give people is the opportunity to obtain a job. The best way that Australians can improve their position is with the opportunity of good employment prospects. Lifting participation in the work force is rightly a major priority for this government. We will do this through a balanced package of obligations, of incentives and assistance, as has been outlined in the recent election campaign.

The government’s agenda on education and skills development, as articulated by the Governor-General, will also be a very exciting development for this country. It will help lower unemployment. It will help Australia, particularly the regional areas of Australia. I have noted that in the recent past employment used to be generated by various make-work programs. A decade ago, the way you put people into work was to instigate make-work programs—building pine log fences, painting rocks white and all those sorts of useful things. In regional areas these days, to increase employment outlooks you need to address issues such as the shortage of skilled workers. Many firms in my electorate are facing skill shortages which are impairing the ability of those enterprises to employ more workers. This government is addressing that through a focus on trade training and looking at the bottlenecks in our labour market and trying to address the skills shortages. This will provide the skilled workers that companies need to increase production and increase the employment of workers—some of them perhaps non-skilled workers.

The coalition certainly supports choice in the sorts of employment opportunities that people undertake. That is why we believe firmly that, while university education is important, skills based trade and trade education are also very important. That is why the coalition has been strongly supporting apprenticeships. The number of New Apprenticeships has grown from some 141,000 back in 1995 to 416,000 today. That is why the coalition is committed to the establishment of some 24 Australian technical colleges. This is a very important strategy which is aimed at alleviating skill shortages and offering young people opportunity and choice in their employment prospects. It is focused on the importance of trade skills. It is certainly focused on the fact that just because you elect not to go to university does not mean that the pursuit of a trade is in any way a lesser occupation than the pursuit of a university degree.

We are also looking at supporting Australians in their later years. During the election campaign, we put forward a range of policies which were wholeheartedly endorsed by the Australian community. The new utilities supplement for all Australians of pension age receiving income support, including veterans, of $100 a year for singles and $50 a year each for couples will certainly help those people pay the bills. I know that it is a measure that has been well received in my electorate. The $200 a year support for self-funded retirees with a Commonwealth seniors health card is another measure that I know would be well received along the north coast of New South Wales. Mr Deputy Speaker, when you are not in your role as Deputy Speaker and are representing the electorate of Page, I know that the people of Page would also be very pleased to receive either of those two benefits.

There is a new $148 million package to look after carers. Carers are a very important element in our society. They do a great job. The government has proposed this package to provide more financial help and more respite for carers. In addition, we are providing $2,000 care packages for people with dementia. We have also introduced a range of
measures in regard to increasing the private health insurance rebate for all Australians over 65. We will also increase the rebate for GP consultations from 85 per cent to 100 per cent of the Medicare scheduled fee from 1 January 2005. We will introduce a $10 rebate on GP services under the Round the Clock Medicare program. This government’s support of Medicare has been very well received indeed. The Labor Party claimed that this government was not committed to Medicare. I have to say that the coalition government is a friend of Medicare and has supported Medicare. These types of initiatives only reaffirm the support of this government for that very important platform of our medical system.

I think the measure to exempt accommodation bonds paid by residents entering low-level aged care from the assets test for social security recipients and veterans’ affairs pension recipients will indeed be well received by the people in my electorate. This government is very focused on creating an environment in regional and rural areas to provide families with the support they need to have a good quality of life. I think that is something that will be appreciated by the people in the wider electorate and certainly in my electorate of Cowper.

As was outlined in the election campaign, the government will be introducing a 30 per cent child-care tax rebate to reduce the out-of-pocket costs paid by parents and also a $300 rebate for recipients of family tax benefit B. The government is delivering on its election commitment to provide grandparents who are primary carers for their grandchildren with better access to affordable child care. The government will continue to work with parents and local communities to develop the potential of our youngest Australians through early childhood development.

Labor’s family tax policy was really going to hurt people in my electorate. Labor’s family tax policy was going to severely disadvantage families on around $35,000 a year. I believe that those low-income families voted accordingly. The people who are on those low incomes realised that under Labor’s family tax package they were going to be worse off. It was quite a change to tax policy—to introduce a regime that was penalising those most in need. I had some difficulty in seeing how members opposite could put forward a proposal that was going to disadvantage low-income families. In this country I believe we need to support those most in need; members opposite formed the view that it was somehow appropriate to disadvantage low-income families. I was certainly surprised to hear the constant remarks by members opposite that the $600 child payment was not real money. People who receive that $600 payment—it is $600 per child—are able to use it to perhaps buy a computer for the family or to help pay school fees. They very much appreciated that the payment of $600 per child was real money. It was not an illusion. They were certainly not fooled by the fact that Labor’s tax policy hit low-income families hard.

During this term of government we will be very much focusing on regional development. I was pleased to be at the announcement during the election campaign of the $12 million North Coast sustainable regions program. This program will assist in job creation and in the development of our industries through partnerships between government and the private sector. Parts of the electorate of Lyne, the electorate of Cowper and parts of the electorate of Page will be covered by this announcement. It is one that will be welcomed by small business. It is a measure that will be welcomed by job seekers who see the prospect of improved employment outcomes through this very important program. We have had sustainable regions pilot programs
operating effectively in a number of areas around the country. The extension of that program to the North Coast—whilst we have done a lot of work on the North Coast, we still have some more work to do there—will greatly enhance the sorts of employment prospects we have there. It is a measure that will be welcomed by business, employees and the community alike.

The Governor-General also outlined the fact that we have a very ambitious and forward looking trade policy agenda. The free trade agreements which have been signed by Australia with countries such as Singapore and Thailand stand to benefit exporters and potential exporters in this country. They stand to benefit the entire community by creating wealth for Australia and a higher standard of living in this country. The Minister for Trade, Mark Vaile, certainly worked very hard during the last term of parliament to maximise our opportunities in the trade area. Certainly the most notable free trade agreement of all—the free trade agreement with the United States, which we hope will become operational on 1 January next year—is a very exciting development for this country and it was negotiated by the coalition government. The FTA with the US is unquestionably a huge boon for Australia, one that is the envy of many of our trading partners. (Time expired)

Mr McMULLAN (Fraser) (3.57 p.m.)—I wish to begin by thanking the voters of Fraser. One way or the other, I have been representing this area, my local area, for more than 16 years. To build on that by achieving a swing to Labor in this very difficult election for us was a ray of light in what was otherwise a very dark night on 9 October. I also want to congratulate all the new members elected this year. I hope they all gain the same satisfaction and recognise the great privilege which flows from being a member of the House of Representatives as I have.

I take this first opportunity to ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, to convey my congratulations to the Speaker on his election. I actually know the real reason why he pursued that position so assiduously. It appears that being in the Parliament House office next to mine was much too great a shock for him and he had to find the first available excuse to move. So, on the very day that I moved in, he moved out! I understand that and there are no hard feelings. My only regret about his activities as Speaker so far, apart from a ruling yesterday and another one today with which I disagreed, is that he has decided to wear that silly gown over his suit. I hope he reconsiders that decision and just sits there dressed like any other member, as you do, Mr Deputy Speaker, and as do all the others. I think that is a 19th-century tradition that we can do without.

Before turning to the principal national issue that I want to address, I want to focus on some national issues with particular relevance for my local community, the community that I have the honour of representing here. First, let me refer to the government’s quiet announcement, pretty much unheralded here in Canberra, during the election to fund one of the Prime Minister’s extravagant election promises by increasing the efficiency dividend from one per cent to 1.25 per cent. Let us get the context of this clear: the Liberal Party were being hit by the judgment of Australians that their election promises were reckless and extravagant. Clearly this assessment was coming through in their polling, as I understand it was reflected in ours. This made the Liberal Party very nervous, so they felt the need for a savings option—one of I think only two they put out during the whole election. And where did they turn? They turned to the modern Liberal Party tradition: to sack public servants.

Senator Humphries here in Canberra had been talking up his campaign for re-election
on the basis of supposed attacks by the Labor Party on the public sector. After this Liberal Party policy announcement, Senator Humphries was struck dumb. We heard nothing more from him on the subject. The Prime Minister announced on 1 October that the government, if re-elected, would increase the efficiency dividend from one per cent per annum to 1.25 per cent. It sounds little enough but the government claims that it will make savings—and I think it is probably right—of about $240 million over three years arising from this measure. We do not yet know all the detail but, if the measure is implemented—as you would expect—in the same manner that the one per cent efficiency dividend has been applied over the years, it is pretty clear by the Howard government’s track record that this change will mean a loss of up to 2,000 jobs—probably at least half of them here in Canberra and over the border in the electorate of the member for Eden-Monaro, who is at the desk.

So here we are with 2,000 jobs potentially being lost, perhaps as many as half here in the ACT and over the border in Queanbeyan. It is true that there are hundreds of millions of dollars which could be saved in wasteful Commonwealth expenditure, but it will not be achieved by an efficiency dividend unless the Howard government changes its policies on issues like government advertising and other indulgences. We were able to identify hundreds of millions of dollars of waste but we did not need to reduce it with broadbrush measures like increasing the efficiency dividend, which is always lazy policy. Why should decent, hardworking Australians lose their jobs to protect pork-barrelling and self-indulgence by this government? If they want to make savings, they should cut it in their own areas of indulgent spending. That is one big issue here in the ACT that concerns me as the representative of Fraser and as an observer of the national public debate.

Another issue of particular concern in my electorate of Fraser is the future of the Australian National University. In many ways, the ANU’s problems are those of all universities in Australia, which have been slowly strangled by the Howard government—with worse to come—including other universities in my electorate, notably the University of Canberra. I assume that it was put out a few days ago, but I received today some key data on higher education, put out by the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee. It summarises some of the issues that anybody who has any association with Australia’s universities is aware of. For example, even since 2001 the student per teacher ratio in our universities has increased from 19 to 21. That is just in the two years from 2001 to 2003. Anyone who, like me, has had the opportunity, first of all, to go through university and then to see their children go through university knows that we are the first generation giving our children a worse university education than we received ourselves. There are fewer resources, bigger classes and tutorials the size of the lectures I used to attend.

There have been some inevitable changes in the funding of universities. In 1981 Commonwealth and state government funding was 90 per cent of the operating revenue of universities. By 2003 it was only 44 per cent. Some of that change had to happen, but the consequences of that are that, when the Commonwealth tightens funding, it puts more pressure on students, parents and families, it makes it harder for people to get access and it makes it harder for the universities to supply the resources. As I said, the student to teacher ratio has increased from 18 to one, to 21 to one. In areas like management and commerce, it has increased to 32 to one and, very fundamentally for the future of this country, in areas like education it has increased to 23 to one.
Internationally, we are falling behind best practice. If you look at comparable countries to see the percentage of the population aged 25 to 64 with a university qualification, you see that in Australia in 2002 we were 20 per cent, compared to the USA at 29 per cent, Norway at 28 per cent, Denmark at 23 per cent, the Netherlands at 22 per cent and Canada at 21 per cent. The problem is that we are not increasing as fast as they are. The total expenditure on higher education institutions as a percentage of GDP in Australia is trailing behind those countries at 1.5 per cent, compared to the United States at 2.7 per cent and Canada at 2.5 per cent et cetera. We are behind and falling further behind in an area of fundamental need if we are going to be a successful country in the 21st century.

There are two special factors that I wish to refer to which affect the Australian National University in my electorate over and above that crisis. Firstly, it is uniquely dependent on Commonwealth funding. It has no state government to assist it as, for example, the Queensland government has done so very well in its Smart State strategy, helping the University of Queensland and others. The ANU is uniquely dependent on the Commonwealth, so when the Commonwealth gets tight-fisted with universities then the ANU suffers more than others. Secondly, the education minister has been speculating vaguely about new arrangements between the ANU and the CSIRO when it comes to research. No-one seems to know what the minister is talking about, but he has referred to it a couple of times. I am very keen to know what Minister Nelson is referring to and what he has in mind, because the ANU is a precious national asset.

In its international assessment of universities, the Times Higher Education Supplement said the ANU is the leading Australian university. It is 16th best in the world ahead, for example, of the renowned Columbia University in New York, which ranks 19th. We have many fine universities in Australia, including the six that the Times Higher Education Supplement listed in the top 50 in the world, but No. 1 in Australia is the Australian National University. This is a very significant assessment. The table ranks universities on the basis of a survey of 1,300 academics in 88 countries and takes into account things like cited research produced, the ratio of faculty to student numbers, an institution’s attractiveness to foreign students and the presence of internationally renowned academics. Against those significant criteria and on the assessment of peers around the world, it is the best university in Australia and in the top 20 in the world, ahead of great universities like Columbia. So I sincerely hope that the minister will do nothing which has the effect of undermining either this great national asset or the fundamentally important role of the CSIRO.

I want to turn now to the election campaign in general and the role of the Charter of Budget Honesty in this and previous elections. Of course, the election result was a great disappointment to everyone on this side of the political divide, but we live in a democracy and that always raises the possibility of losing elections as well as winning them. Having lost, we at least get the chance to learn the lessons that defeat can teach us. In some countries you do not get that chance. There are many such lessons—after all, we did not just lose; we actually went backwards—but most of those lessons are for others to comment on. I am sorry to disappoint all those who hope that because I have graduated to the backbench I am going to make speeches to embarrass my leader or my party. I know there are precedents for such things, but I do not intend to follow them.

I do, however, want to make a positive contribution about one of the lessons the Labor Party in opposition needs to learn: a les-
son about the Charter of Budget Honesty. Only in the Howard government’s Australia or a George Orwell novel or perhaps Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* could something called the Charter of Budget Honesty be rigged. And it is rigged. It is as crook as the electoral system in Florida, with all the trappings of a fair process but operated in a manner designed to favour the incumbents.

Let me make it crystal clear: I am not criticising the officials in the Department of Finance and Administration or the Treasury. On all the evidence I have, they have behaved properly within the constraints set by the legislation and the process which flows from it. What I am referring to is the fundamental unfairness of the structure and process created by the legislation. What purports to treat government and opposition equally is in fact massively skewed in favour of the incumbent party—not skewed by accident but as a conscious design feature of the system.

The fundamental issue is that the implication that, by having a charter in the first place, you somehow put the opposition and the incumbent on an equal footing with regard to the costing of new policy during an election is not only false but also disingenuous. Unlike the opposition, the incumbent government have access to the bureaucracy in the lead-up to the campaign. They can request a policy to be costed, they can put various versions forward and they can have an iterative process backwards and forwards through the draft cabinet process where policies are costed by Finance and Treasury, only to be shelved for later use. We all know that after the Prime Minister called the election, but before he issued the writs, there was another cabinet meeting where they were able to make decisions before the caretaker period began, with all the access to Treasury and Finance that incumbent governments have and oppositions do not have.

Incumbent governments also have complete access to budget parameters and updated budget information. So they can get all their policies costed before the election, put them on the shelf and pull them down when the election comes. This creates the situation where the government has effective access to an interactive, iterative process of exchange with the costing departments while the opposition has a one-off shot which can be damaged by secret information that has never been made available to the public or the opposition—only to the government—or by a legitimate disagreement over underlying assumptions which cannot be questioned. There is no capacity to have a debate about it.

For the opposition there is no effective redress. The charter is essentially an extension of a campaign tool which seeks to discredit any opposition policy and its underlying parameters and costings. It is the pointy heads’ equivalent of the 30-second interest rate scare ad and essentially is designed to have the same effect. It is a tool which turns the occasionally subjective art of policy costing into an absolute, and therefore a convenient political hatstand upon which the incumbent can hang hollow slogans such as ‘unfunded’, ‘uncosted’, ‘costing black hole’ and others.

The process is this: both the incumbent and the opposition submit their policies to be costed by the Department of Finance and Administration and the Treasury. But in the government’s case they have all been costed before—or they should have been if the government is efficient and effective. This involves filling out a ready-made document provided by the secretaries of the departments which aims to glean as much information about the policy as possible. This document should serve as the basis for the departments’ costing of the policy. They should approach the detail of the policies and their underlying assumptions with as much objec-
tivity as possible in order to avoid the interference of departmental views or individual preconceptions of the policy in the costing. Essentially this means that policy officers should be costing the policy that is presented to them rather than the way they think it should be designed or delivered.

This is not an insignificant point, as the case of Medicare Gold demonstrated. Costing a policy with such far-reaching reforms for the sector was never going to be easy. However, with the assistance of health economists, modelling and actuarial analysis and publicly available information, Labor was able to cost the various elements of the policy with rigour. The policy was, however, deemed to be undercosted by the department for two reasons. The first was the use of a different casemix data set, which was departmental information only available from the Department of Health and Ageing and never made available to the opposition. The second was the failure of the department to accept a fundamental aspect of the policy's framework—that is, that the Commonwealth, as a monopsonist in the hospital services market, would be able to leverage better prices and access for services, particularly in participating private hospitals.

Against that, it is interesting to note that the government's own Future Fund was not costed by Treasury and Finance—not because these departments ran out of time to complete the costing but because the government failed to provide the additional detail required to undertake a costing. This act alone reveals the level of arrogance with which the government views its own charter. This should be contrasted with the opposition's willingness to engage the departments in this process by providing additional information when requested. It appears that, in the case of Medicare Gold, the only error Labor made was to engage in the process at all.

The government will argue that they are in the same position that the opposition find themselves in, but this is false. Unlike the opposition, the government have access to underlying budget parameters in the first place. Unlike the opposition, the government have the opportunity to have their election policies costed by the departments prior to the campaign and will have had the luxury of costing under various budget scenarios. So they do not have to change when the PEFO comes out.

The costing of Labor's opposition to the sale of Telstra revealed another aspect of the charter process. As a longstanding policy and in the absence of useful information from the estimates, we found that the department was limited by a commercial-in-confidence classification to not provide any sale parameter information. The Labor Party resorted to using publicly available information and information gleaned from ministerial statements in the parliament and budget papers. This was a rare situation where the government could not totally exploit its incumbency to hide a very damaging story: that the sale of Telstra was bad for the budget, both in the short and medium term. The costing of Telstra presented a rare win for Labor under the charter, but it never got the same media attention as some of the failures, where we ran into conflict in the process. In this one instance, perseverance overcame a rigged process, but it does not change the fact that the process is fundamentally flawed and biased.

So what does all this mean for the opposition next time? It is for others to make that decision, but I suggest that those responsible need to give serious thought to saying, right from the outset, that they will not cooperate with the process unless it is modified to be fair—or at least fairer. One option would be for the opposition to have earlier, confidential access to designated Finance and Treas-
ury officials to enable an iterative costing process on an ongoing basis. Another would be the establishment of an independent body, like the British Institute for Fiscal Studies, to conduct ongoing, independent assessments of the proposals from both sides. Whatever happens, major reform is needed. The Charter of Budget Honesty as it relates to election costing is hopelessly flawed and hopelessly rigged and needs to be reformed or scrapped.

It is a privilege to be returned as a member of this House. We all need to remember that. When we do not get returned on the side of the parliament we want to be, we still have to remember that it is a great privilege, shared by very few, to be here at all. There is no greater honour in a democracy than for your fellow citizens to choose you to be their representative in the parliament.

The election outcome was a great disappointment to me and to the overwhelming majority of the people I represent. We have the great fortune to live in a great country. With a better government, which tapped into our highest hopes rather than our deepest fears, we could be so much better. This last election was a triumph of fear over hope. It is our obligation on this side of the House to be advocates for hope and opportunity, not for ourselves but for those Australians who need a better government, to give them and their families a better chance.

Mr JULL (Fadden) (4.16 p.m.)—Congratulations, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, on your re-election, and may I ask that you pass on my congratulations to Mr Speaker on his elevation to his high and ancient office. The honourable member for Fraser has just made the statement that he feels privileged to be part of this parliament, and I can fully understand his concerns about another term in opposition. What he says is absolutely true. As I enter my 11th parliament, I never cease to be amazed by the capacity of this place to attract what really is a great cross-section of the Australian people as representatives—because this chamber is very much a microcosm of all Australia.

This has been brought home to us in a few of the maiden speeches—I prefer to call them maiden speeches—that we have heard over the last two days. There is no doubt that we have heard some magnificent speeches and that the contributions that many of the new members are going to make will be great ones indeed. I will just concentrate on two of those maiden speeches—and I take a strictly parochial Queensland position on this. I would particularly like to make mention of the maiden speeches of the members for Bowman and Bonner.

As I say, I do that for parochial reasons but also because, as I look back over my career, when I was first elected to this place as the member for Bowman my seat covered an area from the north of Moreton Island to the suburb of Springwood in Logan City. In its form in 1975, that seat would now contain in its entirety the seat of Bowman, the seat of Bonner and a little over half of the seat of Moreton. It is an indication, I think, of the tremendous strides and the tremendous development that have gone on in the southeast corner of Queensland over the last 30 years. Special reference was made by the member for Bowman to the fact that Bowman represents the Redland Shire entirely. I think the population of Redland Shire when I was first elected was something like 21,000. It is now in excess of 100,000 people. The growth of that area has been absolutely phenomenal.

Of course, that growth meant a major redistribution of electoral boundaries before the last election. Queensland gained a new seat. When a state gains an additional seat we see some major changes, and those major changes certainly affected me. There were
areas of Brisbane that I had represented for 28 years that I lost. I have represented the eastern suburbs of Logan City for 22 years. I have represented the southern suburbs of the Redlands for 23 years. When you represent areas for as long as that, there are certainly great affiliations, great friendships and great contacts that you make with your constituents. I was absolutely delighted to learn of the wins of those two gentlemen, the member for Bowman and the member for Bonner. Those areas which I formerly represented will now be in good hands. I sincerely hope, in the case of the Redlands, that the member for Bowman will find that the Redlands development has been in good hands and has been looked after very well by the Commonwealth government, along with some input from the state government, and a very active and efficient local government in the Redland Shire.

East Logan is a fascinating part of the world, because for many years Logan was the second-fastest developing area of Australia. When I look back over the changes that have been made there—going literally from gum trees to a thriving area of nearly 40,000 people—and see the investments that have been made and all that has been achieved over the last 20 years in what was regarded as perhaps almost a second-class part of the outer areas of Brisbane, I have to say it has been phenomenal.

This part of the world has become very much a centre for education. We have seen the development of three very fine high schools. We have seen the development of three private colleges, all of which have an excellent reputation. In particular, I would like to make reference to John Paul College, with which I have had an association almost since its inception. John Paul College is now the largest independent school on one campus in Australia, with an enrolment of 2,400 students. It may be slightly smaller than Geelong Grammar, but Geelong Grammar is spread over five campuses.

It is interesting that the focus of attention on John Paul College from around the world has been considerable, because it is this college that has introduced computerisation to all its classrooms. The children starting in year 1 at the age of five are immediately issued with a personal computer, and their education starts and goes on from there. The connections that college has with universities allow some of the brightest students to make extension arrangements with Griffith University and to start preparing for their careers at university, even in years 11 and 12. It has been a school of great innovation and, as I have said, it has attracted a great deal of attention from around the world. It is seen as a leading light in Australian education not only from the technological point of view but for the contribution that it has made in areas such as music.

After a long period representing East Logan, southern Redlands and the southern areas of Brisbane, I have left them to take on new areas of the Gold Coast. The seat of Fadden has now been pushed so far south that it is contained entirely within the city of the Gold Coast. It is true that Fadden has included areas of the Gold Coast down as far as Labrador for some years, but the extension after this redistribution has seen it taking in suburbs such as Labrador and Southport. It runs along the Southport-Nerang road to Nerang through the city boundaries up into areas such as Oxenford, Coomera and Upper Coomera.

Interestingly, this is now the fastest growing area of Australia. Following the redistribution, there were figures issued by the Australian Electoral Commission which were really quite interesting because the indications of growth were there. Between the 1991 census and that of 2001, the growth of
that area was 69 per cent per annum. Since 2001, the growth rate has been 14 per cent per annum. That gives you some indication of just how quick that growth has been. At the conclusion of the redistribution the number of voters on the electoral roll in Fadden was about 76,000. We went to the election with nearly 82,000 people on the roll, which was a net increase of about 6,000 people in a matter of five or six months.

The great challenge—not only to me during these coming three years but also to the Commonwealth, the Gold Coast City Council and the Queensland state government—is going to be making sure that the development happening there is met with the correct infrastructure. To give you an indication of the figures, the area of principal growth at the moment is an area between Helensvale and Ormeau—a stretch of seven or eight kilometres along the Pacific Highway. The population there has exploded to 37,500 people; the estimates are that by 2007 the population will be 100,000 people. I would think that there are more schools and colleges along that nine-kilometre strip of highway than possibly anywhere else in Australia—something like nine schools and colleges. There is a major super-college, built by the Queensland state government, which was going to be the be-all and end-all of a new development of schools. It was going to have an absolute maximum capacity of 1,200 people; the reality is that within two years that target of 1,200 people had been met. The independent schools in the area are also full, and the demand on our education facilities is going to be absolutely enormous.

But there is also infrastructure such as that for the supply of water. I am sure that many in this House are aware of the difficulties facing the Gold Coast at the moment in terms of future water supplies. The overall population of the Gold Coast is tipped to top 800,000 people by 2020, so some very hard decisions will have to be made at all levels of government in the period leading up to 2020. The M1 motorway, which is probably one of the most magnificent pieces of highway in Australia, works particularly well at the moment, but the estimates are that it could well become a car park by 2009. If there is a criticism of some of the development of recent years it is that while the accessibility of the Gold Coast has become so good, the necessary arrangements—particularly by the Queensland state government—to provide feeder roads from the freeway into the Gold Coast areas have not kept pace with it. We get some of the fiercest traffic jams in Australia in areas of the Gold Coast, and so a great deal of concentration has to be aimed at roads.

The other interesting issue that I should bring to the attention of the House—and indeed to the Minister for Health and Ageing, whom I have written to recently about it—is the supply of general practitioners in a place like the Gold Coast. In the northern Gold Coast we have a shortage. We cannot get GPs. In an area like Paradise Point, which is a great area for retirees, four GPs will drop to three in number by Christmas time. One of the local GPs is leaving for Brisbane to further his studies on Christmas Eve. Basically, it means that we have three GPs with a catchment area of about 30,000 people. The growth has been significant in areas like Coomera, although Coomera has been identified by the Commonwealth as an area of need and hopefully that need will be met. But it is those established areas of the Gold Coast that are really fighting now to get the right number of GPs to adequately service their requirements—particularly the requirements of the ageing population.

That is the interesting part about this electorate of Fadden. When we look at the composition of the population we see that something like 20,000 of the people who live in
the electorate are over the age of 65 years. Many of them are concentrated on the Gold Coast. It is going to be very much my duty over these next three years to do all I can to bring to the attention of the Commonwealth the needs and aspirations of the people in that part of my electorate. It is on that point that I would like to make a few observations.

One of the difficulties that I have quite often found in dealing with Commonwealth bureaucracy is that there is an assumption that the Gold Coast is full of great wealth. The image of the white shoe brigade, the gold chains and the rest of it has really sunk through here in Canberra. The reality is that there are more aged pensioners living in the Gold Coast than there are in any other area of Australia. The demands and the wants of those people are such that we require great investment in things like nursing home beds and basic medical facilities.

I hope later in this speech to point out some of the realities of the Gold Coast that, frankly, have failed to be realised by many members of the federal bureaucracy. It covers areas like the aged, aged care infrastructure and also knowledge of the make up of the income and work force of the Gold Coast, which has changed very dramatically. In the next episode of this speech I will concentrate on the work force and industry in that area.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the House do now adjourn.

Shortland Electorate: Job Network

Ms HALL (Shortland) (4.30 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I would like to reinforce what I said earlier today in the speech that I made in the address-in-reply debate and congratulate you on being elected as Speaker. I look forward to working with you over the life of this parliament. The Howard government cites the abolition of the CES and the establishment of the Job Network as one of its greatest achievements. In question time yesterday the Minister for Workforce Participation spoke at some length about the Job Network and how the government had created it. He said:

... it stands as a matter of record that over 518,000 job placements for the unemployed were posted in the last financial year ... He went on to point out that the CES had only 300 sites as opposed to the 2,800 sites that have now been established through the Job Network.

I have some very serious concerns about the operation of the Job Network. My concerns relate to people who are looking for work and turn to the Job Network for support and to find employment. Also, my concerns relate to the cost and financing of the Job Network. In recent times I have been approached by a constituent who has a lengthy employment history. He moved from Western Australia to Lake Macquarie and since arriving in our area some 18 months ago—he moved there be with family—he has been registered with a Job Network provider. He has contacted that Job Network provider regularly. He is a man with some qualifications and he is a mature age man—he is 50-plus. To date he has not been referred to one single job, despite him constantly contacting that Job Network provider. The only job applications that he has placed have been with employers and contacts that he has found either through cold canvassing local employers or through the newspaper. This gentleman has obviously been failed by the Job Network.

The issue of real concern, one that was brought to my attention just two weeks ago when I was at one of my local shopping centres, relates to a young man who has found
himself six jobs over the last couple of years. When he has lost a job he has registered with Centrelink, and it is a requirement for obtaining payment from Centrelink that he register with a Job Network provider. On each of those six occasions he found his own job, but on each of those six occasions the Job Network provider was paid $550 by the Commonwealth. They did absolutely nothing. All they did was have that job seeker registered with their Job Network agency. To my way of thinking this is not the best use of taxpayers’ dollars; this is an exploitation of the system. It is a system that has failed this young man. It is a system that is failing young and old people throughout Australia.

This government has a lot to answer for. The employment rate is low, but under this government our workforce and the jobs that are available really have become more casual. The casualisation of the workforce has led to insecurity. So many people throughout Australia are in the situation that this young man is in—moving from one casual job to another and being forced to register with a Job Network provider, with that Job Network provider then receiving a payment from the Commonwealth. It is not good enough and it is time it stopped. *(Time expired)*

**Canning Electorate: Unique Mothers of Armadale**

Mr RANDALL (Canning) *(4.35 p.m.)*—I want to talk about a unique group of mothers in my electorate. That is their title: the Unique Mothers of Armadale. They are unique because they are strong, brave and resolute in the protection and support of their children. These mothers formed a group on their own basis because their children have autism. One of the most courageous things that they do is bear a cross for the disability that their children have. I was first introduced to autism when I was a teacher in a special school for handicapped children many years ago. People see autism depicted in such Hollywood movies as *Rain Man*, but it is not like that. Many of these children are severely retarded, have high dependency and need a great deal of care.

The Unique Mothers of Armadale have got together by their own volition—not that they could attach themselves to any existing group—with the support of the DSC. I would like to name these mothers, because they need to be acknowledged. They are Joe-Anne Skippings, Kirsten Burchard, Colleen Page, Lynne Hearns and Raylene Provis. They came to Canberra but it was during the election campaign; otherwise I would have liked to have come and supported them over here. They came to Canberra because they were coming to the Australian Autism Conference, which had a workshop on 30 September and a conference between 1 and 3 October. I also put on record my gratitude to Qantas. Qantas provided free travel for these unique mothers to come to Canberra. They were adequately and strongly supported by Kate Randall—no relation to me—who is the local area coordinator of the DSC, and Carol Franklin, who is with the Disabilities and Development Council. Carol also has a disabled son, who has Prader-Willi syndrome.

I would like to point out how tough these mums do it. Lynne Hearns, for example, has a son, Dermott, aged six, who is severely autistic and requires high-dependency care, day in and day out, for 24 hours a day. To add to this, Lynne could not come to Canberra, even though she was part of the group, because just before they left she found out that her daughter, Alyse, had been diagnosed with Soto’s syndrome—a growth disability. Here is a single mum—so she is on her own—battling away with these disability cases in her family.

My heart goes out to these women. I am doing the best I can to support this unique
mothers’ group, because they need a great deal of support. Autism is not an isolated incident; something like 0.6 per cent of the population of Australia is diagnosed with various forms of autism. Some have severe autism—as I said, there are different traits associated with it. The mums tell me that when they came to Canberra it was fantastic because they realised they were not on their own. They realised that they were not isolated and that there were thousands of women from around Australia in a similar position. When they came here they were able to share ideas and to see what services were available. By meeting so many other mums in the same situation they knew that they were not alone.

What these mums are really fighting for is mobile respite. They do get some respite, but if you book in four hours of respite you might not need it at that time. The respite needs to be on demand—when they really need it; when they are at their wits’ end. Recently we heard of a case in Western Australia where a disabled child was killed by his mother because she just could not take it any longer. It is important that 24-hour mobile respite be available to such brave mums as these in this unique mothers’ group. A four-hour block of respite is fine, but it is not necessarily the most suitable type of respite available.

I have a photo here of the mums standing out the front of Parliament House. They were so proud to come here and to get together and receive some help. I am very pleased to say that they gave me a book when I met with them for morning tea the other day. It is called The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon. They tell me it is a fictitious but true-to-life story about the suffering of a family that has a child with autism. I want to do more in relation to autism in my electorate. I think there should be more done in relation to autism in Australia to support these brave mums, these Unique Mothers of Armadale. I wish to suggest their group as a template and model for people in other places in Australia, and I will do what I can in this place to support that.

Throsby Electorate: MRI Machines

Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (4.40 p.m.)—In July this year the Minister for Health and Ageing announced that he would open up a process that would see approximately 20 new Medicare licences granted by the federal government for MRI machines. I immediately followed up this announcement because for quite a period of time we have been agitating in the Illawarra region for the granting of such a licence for the machine at Wollongong Hospital. In answer to earlier questions on notice, the minister said:

Although Wollongong was not identified as a priority area, the ... 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.

He went on to say:

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.

I was quite concerned because no valid reasons have ever been provided as to why the Illawarra region is not considered to be a priority area. Surely the minister is aware that, without an MBS-eligible MRI service operational on site at our major public hospital, public hospital patients in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions continue to be severely disadvantaged. Currently patients at the hospital need to be transported by ambulance to an off-site facility. With the recent opening of a stroke unit at our hospital, this includes people who are suffering extreme trauma and who are in very precarious health situations. Not only is this cost inefficient but it delays appropriate patient care delivery.
and eventual discharge, thus contributing to the waiting list problems that we are facing at our hospital.

In contrast to the federal government’s position, the state government considers the Wollongong region and the hospital to be a priority area and it has done the right thing by funding the purchase of an MRI scanner for the hospital. The MRI scanner has remained idle since July this year pending the decision by the federal government. Of course, in light of Labor’s commitment to providing a licence for the MRI facility at the hospital we were anticipating, in the event of success at the elections, that the matter would be resolved. The scanner has been installed but it has not been used since July this year. Fortuitously, the New South Wales government has again come to the rescue of the people of the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions by agreeing to some interim funding arrangements. Just this week, the New South Wales Minister for Health, Morris Iemma, announced that $400,000 would be injected into hospital funds to enable it to begin treating in-patients immediately. He also indicated that there would be an additional funding allocation of $600,000 in 2005.

It is estimated that the funds provided by the state government will allow for around 20 scans a week at the hospital; however, as was reported in our local media, based on doctor’s advice clinicians feel that a more realistic figure for the hospital would be approximately 20 scans a day. The federal minister should be working cooperatively with the state government in the provision of health care to our region. A fully operational MRI service on site is necessary for the planned progression of Wollongong Hospital to the status of a teaching hospital. I fear that the government may use the current rather secretive process to allocate MRI licences to areas chosen on the basis of political advantage rather than on the basis of health need.

I believe that the process for allocation of these licences must be transparent and free of political interference. To that end, I have submitted further questions on notice about that this week so that local constituents can have confidence that the process the government will engage in and the outcomes of that process are above board. We do not want a repeat of the earlier MRI scan scam, which resulted in an oversupply of MRI machines in private hands. That scan scam, as we all know, was the subject of a highly critical report by the Auditor-General that pointed out that some radiologists were really enriched at a cost to the Australian community.

(\textit{Time expired})

\textbf{Wool Industry: Mulesing}

\textbf{Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa)} (4.45 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, firstly I congratulate you on your election as Speaker of the House of Representatives and wish you well in this parliamentary term. I want to talk about a matter of importance to the wool industry in Australia, and I know that, as it is to do with the wool industry, you, Mr Speaker, will be most interested. I would like to bring the attention of the House to the matter of a widely practised sheep husbandry measure known as mulesing. On 8 November this year, Australian sheep and wool industry leaders made a commitment to support a phase-out of mulesing of sheep by 2010.

This was in response to threats of international boycotts of the Australian wool industry and clothing retailers by the animal rights activist group PETA—People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. I acknowledge that the group PETA is concerned about the welfare of sheep, but so too is the Australian wool industry. That is why mulesing has been practised in Australia for 60- to 70-odd years. I would like to make clear to the
House that wool producers undertake mulesing for the health needs of the animals. It is also important to note and place on the record that the Australian Veterinary Association and the RSPCA support mulesing as an effective means of preventing deadly blowfly strike in sheep.

Before my election to the House of Representatives as the federal member for Maranoa, at one stage I was the President of the Queensland Merino Stud Sheep Breeders Association and of the Australian Association of Stud Merino Breeders. I was also a wool grower and breeder and used mulesing as a health husbandry measure for my own sheep. I have seen blowfly strike blood poisoning in sheep. They are weakened so dramatically that they are susceptible to attack by birds of prey while they are still alive. To see a sheep in its weakened state having its eyes picked out by crows is a horrible scene—an occurrence preventable by using the animal husbandry practice of ensuring that your sheep are mulesed, which will prevent blowfly strike in the breech area.

Blowfly strike is crippling from both an economic and an animal welfare point of view. The sheep and wool industry in Australia is worth some $7 billion to the Australian economy annually. It creates thousands upon thousands of jobs in our country towns and supports many shearers and other workers, so it is an important industry for our nation. There are many reasons why mulesing should remain a tool of trade available to the wool industry. The most important is from an animal health risk point of view, and that is why I simply cannot support the phasing out of mulesing by 2010, when a reliable alternative would not necessarily be available. The federal government supports the effort to find an alternative. As Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss, reaffirmed earlier this week, the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy, endorsed this year, demonstrates the commitment of the government and the industry research bodies to achieve sustainable improvements in animal welfare. This strategy takes into account national and international benchmarks, scientific evaluation and research, and community standards. It is also acknowledged that the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy was drafted and based on the principle that good health is an essential component of good animal welfare and that diseases should be prevented and controlled. These diseases include those caused by insect pests such as blowfly that could flystrike an animal—a sheep in this case—in the breech area.

Of course, I understand that the Australian wool industry and major international clothing companies have reason to be concerned by the threats of boycotts from animal rights groups, but I encourage them not to be intimidated by these extremists. If the Australian wool industry gives in to extremist groups it will not be long before other animal husbandry practices used to improve animal health will be under attack. There is nothing less humane than the death of an animal through blowfly strike when existing animal husbandry strategies could be used to prevent such painful deaths. The animal husbandry practice of mulesing should remain because of the obvious fact that it prevents painful deaths among sheep. I believe that when, and only when, the Australian wool industry has found a reliable alternative to mulesing should the practice be phased out. (Time expired)

Swan Electorate: After-Hours Services

Mr WILKIE (Swan) (4.50 p.m.)—Firstly, I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to high office. Well done. In the 2001-02 federal budget, $43.4 million over four years was allocated to the After Hours Primary Medical Care Program, a program designed to improve access to quality after-hours pri-
mary medical care and to progress systematic reform by trialling key interventions. Three successful rounds of funding have been allocated through this program; however, the fourth round applications, which were advertised early last year, have been left hanging in the air. Applications closed in July 2003 and the results have never been made public. The department advise that the results will be announced as soon as possible—a tune they have been singing for over 12 months. The unallocated funds, I have been assured, will be used up by 30 June 2005, but for some unknown reason the Minister for Health and Ageing is holding up the allocation process.

We all know that health services in Australia are in an abysmal state. Despite the government’s claims, it is still difficult to find a bulk-billing doctor, getting a hospital bed is potluck chance and waiting times for elective surgery are blowing off the Richter scale. Yet here we have the health minister suspending the allocation of funds in the After Hours Primary Medical Care Program. This program is a useful and resourceful way to help ease emergency department case loads plus provide a valuable and necessary community service to Australian residents, yet here we have the health minister procrastinating and failing to make a decision.

I ask why a grant application submitted from a general practice division in my electorate of Swan was, firstly, not even acknowledged by the Department of Health and Ageing. It is a substantial application full of important research and statistics about the crying need for an after-hours medical care facility in Bentley, yet the department does not even have the common courtesy to acknowledge receipt of the grant application. Secondly, the division have been left waiting, unable to plan for the future after they have spent months on this grant application. They would not have wasted time and money submitting this application if they did not know that the provision of an after-hours primary medical care facility was urgently required.

In this area of my electorate there are clear reasons for this service. One hundred and sixty-six thousand people live in the district. Of the 63 GP surgeries, only 13 offer more than five hours a week of extended services—that is, they are open after 6 p.m. on weekdays or after 2 p.m. on Sundays or public holidays. Of the 63 GP surgeries, only three offer nine hours or more of service on Sundays and public holidays. There are no formal after-hours primary medical care clinics at all, and there are no public or private emergency departments in the precinct. The general practice division has the lowest doctor hours of service of all metropolitan general practice divisions in Western Australia.

The need for an after-hours primary care facility is critical when you consider that over one-third of presentations to public hospital emergency departments from residents in this division were GP type presentations. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents to a consumer survey indicated that they would use an after-hours service rather than attend a hospital emergency department. The minister is still sitting on his hands, dithering away about making grant funding decisions while our hospitals and emergency departments are overflowing, often with minor medical cases that could have been handled at a GP’s surgery that offered an after-hours primary medical care service.

I seek an explanation from the minister. Why is he holding back, and what is he waiting for? Where are the funds? Was he using this money to prop up the Medicare advertising in the lead-up to the election? We need this service now. Is he hoping to plagiarise and polarise those funds into a program like Labor’s hot spot Medicare teams? The divi-
sion of general practice in my electorate initially received seed funding to undertake a needs and gap analysis of GP after-hours services in the south-east metropolitan region of Perth. Their final report was delivered in mid-July 2003 and clearly demonstrated that there was a high degree of unmet need for after-hours primary medical care and that a GP after-hours service would be feasible in the Bentley area. Yet, after submitting their service delivery grant on time, they are still waiting—in the first instance for even an acknowledgment from the department that they received the application and in the second instance for the results of the grant funding process.

It is a sorry state of affairs—embarrassing for the minister, I am sure. But he does not have the right to sit on taxpayers’ money. It is their hard-earned cash that he is failing to release—hard-earned cash that they need for the service they could have if he stopped his procrastination and got on with his job. I say to the health minister: you are failing to deliver. You are failing to deliver to real Australians who are crying out for a better health service and for access to after-hours primary care medical services which will ease the burden on our public hospitals. It is a commonsense, real solution to a problem that the health minister seems to be ignoring. It is a problem that Labor promised to address by announcing during the election campaign that it would fund that program. (Time expired)

Latham, Dr Simon Churchill

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (4.55 p.m.)—Some people walk in and out of our lives and leave little or no mark of any note, yet others whom we meet truly touch our hearts and minds and leave an impression that stays for all time. Simon Churchill Latham was one such man who walked into my life and touched my heart and mind. He has left an impression that I know will stay with me for all time. Simon Churchill Latham was born in Pangbourne, Berkshire, in England on 1 July 1930. He died in Brisbane on 20 October, 2004. My wife and I came to know Simon Latham. He was a man of great charm, integrity and warmth. He became an inspiration to me in the short five years that I knew him. We last saw Dr Latham on Monday, 11 October, just a few days after the election. He was delighted at the news of my re-election and asked me to do all that I could to make this country a better country.

He was renowned for his charm, elegance and warmth. He was at the same time held in universal esteem for his clinical skills and his relentless advocacy for the health, education and welfare of children. Simon Latham was a paediatrician, a man who cared about the health and lives of other people. He was a paediatrician in the most complete sense of that term: a champion for best practice clinical medicine, an advocate for underprivileged infants and children and a tireless proponent of preventative medicine.

He was the son of an engineer, Christopher Latham, and Beryl Latham of the extended Churchill family, from whom he inherited his middle name. He felt particularly close to his mother, who became a nurse in World War I and who was a supporter of the suffragette movement. At the time, she was of such standing that she was able to go and study history at Cambridge University, a place Simon Latham later attended. After completing his schooling at Charterhouse, Simon Latham enlisted and was commissioned in the Royal Engineers. He served as a second lieutenant in the 57 Field Engineers Regiment, based in Hong Kong during his two years of national service. Although still a very young man indeed, he commanded a troop of bridge-building sappers in mainland China.
After demobilisation in 1950, he enrolled in medicine at Cambridge University and graduated in both medicine and arts. He became a member of the Royal College of Physicians in 1963 and, after a year of training in respiratory medicine at Brompton Hospital in London, Simon Latham embarked on his life’s work in paediatrics and the care of other people. In the face of considerable competition for training positions in two of the world’s most highly ranked children’s hospitals, he was appointed to the Hospital for Sick Children at Great Ormond Street in London and subsequently as senior registrar in paediatrics at the Hammersmith Hospital in London.

In 1969, Simon Latham came to Australia, having been appointed senior lecturer at the Department of Child Health at the Brisbane Children’s Hospital, later to become the Royal Children’s Hospital. Dr Latham’s particular interest lay in paediatric gastroenterology, metabolic disease and endocrinology. His contributions to both undergraduate and postgraduate paediatric teaching were exceptional. He was a professional colleague and friend of Professor John Pearn, one of this country’s distinguished doctors, who later said of him that he was a man of natural compassion, empathy and warmth and someone who was an inspiration to all his students. His special contribution to Queensland medicine was that he was an innovator.

Dr Latham’s interest in complete child care led inevitably to his advocacy for improved educational facilities for children with specific learning difficulties. The Glenleighden School is based in Fig Tree Pocket in my electorate of Ryan. It is in this context also that I developed a stronger friendship and association with Dr Latham and the cause which he was so passionate about.