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SITTING DAYS—2008

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- **GOLD COAST**: 95.7 FM
- **MELBOURNE**: 1026 AM
- **ADELAIDE**: 972 AM
- **PERTH**: 585 AM
- **HOBART**: 747 AM
- **NORTHERN TASMANIA**: 92.5 FM
- **DARWIN**: 102.5 FM
FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

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

House of Representatives Officeholders
Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP
Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP, Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mr Steven Georgean MP, Hon. Judith Eleanor Moylan MP, Ms Janelle Anne Saffin MP, Mr Albert John Schultz MP, Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP, Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Hon. Danna Sue Vale MP and Dr Malcolm James Washer MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Stephen Francis Smith MP
Leader of Opposition Business—Hon. Joseph Benedict Hockey MP
Deputy Leader of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips
Australian Labor Party
Leader—Hon. Kevin Michael Rudd MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Leo Roger Spurway Price MP
Government Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP

Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Brendan John Nelson MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Alex Somlyay MP
Opposition Whip—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP
Deputy Opposition Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Chief Whip—Mrs Kay Elizabeth Hull MP
Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

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

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Members of the House of Representatives

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PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—H Evans
Clerk of the House of Representatives—I C Harris AO
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—D Kenny (Acting)
### RUDD MINISTRY

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<td>Hon. Julia Gillard, MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Wayne Swan MP</td>
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Minister for Home Affairs
Assistant Treasurer and
Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs
Ministers for Veterans’ Affairs
Minister for Housing and
Minister for the Status of Women
Minister for Employment Participation
Minister for Defence Science and Personnel
Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and
Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation
Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Governance
Minister for Ageing
Minister for Youth and
Minister for Sport
Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support
Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services
Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing
Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services

RUDD MINISTRY—continued

Hon. Bob Debus
Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Hon. Alan Griffin MP
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Hon. Craig Emerson MP
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Hon. Maxine McKew MP
Hon. Greg Combet MP
Hon. Mike Kelly MP
Hon. Gary Gray MP
Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Hon. Bob McMullan MP
Hon. Duncan Kerr MP
Hon. Anthony Byrne MP
Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens
Hon. John Murphy MP
Senator Hon. Jan McLucas
Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for Employment, Business and Workplace Relations
Leader of the Nationals; Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Local Government
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Defence
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Shadow Treasurer
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing and Leader of Opposition Business in the House
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs
Shadow Minister for Trade
Shadow Minister for Families, Community Services, Indigenous Affairs and the Voluntary Sector
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Shadow Minister for Human Services
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Urban Water
Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and De-regulation
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
Shadow Attorney-General
Shadow Minister for Resources and Energy, Tourism
Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Water Security
Shadow Minister for Justice, Border Protection and Assisting Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Shadow Special Minister of State
Shadow Minister for Small Business, the Service Economy and Tourism
Shadow Minister for Environment, Heritage, the Arts and Indigenous Affairs
Shadow Assistant Treasurer, Shadow Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Governance
Shadow Minister for Ageing
Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence
Shadow Minister for Business Development, Independent Contractors and Consumer Affairs, Deputy Leader of Opposition Business in the House
Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Shadow Minister for Employment Participation and Apprenticeships and Training

Hon. Brendan Nelson MP
Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Hon. Warren Truss MP
Senator Hon. Nick Minchin
Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Hon. Andrew Robb MP
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Senator Hon. Helen Coonan
Hon. Tony Smith MP
Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Senator Hon. Chris Ellison
Hon. Bruce Billson MP
Senator Hon. George Brandis
Senator Hon. David Johnston
Hon. John Cobb MP
Hon. Chris Pyne, MP
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Steven Ciobo MP
Hon. Sharman Stone MP
Michael Keenan MP
Margaret May MP
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Luke Hartsuyker MP
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Andrew Southcott MP
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Housing, Shadow Minister for Status of Women
Hon. Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Youth, and Shadow Minister for Sport
Hon. Pat Farmer MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Cabinet Secretary
Don Randall MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition, Northern Australia
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health
Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education
Senator Hon. Brett Mason

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
Hon. Peter Lindsay MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Roads and Transport
Barry Haase MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Trade
John Forrest MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship
Louise Markus MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government
Sophie Mirabella MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism
Jo Gash MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Ageing and the Voluntary Sector
Mark Coulton MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families, Community Services
Senator Cory Bernardi
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The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 9 am and read prayers.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Wentworth Electorate

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth) (9.01 am)—I rise this morning to talk about important election commitments I secured from the former coalition government for my own electorate of Wentworth. The first was a $110,000 commitment to improve traffic safety at the intersection of Glenmore Road, Cascade and Hampton streets, Paddington. I listened to concerns from local residents who had identified this intersection as a notorious traffic black spot. The second commitment was to help reduce crime and to combat theft, vandalism, graffiti and other antisocial behaviour around Woollahra. In 2006, I hosted a community roundtable to improve the safety of our local area with a strong focus on removing graffiti. It was clear that the key to graffiti prevention is rapid removal. But that needs to be resourced and so, after hearing the views from police, local government and the community, I was successful in securing funding of $150,000.

The third and final commitment was for a communal kitchen at Bondi designed to bring needy families and local charities together over a meal. The Our Big Kitchen project at the Yeshiva Centre in Bondi is a fully functioning commercial kitchen where local charities and volunteers can store, prepare and serve meals to help feed the hungry and people in our community affected by emergencies. Just because the government has changed does not mean the needs of my community have changed. I urge the Prime Minister, who I note is not with us today, to support these important local initiatives.

Electricity Privatisation

Mrs Irwin (Fowler) (9.02 am)—I wish to raise an issue of concern to a growing number of people in the Fowler electorate. The proposal of the New South Wales government to privatise parts of the electricity industry has alarmed many consumers as well as employees of electricity generators and suppliers. Consumers have little confidence that electricity prices would fall if privatisation goes ahead when experience from other states with private generators shows that prices are higher for average consumers. Under this proposal there is no guarantee that the private sector will build a new generating plant. New South Wales will not have sufficient power by 2015. Workers in the power industry are rightly concerned for the security of their jobs. Interstate experience has shown that some suppliers have cut their workforce by half. In one case, 500 call centre jobs were outsourced to India. There is great concern that overseas owners will gain control of our power industry.

In 1946, the long-serving conservative Premier of South Australia, Tom Playford, could not get the private electricity supplier to extend services to new growth areas of the state, so he nationalised the industry. Those governments who today seek to sell the people’s power assets may some day find themselves in the same position. I call on Premier Iemma to listen to the voices of the people of New South Wales.

Dunkley Electorate

Mr Billson (Dunkley) (9.04 am)—On this RDO, the ‘Rudd day off’, I would like to point to a number of commitments that were secured during the election campaign from the Howard government if it were to be re-elected. I am sad that the Minister for Sport is not here to hear about a number of those, but I hope to follow up my advocacy through correspondence with her. There were a num-
ber of issues raised of great importance to the local community. The new basketball facility at the Mornington Secondary College needs some enhancements for traffic and pedestrian movement, given the vast number of families that attend the venue. We secured a commitment for the Ballam Park athletics complex so that it could host regional, state and, where we could secure the opportunity, national athletics events. We also looked for support for the redevelopment of the Eric Bell Reserve in Frankston North. That support has been a long time coming and was something that a re-elected Howard government was committed to. Also, at Langwarrin, a rapidly growing area, Lloyd Park is one of the only focal points for activities for a growing number of young people. Again, there was a Howard government commitment to help with that redevelopment.

What was noticeable in Dunkley was the stealth-like campaign the ALP ran. As they were trading on the ‘cult of Kevin’, we heard nothing from the local candidate, nothing from the central campaign and, in fact, nothing from any Labor advocate in the area about any of these projects. I can only assume that that was a ringing endorsement of these projects—projects which should be carried forward by the Rudd government. (Time expired)

National Multicultural Festival
Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (9.05 am)—I want to talk to the House this morning about the absolutely successful and wonderful National Multicultural Festival that was held here in Canberra between 8 and 17 February. I remind members in the House that I ensured that each of them received a copy of the program for the festival so that they would be aware of the multicultural facets of this city, which I and many others live in. I congratulate the ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs, John Hargraves. I very much congratulate the artistic director of the festival, Dominic Mico, who drew together a marvellous program and a very successful festival. Over 170,000 people are estimated to have attended eight packed days of events in a very large and comprehensive program. The Tradies at Dickson and the Hellenic Club in Woden were both major sponsors of the festival.

I make particular mention of the Al Nour Wal-Amal Orchestra from Egypt, a partially sighted group of women, just on 50 of them with no sight at all, who travelled here and successfully wowed audiences with their wonderful musical talent. They are to be applauded. Here in Canberra we are very proud of the way we live and demonstrate a very successful and cohesive multicultural community. (Time expired)

Aged Care
Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (9.07 am)—I was not expecting the call, but I now have it. I bemoan the fact that yesterday in this House the Minister for Ageing outrageously misled this House on the record of the Howard government in aged care. From the very beginning of the government in 1996 when the constraints were put on that government because of the government that had gone before and the debt we inherited, it was the Peter Costellos of this world who grabbed hold of that budget and enabled the Australian people to get the aged care that they required. In fact, there was a tripling of the spending on aged care over the 11 years of the Howard government, which changed the lives of families right across this nation. I will not for one minute in this House step back from the great record of the Howard government in aged care. Peter Costello and work that he did in those early years set this government up for the Rolls Royce service they have today. You will be struggling, Minister, just to service your portfolio. Do not
put down the work that was done by the Howard government.

**Tasmanian Tigers Cricket Team**

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (9.08 am)—I would like to congratulate the Tasmanian Tigers cricket team for getting into the final of the Ford Ranger Cup tomorrow. The final of the competition is going to be played at Bellerive Oval in my electorate against the Victorian Bushrangers. The Tassie Tigers have had a tough year in the four-day version of the game, after their win in the Pura Cup last year, but they have been the team to beat so far in the one-day competition. Approximately 7,000 people are expected to attend the final tomorrow at Bellerive Oval, and I urge many more Tasmanians to get behind their local team and go to the cricket tomorrow. I wish captain, Dan Marsh, vice-captain, George Bailey, and the rest of the Tigers the best of luck tomorrow. I hope to be able to join them at Bellerive Oval for a brief time tomorrow to cheer them on.

**Paterson Electorate: MRI Licence**

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (9.09 am)—Today I raise an important point on behalf of my constituency. I am glad the Minister for Health and Ageing is here because this week she has committed a fraud upon the people of Maitland. Prior to the election, the Howard government had announced a tender for an MRI licence covering Newcastle and the Hunter. Having lived there for well and truly over a decade now, let me say that Maitland is part of the Hunter. They committed to an MRI licence specifically for Maitland and today—

Ms Roxon—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask whether it is parliamentary to accuse a minister of fraud and whether that can be done in a 90-second statement.

Opposition members interjecting—

The **SPEAKER**—Order! I will listen carefully to what the member for Paterson is saying.

Mr BALDWIN—The reality is that the Minister for Health and Ageing has committed a fraud upon the people of Maitland for not offering them directly the MRI licence that was promised them during the election. What the government have done is put one word in a statement and withdrawn the tenders, and that is not acceptable. Our people want the MRI licence. She promised it and today she is refusing to honour that promise to the people of Hunter and the seat of Paterson. I ask her today to honour that commitment and to deliver that licence as she promised.

**Greek Community Tribune**

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (9.11 am)—I rise in this place today to congratulate the Greek Community Tribune, a Greek language newspaper that services and keeps the South Australian Greek community informed. Tomorrow night I will be attending a dinner organised by the Greek Community Tribune to commemorate 15 years since they first went to print. I take this opportunity to congratulate them and to wish them well for tomorrow night. It is South Australia’s only Greek language newspaper and it keeps the Greek community in South Australia informed. We all know how important it is to be informed through the media; it makes people feel connected to their community. The Greek Community Tribune lets people know what is happening locally, what is happening on an international scale and certainly lets them know of all the community events. The Greek Community Tribune was founded by a gentleman from the Riverland, Mr Peter Ppios, who still runs the paper today. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Peter for the magnificent work he does. He is dedicated to ensuring that every edition
is printed and delivered on time for very little reward. It is a passion that Peter has and, through many ups and downs, he has stood by the paper and ensured that it is printed and distributed across South Australia to keep readers informed. *(Time expired)*

**Palm Island**

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (9.12 am)—How in these modern times could Soviet style collectives still exist in Australia? I have one in my electorate—it is called Palm Island. It is an Indigenous community and we must do something about the land ownership issues that exist on Palm Island. The solution to Indigenous issues in Australia is the three ‘Ls’—leadership, land ownership and law, order and governance. Without those three solutions Indigenous Australia will never move forward. It is very important when you go to Palm Island and you see that people cannot own their own little piece of Australia—they cannot build their own house; they cannot deal in their house—

Mr Albanese—What did you do for them? Twelve years!

Mr LINDSAY—I am going to answer that question. I have been talking to the Queensland government for five years. The Queensland government can change the deed of grant in trust arrangements to fix those beautiful people on Palm Island. I am disappointed that Labor has been so wishy-washy on this issue. I demand that Aboriginal Australians be able to own their own piece of Australia.

**Redcliffe and District Wildlife Rescue**

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (9.13 am)—We all acknowledge the importance of looking after our environment. That is why I wish to acknowledge the hard work of the Redcliffe and District Wildlife Rescue. This organisation assists in the rescue, rehabilitation and release of sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. The organisation is also getting youth involved by running a junior wildlife carers program, which involves visiting schools in Redcliffe and surrounding areas and running information sessions for the different grades. They give the children environmental tips on what they can do to protect our wildlife and what to do if they encounter an injured animal or bird. Today the Redcliffe and District Wildlife Rescue officially open their Bird Rescue Centre. In December 2007 and January 2008 Brian Krause, their wildlife carer, received 94 birds and was able to release 100 birds over those two months. The community needs to continue its support for such an important organisation. I commend the organisation for the wonderful work they do in the community and on the opening of the new centre today.

**Rudd Government**

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (9.15 am)—On this historic RDO, Rudd day off, I wish to—

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 9.15, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

**Rudd Government**

**Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (9.15 am)—Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (9.15 am)—I seek leave to move for a suspension of standing orders.

The SPEAKER—Is leave granted? Leave is not granted.

Mr CIOBO—Under standing order 47, I move:

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

At 12 pm each and every Friday that this House sits, the Speaker shall interrupt the business before the House and call on questions without notice for a period of one hour and thirty minutes.
This is an important suspension of standing orders—

Dr KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support) (9.16 am)—I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER—Order! The question is that the member be no longer heard. All those of that opinion say aye, the contrary no. I think the ayes have it. Division required. In accordance with standing order 133, the division is deferred until the commencement of the next sitting. Is the motion seconed?

Mr Truss interjecting—

The SPEAKER—If the Leader of the Nationals wants to observe what is going to happen, he will not behave like that.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I refer you in the first place to standing order 125, which says:

If the Speaker’s opinion is challenged by more than one Member, the question must be decided by division of the House.

And then followed on by standing order 133(b):

A division called for on a Friday shall be deferred until the commencement of the next sitting, unless otherwise ordered.

This is a very important issue. It goes to the heart of parliamentary democracy and it is about the right of this side of the House to ask questions of ministers and the Prime Minister when the House sits.

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for North Sydney will resume his seat.

Mr Price interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Chief Government Whip is not helping. The point of order is about the deferral of the division. The division is about whether the member can continue his remarks. It is not an invitation in the point of order to then debate the substance of the motion for the suspension of standing orders.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, there is a specific provision in 133(b) that if in your opinion a division can be held then it can be held. It says ‘unless otherwise ordered’. That means that you, as the Speaker, have the capacity to order a division notwithstanding the other provisions in section 133. I ask you to consider the fact that we are ready to do business here. We want a division.

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. I have ordered as I have ordered. That is my ruling. I call the member for Cowper.

Mr Baldwin—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The previous motion for the member to no longer be heard is not resolved. It is not resolved because there has been no vote taken and counted. Therefore, the member for Moncrieff has the right to continue his speech.

The SPEAKER—I have called for the seconder.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (9.19 am)—I second the motion, Mr Speaker. It is vitally important that we have question time at any stage during the parliament.

Dr KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support) (9.19 am)—I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER—Order! The question is that the member be no longer heard. All those of that opinion say aye, the contrary no. I think the ayes have it. Division required. In accordance with standing order 133, the division is deferred until the commencement of the next sitting.
DISSENT FROM RULING

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—Manager of Opposition Business) (9.20 am)—Mr Speaker, I move:

That the Speaker’s ruling be dissented from.

Under the provisions of standing order 133(b) it is clear that you have the capacity to order a division of this House. This place is turning into a farce because, specifically, the government has failed to make the Prime Minister and ministers accountable to this House and accountable to the Australian people for their actions. This is not the way we want to behave in the parliament, but if you are going to close down the parliament, if the Labor Party is going to try to close down accountability, if it is going to close down transparency, then we make no apology at all for calling for question time to come on. It is very important that the member for Moncrieff have a voice in this House for his constituents.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (9.20 am)—I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the member be no longer heard. All those of that opinion say aye, the contrary no. The ayes have it. Division required. In accordance with standing order 133, the division is deferred until the commencement of the next sitting.

Mr Truss—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Because there has been no completed division, the issue is not resolved and therefore the member has a right to continue speaking. The issue is simply not resolved. You cannot move on to the next item until this matter is resolved. The member has a right to exercise his entire speaking time because the House has not voted that his time has completed.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the National Party will resume his seat. This is what the motion before the chair is about. That is the reason the dissent motion is being moved.

Mr Truss interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I have told the Leader of the National Party that, if he wants to remain to witness proceedings, he should not be interjecting. Is the motion seconded?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (9.22 am)—This is an embarrassing farce on the part of the government—

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (9.22 am)—I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the member be no longer heard. The ayes will pass to the right of the chair; the noes to the left. Sorry—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Members will resume their seats, as is required by the standing orders! The member for Flinders will resume his seat!

Mr Hockey—You guys are talking privately. You don’t want to be here.

Mr Adams—You’re on that side of the House!

The SPEAKER—The member for Lyons is not assisting. The question is that the member be no longer heard. All those of that opinion say aye, the contrary no. The ayes have it. Division required. In accordance with standing order 133, the division is deferred until the commencement of the next sitting. The question now is that the motion moved by the member for North Sydney be agreed to. All those of that opinion say aye. The contrary no. I think the noes have it. Division required. In accordance with stand-
ing order 133, the division is deferred until the commencement of the next sitting.

**Mr Ciobo**—Mr Speaker, further to the motion I moved earlier, this is an absolute disgrace that this is before the parliament.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Moncrieff will resume his seat. The Clerk.

**The Clerk**—Private members’ business notice No. 1: organ donation.

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Moncrieff, on a point of order.

**Mr Ciobo**—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I have a right, as a member of this parliament, to continue moving the motion. I have moved the motion and this was not successfully gagged and I was not—

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Moncrieff will resume his seat.

**Mr Ciobo interjecting**—

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Moncrieff will resume his seat.

**Mr Ciobo**—There was no gag—

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Moncrieff will resume his seat.

**Mr Ciobo**—I have a right, as a member of this parliament, to continue speaking to this motion. I have the right to speak to this motion under standing order 47—

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Moncrieff will resume his seat!

**Mr Ciobo**—I will not resume my seat, because I—

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Moncrieff will leave the chamber under standing order 94(a) for one hour.

**Mr Ciobo**—I have the right to continue speaking and I will not leave the chamber—

**The SPEAKER**—The member will leave the chamber for one hour under standing order 94(a).

**Mr Ciobo interjecting**—

**The SPEAKER**—Because of the gross disorderly conduct of the member, I ask the Serjeant-at-Arms to remove the member.

**The Serjeant-at-Arms then escorted the member for Moncrieff from the chamber.**

**Honourable members interjecting**—

**Mr Hockey**—Mr Speaker, it has always been the case, in accordance with the standing orders, that, if the member was going to be removed from the chamber, the member had to be named.

**The SPEAKER**—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The Clerk.

**The Clerk**—Private members’ business—

**Mr Adams interjecting**—

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Lyons!

**Mr Abbott**—On a point of order, Mr Speaker: under the standing orders the member for North Sydney was raising a point of order. You are obliged under the standing orders to hear him out. It was quite improper of you—

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Warringah will resume his seat.

**Mr Abbott interjecting**—

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Warringah will resume his seat!

**Mr Abbott**—Mr Speaker, you are acting dishonourably.

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Warringah will remove himself from the chamber under standing order 94(a) for one hour.

**The member for Warringah then left the chamber.**

**The SPEAKER**—The Clerk.

**The Clerk**—Private members business notice No. 1: organ donation.

**Mr Broadbent**—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: having regard to this occasion and
what might happen, I asked the Clerk whether the Serjeant—

The SPEAKER—The member for McMillan should have his microphone on.

Mr Broadbent—I asked the Clerk prior to this day whether the Serjeant would remove anybody who was disorderly, and I was told—

The SPEAKER—The member for McMillan does not have the call.

An opposition member—You called him up!

The SPEAKER—I appreciate I did, and it was in error because he is not in his place. If I am being asked to act honourably, I will try to uphold the standing orders. I apologise to those operating the microphones. I call the member for McMillan.

Mr Broadbent—I thought that this situation may come to what has happened today. I asked the Clerk whether the serjeants would remove anybody from this House, and the answer I got was, ‘Very unlikely; no, they would not.’ I think the member for Moncrieff has been thrown out improperly.

The SPEAKER—I ask the member for McMillan: is that a reflection on the chair?

Mr Broadbent—I have never reflected on the chair. It was to—

The SPEAKER—The honourable member will resume his seat.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, can you advise me under what standing order the Serjeant-at-Arms removed the member for Moncrieff?

The SPEAKER—On the authority of the Speaker and on precedent. Go back and read House of Representatives Practice.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The honourable member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The member for Fremantle has the call.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Organ Donation

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (9.29 am)—I move:

That the House:

(1) expresses concern about the shortage of organs available in Australia for life saving operations;

(2) notes that where a donor is available, Australia has one of the best records in transplantation outcomes;

(3) supports the efforts of the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister to increase the rate of organ donation in Australia;

(4) congratulates the organisers of Australian Organ Donor Awareness Week across the country for drawing attention to the need for more Australians to become registered organ donors and to discuss their choice with their families;

(5) notes that the report of the National Clinical Taskforce on Organ and Tissue Donation sets out a number of directions for improvement in Australian policies and practices; and

(6) encourages Members actively to encourage organ donation in their electorates.

On this first historic opportunity on a Friday for members to bring forward and discuss matters of significance within their electorates, and within the Australian community—

Dr Southcott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I draw your attention to page 524 of House of Representatives Practice, on which it says:

If the Speaker determines that there is an urgent need to protect the dignity of the House, he or she can order a grossly disorderly Member to leave the Chamber immediately. When the Member has left, the Speaker must immediately name the Member and put the question for suspension without a motion being necessary.

Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to House of Representatives Practice.
The SPEAKER—I call the member for Fremantle.

Ms PARKE—I would like to begin by noting that this is Organ Donor Awareness Week and by acknowledging the many Australians who have made the generous and selfless act of registering as an organ donor. They are making a personal contribution to the collective good health of their fellow Australians.

Dr Southcott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I draw your attention to page 524 of the House of Representatives Practice where it says—

The SPEAKER—The member for Boothby will resume his seat. I name the honourable member for Moncrieff.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (9.31 am)—I move:

That the member for Moncrieff be suspended from the service of the House.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the member be suspended from the service of the House. All those of that opinion say aye, the contrary no. I think the ayes have it. Division required. In accordance with standing order 133, the division is deferred until the commencement of the next sitting.

Dr Southcott—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: House of Representatives Practice, page 524, says that where the question has not been resolved:

If the question is resolved in the negative, the Member may return to the Chamber.

I ask you, Mr Speaker, to use your discretion to put the motion.

The SPEAKER—in accordance with standing order 133, I have deferred the division.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The chair will be resumed in 15 minutes.
I had become aware that each year thousands of Australians were dying or suffering blindness or the debilitating experience of being hooked up to a dialysis machine for several hours every few days for want of healthy organs, a situation that appeared entirely preventable. I later became aware that the shortage of organs is a universal problem. In my work with the United Nations in Kosovo, while chairing a working group on trafficking in persons, I learned of the horrifying international trade in organs and the phenomenon of ‘transplant tourism’. A December 2007 World Health Organisation report has noted that potential organ recipients from countries including Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, Saudi Arabia and the USA travel abroad to undergo organ donation from live kidney and liver donors from such countries as Pakistan, India, Bolivia, Brazil, Iraq, Moldova, Peru and Turkey.

On another aspect of the international organ trade, the WHO report noted that in China around 12,000 kidney and liver transplants were performed in 2005, with most of the transplanted organs alleged to have been procured from executed prisoners. Many operations involved non-Chinese citizens as organ recipients. The WHO and other bodies have raised concern about the dangerous consequences of the international organ trade, both for live organ donors, most of whom are coerced into it through extreme poverty or force, and for recipients who may undergo surgery in substandard conditions and may not survive the transplant process.

It is an appalling situation when Australians in desperate need of an organ feel they must travel overseas to obtain one. Of course, the majority of Australians in need of an organ—and there are approximately 1,900 people currently on the waiting list—do not travel overseas but continue to suffer, to wait and to hope here in Australia. It is a matter of general and bipartisan agreement that we need to lift the number of organ donors and the number of successful transplants that ensue.

This week, being Organ Donor Awareness Week, it is a perfect opportunity to raise the profile of organ donation and to encourage Australians across the board to consider the generous act of registration and to discuss the issue with their families. I note that DonateWest, the Western Australian agency for organ and tissue donation, has this week commenced its Don’t Waste your Wish campaign, the first of its kind in WA. One of the lines in the campaign makes the point: there are some wishes you can’t keep to yourself. That nicely expresses both sides of the equation here: the selflessness of giving and the magical gift it makes possible.

In my electorate of Fremantle, well-known bluegrass musician and local celebrity Jim Fisher has been the recipient of a liver transplant. He speaks with a humble awareness of how lucky he has been to receive a liver and how he had to wait only nine months to receive his transplant, while he has seen other people die waiting for transplants. Jim is well aware that it was not only the generosity of his donor but also Australia’s free public health system that contributed to his still being alive today.

Jim’s recovery after the operation was not immediate. He said he felt like he had been ‘bashed by Mike Tyson for a week’ after receiving his new liver, but some time later he was back playing music in pubs, parks and festivals around Fremantle and around Australia with his band, the Sensitive New Age Cowpersons. As the band’s name and songs such as Daddy wore a mullet suggest, Jim is a man who genuinely enjoys life and he is grateful to have had a second chance, thanks to an organ donation.

I also want to draw special attention to the new Paired Kidney Exchange Program oper-
ating at Fremantle Hospital in the renal unit, headed by Professor Paulo Ferrari. The unique aspect of this program is that it matches family members who are incompatible donors with other families who are similarly unable to donate to their loved one. The two families, both in the same situation, literally swap kidneys, with the approval of the state health minister, under amendments made to the Human Tissue and Transplant Act of WA. The first paired kidney exchange occurred in October last year. This is the kind of innovative policy that could be extended nationally and would result in a significant lift in the rate of live kidney donations. The Western Australian government is encouraging other states to participate in this program.

Indigenous Australians are disproportionately represented as far as kidney disease is concerned. There has only been one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander donor in the last five years and there are cultural reasons, both ancient and modern, for this. The renal department of the Royal Perth Hospital is planning a forum later this year which will address this and other matters.

The final point I wish to make is that all states and territories and both sides of this House agree that action must be taken on the urgent issue of organ donation. This week, two new members, the member for Moreton and the member for Longman, movingly highlighted this issue in their first speeches. I intend to include a prominent article in my first electorate newsletter about organ donor registration, and I hope other members will consider doing the same. I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of this House, as we discuss every option to increase the rate of organ donation in Australia. It is most encouraging and perhaps not well understood that some 94 per cent of Australians have indicated their support for organ and tissue donation. We now need to convert that very high level of approval into action.

**Mrs May (McPherson) (10.00 am)**—Can I thank the member for Fremantle for bringing this motion before the House today. It is an important motion and one we should all take note of. I would also like to offer my congratulations to the member for Fremantle on her election to this place and I wish her well in the years ahead.

I have often spoken in this place about the need for Australians to register for organ donation as I believe bipartisan support is required to raise donation rates in Australia. We need to raise awareness in our own communities. We need to understand what organ donation means to so many Australians who are waiting on that list. The gift of life is the ultimate gift that one human being can give to another. Australians have been receiving life-giving organ and tissue transplants since 1965, and to date more than 30,000 people have received transplants which have saved or enhanced their lives. I think that is an incredible record and something we should move to increase.

Though Australia does boast one of the highest transplantation success rates in the world, with kidney transplant survival rates at about 90 per cent in the first year and over 75 per cent over five years, even with that very high success rate we have an extremely low rate of donation in this country. In fact Australia has one of the lowest rates among Western countries of organ and tissue donation. I would say to all of those in the House today that that is very disappointing and alarming considering our success rate on donor transplants.

Last year just 198 people became organ donors. Incredibly, from those 198 people 626 transplants were performed from those donations. I think it says a lot for what one person can do if they put their name on that
list. With 1,875 people waiting for an organ transplant in Australia, a person has a 10 times greater chance of requiring an organ or tissue transplant than of becoming a donor. We certainly have to turn that around.

Spain has the highest rate of organ donation in the developed world. Their level of national support has been achieved through government legislation, professional education and ongoing community awareness programs. The Howard government did announce the Australians Donate National Organ Donation Collaborative measures on 19 February 2006 and I am encouraged to hear that the new Rudd government has committed to continuing this funding through to 2009. This is a great step forward. The National Organ Donation Collaborative educates hospital staff across the country on ways that donation rates can be improved. It is a great example of social policy and one which makes me proud to stand in this place. I would like to quote from the collaborative charter about the opportunity it sees:

While donation rates in Australia's major hospitals vary greatly, those with high rates did not achieve them by accident. The practices leading to higher rates can be identified and replicated. Through the collaborative, hospitals will form multidisciplinary teams—each to include a donor coordinator—to improve the identification of potential donors. Working closely together, the teams will also lift the conversion rate of potential to actual donors.

I think it will be a great outcome if we can do that through our hospital systems.

Hundreds of Australians every year suffer and die needlessly due to a shortage of organ and tissue donors. Every donor has the potential to improve the lives of at least 10 people. Organ donation saves lives and tissue donation improves the quality of life. But, as we know, every year we lose hundreds of people because those organs are not available. I would like to quote Senator Gary Humphries, who made a speech last week here in the theatre about Australian Organ Donor Awareness Week. One of the comments he made in his speech was:

Every year we burn and bury thousands of perfectly healthy, useful organs, while hundreds of people with serious illnesses die for want of them. For some the decision to take their organs to the grave is made for religious, social or personal reasons, but for the vast majority of Australians the decision is not one they will bother to make nor will they probably even consider. And because of this people are dying.

I think that says it all. We have a huge job ahead of us to educate the Australian public on the importance of becoming an organ donor. I believe that to sign on for organ donation is one of the greatest gifts a person can give but it is one form of generosity that cannot be spontaneous. Research has shown that more than 90 per cent of Australians support organ and tissue donation but that many people are unaware that simply marking your drivers licence as an organ donor is no longer sufficient to carry out your wishes. The law now requires people to register their consent with the Organ Donor Register. You can register online at www.medicareaustralia.gov.au, obtain a registration form from Medicare offices or call Medicare on 1800777203. I make available in my office the registration forms that people can fill in and I certainly talk to constituents about what they can do or how they can become organ donors. I would encourage everyone in this House today to think about having those forms in their offices and trying to encourage constituents to fill them in. It really is a very important step that we can all take.

I cannot stress strongly enough that, if you register, it is a subject you must talk over with your family and your loved ones. The most common reason families decline to donate their deceased relative’s organs and tis-
sue is that they do not know whether or not their relative wished to donate their organs. It is not pleasant to talk about death, but, in the case of organ donation, forward planning is imperative. Families are placed in a situation where they have to make a heart-rending decision when their loved one has just been pronounced dead. Even if someone has registered their wishes on the Organ Donor Register, a family member may still override that wish. If your family knows and understands your wishes, following through with your wishes will not be such a hard decision for them to make when you pass away.

I would like to stress today that organ donors are treated with the utmost respect. The donor’s body is treated with dignity. Of course, that is of huge concern to people putting their names forward as donors. I have been assured by the people I have spoken to, the organisation itself, that bodies are treated with the utmost respect and dignity.

Organ donation is important, and I very much hope that people do not delay but register as soon as possible. As I said before, each individual has the potential to help up to 10 people through organ transplants, such as heart, lungs, liver, pancreas and kidneys, or through tissue transplants, such as bone and eye tissue. We need to educate people about organ and tissue donation, to encourage families to discuss their wishes, to highlight the success of organ transplantation in Australia and to promote the registration of consent through the Australian Organ Donor Register. Each and every one of us can make a difference to someone else’s life if we are unfortunate enough to ourselves to pass away, but we should make the decision, fill in the form and register as organ donors.

In my own electorate there is a wonderful young man named Chris Wills. He was around 37 when he received a heart-lung transplant. Chris could not work and was on oxygen all the time. He could not walk 50 metres and could not put his workboots on because he did not have the energy to do it. Through his transplant—and it only kept him in hospital for 10 days—Chris is now an active member of the community, works full time, and coaches and plays cricket; in fact, he played for Australia in England as part of our Transplant Games. So I urge all of my colleagues here today: please, talk to your constituents and encourage them to register. I hope everyone in this House also registers for organ donation.

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (10.09 am)—I will start by congratulating the member for Fremantle on moving her first motion in the House. The topic of organ donation is an important one every day that we come to this place; but particularly this week, which is Organ Donor Awareness Week, it is timely to add our voices to those throughout the community in raising the issue of organ donation and encouraging our constituents and fellow members of parliament to take the step of registering to be organ donors.

At the outset I also want to pay tribute to all of those Australians who have been organ donors in the past, particularly to their families and loved ones. It is the families and loved ones who are faced with the final decision as to whether or not a deceased person will be an organ donor—whether they will give that gift of a second chance at life to a person they have never met before—and many thousands of Australian families have made that brave and generous decision to donate organs from their deceased loved ones.

As we have seen from this debate and from other statements in the House this week, there is great support for organ donation on both sides of the House. This is a truly bipartisan question. There is also great
support within the community. This is not unusual; Australians are generous, caring and compassionate people. But one thing we are always surprised about when we attend functions in support of organ donation and when we enter into these debates in the House is that, although 94 per cent of Australians support the idea of organ donation—that is the figure that has come out of various studies—we have not been taking the step of registering and consenting to become organ donors. That, of course, is the problem that we as policymakers in this country have to grapple with. As we just heard, in the last year only about 200 deceased people became organ donors, but they gave a second chance to some 626 other Australians. That still leaves almost 2,000 people on waiting lists, as of the end of last year—2,000 people who are wondering, every time the phone rings, if it is going to be their second chance at life. So we still have a lot more to do. Australia has a spirit of generosity but it still has a very low rate of organ donation when compared to other countries.

I am ashamed to say that I only became aware of this issue a couple of years ago, even though I have been in the House for a long time. A family came to see me to share with me their story of being on a waiting list—of what it was like not to be able to participate fully in life and to be waiting to see whether or not they would get the extra time in their life. I am pleased to say that that family’s story did have a happy ending. Their daughter has since been a successful transplant recipient. Since then, I have taken a great interest in this matter and I am pleased to see that, in that time, there has been a lot of activity by governments, both state and federal, to address the low rate of organ donation in this country. It began under the previous government, in which Tony Abbott was the Minister for Health and Ageing, with the setting up of the National Clinical Taskforce on Organ and Tissue Donation. This week, during Organ Donor Awareness Week, the task force reported its findings.

I note that in the past I have called for the government to consider the idea of an opt-out system in Australia but that the task force has not followed that path. I can accept that because I do realise that the evidence on opt-out regimes is very mixed. Spain attributes some of its success in organ donation rates to an opt-out system, but the US has the second-highest donation rate and it does not use that system.

In the time I have left, I want to urge everyone here to do what they can to promote organ donation in their communities and urge all Australians to register their consent on the Organ Donor Register. (Time expired)

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (10.14 am)—I appreciate having the opportunity to speak in support of the motion on organ donation. As a father, a husband, a son and a brother, and as a member of Australian society, I very clearly feel the responsibility to be an organ donor. It is on my driver’s licence and my wife and I are on the register. These things need to occur in the lives of all of us. I struggle to understand why there are not more people on the register and the donation rate is not higher. But, hopefully, through Australian Organ Donor Awareness Week and motions such as this one, and through the commitment of MPs and other members of society, we will see an improvement.

On a daily basis there is a need for organ donation to restore hope to people afflicted with injuries or diseases or needing a transplant for genetic reasons. While it is easy for each of us to think of the image of somebody laid up in a hospital bed or at home, almost unable to move, it is also important to realise that none of us exist in isolation. These people also have families around them. Sometimes it is the carers or providers who are
themselves laid up. They have a place in the lives of children, older parents and friends. All that is at risk if we do not get organ donation right. The point is that there are downstream consequences. So, in considering organ donation, all members of Australia’s society should think not just about that high-profile picture of a person who is laid up in hospital but also about the effect that saving that person or giving them a higher quality of life will have on the families, the kids, and others affected by the circumstances.

Obviously these matters are grave, and we have responsibilities, but, on a slightly more positive note, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that we will be fortunate enough to have the 11th Australian Transplant Games being held in Perth from 5 October to 10 October. Some of the events will be held in the electorate of the member for Fremantle and others will be held in the electorate of the member for Swan. The games take place every two years. They include a range of games and sports, including running, rowing—’God’s own sport’—chess and scrabble. This indicates that organ donations and transplants can result in people returning to a full life of opportunity and capacity. But sometimes people are only being kept alive through organ donations and transplants. While they may not end up being able to run marathons and things like that, it is still a great thing for them to be able to carry on and remain part of the lives of their family and the people around them. Hope can be restored and there is life after great adversity if we get organ donation right.

As others have said very clearly, leadership is required—not just advocacy but demonstrated commitment. It needs to be on our driver’s licence. It needs to be on the organ donation register. We need to discuss these things with our families. I have spoken to my wife about it and she is clear on it. I have spoken to my parents-in-law and they are clear on it. Everybody knows the wish of my wife and I, which is that, should things come to the worst, we want to be there for people who need organ donation.

I endorse this motion. I urge all who are present today and those who note this motion to speak to their families and get on the register. This is our responsibility. We cannot and should not avoid it.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (10.19 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, I congratulate you on your elevation to the position of Deputy Speaker. I thank the member for Fremantle for putting this morning’s motion on the Notice Paper. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to speak to it. I want to speak about some personal cases where we have seen an impact from organ donation. But first of all I refer to a very timely letter to the editor that appeared in the Canberra Times this morning. It was from David Mitchell, of Waramanga, whom I do not think I have met. He said:

My son, Jon, died suddenly at age 17. As a family group we had previously discussed what we would do if any of us died suddenly and we all agreed that we would like our organs donated to save other people’s lives.

So in the midst of shock and despair we were able to inform the hospital that Jon’s perfectly good organs were available for transplant.

What followed was the arrival of the transplant co-ordinators who quietly discussed what was going to happen with us and we agreed to go ahead.

At all times the transplant co-ordinator kept contact with us and showed care and concern for our feelings.

We found out later that Jon’s organs had saved five other people.
We miss him every day and suffer the loss and feel the despair of losing him deeply still.

We are consoled that part of him lives on in the people he saved.

I urge everyone to sign up to donate their perfectly good organs when they leave this world.

I thank Mr Mitchell for having the energy and foresight to send such an insightful letter to the Canberra Times.

I also want to speak about a very dear friend of mine, Justice Terry Connolly, who sadly died very suddenly last year of a heart attack. He was only 49 years of age and in the prime of his life. He was actually fit and healthy and he was making, as he had always made, a significant contribution to our community. He was looking forward to growing old with his wife, Helen, and seeing his two daughters grow. When Terry died, Helen and his two daughters, Lara and Maddy, consented to having Terry’s corneas donated. This followed a previous family discussion about organ donation and the decision to register as organ donors. Helen says she and Terry made the decision to donate their organs because they felt it was something they should do as responsible partners and parents. Helen says that, through the experience of Terry donating his corneas, some tangible good has come from the time of deep sadness for the family. The fact that through Terry’s death someone was alleviated from their pain and suffering brought them some semblance of comfort and some sense of meaning from his death.

At the other end of this debate we have people who are waiting. I want to talk about 10-month-old Cordelia Vance, who lives in Canberra. Cordelia’s rare liver condition has prevented her from reaching any milestones that other babies of her age would automatically reach. There have been stories in the press in the last few days about Cordelia’s family and circumstances. She is a dear little possum with an older sister named Octavia. The family desperately need to see a liver come their way.

I also want to talk about Ms Cahill-Lambert, a woman of older years with a rare lung disease who is hooked to an oxygen machine for 24 hours a day. I have met her many times. She is a local person in Canberra and she desperately wants to have a transplant arranged so that her life can continue.

When we look at the two particular angles of this human story—the first where people are waiting and the second where we actually see the successful outcome of that wait—we see every reason why none of us have a real excuse, other than for the accepted reasons, not to register for organ donation.

For my part, like other members in this place I send out a community newsletter, which goes to 72,000 households in my electorate. The next edition is going out in two weeks, and I have decided that in that newsletter there will be a tear-out page with the donor registration form and with, on the other side, my reasons for wanting people to fill it out. I am very hopeful that they will. The statistics given by the previous speakers and the stories I have repeated here from the human side this morning really make it very difficult to understand why those with other than religious objections cannot fill those forms out. (Time expired)

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (10.24 am)—I rise to speak in support of this motion in relation to organ donor awareness. Ultimately, this is a motion about families who lose people and families who gain people. For me it is all too personal. In 1992, my then 25-year-old cousin, Christopher, lost his life in a skiing accident. For some days he was on life support, and during that time my uncle David...
Hunt, whom I love very dearly and who is perhaps one of my harshest critics and challengers, had to make a very powerful decision—that is, to release the organs of his young son. It has been a very difficult period for David since then, but the one sustaining element that he has had is that those organs which were taken from his son, my cousin, gave life to many people. Not all organs were taken. A decision was made that the corneas were too personal, but the principal organs were taken. I cannot tell the House how many people they gave life but I know it was to a significant number. That story is the story that occurred 198 times around Australia last year. Christopher’s story is the story from the side of the donors. It has never been easy for my uncle or for our family, but the fact that there was some good, a profound good, which came from this passing and this process means, to me, that it is one of the most significant things which anybody in our society can do—that is, to make the commitment at an early stage to be an organ donor.

I also want to focus on the side of the recipients. One is Zoe Wood, a two-year-old girl from Mount Martha. I am the father of another two-year-old girl who lives in Mount Martha and so I was in close contact with Zoe’s family. Zoe needed an organ transplant in order to save her life and she was fortunate enough to receive it. She has two loving parents and three older siblings. They have back this beautiful little girl, they have back the hope of a unified family and they have their lives before them with all the glory that comes from having a two-year-old with a real future in front of her. That little girl, Zoe Wood, will be the face of the Royal Children’s Hospital appeal this year, because of the magnificent work of the hospital and the generosity of another family who, sadly, lost their own child.

This brings me to the question of the medical staff who give their time and wonderful expertise. My wife is a neurosurgical nurse. Paula has done much work in transplant surgery, and so we have, in a strange way, been surrounded by this issue—as family of a donor, as a family which has been close to recipients and as a family with a member who has been engaged in the transfer process. I think it is very important to pay tribute to the extraordinary medical staff, who have a sense of hope, belief and purpose in their work and who make life possible. They face tragic loss across the operating table and, at the same time, they have an extraordinary opportunity to bring life and a sense of hope to those who are facing loss.

In conclusion, we do need to examine the way in which the magnificent Organ Donor Register works. We have to examine whether there should, perhaps, be an opt-out system. If not that, I would urge the House and all those responsible to consider whether or not we should give more weight to the drivers licence signing process. I think that that should be sufficient. A family might have the right to override it, but if people can simply use their drivers licences—if that is enough to be registered as an organ donor—that will offer the potential to save hundreds of lives. I thank the House for its indulgence on this occasion and I remember my cousin Christopher.
(2) notes the continuing advances in medical science, making available new diagnostic tools; and

(3) recognises the need to extend the availability of Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scanning to regional Australia.

I do not think there will be any disagreement in the House with the view that we support the provision of the highest quality health services to all Australians. It is a fundamental belief on both sides of the parliament that, as a modern country, we should look after our people and provide them with support. There is already marvellous support. Our health facilities are certainly very good indeed when you compare them to some of the other countries in the world. There are continuing advances in medical science making available a huge range of other opportunities for the medical profession to do its job even better. But of course that comes with a cost. Some of the latest drugs and technologies are hugely expensive.

Today I would like to address just one example of those technologies, and that is the PET/CT scanners that are now available. I would like to address that in the context of making them available universally. One of the fundamental tenets of Medicare is that there should be universal access across Australia. Access is not only about affordability; it is also about availability. I understand, as do other members of the House, that you cannot have hugely costly technology out the back of Bourke, but you have to be mindful about where you can have it. Currently, this modern marvel of PET/CT scanning, which is used particularly in the detection of cancers and their spread, is only available in the capital cities. In the whole of the state of Queensland there is only one PET/CT scanner, which is at the Wesley Hospital in Brisbane, to service—

Ms Hall—The Howard government refused to license them.

Mr Lindsay—Thank you to the member for Shortland for being bitter and twisted. We had an election and now you are in control of the government and we will make sure that you address this issue. There is only one of these scanners in Queensland, and it is in Brisbane. That means, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, that the people from your electorate have to travel to Brisbane, as do the people from my electorate. Some of our Queenslanders have to travel up to 2,000 kilometres to get a PET scan. Access should be about availability as well as affordability. Regional Australia does tend to have fewer health services available than our city and urban counterparts. I can understand that. That does not mean to say that we should not all be on guard to make sure that services are provided where they can be.

Differential access to specialist medical services for rural and remote Queenslanders is demonstrated by this information before the House today. We need a PET scanner in Townsville. We have nuclear medicine facilities which will run PET scanning in the city already. We have qualified doctors who can run it, and it can be provided in both the public and the private system. The member for Burdekin wrote a letter to the Townsville Bulletin this morning pointing out that the Townsville Cancer Centre at the Townsville Hospital purchased a new three-dimensional planning system 3½ years ago with PET scanning in mind. He also pointed out that the $300 million that was provided by the Queensland government for oncology in its ‘post-Patel’ reforms has not materialised as far as Townsville is concerned. What has happened to the money? Why have we not seen the Queensland government invest in such a vital technology for our region? The member for Burdekin makes a very valid point.

Queensland is not the only state with this issue, of course. Western Australia and South
Australia have only one PET scanner each and Tasmania does not have one at all. We as a parliament need to be thinking about the availability of PET/CT scanners to regional areas. The Cancer Council of Australia in its submission to the inquiry of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, which resulted in the report *Highway to health: better access for rural, regional and remote patients*, pointed to poor outcomes for cancer patients in rural and remote areas. There is growing evidence that cancer mortality rates increase significantly with geographical isolation. That is a very worrying piece of evidence. Are my people in Townsville in a situation where, if they do not go to Brisbane for the use of this technology, their mortality rates will increase?

PET/CT scanning does a different job to an MRI or just a straight CT, and it provides our specialists with more information on the spread of cancer and how it can be managed. Dr Stuart Ramsay from Queensland X-Ray is certainly a strong supporter, having said that PET/CT scanning is long overdue in North Queensland. We have a population in the north which is close to 700,000 now. There is certainly a need, a demand and a client base for a scanner, but we do not have one.

We will be waiting to see what the Rudd government does in relation to PET scanning. Minister Nicola Roxon has said that she is considering the current situation. We have to do more than consider. I committed to my electorate that, if the Howard government were re-elected, we would have a PET scanner in Townsville. I would have delivered that. I ask the Rudd government to back my commitment and I ask the Rudd government to ensure that we do get a PET scanner in the city.

*Ms Hall interjecting—*

*Mr LINDSAY—You do what the people of North Queensland want, Member for Shortland. You get a PET scanner up in Townsville. We are the capital city of northern Australia. We do not deserve to be second-class citizens.*

*Ms Hall—You had 11 years to do it and you did nothing.*

*Mr LINDSAY—You make sure that our people are looked after. I am going to make sure that we are looked after. Under the standing orders, stop interjecting!*

*The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Member for Herbert, I will apply the standing orders.*

*Mr LINDSAY—And you will do it in a very fine way, Mr Deputy Speaker. There is evidence now that you can assess people after one dose of chemotherapy using a PET/CT scanner to see if that chemo is going to work rather than having to wait for three or four doses. That is beneficial for the patients and for the professionals looking after them. Surely, in this modern day and age we can get a PET scanner in Townsville. PET scanners have applications for all sorts of cancers. We do really need to make sure that we get one in the city. I am advised by the professionals in Townsville that at present many people are simply not travelling to major cities for PET scans. If we had a local scanner then these patients would be more likely to get their medical conditions attended to.*

PET scanning was first available on the Medical Benefits Schedule 10 years ago. It is now in all capital cities and it is time that it came to Townsville. The Minister for Health and Ageing also needs to look at the kinds of services that are available under the Medical Benefits Schedule. Currently, they are quite limited and that makes it uneconomical in a place like Townsville to install a machine. There is also not the customer base to fund the machine to make it economical for the city. I ask that the Medical Benefits Schedule
The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Ms HALL (Shortland) (10.40 am)—I second the motion due to the fact that there were no members from the opposition side in the House.

Mr Lindsay—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. An opposition member was not required to second the motion in terms of the procedure. The seconder should have been called on at the end of my speech. The member for Shortland should get her facts right.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Member for Herbert, I called the Government Whip to second it and she has done so.

Ms HALL—This motion before the House on health services raises some very important issues, none more important than the fact that licences for PET scanners under the previous government were very slow to be granted. It is interesting that the member for Herbert is in here arguing for a PET scanner for North Queensland. Under the last government there were numerous applications put in for the licensing of the PET scanner that was already at the Mater Hospital in Newcastle. The Mater Hospital is one of the leading hospitals in treating cancer in New South Wales, and for that matter throughout Australia.

I wrote letters to the previous health minister that were never answered. In consideration in detail of estimates last year I asked the minister if he could give me some information and give consideration to the licensing of the PET scanner in the Hunter. My question to the minister was never acknowledged or answered. The Minister for Ageing at the time summed up the debate and did not choose to deal with that part of the question. The opposition come with very dirty hands from the time that they were in government.

During the election campaign the Rudd government gave an undertaking that we would fund a PET scanner in the Hunter. That undertaking was given on 7 September. It will be no surprise to the House to learn that on 21 September the me-too member for Paterson gave an undertaking on behalf of the then Howard government that they would do the same. If there was ever an example of me-tooism, it was exhibited there. I am pleased to say that the people of the Hunter will have that PET machine licence at the Mater—something that is vital for the region that the Shortland electorate covers and vital for the people who are suffering from cancer.

I understand that this motion goes a lot further than just looking at PET scanners. Rather, it talks about a commitment to quality health care, something that we on this side of the House are totally committed to. It is not something that we have just discovered since the last election; it is something that we have been fighting for for many years. Unfortunately, under the previous government, quality health care was something that was delivered to just a few.

In the last parliament, I was a member of the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing at the time the report The blame game: report on the inquiry into health funding was tabled in parliament. I was deputy chair of that committee, which made a number of very important recommendations and identified a number of problems within the health system in Australia. That report was tabled in November 2006 and, believe it or not, by the time the last parliament—

Mr Baldwin—On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the member for Shortland has just misrepresented my position.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER—That is not a point of order. There are other times to do that and the member for Paterson would know that.

Ms HALL—I understand that the member for Paterson is very sensitive about his failure to get the previous government to fund a PET machine in the Hunter until just before the last election. What I am talking about is the overall delivery of health services to people in Australia and the recommendations of The blame game. This report made a number of very important recommendations, which the government of the day, the Howard government, failed to respond to. It made a recommendation that this parliament develop and adopt a national health agenda. It made recommendations that we identify policy and funding principles and initiatives. It also identified the fact that there was a chronic shortage of health professionals and doctors in Australia.

While the Howard government refused to respond to this report, the Rudd government will. In the policy which it took to the last election, it gave an undertaking that it would invest $2 billion in a national health and hospital reform plan. This is quite different from what the Howard government did—they actually ripped money out of hospitals. This reform funding program will include additional funding to state and territory governments if they achieve agreed reform milestones, similar to the system of the competition policy payments designed to reward states and improve their performance.

This is a different approach to health. This is an approach that stops the blame game. This approach brings the states, territories and the Commonwealth together. So instead of standing up in this parliament and blaming the states for the problems, instead of standing up in state parliament and blaming the Commonwealth for the problems, we are joining together the states and the Commonwealth to work for the delivery of quality health services to the people of Australia.

I can speak with some authority on this, having previously been a member of the state government when there was a coalition government in power in Canberra. At that time, I made a speech stating where we identified problems at the Commonwealth level. I have sat here and heard speaker after speaker blame the states for all the problems that exist with health. What happens? Absolutely nothing. All that happens is that the member who stands up in whatever parliament feels good and puts out a media release, but the people of Australia, who we are representing in this parliament, miss out on the quality health services they need. We need more doctors. We need to ensure that the people of Australia get the type of health care they deserve. We do not need any more governments using weasel words to get away from the fact that they need to make sure that the money for health goes to the delivery of health services, rather than promoting their own health agenda.

Dr WASHER (Moore) (10.50 am)—I must first apologise to the member for Herbert. I was not here in time to second the motion, so I apologise. Unfortunately, being the doctor here, I was treating someone and got distracted. They did not need a PET scan, fortunately.

Ms Hall—And treated them very well, I’m sure.

Dr WASHER—Thank you. I rise to support the motion. It is essential that the highest quality health services be provided to Australians in a timely fashion. It is critical that the best diagnostic tools be made available to Australians. There is no doubt that accurate diagnosis in the early stages of a disease is vital for effective treatment and management. I want to talk about this ma-
machine. Bear with me—I do not want to make it too technical, but I think it is important that members understand what it is.

Positron emission tomography or PET scanning, which produces a three-dimensional image of the functional processes of the body, is one of the new diagnostic tools we have—new in only the last decade or so. The system produces pairs of gamma photons—that is, light—emitted indirectly by a positron-emitting radioisotope. It is interesting to note that a positron is the antimatter counterpart of an electron, making a PET scanner one of the significant applications of quantum physics.

This radioisotope is introduced into the body, usually via the blood circulation, on a metabolically active molecule like a sugar. The common sugar they use is called fluoro-deoxyglucose—for the sake of simplicity, we will call it FDG. This then concentrates in the tissues of interest, like cancer cells, which rapidly take up the glucose because their mitochondria—that is, the powerhouse of the cells that make our cells work—need the glucose to be active. In these cells there is hyperactivity, overactivity, due to their rapid growth, and so it concentrates in the tumour cells.

The positron-emitting isotope is thereby concentrated in these tissues and the positron is eventually released. When it encounters an electron—electrons are in all of the cells surrounding it—it annihilates rapidly, producing a pair of photons—bursts of light—which move in opposition directions, allowing for localisation of where the event occurred. Thereby we are able to accurately show where the metastasis—the spread of the tumour—is positioned.

PET scans are increasingly read alongside computerised tomography, or CT, scans, the combination giving both anatomic and metabolic information on the illness. Limitations to the widespread use of PET scans arise from the high cost of the cyclotrons needed to produce these radioisotopes. Also, the chemical synthesis apparatus to produce the radiopharmaceuticals necessary for the procedure is complex. As the member for Herbert said, wider use would make this more cost-effective. The PET scanner is valuable for oncology because of the cancer’s mitochondrial forms—the powerhouse forms. This is of particular value in Hodgkin’s and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma and lung cancer. It is proving very useful with cancers like breast and prostate, particularly if disease recurrence is suspected.

Oncology scans using this sugar, or FDG, make up over 90 per cent of all PET scans in current practice. PET scanning is used in neurology to indirectly measure blood flow in the brain and, for example, it can be used to differentiate Alzheimer’s disease from other dementing processes. It may also enable an early diagnosis of Alzheimer’s with new techniques that can visualise the amyloid plaques, which are the essential part of Alzheimer’s. PET is also used for localisation of seizure focus in epilepsy, which of course is necessary if we are going to treat epilepsy by applying surgery, which is a more common means of treating epilepsy. It is proving of increasing value in cardiology, neurophysiology, psychiatry and pharmacology. I can tell the House we will hear much more about this potentially magnificent tool for medicine in the future.

Mr HALE (Solomon) (10.54 am)—I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, for your appointment to the Speaker’s panel. Today I would like to use my contribution to set out the Rudd government’s plan for improved health services for my electorate of Solomon. I certainly concur with the member for Herbert about the isolation people experience at times with our health services. I was pleased last September when I met with
the then shadow minister for health to discuss the Rudd government’s commitment to a GP superclinic in Palmerston. The Rudd government’s commitment will see a contribution of up to $10 million towards the creation of a GP superclinic to provide better health services to Top End families. I have already met with the office of the Minister for Health and Ageing and indicated that I see the delivery of this commitment as a fundamental priority for the working families of Solomon. The minister has informed me that consultation will commence in April with the local community and local health professionals. I would also like to thank the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services for the preliminary work they have been undertaking on this important project.

Once completed, the Palmerston GP superclinic is expected to include: 24-hour GP services; chronic disease and complex care management services; outpatient services provided on an outreach basis from the Royal Darwin Hospital such as cancer and oncology support services, obstetrics, gynaecology and ophthalmology; a greater range of allied health services such as physiotherapy, dieticians and podiatry than is currently available; and dental services.

Speaking of dental services, I am pleased with two important commitments that the Rudd government has made to the community in this vital area. I was quite shocked to learn after my election that 3,957 Territorians are on dental waiting lists. Two important commitments outlined by the Rudd government will see, firstly, the establishment of the Commonwealth Dental Health Scheme, which will provide $290 million for up to one million additional treatments. Secondly, the government will introduce a teen dental plan that will provide a $150 tax rebate to help families in receipt of family tax benefit part A. These are both practical solutions to help families in the area of dental care. People’s teeth are so important to their overall self-confidence, and I think this investment is great news for families.

Federal Labor is committed to ending the blame game—I know that a lot of that happens with regard to health between the states and territories and the Commonwealth—and to improving health care for all Australians. I look forward to working with the Minister for Health and Ageing to deliver Labor’s $1.5 billion national health reform plan to improve health and hospital services around the country. Solomon is no different to other electorates. Basic health care for all Australians is vital. Probably one of the biggest issues that I have discovered while getting around in my electorate and talking to people is the lack of health services, especially in the Palmerston area. It is a growing area. Usually kids will get crook at the most inopportune times—and having to drive from Palmerston to the Darwin Hospital at 2 am is an issue for people. I look forward to working with the minister. I thank her for the way she has kept me informed of the progress of the plan and I look forward to delivering this for the people of Solomon.

Dr SOUTHCO T (Boothby) (10.58 am)—Congratulations on your election to the Speaker’s panel, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott. I am very pleased to speak on the motion which has been moved by the member for Herbert. The first limb of the motion supports the provision of the highest quality health services to Australians. That is an aspiration that all members of this House would hold. Australia enjoys one of the best health systems in the world by any measure. We have amongst the highest life expectancy in the world. We are comparable with Sweden and Switzerland and ahead of comparable countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.
Our survival rates for many cancers are comparable with world’s best practice. We have specialised centres for the treatment of things like colorectal cancer and breast cancer, and our survival rates are extremely high there. We enjoy low child mortality, low infant mortality and low maternal mortality. Again, these are indicators of a very strong health system.

As the member for Herbert has correctly pointed out, our health is unequal. It was highlighted last week that we have a whole range of measures for Indigenous health and that this group has much lower health outcomes than the rest of the population. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, in a report in 2005, made the well-known point that people who live away from major cities and for whom access to health services is restricted may be disadvantaged as a result of different access to specialist surgery and medical care services. This has long been noted by organisations such as the Australian Medical Association and the National Rural Health Alliance.

PET technology is not applicable everywhere. Queensland is the most decentralised state and there are major population centres all up the coast in Queensland. There are very good arguments that can be made for the extension of PET technology. As previous members—most notably the member for Moore—have said, there is a whole range of applications for this technology. It is useful in diagnosis, it is valuable in treatment and it can be used to monitor the effect of surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy. So it is only going to be applicable in a larger centre. MSAC, the Medical Services Advisory Committee, is looking at the application of PET technology in a whole range of new areas stage by stage. It is looking at whether it can be extended to ovarian, melanoma and colorectal cancer, the second stages of oesophageal, gastric, head and neck cancer, third-stage lymphoma and fourth-stage sarcoma and glioma.

We do have evidence based medicine. We do have the Medical Services Advisory Committee. I believe we need to maintain the rigour of those bodies. Having said that, there has been quite a debate in the Medical Journal of Australia, most notably in 2004, that Australia does not have enough positron emission tomography machines. We need a much larger number. There are currently only eight eligible centres in Australia. As the member for Lyons said, there is not one in Tasmania, but I understand the Labor Party has committed to introducing one in Hobart.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. PET technology is a useful technology and, if supported by the evidence, it should be more widely available and should be available for a much greater number of indications.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (11.03 am)—There is no doubt that health is an issue that dominates our kitchen table discussions, nowhere more so than in my electorate of Braddon. We are all aware of the growing demands on the provision of health services, and that is obviously for a variety of reasons. There is a growing demand and pressure on service delivery across the board—attracting, training and maintaining a sufficient workforce in particular, and nowhere more so than in rural and regional Australia—and also on the increasing equipment, material and capital costs associated with the provision of health services. Indeed, in relation to the latter, the provision of MRI equipment and PET scanners are special examples of this. Other speakers have highlighted this. I was very pleased that federal Labor, in its health and wellbeing policies for Tasmania in general and on the north-west coast in particular, honoured the MRI licensing commitment of
the former government for the north-west coast.

A $3.5 million PET scanner is being set up in Hobart to service the state. It is a very valuable and very necessary service. In addition, federal Labor offered Tasmania a $50 million health and wellbeing package above and beyond the normal health agreement funding. I am very pleased to be able to put on the record some of those health initiatives, particularly for the north-west coast. Most important—and we share this with the rest of Australia—is Labor’s commitment to reduce elective surgery waiting lists. I was very pleased with the additional $8 million that was given to Tasmania for an additional 895 procedures to try and tackle these long waiting lists. That is something we do not need to be blaming each other for. We just need to do something about it.

I was very pleased with the Commonwealth’s reinvigoration of the dental health scheme, particularly for my electorate of Braddon, which, unfortunately, has one of the highest waiting lists for dental services, and the $81 million commitment to try to get more nurses back into the hospital system. More specifically, on the north-west coast I was very pleased to be part of a collective that lobbied federal Labor to provide services—for example, the $7.7 million commitment to a new cancer treatment unit, preferably on the north-west coast.

Mr Lindsay—Mr Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! In accordance with standing order 55(c), the House will be counted at the conclusion of the grievance debate if the member so desires at that time.

Mr Sidebottom—I want to use this time for what it was meant for, and that is to raise issues that affect my electorate and this country. If you want to make a joke of it, mate, leave! Do us all a favour and get out of the system. There is $7.7 million for a new cancer treatment unit, preferably on the north-west coast. We have wonderful commitments of up to $5 million for a GP superclinic in Devonport and $2.5 million for an after hours doctors clinic in Burnie. Very importantly, there is a $60,000 contribution to a new Penguin Medical Centre. Of course, that will help particularly in its relationship to the nursing homes nearby.

I would also like to point out that the Mersey hospital was very much part and parcel of this election. Labor, I am proud to say, have made the decision to honour that commitment. We are working away to do that and I give our assurance that we want to make those services the best possible for the people in the Mersey region. (Time expired)

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

Interest Rates

Mr Bradbury (Lindsay) (11.09 am)—I move:

That the House:

(1) notes:

(a) the recent increases in interest rates;
(b) the impact that rising interest rates are having on families, particularly in western Sydney; and
(c) the Reserve Bank of Australia’s warnings in its latest Statement on Monetary Policy of the risks to the Australian economy of continued inflation; and

(2) supports the Government’s five-point plan to fight inflation.

I rise to give some public recognition in this House of the pain and the suffering that many working families throughout this country are now feeling as a result of recent increases in interest rates. As members of the
House would be aware, at its February meeting the Reserve Bank took the decision to increase the official cash rate by 0.25 per cent, which took the cash rate to seven per cent. This, of course, represents the 11th consecutive increase in interest rates.

Most disturbing about this decision was one of the comments of the Reserve Bank which was described in the minutes that they have released recording the events of that meeting. I must take this opportunity to acknowledge that this is the first time that the minutes of the Reserve Bank’s meeting have been published in this way, which I think is a significant move towards making those decisions, which impact on so many individuals and families throughout our community, much more transparent. In those minutes, of most concern to the working families of my electorate would be the comment that reads:

The debate focused on whether the change in the cash rate should be 25 or 50 basis points. Apart from the increase that we have recently seen of 25 basis points, what we now have knowledge of is that the Reserve Bank were actively considering increasing the official cash rate by 50 basis points. I might begin by saying I am glad that they did not do that, but I think there is also a very stern warning to us all, and particularly to many of the families in my electorate, of what that may indicate in terms of what the future position of the bank may be.

The key issue that is driving the continued increase in interest rates is inflation. There is no question about that. If you look at both the minutes and the RBA’s statement on monetary policy, it is clear that underlying inflation is now running well and truly outside of the Reserve Bank’s preferred band of between two and three per cent. In fact, it is now running at a rate of about 3.6 per cent. In underlying terms, this reflects the high-inflation legacy that has been left by the former Howard government.

I wish to reflect upon some of the detail of how these interest rate increases have been affecting people in my electorate, the electorate of Lindsay. I wish to make the specific point that, whilst mortgage holders right around this country have been impacted by these increases in interest rates, in particular places such as Western Sydney and the electorate of Lindsay have been more adversely affected by those increases than many others. This is a fact that the Reserve Bank itself acknowledged in its financial stability review back in March 2007. On that occasion the bank reflected on the fact that the overall picture for the nation was looking good but went on to say:

Areas of western Sydney, in particular, look to have been adversely affected by the fall in residential property prices, with a disproportionate number of households in this area taking out loans with high loan-to-valuation and debt-servicing ratios near the peak of the house price boom. Partly reflecting this, the arrears rate and the number of personal administrations has increased by more in New South Wales than in the other states …

That was true when the Reserve Bank issued that statement back in March 2007 and it remains the case. The other point of considerable concern emerging from the minutes of the bank’s last meeting goes to the following quote. The bank said in its recent statement:

… the risk of inflation remaining uncomfortably high for some time is considerable. Absent a further shift in economic risks to the downside, therefore, monetary policy is likely to need to be tighter in the period ahead.

The impact of this on working families in my electorate has been extreme. Throughout the course of the election campaign—from July, shortly after I first became preselected as a candidate, right through to the election itself—I doorknocked some 23,000 house-
holds in my electorate. There were a number of issues of concern to people, and primarily their concerns about Work Choices were expressed to me in the course of the discussions that ensued. But one of the other significant issues was the impact of interest rates, in particular the impact of interest rates against the background of the increasing cost of living. In an outer suburban electorate such as Lindsay, many working families rely upon several motor vehicles in order to go about their business each day, so the high cost of petrol has had a particularly severe impact on the household budget. In addition to that, with an electorate of a fairly low median age in terms of our population, we have a number of young families that have their children in child care, and the increases that we have seen in the cost of child care have been dramatic and well and truly above the overall rate of inflation across the rest of the economy. And of course members of this place are well aware of the increase that we have experienced in the price of groceries over that period as well.

All of this builds to form a picture of many families that are under mortgage stress and also rental stress. I just acknowledge the fact that, in 2006, 33.5 per cent of the households in my electorate of Lindsay were suffering mortgage stress. That is an increase from 19.5 per cent back in 2001, which accounts for a 111.8 per cent increase. That gives you some indication of the extent to which the pressures on working families in my electorate have increased considerably over that period. This was a fact that seemed to be lost on members of the former government. The former member for Bennelong—and I acknowledge the presence of the current member for Bennelong in the chamber—as we all recall, said that working families in Australia had never been better off. This is one of those sentiments for which I was not able to find one supporter throughout my electorate in the course of my campaign between when I was preselected and November 2007. So it is further evidence of how out of touch the former member for Bennelong, the former Prime Minister, was. But it was also symptomatic of the views more broadly throughout the then government.

This is just further evidence of the high-inflation legacy that has been left behind. That legacy is built on two pillars. It is built on the first pillar, which is complacency. The second pillar is denial. In the first instance, we see that the complacency is best given expression in the words of the member for Higgins, the former Treasurer, who said, as far back as 28 July 1999, there is ‘no life left in the inflation dragon’. Well, it seemed to have puffed a few more breaths and has now become a fighting force that this nation needs to contend with. More recently, on 26 July 2007, the member for Higgins said they had inflation now ‘right where we want it’. I am not exactly sure where that is but it is certainly not within the Reserve Bank of Australia’s preferred band of two to three per cent.

On the issue of denial: the denial upon which this government’s inflation legacy is built continues in the words of the member for Wentworth, who said:

Wayne Swan is trying to create a myth, a fairytale about economic history.

Then there was this, and I read from a report in the Australian Financial Review on 9 February this year:

Asked if inflation was out of the target band, Mr Turnbull on Friday said it was not.

So much for ‘fairytale’! The story that I tell today is not a fairytale; it is the nightmare that residents of my electorate, working families, are living with. Let’s not look to the words of the member for Wentworth, let’s not look to the words of the member for
Higgins. Let’s look to the words of a respected economist, Mr Barry Hughes, as reported in the *Australian* a few days ago. He said:

They

referring to the Rudd Labor government—

have been dealt a much tougher hand than either—

John—

Howard or—

Bob—

Hawke got in 1983.

We have a five-point plan to tackle inflation. We also have a plan to make switching banks more of an option. *(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Clare—Mr Deputy Speaker, I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (11.19 am)—I begin by saying that the member for Moncrieff was very keen to make a contribution to this debate today but of course he is unable to because his status in this place remains unresolved. I think this a very sad day because what we have seen has been, astonishingly, the Speaker arbitrarily deciding on whether a member needs to leave this chamber or not. I wonder whether that is precedent in the history of Federation.

Government members interjecting—

Mr KEENAN—Members opposite are interjecting. I would be very happy for them to make a contribution on that as to whether the Speaker—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Does the member for Lyons have a point of order?

Mr Adams—Mr Deputy Speaker, my point of order is whether this member is speaking to the motion before the chair.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Sorry, I could not hear your point of order. You have the call.

Mr Adams—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am asking what this member is addressing—what motion is before the chair and whether this member is addressing the motion that is before the chair.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I thank the member for Lyons. I call the member for Stirling and remind him of the motion before the chair.

Mr KEENAN—I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and at your command I will move on directly to the motion. I say this to the member for Lindsay. While I congratulate him on his election to this place, it must be terribly disappointing for him and, I think, also his constituents that he has brought on a private members’ business motion yet his colleagues—the Treasurer, the finance minister, the Assistant Treasurer—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Does the Government Whip have a point of order?

Ms Hall—Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, I very definitely have a point of order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—And that is?

Ms Hall—My point of order is that the speaker is actually flouting your ruling. He is not coming to the point. There is no relevance. He is not being relevant.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—There is no point of order. I call the honourable member for Stirling—and I am listening to him, although he has only resumed speaking for the last 15 seconds.

Mr KEENAN—I was saying that it is very disappointing for the new member for Lindsay to bring this private members’ motion before the House and for his colleagues
or his constituents not to even give him the courtesy of listening to what he has to say.

Ms Hall—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of relevance, once again. He is not speaking to the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—There is no point of order, and I will deal with the member for Shortland if she continues to disrupt on frivolous points of order. I call the member for Stirling.

Mr KEENAN—The government have a fundamentally inconsistent approach to managing the economy. You see government members coming into this chamber and talking down the strength of the Australian economy. What they are fundamentally trying to deny is the fact that, as an incoming government, the Rudd Labor government have inherited the strongest economic position of any government in the history of this country. They have a strategy to talk down the Australian economy.

Mr Shorten interjecting—

Mr KEENAN—In a fast-growing economy—and I am sure the member for Maribyrnong would be aware of this—in a very tight labour market you have challenges associated with managing that economy. When you are approaching the challenge, the last thing the government want to do is run around like Chicken Little saying how terrible the problem is and talking up the problem. This is what we have had from the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation and, extraordinarily, we have also had it from the Minister for Foreign Affairs when making a speech in New York to potential investors in Australia.

I obtained an article from the ABC website. Michael Blythe, Chief Economist for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, gave evidence to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia. He contributed to a forum they had the other day and, importantly, he said:

We’re maybe a little bit too pessimistic on the inflation story for Australia.

He went on to say:

… it’s important not to talk down the economy.

I think that is a very important point. Yes, we have a fast-growing economy, we have a very tight labour market and that presents challenges. That is what the government have been elected to address. When they are addressing this challenge it is vitally important they do not make it worse, which is what they are doing at the moment.

I would like to place some facts on the record because we do have a lot of disinformation on the current state of the Australian economy. The member for Lindsay was talking about inflation in the recent December quarter. One way to assess the strength of the Australian economy is to compare us with our competitors, particularly the OECD countries. With respect to inflation in the December quarter, Australia was at the lower end compared to its trading partners. By the way, contrary to what the member for Lindsay was saying, inflation remains within the target rate that was established by the RBA, which is two to three per cent.

The reality is that, compared to our trading partners, inflation in Australia is particularly low. The weighted average within the OECD is 3.3 per cent. Importantly, it is very low and we need to remember that Australia is growing faster than most of the other countries within the OECD. If we look at the record, we see Australia is growing faster than our competitors, yet inflation remains lower. The other very important point to make is that the unemployment rate remains vastly lower than that of our economic competitors.

Our inflation rate is lower, our employment rate is lower and our growth rates are
higher. The reality is that the incoming government have inherited a stronger economy than any incoming government in the history of Australia. They should not perpetuate this myth that they have not inherited the most amazing economic state, an economy that was called the ‘wonder down under’ by the Economist. They should acknowledge that fact and not run around the country talking down the economy.

I want to move quickly to the five-point plan which has been put forward by the Prime Minister. You always have to look at what the government do and not what they say. The Prime Minister will often make a speech, and he has a habit of just stating the obvious and trying to put it forward as something that is incredibly profound. He came along to Perth on 21 January and, in a speech where he announced his five-point plan to fight inflation, he commenced by saying:

The future of the national economy is core business for the new Government of Australia. I would have thought that was a statement of the obvious. When he goes on to list his five-point plan, again, what we see is a collection of cliches and statements of the obvious. He said the government would be committed to fiscal restraint. That is not bad, because this government has inherited a zero net position, as opposed to when the Howard government came in and we inherited $96 billion of Labor debt. That is real fiscal restraint: paying off Australia’s debt. The Prime Minister then referred to private demand and saving for the future. That is very admirable but, again, there is no detail about how he intends to actually encourage private savings. Point 3 of his five-point plan is headed ‘Tackling chronic skills shortages’. This is an important point. It seems to be one of the government’s main attack points on the opposition at the moment. In Australia we have an incredibly low rate of unemployment and that, obviously, puts pressure on employers who wish to find skilled employees.

Point 4 of the five-point plan to fight inflation is headed ‘National leadership to tackle infrastructure bottlenecks’. Again, that is a very noble sentiment, but there is no level of detail. The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government seems to think he will get his hands on all this superannuation money to do it but, again, he never actually explains the mechanism through which he might do that. In the time I have remaining to me, can I say that the Rudd Labor government have inherited the best economic position of any preceding government. Instead of running around like Chicken Littles talking down the Australian economy and destroying business confidence, what they should be doing is managing the challenges of the economy, as the previous government did.

Mr Adams—Speak about the economy!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr MJ Washer)—Order! The member for Lyons!

Mr KEENAN—Mr Deputy Speaker, with your protection, I will continue. This is a government that have inherited a fast-growing economy. They have inherited extremely low unemployment and, instead of complaining about doing their job, they should get on and do it. *(Time expired)*

Mr CLARE (Blaxland) (11.30 am)—I congratulate the member for Lindsay for bringing this motion on interest rates before the House. It is one of the most important motions we could debate in this chamber because inflation, interest rates and the threat that they pose to working families are the greatest challenges that confront this government at this time. It is with deep concern that I hear from the member for Stirling that he still thinks Australians have never been better off. The fact is that inflation is the great menace.
Mr CLARE—I can hear cries coming from the other side of the chamber, but I am more concerned about the cries of working families in places like Western Sydney and cries from working families in my electorate. Inflation is the great menace that confronts us. It erodes savings and productivity, destroys businesses and communities and hurts working families. Last year, the member for North Sydney said on the record that inflation is:

...the curse, the evil that cuts to the core; inflation is like a cancer on the economy ...

I agree; I think that is right. The problem is that the former government did nothing about it. They allowed it to gather momentum. It did not just pop up on 25 November last year. This is something that has been brewing, causing problems and hurting working families for the last two years or more. The problem is that all of the 20 warnings from the Reserve Bank were ignored.

The member for Higgins is often accused by others of lying back in his hammock, doing nothing about inflation, but we learn by reading the Howard biography that he was trying his best, doing his hardest and trying to rein in the spending spree of the former Prime Minister. But he tried in vain. He failed and the working families of Australia are paying for the price of that failure. Inflation is now at 3.6 per cent. That is the highest level in 16 years and there is the threat that it will go even higher. We learnt this week from the Assistant Governor of the Reserve Bank, Malcolm Edey, when he spoke at a CEDA conference, that it could reach closer to four per cent next month. That is what we inherited: the highest inflation in 16 years, the second highest in the developed world and the threat of it going even higher if we do not act. I am not saying it is the highest inflation in the world—not by a long shot. It was reported yesterday that Zimbabwe’s inflation has gone to 100,000 per cent. I do not think anyone here is about to say that is a precedent or template that we should aspire to replicate. It is not the type of good government and responsible economic management that Australia benchmarks itself on.

The shadow Treasurer told us only very recently that the inflation problem is a fairytale. The member for Lindsay put it very clearly today when he said that it is not a fairytale; it is a nightmare. It is a nightmare for people around the country, in Western Sydney, and very particularly in my electorate of Blaxland. They are paying the price because the former government failed to act.

In my first speech to this House earlier this week, I mentioned very briefly what the impact of that failure is. Three hundred families in Blaxland lost their homes this year because they could not keep up with the rising cost of interest rates and the pressure that put on them. The value of their houses has also dropped by 16 per cent over the course of the last three years. They lost their homes because the former government lost their way and, as a consequence, the government also lost their jobs.

What lies ahead? The Reserve Bank has advised that interest rates are expected to be at or above the target band for the next two years. If we do not heed this warning, it is not going to be a problem for the next two years; it will be a problem for the next generation. Monetary policy is a very blunt instrument. It ends up hurting about a third of the people in this country—the people with mortgages. We as a good government have a responsibility to do more than just use monetary policy to help the Reserve Bank.

What we have got here is a stark contrast. There are two types of people in this chamber, the Rudds and the duds. The Rudds have got a plan for the future and the duds have
lost their way. You have got the Rudds, who have got a plan to tackle inflation, and you have got the duds, who only had one plan to tackle inflation, and that was Work Choices. They said Work Choices would help keep inflation under control. Now they say it is dead. Earlier this week they said it was alive again. Now it is dead again. It is the zombie policy that they are going to bring back to life at the next election. The nightmare of Work Choices will soon be over for the people of Australia, but the nightmare of inflation, which was let loose, let out of control by the former government, is going to hurt the people of this country and the people of my electorate for a lot longer unless we do the work needed to put it in its place.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (11.35 am)—I am pleased to take this opportunity to speak on the motion before the House moved by the member for Lindsay on interest rates. Before I begin the central elements of my contribution, I would like to refer to a number of statements made by the previous speaker, the member for Blaxland. He referred to benchmarking and was somehow attempting to compare the Australian economy to that of Zimbabwe. It is interesting to refer to the words of the member for Fraser from the early nineties. I cannot remember his words exactly, but he was actually comparing this economy to those of Mali, Peru and Bangladesh. We do not compare ourselves with Mali, Peru and Bangladesh anymore, but they were the comparisons being drawn under the previous Labor government. I also refer to the issue raised in relation to high mortgages. The member for Blaxland did not mention the huge state imposts that are put upon home buyers in Western Sydney, the huge costs that are imposed by the New South Wales and other state governments. He was silent on this point. I see him leaving the chamber. He has lost interest because he does not want to hear the truth. He does not want to hear the fact that state Labor is driving up the cost of housing. He has turned around; he has turned tail. He did not want to hear the fact that state Labor is driving up the cost of housing.

Let me continue with my contribution. There is very much an issue of confidence out there in the Australian economy, and confidence is an important element in any market. It is the very foundation for strong economics within those markets; it is the very foundation of an orderly market as opposed to a market that is out of control. What we see appearing in the Australian market—and in the Australian economy, for that matter—is a crisis of confidence in the Treasurer. The people do not believe that the Treasurer has what it takes to run a $1.1 trillion economy. The Treasurer comes into this House and seems to be in a hell of a muddle over what NAIRU is. He seems to think it is the Pacific solution. He referred to a whole range of things and said, ‘Well, sometimes I have the answers and sometimes I don’t; sometimes I’ll be able to give this House the answers and sometimes I won’t.’ The Treasurer, who is responsible for a $1.1 trillion economy, is uncertain of the concept of NAIRU and certainly out of his depth. He has moved from brown-paper-bag-onomics to trying to run a $1.1 trillion economy and he has come up short. And the people of Australia are seeing that. They are nervous. Confidence is faltering and falling. People need to have the confidence to invest; they need to have the confidence to purchase. But, under this Treasurer, we see a fall in confidence. People do not have confidence in him to run the economy. I was reading in the Herald Sun today an article by Steve Lewis. What was said of the Treasurer in that? It said:

Voters rated Swan as ‘dishonest’ and ‘slimy’ with an ‘untrustworthy character’.
That was in the paper today: ‘dishonest’ and ‘slimy’ and an ‘untrustworthy character’. That has to have an effect on confidence.

There is a great irony with the Australian Labor Party. They opposed every measure that the previous government took to bring the budget into surplus, they opposed every measure to implement solid economic policy and they opposed tax reform; yet, at the end of the day, they claim to be fiscal conservatives. They opposed every measure that was put in place. I find it very ironic that members opposite can come into this House and claim the mantle of fiscal conservatism when, during their time on the opposition benches, they did not assist the government of the day with the passage of those bills; they voted against them. All of the previous members are on the record as voting against the GST. We all remember the words ‘day of fundamental injustice’ from the now Prime Minister. (Time expired)

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11.40 am)—I rise in support of the motion before the House, put so eloquently by the member for Lindsay. Inflation is impacting on working families around the nation as those on tight household budgets struggle to find extra money to meet daily cost-of-living pressures. Petrol, groceries, housing prices—the basic costs of living—have been spiralling out of reach of many families for way too long. In the light of this, I welcome the leadership of the Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs in establishing the national grocery prices inquiry. The ACCC inquiry will make sure that we are getting a fair deal at the supermarket. The inquiry will investigate all aspects of the supply chain, from the farm gate to the checkout, to see what more can be done to ensure that working families have access to a fair, competitive food market.

Of course, there are many causes for Australia’s current inflationary pressures. The US subprime mortgage crisis and spiralling world oil prices are certainly playing a part. However, at home we face our own challenges. A nationwide skills crisis across many industries is driving up wages and inflation, and this pressure in the labour market is simply not sustainable. The freeze on MPs’ wages sends a strong signal to the private sector that we are serious about controlling wage growth. Yesterday, this was acknowledged in the chamber by the member for Slipper.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr MJ Washer)—Peter Slipper, Fisher.

Mr PERRETT—The member for Fisher. I beg your pardon, Mr Slipper. The neglect of skills and maniacal pursuit of union-busting projects like the Australian Technical Colleges, especially when the real opportunities were waiting in our TAFE colleges and universities, show how the former government dropped the ball when it came to skills. But perhaps the biggest factor in Australia’s current inflationary explosion is the legacy of the previous government. Today’s inflationary pressures are a direct result of the Howard-Costello government’s failure to act on a number of Reserve Bank inflation warnings. How many warnings?

Mr Sullivan—Twenty!

Mr PERRETT—Not one, not two, not three, not 10, not 15, but 20 warnings! The previous government were blind to the needs of working families. The Howard-Costello government just refused to act—six official interest rate rises in the last term of government, and they refused to act. Australians are entitled to feel ripped off. The coalition spent 11½ years masquerading as the masters of economic management, but we now know that to be a complete fraud. While enjoying the spoils of the Hawke-Keating realistic
economic reforms—tough reforms—the Howard government failed to address the skills crisis, failed to act on infrastructure for the future and failed to take any meaningful measures to ensure housing affordability. What was their No. 1 economic reform, as mentioned previously by my colleagues? Only one: Work Choices. Now the members opposite treat the Work Choices policy like something they stepped in—they want to get as far away from it as possible. The previous government cared so little about housing affordability that they did not even have a housing minister and contributed very modestly to public housing. Instead, they filled the pockets of private landlords through rent assistance. It was shameful.

The Reserve Bank cash rate now stands at seven per cent. Of course, this means many families are now paying more than nine per cent on their mortgages—and when I say ‘nine per cent’ I am not talking about the Leader of the Opposition’s approval rating! In my electorate, in mortgage belts like Moorooka, Salisbury and Eight Mile Plains, they are really doing it tough. Every rate rise is a kick in the guts for families already struggling to make ends meet. I read in the Sydney Morning Herald today that some families are going without meals and basic health care just to cover skyrocketing rents. That is shameful. That should be contrasted with the economic legacy of John Howard and Peter Costello—I beg your pardon, I should have said ‘the part-time member for Higgins’—who said Australian families have never been better off.

Mr Simpkins—As opposed to ‘part-time Prime Minister’. Where is the Prime Minister?

Mr PERRETT—Actually, where is the member for Higgins? Where is anyone from the other side? We finally have a federal government that cares about working families and is prepared to do the hard yards to fight inflation. One of our first strategies was to turn the tide of reckless government spending. The member for Higgins wanted to keep wearing Corey’s big, yellow sunglasses and keep the party going. The Rudd Labor government is much more reasonable. (Time expired)

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (11.45 am)—I am going to enjoy my time in this parliament listening to new members coming forth with overblown rhetoric. I did not enjoy the member for Blaxland’s comment about ‘Rudds and duds’. There is going to be some real inspiration coming from these new members. I am disappointed with the member for Lyons, though, a person of such talent and experience, so raucously attacking a new shadow minister. I recommend that members be careful what they say in this place.

Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr BROADBENT—The words you had in your speech on this very important address on inflation will stay in Hansard. You do not want to be in a position where you have stepped in something that you want to walk away from when you leave this House.

Mr Adams—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: the member is waffling about nothing. He is trying to lecture me. I suggest that you bring him back to the motion before the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr MJ Washer)—I call on the member for McMillan to address the motion.

Mr BROADBENT—I am responding to the motion before the House and to the speakers who have spoken before me. There is a warning in this. The Labor Party is coming into government at a time when the Howard government—in particular, Peter Costello—has a proud record of delivery of service in this House. Those gains were hard-won by the Howard government. As I said
before, that did not come easily. The first three years of pulling the financial and fiscal policy of the nation into order were very hard. There are those in this place who know that some of us on this side of the House paid a very dear price for getting this nation’s house in order when it comes to finances. I was one of those people who paid the price for the cuts we had to make and it was very difficult in Gippsland at that time. But those cuts were made and that is what drove down inflation and unemployment.

That is very important because, as some members have reflected on, the decisions that are made by the parliament and the new government affect individual families in their own homes. It is too early to criticise the new government for anything they might have done at this stage. They have a budget to produce. In that budget, they will be putting themselves on the line as to how they are going to tackle the big issues of the day such as skills shortages, which we all recognise. In a booming economy, a Rolls-Royce economy, there will be skills shortages. It does not matter what industry it is—whether it be the dairying industry or the building industry—there are skills shortages. In parts of Gippsland they can do with 60 plumbers in just one area and there is a shortage of electricians.

We recognise that there are skills shortages and this is driven by a strong economy. But it does not help the nation when the Treasurer of the country says, ‘The inflation genie is out of the bottle.’ The unions respond to that by saying, ‘If the inflation genie is out of the bottle and everything is going to go up, we are going to have to apply for higher wages.’ Politicians can show restraint and have their wages frozen, but it is a symbolic act and no-one is going to fight about it. Let us get on with the job. But, importantly, wages need to be restrained in this booming economy. There are shortages throughout the nation. As you, Mr Deputy Speaker Washer, coming from the west, would know, the shortages in the mining industry are manifest. I know that people are being hauled out of Gippsland just to drive trucks in the west, so we now have a shortage of truck drivers in our area. These things are crucially important because they affect the whole nation.

Paul Keating said he could just pull and turn the levers of inflation and unemployment at any time. He said, ‘I’ve got the levers of the nation in my hand.’ He handed them over to Peter Costello, who handled those levers very carefully for a long time on behalf of this nation. Right now those levers have gone into the hands of Wayne Swan, and the nation will be looking very carefully at how he holds them.

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

Ministerial Accountability

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (11.52 am)—I thank the House for its indulgence in waiting a few moments for me to arrive in the chamber. I move:

That the House:

(1) acknowledges its support for the advancement of democracy around the world, including Pakistan; and

(2) recognises the importance of ministerial accountability in our Westminster system of government.

I want to take this opportunity in this first fortnight of the sittings of the 42nd Parliament of Australia to extend very warm congratulations to the members of both sides who have given their maiden presentations to this parliament and to wish them well in their parliamentary careers. It is interesting that in this 42nd Parliament we are sitting at an his-
toric time in the world, and part of my motion goes to some of the historic moments that have happened in the last few days of this week and, as well, in the preceding week.

This motion is very relevant and very timely because around the world we have seen the creation of a ‘new’ nation state. We have seen elections in Pakistan, a country of immense importance in the world, a nation of the Commonwealth, a good friend of this country, and a country with which we have very warm, generous and strong ties. As well, we see a very robust contest happening in the United States, a contest where candidates for the highest office in that country are pitching their ideas and policies against each other and seeking to earn the confidence and trust of the American public.

I think this motion is very relevant in this parliament at this time because we sit here on a Friday for the first time in a very, very long time; we sit here on a Friday, when the executive is not able to be questioned by members of the opposition. I will come to more of that later. I find that very, very disappointing.

Mr Shorten—You cannot get here on time.

Mr JOHNSON—I notice one of the newer members to the parliament, the new member for Maribyrnong, I believe, who certainly has a national profile and no doubt seeks to lead this country one day. In a previous presentation in this parliament some years ago, I commented that I expected a fellow Queenslander and a Victorian—the now Prime Minister and the now Deputy Prime Minister—would be very much watching the back of the then Leader of the Opposition, the former member for Brand, and I suspect that the member at the table, the member for Maribyrnong, will be doing a similar thing. I am pleased to extend my personal good wishes to him in his career—

Mr Shorten—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member for Ryan is wandering all over the paddock like Brown’s cows and he should stick to the motion. There is no relevance where he is going now.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr MJ Washer)—The member for Ryan will address the motion.

Mr JOHNSON—If the member for Maribyrnong and the government have any difficulty with my presentation, I am more than happy for them to call a division and seek my expulsion from the chamber. This interjection by the member opposite—

Dr Washer—Order!

Mr JOHNSON—if the member for Maribyrnong and the government have any difficulty with my presentation, I am more than happy for them to call a division and seek my expulsion from the chamber. This interjection by the member opposite—

Ms Hall—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Not only did the member for Ryan fail to get himself to the chamber on time to speak to his motion, not only did we on this side of the House give him leave to speak, but he is now flouting your ruling, and what he is saying has absolutely no relevance to the motion before the House—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Hall—and he is being totally disorderly standing up while I am talking at this time. The point of order is relevance, Mr Deputy Speaker.
Mr JOHNSON—I find it absolutely hypocritical that the government of the day expects members of the parliament to be sitting here and expressing their views, their thoughts and their comments and putting together words of wisdom on behalf of their constituencies, and yet, because the members opposite do not like what we are saying, they stand up on a point of order. Talk about hypocrisy! The Prime Minister of the day is not even in the parliament. This motion goes to democracy and to the capacity of members of the parliament to question the executive, to question the Prime Minister—and he cannot even find it within himself to be here. I am more than happy to be here. I am more than happy to sit here on a Saturday, on a Sunday or on any day of the week, but I find it very, very odd that the Prime Minister is not here. I might have a question to ask him. I might have a question to ask him on behalf of the Ryan electorate. I was, after all, duly elected by the people of Ryan.

Mr Sullivan—Only just!

Mr JOHNSON—I was more than comfortably re-elected by the people of Ryan. I hear one of the newer members of the parliament already acting with absolute arrogance.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! A little less exchange across the chamber would be appreciated.

Mr JOHNSON—He is a man who has, in fact, been here only a short time and yet he is acting with incredible arrogance. Talk about the Sun King! I understand that the man I am looking at is the member for Longman. I certainly congratulate him on his election to the parliament, but I find it remarkable, in the spirit of generosity and in the spirit of democratic robust conversation and debate—

Ms Hall—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member for Longman is a new member. This does not relate to the terms of this motion, which is about ministerial accountability. The member for Ryan is flouting your ruling. He is showing his total disrespect for this House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I call the member for Ryan.

Mr JOHNSON—Clearly, I think I have the goodwill and the support of the members of the Australian public who are sitting in the gallery. Wherever they come from around our great country, I welcome them to the national parliament. They are seeing robust debate in action here, and to those of them who might be from Queensland I give a particularly warm welcome. I represent the federal seat of Ryan, and my comments in fact go to the heart of my motion, because we are talking about democracy. My motion is about democracy; it is about accountability. It is about the executive being accountable to the parliament—and the executive is not here to be questioned. I cannot get up here now and ask a question to the Prime Minister of the country. How absolutely absurd. Talk about the Sun Kings of the Sunshine State!

Mr Adams—I rise on a point of order. There is a motion before the chair. This is backbenchers’ time, private members’ time. The member on the other side of the chamber is trying to introduce a whole range of other matters into the debate, which were debated here yesterday, and somewhat this morning. We should be debating and giving to people who want to speak on this motion the opportunity to do so. I ask that you bring the member back to the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I call on the member for Ryan.

Mr JOHNSON—The motion on the Notice Paper is about the accountability of the ministers of this government. Where are
they? I look around the chamber of the House of Representatives of the 42nd parliament and I do not see one single member of the executive here.

Dr Southcott—Bill’s here.

Mr JOHNSON—He is not quite the Prime Minister yet. I know that he is from Victoria and I know that a Victorian member of parliament from the Labor Party should be the Prime Minister, but right now the Sun King from the Sunshine State is the Prime Minister, and I want him here so I can ask him a question. Why can’t I, on behalf of the Ryan electorate, ask the Prime Minister of Australia a question about issues relevant to the people of my electorate? I need to have all kinds of answers from the executive. I know you seek to be on the front bench but, member for Maribyrnong, bide your time. There are a lot of people around you and you might enhance your career if you say to the Prime Minister, ‘Yes, Prime Minister, we should be here answering questions from the opposition.’

It is costing taxpayers $1 million per day for this parliament to sit, and we cannot even ask questions of the executive. How absolutely absurd, and what an affront to the people of Ryan! It is costing the taxpayers of Australia $1 million. It is costing every taxpayer of Australia—(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Robert—I second the motion.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (12.02 pm)—We have heard from the member for Ryan an absurd rhetorical question today: ‘Why can’t I ask a question of the PM?’ The member for Ryan has not even attempted this year to ask a single question of the PM. We have had two weeks of sittings. What we have had today from the member for Ryan is a continuation of the hysteria and a continuation of the attempt to create a cloud of uncertainty and doubt about a simple change to standing orders, when there is no uncertainty. There is no doubt nor is there the slightest change to the accountability of the executive in this place. I just need to state a few very simple facts about the changes to these standing orders. First, we used to have under the former standing orders, question time—

Mr Johnson—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The new member in this parliament alleged that I had not asked a question of the Prime Minister. I wonder if he has asked a question of the Prime Minister in this chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr MJ Washer)—There is no point of order.

Mr DREYFUS—I am not the person complaining, as does the member for Ryan, that he cannot ask a question of the Prime Minister.

Mr Johnson interjecting—

Mr DREYFUS—If the honourable member would just listen I could tell him that under the former standing orders we sat four days a week. There was question time four days a week. Under the new standing orders we will sit on the first four days of the week and there will be question time on the first four days of the week. Under the standing orders there used to be three matters of public importance debates. Under the new standing orders there will still be three matters of public importance debates.

Can I further point this out: just let’s look at the way in which the parliament has been operating in its first two weeks of operations. Under the life of the Howard government there was an average of about 18 or 19 questions every question time. Under the first two weeks of the Rudd Labor government we have been averaging more than 20 questions, and that is over the question times that we have had so far. There have been more questions—and that is with the extraordinary in-
tterruptions and objections that have been attempted by the opposition in these first two sitting weeks.

Can I make another point about the way in which this parliament has been operating? Throughout the whole of 2007 the Howard government gave precisely two ministerial statements in this House. In the first two weeks of the parliamentary sittings under the Rudd Labor government there have been four ministerial statements, and there will continue to be ministerial statements made.

There have been complaints made, both last week and this—with all kinds of hysterical statements—about the changes to standing orders. There was a suggestion, first of all, that there was some problem about the quorum requirement imposed under section 39 of Commonwealth Constitution. The other point that has been made was about some bizarre allegation by a number of the members opposite that there might be some loss of the absolute parliamentary privilege that attaches to statements made by members in this House. I need to state it clearly: there is no problem in relation to the quorum. All that we have now, with the new standing orders that have been introduced to regulate these Friday sittings, is a continuation of a practice that has been in place in this House—and, might I add, in the Senate—for some years.

It is an absurd suggestion that proceedings in this place could in any sense lose the parliamentary privilege that attaches to them, because of some imagined point that has been put forward about the quorum requirement. Earlier this week, on the morning of 20 February, the Speaker made an exceptionally clear statement on both points, and that should have put the matter to rest. It did not put the matter to rest because we have seen, both yesterday and again today, continued complaints about the new standing orders that have been introduced.

Mr Perrett—There has been no discussion about policy.

Mr Dreyfus—Indeed. I am reminded that, far from there being an attempt to actually engage in this place, to put forward some ideas and to deal with the new policies and the agenda for work that the Rudd government has, all we have had from members opposite is self-indulgence and concentration on what can only be described as arcane aspects of parliamentary procedure that, I would suspect, are of no interest to the Australian people. The Australian people want to see this parliament working on the future of this country, putting forward ideas for the future of this country and carrying forward the agenda for work that the Rudd government was elected to fulfil.

Bizarrely, yesterday the member for North Sydney said, in extraordinary terms, that the changes to standing orders ‘cut to the heart of the Westminster system’. The changes to the standing orders say nothing about the Westminster system. They do not change the accountability of ministers in this place and they do not change the way in which this parliament can work. The suggestion that has been faintly and incoherently raised today by the member for Ryan—that the standing orders in some way have lessened ministerial accountability in this place—is simply wrong.

I had expected, on reading the motion, that we might hear something about Pakistan because Pakistan is mentioned in this motion. The motion reads as follows:

That the House:
(1) acknowledges its support for the advancement of democracy around the world, including Pakistan ...
We have not heard a word about ‘the advancement of democracy around the world, including Pakistan’.

Mr Johnson—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would have been able to talk about Pakistan if the members opposite had allowed me to and had stopped interjecting all the time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—That is not a point of order.

Mr DREYFUS—This government, as the foreign minister has made absolutely clear, strongly supports a return to democratic processes and the holding of elections in Pakistan. It is hoped that the elections that we have just had in Pakistan will produce a workable government and an early return to full democracy. I am going to assume, charitably, that the member for Ryan would support that sentiment even though we heard nothing from him about that.

It is ironic to hear, from members on the other side, a motion that asks this House to recognise the importance of ministerial accountability in our Westminster system of government. Be in no doubt that the Labor Party—we on this side of the House—fully recognise the importance of ministerial accountability. The shame is that the former government did not. Regrettably, I do not have time to give you what would be a very long list of the failures by the former government to pay even the slightest attention to, to use the words of the motion, ‘the importance of ministerial accountability’.

I need only go back to about 2004, which is probably far enough. I remind the House that, when the former member for Dawson was the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, she was found to have breached the former government’s ministerial code of conduct when she employed a former lobbyist, Ken Crooke, before announcing a grant of $1.27 million to the company where that lobbyist had previously worked. There was no accountability, because the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, the former member for Dawson, remained in her post.

I could mention the Australian Wheat Board disaster. No minister answered for that shame in Australia’s history. I could mention what occurred in relation to the history of maladministration of the immigration department under not one but two ministers for immigration. It was year after year of ministerial mismanagement where we saw Australian citizens deported—(Time expired)

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (12.13 pm)—I rise to talk to the motion of the member for Ryan, which reads:

That the House:

(1) acknowledges its support for the advancement of democracy around the world, including Pakistan; and

(2) recognises the importance of ministerial accountability in our Westminster system of government.

Churchill’s famous dictum that ‘Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time’ is indeed correct. It was delivered in the House of Commons on Remembrance Day in 1947 and was fitting at the postwar time that it was delivered. I contend it remains fitting to this day. Churchill had won the war but, in the election of July 1945, he was defeated, seen not as the man to organise the peace. When the news came out, Churchill was taking a bath. He remarked, ‘They have a perfect right to kick me out. That is democracy.’ He returned to power in 1951, but note that the remark about democracy was made after he had lost power. That is the wonderful nature of democracy. When only the gentle hum of shredders fills the thick disappointed ministerial air once the people have voted for a change, that is democracy. When the sounds
of gunfire are absent and when High Court judges can sleep well at night, not fearing their door being kicked in and their being dragged off to prison in front of their children, that is democracy. When people live in freedom, with freedom of speech, of assembly and of thought, that is democracy. It may well be the worst form of government, Mr Churchill, but it is the best of the worst, and I welcome the return to democracy in Pakistan.

The Westminster system of parliamentary democracy was inherited by Australia. In this country it is fashioned around citizens electing a parliament and all being governed by one rule of law. The system of checks and balances was introduced as the historical absolutist monarchies crumbled in order to ensure that the system prevailed. It separated powers into three branches of government: parliament, elected by citizens; the executive branch, known as the Crown, of ministers, cabinet and public servants administering the laws passed by parliament; and the third branch, the judiciary, which cannot make laws and whose role is purely judicial.

It is interesting to note that neither the Prime Minister nor the cabinet are mentioned in the Australian Constitution. The framers of the Constitution took their existence for granted, as they did the various conventions of the Westminster system of government inherited from the United Kingdom. Within our great democracy, guided by our Westminster tradition, ministerial accountability is a paramount. The government’s Standard of Ministerial Ethics—exhibit A—states in the first bullet point of the foreword:

- Lobbyists will be required to register their details publicly on a Register of Lobbyists ... before seeking access to Ministers or their offices.

It is the very first bullet point. Section 8.2 says that this register will be available online. I have tried to find it online and you can imagine my surprise when I could not. So I had my staff call the office of the Prime Minister at 11:05 this morning and they said they would call us back. At this time they still have not called back. Perhaps they are on a Rudd day off, like the Prime Minister. This is despite Senate estimates on 18 February—four days ago—revealing that there are no rules in relation to meeting with lobbyists in advance of the register being established. Indeed Labor actually refused to answer the Senate estimate question about how they will define ‘lobbyists’ or what constitutes a ‘meeting’ with a lobbyist. This government cannot even get the first bullet point of their Standards of Ministerial Ethics right. I warn the Australian people here today that we are in for three very dark years of misery as this Labor administration follows the state Labor governments on the slippery path into mordid practice. Section 3.1 of exhibit A also says:

Ministers must be able demonstrate that they have taken all reasonable steps—

There is a typo. Their preposition ‘to’ is missing. It should say ‘able to demonstrate’. I seek leave, Mr Deputy Speaker, to table this shoddily-written document to allow the Prime Minister, whose signature, I am sure, is on it, to fix it up before they embark on their education revolution. Like the missing preposition, the Prime Minister and most of his ministers are, indeed, missing with the preposition. (Time expired)

Leave granted.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (12.19 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker, let me congratulate you on your elevation to the job. I put myself down on the speaking list because I thought this was a serious motion. I support the advancement of democracy around the world including Pakistan. It goes on to talk about ministerial accountability and the Westmin-
ster system. That is something I feel quite passionate about.

I thought it was wonderful to see the Pakistan elections taking place without the spectre of the carnage that we have seen recently in that country. We do hope that what is going to emerge is a solid democracy over there. It does appear that it will be a coalition—I hope that it is not a coalition, a rabble, like the one over here. I hope that it is a more sound in that respect. But it will be a coalition of power that will be running the government in Pakistan and that is something to look forward to.

I also thought that the mover of this motion might want to talk about our youngest democracy in East Timor and the threat that democracy has had in recent times, about attempts that were made on the lives of both the President and the Prime Minister of the country or about the fact that, presently, we have about 100 police and 1,000 troops in East Timor. I feel quite passionate about that, having regard to the fact that I was part of the original negotiations, negotiating Australia’s police contingent when it went to East Timor some time back. The efforts that are being performed by Australian servicemen and police officers in furthering the interest in democracy and fighting the challenges and the threats to democracy in what is one of our nearest neighbours and one of the world’s youngest democracies are highly commendable.

No, that is not what the member wanted to talk about. He wanted to get in and raise issues that we spent many hours debating during the first sitting of this parliament. I do not know whether or not people can remember—maybe they were comatose at that stage—but on the first day of parliament we sat through until 2.00 am. Most people on the other side of the House decided to participate in that debate. They put their position forward and they lost the numbers—they just did not win the motion. Now we have had question time after question time and all they want to do is to not talk about issues of state or issues affecting the interests of people in their electorates. All they want to talk about in a roundabout way is how they can possibly get out of being here on Fridays.

I do not mind being here on Friday. I do not mind being here with an opportunity to talk about the interests of the people of Werriwa or the people of Macarthur or, quite frankly, the interests of any other people in south-west Sydney that need some assistance or need to have their views ventilated in this place. I know there might be some difficulty for the member for Macarthur in expressing their views, as I understand he is now referred to as the ‘Mayor of Mosman’, but that might be something for the member for Warringah to deal with. This is what Friday sittings are about. They are primarily to allow backbenchers to discuss and bring forward matters concerning their local electorate.

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

75th Anniversary of the Ukrainian Famine

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (12.22 pm)—I move:

That the House:

1. notes that 2007 marks the 75th anniversary of the Great Ukrainian Famine—Holodomor—of 1932–33, caused by the deliberate actions of Stalin’s communist Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics;

2. recalls that an estimated 7 million Ukrainians starved to death as a result of Stalinist policies in 1932–33 alone, and that millions more lost their lives in the purge that ensued for the remainder of the decade;
(3) notes:
(a) that this constitutes one of the most heinous acts of genocide in history;
(b) that the Ukrainian Famine was one of the greatest losses of human life in one country in the 20th century; and
(c) that it remains insufficiently known and acknowledged by the world community and the United Nations as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian nation and its people, but has been recognised as such by the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament of Ukraine);

(4) honours the memory of those who lost their lives;
(5) joins the Ukrainian people throughout the world, and particularly in Australia, in commemorating these tragic events; and
(6) submits that the Australian Government support a resolution to the General Assembly of the United Nations, which may be submitted by the Government of Ukraine, that the Holodomor in Ukraine in 1932–33 be recognised as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian nation and its people.

I rise with great sadness to speak on this resolution, a resolution which must be very painful for members of the Ukrainian-Australian community who remember one of the great crimes of Stalin in the period of Soviet communism. He was responsible for the death of between eight million and 10 million citizens of his own country who live in what is now a free country, the Ukraine. Any of us who read that magisterial history The Harvest of Sorrow by the great Professor Robert Conquest, one of the most important works about the period of Soviet communism, understand exactly the nature of the crimes that were perpetrated against the Ukrainian people. I must say that my knowledge of this issue began in the 1970s when I met the Ukrainian mathematician Leonid Plusch. He was one of the persecuted dissidents from the Ukraine who managed to get out. He was brought to Australia by someone I became friendly with, Dr Michael Lawriwsky. He is now a leading financial expert, but was then one of the young leaders of the Ukrainian community. This began my journey of discovery of exactly what happened in the Ukraine in those periods.

It seems that Stalin, in the period of complete Soviet power, in probably what is the equal worst paradigm of a totalitarian state, decided he was going to eliminate entire categories of people who might be a threat to him. In this case the kulaks, the peasants of the Ukraine, which was the breadbasket of the USSR, were a category of people—an entire minority who, as private producers, had been encouraged to production after the New Economic Program of the early part of the Soviet Union—who were considered enemies and dispensable. Under the dreadful commissar of the Ukraine, Lazar Kaganovich, who died, unmourned, in his bed aged 92 just a few years ago, the mass starvation program was begun. Exports of wheat from the Ukraine were increased, production quotas were increased completely unrealistically and the producers—the Ukrainian people—were not fed. As news of the famine spread beyond Ukraine, then a province of the Soviet Union, various people were brought in to write stories about the kinds of Potemkin villages that Stalin wanted them to know about.

There was an infamous writer for the New York Times called Walter Duranty, who won a Pulitzer prize for saying that there was no famine in the Ukraine. He is the only person to have been stripped of a Pulitzer prize subsequently, because of what people discovered happened in that benighted area at that time. This Stalinist forced famine, undertaken after the Bolshevik Revolution, stemmed from the move to collectivise farm into kolkhoz, or state farms, and to deprive people not just of their livelihood but actually of food with which to live. There are
terrible examples of what happened during the Holodomor. People were said to be actually turning to cannibalism because the starvation was so widespread.

As I said, seven million to 10 million Ukrainians perished as a result of the famine—a deliberate state policy—while Ukrainian wheat was exported to earn foreign exchange for the USSR. It was not mere indifference of the Soviet apparatus to its own people; this was an exercise that was understood and advanced at a macro level by Stalin and henchmen like Kaganovich as an early example of ethnic cleansing. To this end, the quotas for Ukrainian grain production were increased by in excess of 40 per cent but all of the fruits of the labour of the hardworking farm labourers were taken for the Red Army, guarded by the NKVD and the legion of other Soviet security agencies. The grain of these starving farmers, who worked so hard, was guarded and kept under lock and key as the farmers and their families died. Internal travel controls were implemented to prevent movement in areas where food was comparatively more plentiful, further compounding the suffering of ethnic Ukrainians in the northern Caucasus and lower Volga. The world should never forget this mass starvation of the Ukrainian people.

Mr GEORGIOU (Kooyong) (12.27 pm)—I second the motion moved by the member for Melbourne Ports, and I would like to recognise the initial work done on this motion by the member for Reid. I would also like to recognise members of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations who are in the gallery. The 1932-33 Holodomor, the death by hunger of an estimated seven million Ukrainian people, more than one-fifth of that nation’s population, was a tragedy of such magnitude that it can only move us to a sadness that is essentially beyond words. The great Ukrainian famine was a man-made horror of a kind and on a scale that was inconceivable before the 20th century. The horror belongs to the legacy of that century and, from it, we learn the consequences of not only political ambition, which has been and always will be with us, but also political and ideological ambition mobilised by the power of a totalitarian state.

When Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin’s crimes at the 1956 Communist Party conference, he said that Stalin had wanted to deport all Ukrainians—all 30 million of them—but that he could not find a location for the resettlement. Political scientist Yaroslav Bilinsky recalls that:

... in 1932, Stalin had no illusion that he could exterminate all the Ukrainians at once, but by killing approximately one fifth of all the Eastern Ukrainians, he made a good start in turning them into a more submissive, denationalised people of ‘sowers of millet and hewers of wood’. Bilinsky asks:

... is this not genocide?

For far too long, the world has failed to recognise the Ukrainian famine as genocide. We have failed to realise that in 1932-33, the Soviet policy of forced collectivisation created an unprecedented and horribly unsustainable crop failure in the breadbasket of Europe, that the regime punished starving men, women and children alike with execution or deportation for stealing so much as a handful of grain from the collective, that the very seeds were taken from the hands of the planters, that the borders were barred against those who tried to flee and that, in the end, the deaths of millions were defended as the successful execution of a policy assembly.

The world failed to respond. As the Ukrainian Ambassador to the United Nations, Valeriy Kuchinsky, stated on 10 December 2003:

In 1933, the international community believed the cynical propaganda of the Soviet Union, which
was selling bread abroad while in Ukraine the hunger was killing 17 people each minute.

On that day, Ambassador Kuchinsky also informed the General Assembly that a joint statement on the Holodomor, signed by 36 delegations and supported by 27 other member states, had been issued. The statement recognised the national tragedy caused by the cruel actions and policies of a totalitarian regime.

I wish to acknowledge the significance of the 2003 motion moved by Senator Bill Hef-fernan in the Australian Senate. The motion acknowledged the 70th anniversary of the enforced famine, recognised that it constituted one of the most heinous acts of genocid in history and honoured the memory of those who died.

This motion recalls the seven million Ukrainians who starved to death as a result of Stalinist policies and the millions more, amongst whom were intelligentsia, religious leaders and politicians, who died in the subsequent purge. It is a motion of remembrance and honour. It is a motion that joins the Ukrainian people and Ukrainian Australians in commemorating this tragedy. It is a motion that asks the Australian government to support a resolution to the United Nations General Assembly that the Holodomor in Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 be recognised as an act of genocide against the nation of Ukraine and its people. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (12.32 pm)—I rise to support this motion as well, but before I do, on behalf of the member for Kooyong, the member for Melbourne Ports and all other members of parliament, I welcome members of the Ukrainian community who are in the gallery today. I support this motion with all sincerity, humility and ongoing sorrow, perplexed by the all-too-evident human ability to show astonishing disregard for human life—to deliberately, purposefully and even comfortably administer death, irreversible and eternal, to tens, hundreds of thousands, millions and tens of millions of Ukrainians, our fellow human beings. I also acknowledge the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor, the Great Famine of 1932 to 1933. It was a genocide orchestrated by the then Soviet leadership of Joseph Stalin for the decimation and subjugation of a people, the theft of their land, the fruit of their toil, their hope of a future and any chance to live.

The Soviet claimed as state property the Ukraine’s farming land and its produce on which Ukrainians relied to live. Ukraine’s breadbasket was targeted for state theft; it was exported and dumped in Europe. Stalin’s policy of bleeding every last head of grain from the regions literally left the local populations to starve. Ukrainians, showing due regard for their own survival—spiriting away and hiding what food they could find for themselves and their families—if caught with so-called state property, were sent to show trial, Siberia or executed.

The Soviet exploitation of the Ukraine’s harvests was devastating. The three harvests of 1931 to 1933 produced 18.3, 14.6 and 22.3 million tonnes of grain—easily enough to feed the population, but not enough to satisfy both the demands of the Kremlin and the needs of the Ukraine people. Millions of Ukrainians died of starvation as a result. Sources vary in their estimations—perhaps seven million or eight million from 1932 to 1933. Stalin told Churchill once of 10 million dying, and it is suggested that up to 14 million died in the six years to 1937.

Survivors’ accounts conjure up mental images of food confiscators returning again and again to deprive families of identifiable sustenance. There are stories of children slowly and painfully assuming gargoyles, bodies swollen with hunger and leak-
ing fluid, of bodies lying in the street wrapped in children’s blankets—town after town, region after region, million after million. It is suggested that throughout the 20th century Ukraine lost 50 million human souls—almost as many as all of those lost in World War II, more than the Ukraine’s total current population and equal to two deaths for every man, woman and child currently resident within Australia. Such figures surely put Holodomor as one of the most heinous events in human history.

I support the motion before the House in honour of the lives of the millions who were murdered by the Soviet state, to honour the Ukraine nation that continues to mourn their deaths and to encourage all peoples and nations to identify the need for such human induced horrors to be remembered as genocide. I would support such evils being identified within the context of the United Nations General Assembly, should the opportunity arise.

The parliament should note that 2007 marks the 75th anniversary of the Ukrainian Great Famine, known as the Holodomor, of 1932 to 1933, which was caused by the deliberate actions of the Stalinist communist government of the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. There are many, many Ukrainians who found their way to Australia and have made their home here. Many of them had no hope of survival or of seeing a better future in their homeland. We see many Australian Ukrainians today who have gone on to make a commitment to this land. They certainly contribute to this great multicultural country that we call home—Australia. This motion marks their astonishing deeds, leaving their homeland in such tremendous poverty and amid such destruction. I would like to acknowledge all those people. (Time expired)

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (12.37 pm)—I rise today to support this motion and to remember the crime committed on the people of the Ukraine. After years of chaos, conflict and battles for ownership of the Ukraine, in 1921 those battles ended with the Soviet victory led by Lenin. The Soviets immediately began shipping out huge amounts of grain to feed the hungry people of Moscow and other Russian cities and deprived the people of the Ukraine of the food that they had grown with their own hands.

If Ukrainians thought that Lenin was a monster at that time, they had not seen anything. When Lenin died in 1924, Stalin, one of the most ruthless humans ever to hold power, succeeded him. To Stalin, the burgeoning national revival movement and the continuing loss of Soviet influence in the Ukraine was completely unacceptable. Stalin immediately imposed the Soviet system of land management known as collectivisation. This resulted in the seizure of all privately owned farmlands and stock. In the Ukraine, once proud village farmers were by now reduced to the level of a rural factory worker on large collective farms. Anyone refusing to participate in that compulsory collectivisation system was denounced as a Kulak and deported.

The people simply refused to become cogs in the Soviet farm machine and remained, rightly, stubbornly determined to return to their pre-Soviet farming lifestyle. In Moscow Stalin responded to their unyielding defiance by dictating a policy that would deliberately cause mass starvation and result in the deaths of millions. By mid-1932, nearly 75 per cent of the farms in the Ukraine had been forcibly collectivised and the mandatory quotas of foodstuffs being shipped out to the Soviet Union were drastically increased. There was simply no food remaining to feed the people in the Ukraine. All food was considered to be the sacred property of the state. Mothers in
the countryside would sometimes toss their emaciated children into passing railway cars travelling towards cities such as Kiev, in the hope that someone would take pity on them. However, children and adults had already flocked from the countryside to the cities. They were dropping dead in the streets.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—It being 12.40 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 41. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will make an order of the day for the next sitting. The member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed on a future day.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed:
That grievances be noted.

Cowper Electorate: Centrelink

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (12.40 pm)—I grieve for the people in my electorate because of the 150 jobs that have gone as a result of the failure of the government to proceed with the Centrelink call centre. This government alleges that it is concerned for the people of Australia. This government alleges that it is concerned to create opportunities. But in fact what we have is a regional area with high unemployment, with great need, and the government has curtailed a project that was going to create great benefits. It was going to create great benefits not only for the people who received those jobs but for Centrelink customers. We all want to provide better services for the customers of Centrelink. How can failing to upgrade our call centres provide better services from Centrelink for the people who need them?

It is pure hypocrisy of the people on the other side to say that they claim to care for the people who use Centrelink services but at the same time fail to proceed with an important upgrade. They fail to allow jobs to be created in regional areas through an upgrade of our call centre services which would provide faster, more efficient services. We hear all the time in our electorates that people want better services from Centrelink, and the previous government was committed to delivering those. But in the government’s first action, when their backsides are barely on the treasury benches, they cut services to Centrelink. They cut the ability of Centrelink to provide for the people whom it is supposed to look after. It is an absolute disgrace. I cannot believe this, particularly from the new members opposite. How does the member for Bass feel when she comes into this place and the first action is to deliver the loss of jobs in her electorate?

Mr Truss—She is not even here!

Mr HARTSUYKER—She is not even here. I can see her newsletter now: ‘150 Jobs Slashed from Bass’. Hear, hear! I see the members opposite cheering about 150 jobs lost in Bass as well as 150 jobs lost in my electorate. It is a disgrace.

The expansion of call centres in regional areas makes sense for a range of reasons. It makes good economic sense as well as good service delivery sense. We have in regional areas a supply of labour available to do a range of tasks, but currently, in many cases, people are underemployed. A call centre would draw on what is perhaps currently an underutilised labour force. But what is this government doing? It is not creating opportunities in regional areas. It is not looking to improve the unemployment situation in regional areas. What it is doing is ripping jobs out of regional Australia. The member for Bass did not bother to front on the RDO. I am here putting the case forward for my electorate. The Prime Minister is not here.

Opposition members—Where is he?
Mr HARTSUYKER—We want the Prime Minister here. I want Kevin Rudd to hear what 150 jobs—

The member for Canning displaying a placard—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! The member for Cowper will resume his seat. The member for Cowper will resume his seat. The member for Cowper will resume his seat! The member for Cowper will remove himself from the House under standing order 94(a) for ignoring my call.

Mr Albanese—Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As the Leader of the Opposition knows, the Prime Minister is today visiting Indigenous communities in Walgett and then visiting flood victims in Mackay. That is what the Prime Minister is doing today. This is an extraordinary breach of the protocols of this House that the member here is continuing with. Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask that you take action on this disorderly conduct.

Mr Abbott—Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I presume you are about to sit him down because that was not a point of order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—No. I was going to ask the member for Canning to remove himself and that article from the House.

Mr Hockey—Madam Deputy Speaker—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I have asked the member for Canning to remove that from the House.

Mr Hockey—Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a right to be heard.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—So do I. I am in the chair and you will hear me.

Mr Hockey—I have a right to be heard.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—And you have not heard me. I am actually in the chair and I will be heard. Under previous rulings, such articles have been asked to be removed from the House. I am asking the member for Canning to remove that from the House.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Hockey—Where’s the frontbench? Where are they?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—For the benefit of the member for North Sydney, I have not made a ruling. I have asked for the offensive article—

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—It is offensive. I have asked for the article to be removed from the House. The Leader of the House will resume his seat. I am on my feet.

Mr Hayes interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Werriwa is not helping. I am on my feet. I have asked for that to be removed and it will be done.

Mr Hockey—Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: yesterday the Speaker of this parliament said:

The use of props is not encouraged but it is tolerated.

All week we have had the Deputy Prime Minister coming into this place with props—

Mr Albanese—Madam Deputy Speaker, given that the Leader of the Opposition gave a commitment on behalf of the opposition just an hour ago that we would have private members’ business proceeding, perhaps we can proceed with it now and stop the nonsense.

Mr Hockey—Madam Deputy Speaker, to provide absolute clarification for the House, we have had the Deputy Prime Minister introduce props to the House during the course of debate, and yesterday—

CHAMBER
Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Hockey—I have a right to be heard.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—What is the point of order?

Mr Hockey—Yesterday, in a debate before this chamber, the Leader of the House—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat.

Mr Albanese—Madam Deputy Speaker, what is this?

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the House will be heard in silence.

Mr Albanese—On what basis does the member for North Sydney have the call?

Mr Hockey—Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I remind the Deputy Speaker of the Speaker’s words yesterday that the use of props is not encouraged but is tolerated. The simple point is—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. I call the member for Cowper.

Mr HARTSUYKER—Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My people have the right to expect that their government will be here to hear their concerns.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Cowper will resume his seat. I call the member for Cowper.

Mr Hockey—He’s on grievance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—He is on grievance. I called him on grievance. I have actually asked the member for Cowper to remove himself from the chamber, as he did ignore my ruling before. I let it go on, but I actually did ask the member for Cowper under 94(a)—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The members will resume their seats. I had called the member for Cowper and I was going to remind him—I had let it go on—to remove himself from the chamber because he had been ignoring the chair.

Mr Hartsuyker—On what basis?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—On the basis that I am in the chair and, at the time, you were ignoring the chair. I asked you to remove yourself under 94(a). Please remove yourself from—

Mr Hartsuyker interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I let it go on and now I am asking you to remove yourself under 94(a). The member is named.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (12.50 pm)—I move:

That the member for Cowper be suspended from the service of the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The question is that the member be suspended from the service of the House. All those of that opinion say aye, the contrary no. The ayes have it. Division required. In accordance with standing order 133, the division is deferred until the commencement of the next sitting. The member will remove himself from the chamber.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—You do not have the call.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—You are not entitled to yell at me until I give you the call. The member for Warringah.

Mr Abbott—Madam Deputy Speaker, there has been no resolution of the House—

Mrs Gash interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I ask the member for Warringah to sit down. The member for Gilmore will remove herself from the chamber.

Mrs Gash—On what basis?
The DEPUTY SPEAKER—On the basis that I found that remark offensive and a reflection on the chair. I will call the member for Warringah when the member for Gilmore has removed herself. The member for Gilmore has been in this place long enough to know that she has been reflecting on the chair.

The member for Gilmore then left the chamber.

Mr Albanese—Madam Deputy Speaker, since Federation, this parliament has functioned on the basis of respect for whoever is in the chair. I am very familiar with standing order 94(a), because over the last term on more than 190 occasions members of the then opposition were asked to leave the chamber. Not once was that questioned—not once. I ask the Leader of the Opposition to show leadership—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will resume his seat.

Mr Abbott—Madam Deputy Speaker, if we can return to the matter that you were previously dealing with and where you indicated that you would give me the call, the point of order I was raising is that no motion of the House has been carried and, on that ground, you cannot ask the member for Cowper to remove himself.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Warringah will resume his seat. As was discussed earlier today, you may not be happy with the new standing orders, but they were put in place prior to coming into the House today. I am operating under the standing orders as they apply today.

Mr Bevis—Madam Deputy Speaker, on the point of order that was raised by the member for Warringah, he was, I assume, referring to the naming and the suspension for 24 hours that would follow. Prior to that event, you had quite properly in accordance with standing order 94(a) requested the member for Cowper to leave the chamber. Standing order 94(a), in part, reads:

The direction shall not be open to debate or dissent, and if the Member does not leave the Chamber immediately, the Speaker can name the Member under the following procedure.

The following procedure was the subject of the division. The prior requirement under standing order 94(a) for the member for Cowper to remove himself for one hour is not open to debate. Everyone in this chamber knows that, and it has been obeyed without exception by anybody from the time it was inserted under former Speaker Martin. I would therefore suggest that the member for Cowper should remove himself for the hour, as has been the practice ever since that standing order was put in place—without exception.

Mr Hockey—Madam Deputy Speaker, the member was named. You asked for a vote. The vote on the voices was challenged. A division was called for. No division was held. Therefore, no decision of this chamber has been made and the member has a right to be heard. If the government does not have the numbers on the floor of the chamber, it should give it to someone else.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The member for Cowper will remove himself from the chamber. The member for Cowper’s refusal to leave the chamber places the chair in an untenable position. The sitting is suspended until the ringing of the bells.

Sitting suspended from 12.56 pm to 2.00 pm

The SPEAKER—Order! Today’s events have been of considerable concern to me. I repeat my earlier statement that I understand that some members have concerns about the arrangements for Friday sittings. I wish to express my full confidence in the work of all occupants of the chair today in what have
been difficult circumstances. If our House is to expect the community to have confidence in it, all members should conduct themselves with decorum and dignity regardless of their views about particular matters, including the conduct of business on future Fridays. The time for the grievance debate has expired. The debate is interrupted and I put the question:

That grievances be noted.

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER—Earlier today the member for Herbert drew the attention of the Speaker to the state of the House. In accordance with standing order 55(c) I will count the House if the member so desires. I ask the member for Herbert to indicate if he requires a count of the House to be taken.

Mr Lindsay—Mr Speaker, my request was before lunch. I require this parliament to operate properly. I require a count of the House.

The House having been counted and a quorum being present—

The SPEAKER—Quorum present. Order! The House will now adjourn until 2 pm on Tuesday, 11 March 2008.

House adjourned at 2.02 pm