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SITTING DAYS—2008

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- **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 Georganas 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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<tr>
<td>Vale, Hon. Danna Sue</td>
<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vamvakinou, Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wood, Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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)
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Education and</td>
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<td>Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Social Inclusion</td>
<td>Hon. Julia Gillard, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary and</td>
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<td>Vice President of the Executive Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade</td>
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<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>Minister for Defence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indigenous Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance and Deregulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development and Local Government and Leader of the</td>
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<tr>
<td>House</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital</td>
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<td>Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Climate Change and Water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts</td>
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<td>Attorney-General</td>
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<td>Minister for Human Services and Manager of Government</td>
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<td>Business in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
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<td>Minister for Resources and Energy and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator Hon. John Faulkner</td>
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<td>Hon. Simon Crean MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Stephen Smith MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Nicola Roxon MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Jenny Macklin MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Anthony Albanese MP</td>
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<td>Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy</td>
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<td>Senator Hon. Kim Carr</td>
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<td>Senator Hon. Penny Wong</td>
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<td>Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Robert McClelland MP</td>
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<td>Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hon. Tony Burke MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hon. Martin Ferguson MP</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Minister for Home Affairs  
Hon. Bob Debus

Assistant Treasurer and  
Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs  
Hon. Chris Bowen MP

Ministers for Veterans’ Affairs  
Hon. Alan Griffin MP

Minister for Housing and  
Minister for the Status of Women  
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP

Minister for Employment Participation  
Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP

Minister for Defence Science and Personnel  
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP

Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and  
the Service Economy and  
Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation  
Hon. Craig Emerson MP

Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Governance  
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry

Minister for Ageing  
Hon. Justine Elliot MP

Minister for Youth and  
Hon. Kate Ellis MP

Minister for Sport  
Hon. Maxine McKew MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and  
Childcare  
Hon. Greg Combet MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement  
Hon. Mike Kelly MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support  
Hon. Gary Gray MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and  
Northern Australia  
Hon. Bill Shorten MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s  
Services  
Hon. Bob McMullan MP

Parliamentary Secretary for International Development  
Assistance  
Hon. Duncan Kerr MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs  
Hon. Anthony Byrne MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister  
Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens

Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the  
Voluntary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting  
the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion  
Hon. John Murphy MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade  
Senator Hon. Jan McLucas

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and  
Ageing  
Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and  
Settlement Services
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 Deregulation
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 and Rural Economy
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
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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**Tuesday, 11 March 2008**

The **SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins)** took the chair at 1 pm and read prayers.

**RUDD GOVERNMENT**

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

The **SPEAKER**—At the previous sitting, the first two divisions deferred in accordance with standing order 133 were called on the questions that the members for Moncrieff and Cowper be no longer heard. I do not propose to proceed with these divisions as they are redundant and otiose, given that they have no effect.

**Mr Hockey**—On indulgence, Mr Speaker: this illustrates the farce that was Friday sittings; the members would have been entitled to continue speaking, given that the divisions are not being put.

**DISSENT FROM RULING**

The **SPEAKER**—Order! In accordance with standing order 133, I shall now proceed to put the question on the motion that the member for North Sydney be no longer heard, on which a division was called for and deferred in accordance with the standing order. No further debate is allowed.

A division having been called and the bells being rung—

**Mr Truss**—Mr Speaker—

The **SPEAKER**—If the Leader of the Nationals is seeking the call, I will allow him to come to the dispatch box and seek clarification.

**Mr Truss**—I will ask the question on the record then: why is this one being put to the vote when with the two previous ones—I think quite wisely—you decided not to do so? It is obvious that the—

The **SPEAKER**—The Leader of the Nationals will resume his seat. I thank him for the question. The reason that those divisions are otiose is that the time allotted for the suspension of standing orders, being the 25 minutes, has well and truly expired, whereas this motion was—regrettably for me—based on a motion dissenting from a ruling from the chair, which does not have such a time limitation.

**Question put:**

That the member be no longer heard.

The House divided. [1.06 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ayes</th>
<th>79</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noes</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AYES**

- Adams, D.G.H.
- Bevis, A.R.
- Bird, S.
- Bradbury, D.J.
- Burke, A.S.
- Byrne, A.M.
- Champion, N.
- Clare, J.D.
- Combet, G.
- D’Ath, Y.M.
- Debus, B.
- Elliot, J.
- Ellis, K.
- Ferguson, L.D.T.
- Fitzgibbon, J.A.
- Georganas, S.
- Gibbons, S.W.
- Gray, G.
- Griffin, A.P.
- Hall, J.G. *
- Irwin, J.
- Kelly, M.J.
- King, C.F.
- Macklin, J.L.
- McClelland, R.B.
- McMullan, R.F.
- Murphy, J.
- Neumann, S.K.
- Owens, J.
- Price, L.R.S.
- Rea, K.M.
- Albanese, A.N.
- Bidgood, J.
- Bowen, C.
- Burke, A.E.
- Butler, M.C.
- Campbell, J.
- Cheeseman, D.L.
- Collins, J.M.
- Crean, S.F.
- Danby, M.
- Dreyfus, M.A.
- Ellis, A.L.
- Emerson, C.A.
- Ferguson, M.J.
- Garrett, P.
- George, J.
- Gillard, J.E.
- Grierson, S.J.
- Hale, D.F.
- Hayes, C.P. *
- Jackson, S.M.
- Kerr, D.J.C.
- Livermore, K.F.
- Marles, R.D.
- McKew, M.
- Melham, D.
- Neal, B.J.
- O’Connor, B.P.
- Perrett, G.D.
- Raguse, B.B.
- Ripoll, B.F.

CHAMBER
Question put:
That the member be no longer heard.

The House divided. [1.13 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes…………75
Noes…………58
Majority………17

AYES

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R. Bidgood, J.
Bird, S. Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S. Butler, M.C.
Byrne, A.M. Campbell, J.
Champion, N. Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D. Collins, J.M.
Combet, G. Crean, S.F.
D’Ath, Y.M. Danby, M.
Debus, B. Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J. Ellis, A.L.
Ellis, K. Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T. Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A. Garrett, P.
Georganas, S. George, J.
Gibbons, S.W. Gillard, J.E.
Gray, G. Grierson, S.J.
Griffin, A.P. Hale, D.F.
Hall, J.G. Hayes, C.P. *
Irwin, J. Jackson, S.M.
Kelly, M.J. Kerr, D.J.C.
King, C.F. Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L. Marles, R.D.
McClelland, R.B. McKew, M.
McMullan, R.F. Melham, D.
Murphy, J. Neal, B.J.
Neumann, S.K. O’Connor, R.P.
Owens, J. Perrett, G.D.
Price, L.R.S. Ripoll, B.F.
Rea, K.M. Roxon, N.L.
Rishworth, A.L. Shorten, W.R.
Saffin, J.A. Smith, S.F.
Sidneybottom, S. Sisson, J.
Snowdon, W.E. Symon, M.
Swan, W.M. Thomson, C.
Tanner, L. Thomson, K.J.
Turnour, J.P. Trevor, C.
Turnour, J.P. Vamvakinou, M.
Zappia, A.

* denotes teller
Tuesday, 11 March 2008  HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES 1289

The Speaker—Order! In accordance with standing order 133, I shall now proceed to put the question on the motion that the Speaker’s ruling be dissented from, on which a division was called for and deferred in accordance with the standing order. No further debate is allowed.

Question put:
That the Speaker’s ruling be dissented from.

The House divided.  [1.16 pm]
MEMBER FOR MONCRIEFF

The SPEAKER—Order! In accordance with standing order 133, I shall now proceed to put the question on the motion that the member for Moncrieff be suspended from the service of the House, on which a division was called for and deferred in accordance with the standing order. No further debate is allowed.

A division having been called and the bells being rung—

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, on indulgence: just to provide clarity for the Hansard, the member for Moncrieff was, I understand it, suspended from the House under standing order 94(f) and, in fact, it was one of our own members who pointed out that the member should be named. I also point out that, in this case, the member for Moncrieff and the member for Cowper are, under 'farcical Friday' rules, effectively being suspended from the House for 48 hours because in deference to the Speaker they left the chamber at the appropriate time on the Friday, have served 24 hours, have not come back in—

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

Question put:

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

The House divided. [1.21 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes……………… 79

Noes……………… 58

Majority……… 21

AYES

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R. Bidgood, J.
Bird, S. Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S. Butler, M.C.
Byrne, A.M. Campbell, J.
Champion, N. Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D. Collins, J.M.
Combet, G. Crean, S.F.
D’Ath, Y.M. Danby, M.
Debus, B. Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J. Ellis, A.L.
Ellis, K. Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T. Ferguson, M.I.
Fitzgibbon, J.A. Garrett, P.
Georganas, S. George, J.
Gibbons, S.W. Gillard, J.E.
Gray, G. Grierson, S.J.
Griffin, A.P. Hale, D.F.
Hall, J.G. * Hayes, C.P. *
Irwin, J. Jackson, S.M.
Kelly, M.J. Kerr, D.J.C.
King, C.F. Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L. Marles, R.D.
McClelland, R.B. McKew, M.
McMullan, R.F. Melham, D.
Murphy, J. Neal, B.J.
Neumann, S.K. O’Connor, B.P.
Owens, J. Perrett, G.D.
Price, L.R.S. Raguse, B.B.
Rea, K.M. Ripoll, B.F.
Rishworth, A.L. Roxon, N.L.
Saffin, J.A. Shorten, W.R.
Sidebottom, S. Smith, S.F.
Snowdon, W.E. Sullivan, J.
Swan, W.M. Symon, M.
Tanner, L. Thomson, C.
Thomson, K.J. Trevor, C.
Turnour, J.P. Vamvakinou, M.
Zappia, A.

* denotes teller

Question negatived.
MEMBER FOR COWPER

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 133, I shall now proceed to put the question on the motion that the member for Cowper be suspended from the service of the House, on which a division was called for and deferred in accordance with the standing order. No further debate is allowed.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, on indulgence, in deference to you: the member is effectively serving a 48-hour penalty under a 24-hour provision. It indicates what a farce that Friday was.

Question put:

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

The House divided. [1.26 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

AYES

Adams, D.G.H.
Bevis, A.R.
Bird, S.
Bradbury, D.J.
Burke, A.S.
Byrne, A.M.
Champion, N.
Clare, J.D.
Combet, G.
D’Ath, Y.M.
Debus, B.
Elliot, J.
Ellis, K.
Ferguson, L.D.T.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Georganas, S.
Gibbons, S.W.
Gray, G.
Griffin, A.P.
Hall, J.G.
Irwin, J.
Kelly, M.J.

Albanese, A.N.
Bidgood, J.
Bowen, C.
Burke, A.E.
Butler, M.C.
Campbell, J.
Cheeseman, D.L.
Collins, J.M.
Crean, S.F.
Danby, M.
Dreyfus, M.A.
Ellis, A.L.
Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, M.J.
Garrett, P.
George, J.
Gillard, J.E.
Grierson, S.J.
Hale, D.F.
Hayes, C.P.
Jackson, S.M.
Kerr, D.J.C.

NOES

Andrews, K.J.
Baldwin, R.C.
Bishop, B.K.
Broadbent, R.
Costello, P.H.
Downer, A.J.G.
Farmer, P.F.
Georgiou, P.
Hawke, A.
Hockey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A.
Jensen, D.
Keenan, M.
Ley, S.P.
Macfarlane, I.E.
Markus, L.E.
McGauran, P.J.
Morrison, S.J.
Neville, P.C.
Ramsey, R.
Robb, A.
Ruddock, P.M.
Scott, B.C.
Simpkins, L.
Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J.
Truss, W.E.
Vaile, M.A.J.
Washer, M.J.

Bailey, F.E.
Billson, B.F.
Bishop, J.I.
Cobb, J.K.
Coulton, M.
Dutton, P.C.
Forrest, J.A.
Hawker, D.P.M.
Hull, K.E.
Irons, S.J.
Johnson, M.A.
Laming, A.
Lindsay, P.J.
Marino, N.B.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER—The question having been resolved in the affirmative, the member for Moncrieff is therefore suspended from the service of the House for 24 hours under standing order 94(d).

CHAMBER
The question having been resolved in the affirmative, the member for Cowper is therefore suspended from the service of the House for 24 hours under standing order 94(d).

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (1.29 pm)—by leave—I move:

That Government business orders of the day have priority prior to 2 p.m. for this sitting.

Question agreed to.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION (TARGETED ASSISTANCE) AMENDMENT (2008 MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 21 February, on motion by Ms Gillard:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr HAASE (Kalgoorlie) (1.30 pm)—Previously I had pointed out the justification for the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008 and the realistic need to close the gap between the standard of education achieved by Indigenous children in community schools versus the standard achieved by mainstream students. The reasons for this bill are quite obvious. There exists a huge gap—a great disparity. But why is it so? Is it to do with the quality of teachers? Is it to do with the availability of teachers? I suspect not. I suspect it is much greater than that. In fact, this bill is being put up as an attempt to better resource education facilities in communities when that is not the great problem. The real problem is the fact that we are trying to put a square peg in a round hole. The quality of education achieved by community children is poor because they simply do not attend those educational institutions. The primary reason for that, I believe, is that they
see no justification for gaining an education, because there is no example set for them of the benefits of employment: an enhanced self-esteem that comes through financial independence as a result of holding down a job. They see no example of what we loosely term the Christian work ethic these days.

‘Why is that so?’ you might ask. I will assert that it is simply because in mainstream Australia we are so well accustomed to the connection between place of residence and employment. We live where we live because we can be employed in proximity to where we live, and we gain that self-esteem through the employment and the wages we receive. When you cast about regional and remote Australia and observe the location of Indigenous communities, the commonality is that they are not located adjacent to sites of industry. Unfortunately, on so many occasions they are not enriched with resources, mineral deposits, petroleum et cetera. So we have an artificiality right from the start. We have this Australian parliament, this current government, putting up a bill to improve the teacher resources in institutions where there is, on the most basic concept, almost no justification for education. Most certainly that is the perception of Indigenous parents: ‘Why send my child to school when the education they receive will be meaningless because there are no jobs?’

Indigenous Business Australia has been established for a very long time. A number of Indigenous businesses have been resourced with seed funding and created, with all of the boxes ticked in relation to the formation of a business, such as projected cash flows et cetera. But how often do we see an abject failure in the business proposed? How often do we see that the targets theorised about are never met? How often do we see that the administration processes put in place for the running of that business fail? How often do we see that heads are turned when it comes to the failure of that business?

We are trying to put a round peg in a square hole because we are talking about the level of education being produced by community schools without looking at the major reason for education not being valued in communities. We must, therefore, question the whole issue of the existence of communities where there is no justification for them. Some of you may say, ‘Shock! Horror! Is the member for Kalgoorlie proposing that there are today communities being funded that should not be funded or where there is no justification for funding them?’ Yes, I am. I ask the question: is this government prepared to constantly go to the taxpayer of this nation and say, ‘We are going to keep pouring your tax dollars into communities that cannot be justified’? There is no end point in sight where that funding can be justified in communities where there is no number of inhabitants that will create meaningful service industries, where the community is located so far from any source of genuine employment, where the community is at the end of the track, wandered by no-one except lost tourists and the people that live there.

The purists will say that everyone has the right to live where they want to live in Australia. That is the case right across my vast electorate in Western Australia. Remember: it is 2.3 million square kilometres. I see it all. There are so many communities that cannot be justified except to say that people are being funded to live where they want to live. Even that base statement I question. So often the members of those communities are not living where they want to live; they are living where they have been coerced to live because of a particular community leader who wants to bolster his numbers to justify his leadership in the community and the cashflow from government that allows him to maintain his leadership. What so many
members of remote communities that are unsustainable really want is a job. They want a future for themselves and their children. They want sustainability. They want employment. They do not want to be seen to be living in a remote location with their families. They do not want to gain the self-respect that comes from employment by having to travel hundreds of miles to employment on a temporary basis, leaving their families behind, able to be predated on by those who carry out those acts that have been so clearly demonstrated in the *Little children are sacred* report.

I support the bill in principle because we do need more teachers everywhere, but I put it to you that this is but a tiny, almost misplaced, step. One of the major reasons that children in these unsustainable communities are not attending school today is that their parents do not value education—a reason being that there is no employment. Worse than that, so many children enrolled in these community schools do not live in conditions that are conducive to attending school. They are often malnourished, in the true sense of the word; they are sleep deprived; and there is no home environment that encourages them to take part in the education system—I refer to something that mainstream society accepts as a norm: homework. Imagine a student from a community school being allocated homework, going home to their residence and having even the remotest expectation that they might get parental guidance in an environment that was conducive to doing homework. It is out of the question, yet we talk about imposing mainstream values, conditions and achievements on Indigenous communities’ schools.

If this government genuinely wanted to solve the problem, it would go to the taxpayer and say: ‘We are going to represent this percentage of the population ad infinitum with your dollars and create high standards of education comparable with those achieved in mainstream Australia. The first thing is that controls that we would have in normal mainstream communities will be put in place.’ I refer to effective law enforcement. It is not done. The only presence that could be vaguely referred to as ‘effective law enforcement’ may visit overnight on a six-weekly basis, and everyone in the community knows when that is going to occur. I will take much more convincing that this is an effective deterrent for some of the abhorrent acts that are carried out in the communities, which we all should know about because a very valid report has been written. The truth is that, especially in the areas of child sexual offences, the perpetrators go bush when any law enforcement is going to visit the community. Those against whom the acts have been perpetrated, and any adults who know of the illegal act, are frightened into silence because of the retribution that will be carried out by the perpetrator once that 24-hour period has finished and the law enforcement agency has moved on.

If we are fair dinkum about making a change in the standards of education achieved in remote communities, the very first thing this government ought to do right across Australia is to call on the state governments, who are of a similar political conviction, to join with them in solving this problem and achieving the outcome. We should resource these remote communities with an effective, sustainable police presence. That means having at least two people present at any one time. It means accommodation for those persons and their families. It means communications, transportation and an environment that is reasonable enough to expect members of the police force to live there with their families.

We are talking about $7-plus million per annum simply for another 50 teachers in the Northern Territory. If we really wanted to
solve the problem, we would spend $7 million in one jurisdiction on building some houses that could accommodate an effective police force, which in turn would maintain social order. Children could sleep in their beds at night instead of hiding elsewhere away from their homes. The teachers would see that the children are well fed and well clothed. They would see them enjoy a home environment that was conducive to carrying out homework and those normal activities that we associate with the students in mainstream Australian schools that do achieve a reasonable level of education.

I pointed out that I have a very large electorate, and you could correctly assume that there is a very large number of remote communities within my electorate. I visit them, and I see these things. For members of this House who are ignorant of the conditions that exist in those communities, I invite them to contact me and I will arrange visits. Before we go off on a tangent and focus our efforts wholly on more teachers for these schools, we need to focus on all the other problems. I have raised the question as to whether the schools and the communities ought to even be there in the long term, because what so many people in these communities want is to be elsewhere so they can enjoy the whole experience of being Australian. And they certainly cannot do that today living in these communities. There are so many forces brought to bear upon them to make sure that they live in these communities. In many cases, although they may want a future for their children because they have had a sniff of mainstream life in town where their relatives have employment, they are dragged back to the community because the leader of that community needs the numbers to attract the funding from government so as to maintain their position of authority.

If you were to seriously ask why these people live where they live, you would find that it is simply because somebody has told them that that is their country, that they have a natural attachment to it, and that they ought to go and occupy that country because there is a thing called ‘native title’ and one day they will all be very, very wealthy because they have gone to the trouble of returning to country. I might add that often there is very little personal effort, because these days there is a great deal of support from the government to get people back onto country. But I suggest to you that it is a philosophical ideal and that it is not very practical. When we have something that is based on romantic philosophy and then we recognise the pitfalls of it in practice, we cast our minds in the opposite direction and say, ‘The standards of education achieved in these artificial communities are not up to scratch. We have got to put millions of dollars into that community to lift the education standard.’ Why? There are no jobs. Are we going to turn out university professors? Are we going to build a university in the community so that they can all be lecturers—in language, for instance?

It is a practical nonsense. We are trying to throw money at a problem in an effort to solve it, with no concept of what the real problem is, and our justification for fixing the problem is ‘because it is sustainable’. Well, it is not sustainable. If you want to build these communities in an environment where they are real, you have to have jobs. The philosophy ought to have been: find a justification for industry, for productivity. Create training to put people into jobs, and then look to the success of those individuals, because those individuals will have a full life in an environment that is sustainable—rather than having an artificially-sustained situation which has been created simply with the input of taxpayers’ dollars via government.

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (1.46 pm)—I would like to commend the honourable
member for Kalgoorlie for his very erudite and thought-provoking speech in relation to Indigenous education in remote parts of Western Australia and, more specifically, in his electorate of Kalgoorlie. I am pleased that right across the parliament we have this sense of wanting to do something about the plight of our Indigenous people. While I do not always agree with the Deputy Prime Minister, I do commend her comments in her second reading speech when she said, ‘We have to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia,’ and then referred to the Prime Minister’s commitment to closing the gap in life expectancy, in educational achievement and in employment opportunities; to halving the gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes; to providing opportunities for Indigenous Australians within a decade; and to halving the gap in infant mortality rates within a generation.

It seems to me that we have collectively thrown money at the problem over the years. It is almost as though we are at times focused on process rather than on outcomes. It is almost as though we are trying to salve the nation’s collective conscience by throwing money at the problem instead of looking at improved outcomes for Indigenous people.

As the shadow minister indicated, the opposition do not oppose the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008; however, we do have some concerns about it. We do worry because it appears to be a piecemeal approach. While, from my point of view, having 50 extra teachers is obviously a step in the right direction, I would ask the Deputy Prime Minister—who I think is, deep down, a very reasonable person—to consider, in a bipartisan way, the point made by the member for Kalgoorlie when he referred to a lot of these communities which do not seem to have any real purpose for existence. I am not sure whether or not the member for Kalgoorlie is right, but I do think it is something that really ought to be looked at, because we have finite resources and we want to redress Indigenous disadvantage as much as we can.

Quite some time ago, when I was Chairman of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, we sought from then Minister Wooldridge a reference into Indigenous health. I thought it was appalling that the gap between the life expectancy of Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians was so wide. Ten years or more down the track, the gap has not been reduced. We have spent lots of money on Indigenous affairs. I do not begrudge the money we are spending but I do regret that, from the point of view of the community—particularly the Indigenous community—we do not seem to be achieving the outcomes.

I am aware that this bill is partly to fulfil an election promise that was made by the government. I do commend the fulfilling of election promises, because one of the problems we have in Australia is a sense of alienation from the political process, where people cynically think that politicians are prepared to do anything and say anything to get into office and then, once they get elected, lose the commitment to their promises. I do commend the government on bringing in this particular bill, but I am wondering whether it was a well-thought-out promise. I would hope that the government looks at what the previous government did, because neither side of politics has a monopoly on good ideas and common sense, no-one has a monopoly on good intentions and no-one has a monopoly on doing the right thing or the wrong thing. I am not for a moment claiming that the Deputy Prime Minister is suggesting she does have a monopoly on compassion, but we need to do whatever has to be done to redress Indigenous disadvantage while at the
same time making sure that the Indigenous community actually achieve positive outcomes. There was, prior to the Howard government’s election to office, a move away from focusing on outcomes towards focusing on process, and often we gave Indigenous groups the ability to self-determine how or where funding would be spent.

We were all appalled by the many stories of unscrupulous non-Indigenous bureaucrats coming in and making decisions for people who did not have adequate experience, regrettably, to make those sorts of decisions, with the result that there was a vast waste of money. That then created the political environment for someone like Pauline Hanson to come into the political scene. She spoke about waste; she spoke about theft; she spoke about fraud. She did for a while obtain strong support from some sections of the community.

While wanting to empower Indigenous people, we ought never to lose sight of the fact that what we need is an improvement in Indigenous outcomes. By all means, have your self-determination on the way through, if that is a better means of attaining outcomes, but I would hate to think that we are spending huge amounts of money on the one hand focusing on process and in doing so forgetting the real purpose of these programs. The real purpose of these programs is to remove Indigenous disadvantage. I would love to see an Australia where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are absolutely equal in every respect: with respect to opportunity, with respect to success in business and with respect to education. I know that is an aspiration shared by all of us. Where we differ at times is on the way that we actually get to that very desirable outcome.

The former government did quite a lot in relation to Indigenous education, in particular the upskilling of teacher aides to become fully qualified teachers. The reason we wanted to achieve that was of course to give increased educational opportunity. My understanding is that the former government gave up to $30 million to the Northern Territory government for that purpose. We are not quite sure at the present time whether the current government will continue that process, particularly given the fact that the current government is now reviewing its former pledge to abolish CDEP.

The bill before the House is fair enough as far as it goes. I hope that those 50 teachers, at a cost of over $7 million, will assist in educating and upskilling Indigenous children in remote communities. I would reiterate my request that the Deputy Prime Minister consider the point that was made quite reasonably by the honourable member for Kalgoorlie that we really ought to look at whether some of these communities should exist. Obviously, many of them should but maybe there are some that should not. I know that the Deputy Prime Minister, being a reasonable person, will in fact consider that, because, let us face it, we simply cannot go on as we are. We have been in this country now for more than two centuries. We find that Indigenous Australia is probably as badly off as it has ever been. The former government had lots of very positive policies in the area of practical reconciliation, but I think that we need to move forward as a parliament, as a community, to try and erase those elements of Indigenous disadvantage which continue. We need to focus on outcome rather than process. As a small step towards a successful outcome, the coalition does support the bill currently before the chamber.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (1.55 pm)—in reply—I will not take long in summing up this debate on the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance)
Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008, and the matter before the House can therefore be dealt with before question time. Obviously, the opportunity has been taken by some members to raise issues further afield and more broadly on matters associated with Indigenous Australia during the debate. I am sure members will reflect on those contributions.

But the purpose of this bill—and it is an urgent measure; it is an immediate budget measure—is to ensure that we can fund additional teachers in the Northern Territory. As members of the parliament, and members of the public more generally, would be aware, one of the things that has happened as part of the Northern Territory emergency response is that a number of measures have been put in place to increase school attendance. That is to ensure that Indigenous students who have never been enrolled in school are enrolled in school and also to ensure that Indigenous students who have only intermittently attended school attend school more regularly.

It would obviously be a great tragedy if those Indigenous students were to come to school and not be met with the resources that are necessary for their education. There is no more vital resource than a teacher being there, ready to receive, ready to teach and ready to facilitate the learning of those Indigenous students. So this bill is before the House to accomplish that purpose immediately. I commend it to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

BUSINESS

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr Hockey (North Sydney) (1.59 pm)—On indulgence, Mr Speaker: I am just wondering if the Leader of the House could give us an indication of the new sitting schedule some time earlier than Friday, given that a number of members will probably have to change flights.

Mr Albanese (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (1.59 pm)—It is intended that the motions to change standing orders will be put on notice today so that the opposition will have the full ability to peruse them. Included in that will be the new sitting schedule, but all the arrangements will be those which were outlined in writing by me to the Leader of the Opposition in a very well written letter last Friday.

CONDOLENCES

Mr Siegfried (Sid) Spindler

The Speaker (2.00 pm)—I inform the House of the death on Saturday, 1 March 2008 of Siegfried Emil (Sid) Spindler, a former senator. Mr Spindler represented the state of Victoria from 1990 to 1996. As a mark of respect to the memory of Mr Spindler, I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The Speaker—I thank the House.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Climate Change

Mr Rudd (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.01 pm)—by leave—Today marks an important step forward in building a modern Australia, ready to face the challenges of the future.

Third Reading

Ms Gillard (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (1.58 pm)—by leave—I move: That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
Climate change is one of the greatest challenges that Australia faces in the future; it is one of the greatest challenges that the world faces in the future.

It is an immense economic challenge.

It is an immense environmental challenge.

It is an immense moral challenge as well, with its greatest impacts falling on those who can least afford it.

No individual nation can solve the immense challenge of climate change alone. It requires the hard work of international engagement and cooperation.

From today, Australia officially becomes part of the global solution on climate change—and not just part of the global problem—because from today Australia’s ratification of Kyoto enters into force.

After being sworn in as Prime Minister on December 3 last year, I signed Australia’s instrument of ratification as the first act of the new government.

I handed that instrument of ratification to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon on December 12 in Bali.

Under Kyoto rules there is a mandatory 90-day waiting period before it comes into force.

Those 90 days have passed. Australia’s ratification of the Kyoto protocol has now come into force today.

Australia is now sending a clear signal to the world that we are taking responsibility when it comes to our global responsibilities and our national responsibilities on climate change.

Ratifying Kyoto has put Australia back on the map.

We have a full seat at the table. For the first time we are a full negotiating partner in all key international forums.

**Release of report**

One of the government’s obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is to submit a report that demonstrates how Australia is able to measure the reductions in emissions that are required under Kyoto.

The deadline for this report is twelve months from the date that ratification comes into effect—that is, 11 March 2009.

The government is pleased to announce that we are submitting Australia’s *Initial Report under the Kyoto Protocol* today, 11 March 2008, one year ahead of its deadline.

I am tabling this report in the House today.

The initial report outlines the measures we are using to calculate our emissions levels.

And it also outlines the critical role of the National Carbon Accounting System in measuring emissions from land use, land use change and forestry.

We have taken this a step further by announcing agreements to share this technology and system regionally and globally—all part of taking responsibility to help shape a global solution.

Last week I visited our regional neighbours Papua New Guinea and discussed the challenge of climate change with Prime Minister Michael Somare.

As part of the government’s new Pacific Partnerships for Development, we will embark upon a PNG-Australia Forest Carbon Partnership.

This will involve assisting PNG in developing their carbon monitoring and accounting capacity to underpin participation in global carbon markets.

Australia’s National Carbon Accounting System will be an important element of the Forest Carbon Partnership.
The government has also announced a partnership with a range of international organisations (including the Clinton Foundation) to take the National Carbon Accounting System global.

This reflects the kind of technical leadership that Australia can provide in tackling climate change on a global level.

**Tracking to the Kyoto Target 2007**

I am also tabling a second report today, the *Tracking to the Kyoto Target 2007* report.

As the *Tracking to the Kyoto Target 2007* report shows, the latest projections of these emission levels indicate Australia is now on track to meet its Kyoto emissions target.

This report reflects the fact that the policy commitments of this Government will begin to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions immediately.

By increasing the use of renewable energy, we will trigger much greater emissions reductions in the longer term than had been forecast in 2006 under the previous government.

This report shows Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions, under this government’s policy settings, are now projected to be 108 per cent of 1990 levels over 2008-12.

This is equal to Australia’s Kyoto target.

Under the previous government’s policy settings, the projections showed that Australia would be around six million tonnes off our target. This is equivalent to the annual emissions of around 1.2 million cars.

**Decisive action on climate change**

We recognise that ratifying Kyoto was just the first step and much more needs to be done.

The Australian government has a comprehensive plan for responding to climate change based on three pillars: reducing Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to climate change that we cannot avoid and helping to shape a global solution.

We will implement a system of emissions trading which will place a limit, or a cap, on the emissions we will allow to be produced. Emissions trading will make us responsible for the greenhouse gases we put into the atmosphere.

We have also announced that 20 per cent of Australia’s electricity supply will be sourced from renewables by 2020.

The COAG Working Group on Climate Change and Water is working to bring together state and federal renewable energy targets.

A nationally consistent renewable energy target would stimulate much needed investment in clean energy to reduce greenhouse emissions.

We are committed to working towards a post-2012 agreement for addressing climate change and reaching an agreement on a long-term global goal for emissions reduction.

To support our efforts in the UN negotiations, the government is also working through the US-led Major Economies Meetings process and the climate change forums under the G8 and engaging in strategic bilateral dialogue with key countries.

**Conclusion**

Confronting the challenge of climate change is the challenge of our generation. It is an immense challenge. But with decisive action we can turn challenge into opportunity. We have made a start, but there is a long way to go. We can be a leader in our response to the threat of climate change; and, by getting on the front foot, we can build a modern economy that seizes the opportunity of new, low-carbon energy industries and technologies. Ratifying Kyoto was just the first step. This Government is committed to taking responsibility by tackling climate change.
change. Being part of the global solution to climate change is an important step forward in building a modern Australia. Australia is capable of dealing with the challenges of the 21st century. I present a copy of the report: Tracking to the Kyoto target—Australia’s greenhouse emission trends, 1990 to 2008-2012 and 2020—Department of Climate Change.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (2.08 pm)—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Dr Nelson (Leader of the Opposition) speaking for a period not exceeding 6 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Leader of the Opposition) (2.08 pm)—On behalf of the alternative government, the opposition, I welcome Australia’s formal ratification of the Kyoto protocol which comes into force today. Climate change is real, it is important and it is fundamental. In that context, climate change presents us with two great challenges. Both are major but achievable challenges. The first is to allow the poor of the world to develop and achieve the benefits of a modern economy and to encourage the continued improvement of health, freedom and prosperity in the already developed societies. The second is to progressively shift from a high emissions economy to a low emissions economy. Managing climate change will be one of the great challenges of our time—indeed, it already is. It represents an important economic shift and will require a portfolio of responses. In Australia’s case, we are moving towards progressive pricing and the cost of carbon in the way our economy operates, and this will be essential to any agreement beyond 2012. This is big history in the making, as the member for Flinders has observed, perhaps the most significant economic decision in a generation. With such a profound change, we need to make sure that we get our policy responses right. For businesses and households, the impact of climate change will be far reaching and will present both major challenges and opportunities.

By ratifying the Kyoto protocol, Australia has committed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 108 per cent of 1990 levels by 2012. We are on track to meet this target thanks to the practical coalition government programs to fight climate change introduced over the last 12 years. These include the $500 million Low Emissions Technology Demonstration Fund, which leveraged over $3 billion in private sector investment for significant projects, including the world’s largest carbon capture and storage project; investment of more than $1 billion to promote renewable energy, including nearly $18 million under the Advanced Electricity Storage Technologies program to look at more efficient ways of storing electricity from renewable power sources; and an $8,000 rebate for Australians to install renewable solar energy in their homes—a very important and practical measure. On energy efficiency, the previous government led the world in announcing the phase-out of inefficient incandescent light bulbs that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated four million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year by 2015.

The ratification of the Kyoto protocol is important, but it will be meaningless if we do not also redouble our efforts to create a truly inclusive international agreement on climate change, one that commits all countries—developing and developed—to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Australia’s annual emissions are around 560 million tonnes of carbon dioxide or around some 1½ per cent of the total global emissions, which are around 40 billion tonnes every year. It is forecast that, on current trends, Australia’s
emissions will be one per cent of global emissions by 2050. The developing world at the moment is 50 per cent of global emissions, forecast on current trends to be 75 per cent by 2050. To put this into perspective: by 2050, China’s and India’s emissions, without any change, at one-third of total global emissions, will exceed those of the United States, Europe, Russia, Japan, Brazil, Canada and Australia combined. We in Australia have an important role in reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for the challenge of climate change, but any real solution to climate change must be global and it must take in the world’s biggest emitters, including the United States, China and India. Carbon does not respect borders.

I urge the government to take seriously the damaging impact of deforestation on global greenhouse gas emissions. Deforestation in developing countries accounts for around 20 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The Global Initiative on Forests and Climate, launched by the coalition government last year, was designed to immediately and practically reduce global deforestation and promote reforestation in developing countries in our region. I call on the government to commit to continuing this important program and provide practical steps to protect the world’s great forests.

A carbon trading scheme, as I said, is an essential part of our post-Kyoto framework. The government has also expressed concern about effectively addressing climate change but, ironically, has refused to sell uranium to India needed for the development of its domestic power industry—one of the largest and growing emitters of carbon throughout the world. Australia alone cannot save the world from climate change, but if we make the wrong decisions we will cause irreparable damage to our children’s economic and environmental legacy and we have a responsibility to the next generation to know precisely what it is that we are signing them up for before we move further beyond Kyoto and the agreements beyond 2012.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Pensions and Benefits

Dr NELSON (2.14 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister really understand the anxiety that he and his government are causing to vulnerable carers? Will the Prime Minister give a guarantee to the 400,000 Australian carers that the annual lump sum payments will be delivered in the budget?

Mr RUDD—I give an absolute guarantee that those carers will not be a dollar worse off as a result of the budget.

Alcohol Abuse

Mr NEUMANN (2.15 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. What is the government doing to begin the important job of reducing the level of binge drinking in Australia?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for Blair for his question. Binge drinking imposes a huge toll on the community. In any given week, studies indicate that one in 10 people—that is, 168,000 young people-aged 12 to 17 are binge drinkers and are drinking at risky levels.

Mr Abbott interjecting—

Mr RUDD—I note that the former Minister for Health and Ageing thinks this is very funny. Given his remarks earlier today, I would suggest he regard this as not a marginal or minority concern but a real concern for the mainstream community. Commonly defined as ‘seven or more drinks for males’ and ‘five or more drinks for females’, binge drinking is becoming a matter of widespread and legitimate concern in the Australian community. Among 16- and 17-year-olds, one in five are drinking at risky levels. Furthermore, young people aged 18 to 24 have
the riskiest drinking patterns, with almost two-thirds drinking at risky levels for harm in the short term. Some may ask why this is necessarily a concern, given that we have drinking problems across the entire community. The answer lies in the fact that, for adolescents, particularly those in the age bracket from 14 to 17, studies show that a drinking profile of this nature can result in considerably increased physical harm which can be irreparable. Therefore, it is a legitimate matter of community concern.

In addition to the objective evidence of the costs of binge drinking, there is the untold impact on families and communities across the country. The government is determined to work with the wider community, with parents and with young people themselves to tackle this problem. The strategy will not fix the problem overnight but it is a solid first step. This will initially involve three measures to tackle binge drinking among our young people. First, I want to work with sporting and other non-government organisations to affect the environments that shape the culture of binge drinking among young people. The government is committing $14.4 million towards a grants based program focused on reducing binge drinking at the community level. I see this supporting, in particular, sporting codes and clubs in educating and informing club members about the harms associated with binge drinking.

Second, the government will invest $19.1 million to support innovative early intervention and diversion programs to get young people under the age of 18 back on track before more serious alcohol related problems emerge. These early intervention initiatives will involve a new emphasis on personal responsibility. They will target young people under the age of 18 who have been involved in an episode involving alcohol. The interventions supported could include requiring young people to participate in educational and/or diversionary activities and allowing police to confiscate alcohol or provide formal warnings. When young people involved in binge drinking present to hospitals or fall foul of the law, the personal responsibility approach needs to be triggered. The government will endeavour to have at least one pilot project operating in each state capital by the end of 2008. Pilots would require community buy-in from states and other local governments, community and health organisations and local police.

Third, the government will invest $20 million in a targeted television, radio and internet based campaign to confront young people with the costs and consequences of binge drinking. This campaign will go through the appropriate approval processes of the new government to make sure that it is advertising not of a political nature but of a public health nature—a practice not engaged in by those who preceded us. Consistent with the government’s election commitments, the public information campaign will be evidence based and non-political. I welcome the positive community reaction to these initiatives.

Today I inform the House that, as a next step, I will very soon be forming a collaborative activity with the heads of sporting codes across Australia. This morning I spoke with Andrew Demetriou, from the AFL; Kate Palmer, from Netball Australia—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I refer you to page 554 of the House of Representatives Practice, which, as you know, indicates that, although there is no specific power under the standing orders to require the minister to conclude shortly, there is discretion in the chair, which has been exercised by your predecessors, to advise ministers to wind up their answers. This is properly a statement
that should be made after question time. It rests in your hands, Mr Speaker. I request that you ask the Prime Minister to shorten his answer and that you return this chamber—

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will continue.

Mr RUDD—When it comes to the next step, today I held discussions with the heads of the major sporting codes in Australia. I have spoken to Andrew Demetriou, from the Australian Football League; Kate Palmer, from Netball Australia; David Gallop, from the National Rugby League; John O’Neill, from the Australian Rugby Union; Ben Buckley, from Football Federation Australia; and James Sutherland, from Cricket Australia. I have convened a meeting this Friday to discuss with them how the government will work with peak sporting bodies across Australia to tackle together the challenge of binge drinking, which is affecting young people. I will be joined in those discussions by the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Minister for Sport. Millions of Australian kids play sport. We believe that, by engaging the peak sporting bodies in this fashion, we have a real opportunity to turn the corner on this problem which is confronting so many families and so many communities right across Australia.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.21 pm)—Before calling the member for Warringah, and with fear and trepidation that I might affect Irish-Australian relationships in doing this straight after that question, I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Irish Minister for Transport, Mr Noel Dempsey, and the Irish Ambassador, His Excellency Mairtin O’Fainin. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Pensions and Benefits

Mr ABBOTT (2.21 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister give a guarantee to over two million seniors that the annual lump sum payment will be delivered in the coming budget? I further ask: does the Prime Minister really understand the uncertainty and the anxiety he is causing to older Australians by refusing to guarantee this bonus payment?

Mr RUDD—In response to the honourable member’s question, I can guarantee that pensioners, when it comes to their one-off bonuses, will be no worse off under this budget.

Alcohol Abuse

Ms BURKE (2.22 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Will the minister explain the health impacts of binge drinking and why the government is taking action to combat it?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for the question. I know that the member for Chisholm, along with many others on this side of the House—and having listened to many of the first speeches by those opposite I must say they are also concerned—are worried about young people and the trends of binge drinking; we have watched it increase. The Prime Minister has already taken the House through the initiatives that were announced yesterday and I think it is important that we spend a little bit of extra time on the impact that binge drinking can have on young people. We are not just talking about young adults here. We are talking about children in some instances—people aged between 12 and 17—and reports that one in 10 in this age group are regularly binge drinking. Hundreds of thousands of children, adolescents and young adults are repeatedly causing damage to their own bodies and to their
future health, as well as quite a lot of worry and cost within the community.

Mr Hunt—Don’t forget middle age binge drinking.

Ms ROXON—It is appropriate for the interjections to be raised about middle age drinking as well. If the member wants to wait until I complete my answer I will be able to deal with the questions that have been raised. We regard this as a very serious issue. We know that alcohol, tobacco and obesity are the three biggest risk factors for three of the biggest killers in the country, whether it be cancer, cardiovascular disease, car accidents or the increasing rate of diabetes. All of us in this House would do well to think about the way we might not only set good examples for young people but also encourage other interventions which will help tackle this serious problem within the community.

We know that some of the immediate health effects can be loss of consciousness, fits and alcohol poisoning and we know of the much more common symptoms of diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting. But many people are not aware of the long-term damage that can be caused to the small bowel, the central nervous system, the liver and the brain. This is a serious health problem. For some reason we have seen a massive increase in the number of young people who have taken on binge drinking as their form of entertainment. We all need to be involved in finding the solutions. Government can do a certain amount. The communities which are already actively engaged and the parents who fundamentally need to be involved in the way that we take on and handle this issue—

Mr Schultz interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Hume!

Ms ROXON—Mr Speaker, it staggers me that members opposite would think that this is an opportunity for derision. This is a serious health risk for hundreds of thousands of young people in the seats of the shadow minister, the member for Hume and others.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms ROXON—Members opposite clearly are not aware that 72,000 hospitalisations occur every year as a direct result of over-consumption of alcohol. That does not take into account the presentations that result from the long-term effects of excessive consumption of alcohol. So let us understand how serious this problem is. The Rudd Labor government has committed to three initial steps which we believe will make a difference. We want to work with parents and community leaders to help bring about change. We are also going to work with the states and territories and will talk to them about the areas that they have responsibility for. Further, in the coming weeks we will announce our preventative healthcare task force which has been tasked with prioritising the excessive consumption of alcohol, tobacco and obesity. It will look at the long-term changes to our healthcare system to make sure that we are sending the message not just to our kids but to the whole community that this serious problem must be dealt with.

Pensions and Benefits

Mrs MAY (2.27 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, can you confirm that your office has received seven letters from Mr Ashley Norman, of Walkerston, regarding the carers lump sum payment? Prime Minister, can you also confirm that your office has lost all seven letters? Can you also confirm that when Mr Norman phoned the office of the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs on Friday, a senior adviser confirmed that the carers bonus and allowance had been scrapped? Can you also con-
firm that when Mr Norman was put through to your office on Friday, one of your senior advisers confirmed that the carers bonus and allowance had been scrapped?

Mr Rudd—On the first part of the honourable member’s question, I am unaware of that correspondence. I will seek to find out what correspondence has arrived. On the second, I have absolutely nothing to add in terms of my earlier answers. We would not have indicated to a constituent that these bonuses were under risk of being scrapped. That is not the case. Government policy is as I have stated it.

Economy

Mr Clare (2.29 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the latest economic figures and what they say about the need for an economic agenda focused on productivity?

Mr Swan—I thank the member for his question. The December quarter national accounts released last week show that growth eased in the quarter but it still remains very solid. Growth was 0.6 per cent in the December quarter and it was 3.9 per cent over the year, and domestic demand continues to grow strongly. It is driven by strong growth in consumption. Domestic final demand rose by 1.6 per cent in the quarter to be 5.7 per cent higher for the year. Australia’s net exports continue to weigh on growth, reflecting ongoing weakness in export volumes and strength in imports. This strong growth in imports is further evidence that domestic demand continues to outpace domestic supply, highlighting the importance of the government’s supply-side policies.

While domestic demand has been growing strongly, it has not been matched by increases in the economy’s productive capacity. The national accounts show that productivity growth in the last year of the Howard-Costello government was zero. This reflects the pattern of long-term decline in Australia’s productivity performance, with average productivity growth over the last five years lower than in any other equivalent period in the last 16 years. Precisely at this time, when Australia’s productivity growth was declining, underlying inflationary pressures in the Australian economy were building. These figures paint a valuable portrait of the economic landscape that we inherited—an economy with strong demand but shackled by poor productivity growth and capacity constraints in the economy. These figures underscore the need to modernise the Australian economy and to lift our productivity—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The Speaker—The member for Dickson!

Mr Swan—to lift the productive capacity of the Australian economy.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The Speaker—The member for Dickson is warned!

Mr Swan—This is absolutely the case when there is international uncertainty in the wind, so the Rudd government is prepared to modernise the economy, to make the investments in skills and to provide the political leadership when it comes to infrastructure. We do acknowledge the challenges, but, sadly, those opposite do not acknowledge the challenges. The coalition has lost its way. On Sunday the Leader of the Opposition said that the economy was first rate.

Opposition members—It is!

Mr Swan—Is that right? Yesterday—three days later—the member for North Sydney said it was heading for recession. Of course, the member for Wentworth cannot agree with himself. He has been out there criticising others for talking down the economy, and this morning on Neil Mitchell’s program he said a recession is a possibility.
The member for Wentworth will say anything and do anything to get a headline because he has one job in mind—that is, the Leader of the Opposition’s job—no policy to deal with inflation and no policy to do with productivity. This is a government that is facing up to the challenges. They are a divided rabble.

**Pensions and Benefits**

**Mr Abbott** (2.33 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. If he will not guarantee that carers lump sum payments will be paid in the coming budget, will he alternatively guarantee that carers payments will be increased by an equivalent amount of $31 a week fully indexed?

**Mr Rudd**—I guarantee that carers will not be one dollar worse off as a consequence of the budget. Furthermore, it is time that we looked at the challenges of carers and pensioners long term, rather than a series of one-off payments made year after year after year by those opposite—and incorporated in so many of their statements leading up to the last election. We the government, by contrast, are examining ways in which we can place payments to carers and pensioners onto a more secure, long-term footing. But I repeat what I said before: carers do a fantastic job across the nation and, when it comes to this upcoming budget, they will not be one dollar worse off. In contrast to those who have preceded us, we are examining ways in which we can place payments to carers on a more secure, long-term footing.

**Climate Change**

**Mr Bidgood** (2.34 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. How is the government addressing the barriers to practical action to improve Australia’s environmental sustainability by reducing Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions?

**Mr Garrett**—I thank the member for his question. Everybody listening, and everyone in this House, knows that climate change is the greatest challenge that this and subsequent generations face, and most of the Australian community and most of us in this place are aware of the immensity of the challenge. I know for certain that members of Pacific island states—neighbours of ours—continuing to experience the prospect of rising sea levels are too. Fundamentally, this government understands that the basic point is that the cost of inaction on climate change is greater than the cost of action. That is the crucial point, and that is why we are taking action now, committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 on 2000 levels, adopting market based instruments, including an emissions trading system, to be introduced by 2010, and mobilising the tremendous willingness of households and schools—and of the business community—who are all frustrated by a previous government, which viewed any action on climate change as an overreaction.

If there is any doubt about the genuine concerns in the Australian community about the challenges of dangerous climate change, that doubt was put to rest last November. The electorate sent a very clear message that 11½ years of denial and delay on climate change should be brought to an end. In fact, I think the community realised then that the former government was actually light years behind the Australian public on the climate change challenge. I say ‘light years’ because, if we cast our minds back to last September—and it is not that long ago—we had backbenchers of the former government disputing the scientific basis for climate change. It is the case that it was the former members for Solomon and Lindsay and the current members for Tangney and Hughes who, incredibly, disputed the validity of the scientific consensus.
that human activities are contributing to
global warming, citing evidence that:
  … warming has also been observed on Mars,
Jupiter, Triton, Pluto, Neptune and others.
They were lost in space, light years behind
the Australian community and the interna-
tional community. As it was said at the time
in this House, they were definitely on an-
other planet. That was last September. One
would have thought that times had moved
on, that times had changed. In fact, they did,
because a new government was elected and
its first official act was to ratify the Kyoto
protocol—and I note the comment made by
the Leader of the Opposition that ratification
is important.
I was asked in this question about the bar-
riers to practical action on climate change.
We were reminded of one of the biggest bar-
riers to practical action in a speech given last
week by the former Prime Minister, when he
said:
Global warming has become a new battleground.
The same intellectual bullying and moralising,
used in other debates, now dominates what passes
for serious dialogue on this issue.
If we want to talk about serious barriers to
action on climate change, it is the Liberal
Party that for 11½ years dismissed a growing
scientific consensus as ‘alarmism’, as ‘mor-
alising’ and now, apparently, in this form of
revisionism by the previous Prime Minister,
as ‘intellectual bullying’. This was the party
that in government demonised former Vice
President Al Gore. This was the government
that refused to put the issue of climate
change on the agenda for the South Pacific
nations. And this is the former government
that has a member who made an interesting
contribution in the House just last month. I
refer to the contribution by the member for
Barker, who spoke on climate change in the
parliament in 2008 and offered a scientific
analysis from which he concluded:
  … it follows that—
climate change—
cannot be attributed solely, or even partly, to hu-
man origin.
Let me take this opportunity to refer the
member and other members to the Intergov-
ernmental Panel on Climate Change. In 1995
it said:
The balance of evidence suggests that there is a
discernible human influence on global climate.
In 2001 it said:
There is new and stronger evidence that most of
the warming observed over the last 50 years is
attributable to human activities.
There is more of this. Just last year it said:
Most of the observed increase in globally aver-
gaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is
very likely due to the observed increase in an-
thropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations.
Is this intellectual bullying? Is it moralising?
The fact is that there has been no greater bar-
rier to serious action on climate change than
the remarks and the thoughts—

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I raise a point
of order. This diatribe has been going for
more than five minutes now. I ask you to
bring the minister back to the question. He
was not asked about alternative views. If he
does not have a proper answer, we have
plenty of questions over here.
The SPEAKER—The minister was asked
about barriers to greenhouse gas reductions.
The minister will bring his answer to a close.

Mr GARRETT—The member for Barker
got on to advise that the most sensible ap-
proach to climate change would be ‘to adapt’. The Australian community adapted.
They took the most sensible approach to cli-
mate change—and that was to elect the Rudd
Labor government, a government that would
take climate change seriously.
Pensions and Benefits

Mr ABBOTT (2.41 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister will not guarantee that carers and seniors lump sum payments will continue in this budget, and if he will not guarantee an increase in the basic rate of payment to carers and seniors, how will he ensure that carers and seniors will not be a dollar worse off in the budget, as he has just assured the House? Further, does he really understand the anxiety that his indecision and vacillation is causing some of the most vulnerable people in our country?

Mr RUDD—As I said the other day, there is no intention whatsoever on the part of the government to leave carers or pensioners in the lurch. The government that I lead takes seriously the concerns of working families, takes seriously the concerns of pensioners and takes seriously the concerns of carers. In my engagement with carers right across the country—hundreds and thousands of them, right across Australia—the work that they do is to be admired and supported by the community and supported by appropriate payments from the taxpayer. I confirm again, for the benefit of the honourable member, that carers, when it comes to bonuses, will not be a dollar worse off as a consequence of this budget and nor will pensioners.

Workplace Relations

Ms CAMPBELL (2.42 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Will the minister update the House on the timing of the implementation of the government’s laws to end the making of Australian workplace agreements, a key part of Labor’s fair, flexible and balanced workplace relations system?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Bass for her question. Of course, as members of the House are aware, the government was elected on the basis of its policy Forward with Fairness, a new workplace relations system for the Australian nation. The bill before the House, the Workplace Relations Amendment (Transition to Forward with Fairness) Bill 2008, is the first part of the government’s plans to ensure that fair, flexible and balanced workplace relations system. It would, of course, end forever the ability of anyone in this country to make an Australian workplace agreement, and we know that Australian workplace agreements have hurt Australian working families by taking away hard-earned pay and conditions. This matter is not only before the House but before a Senate inquiry due to report on 17 March. It is the government’s intention, when that Senate inquiry reports, to have the bill dealt with by both houses of parliament prior to the House rising before Easter. This will enable the bill to be proclaimed into law shortly after Easter and to deliver on one of the government’s important election commitments, to end the making of Australian workplace agreements.

The Australian people voted for this at the last election. They know what they want. The Australian government—the Rudd Labor government—knows where it stands. We stand behind our policy, Forward with Fairness. Unfortunately, the opposition have been unable to articulate a coherent position on Labor’s bill, and I am concerned that their dithering and vacillation will mean that there is a delay in dealing with this bill before the parliament.

Mr Speaker, can I direct your and the House’s attention to an article by Steve Lewis published on 23 February. In that article, Mr Lewis reported that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said that, when it came to defending Australian workplace agreements, her colleagues the member for North Sydney and the member for Warringah ‘went to water’. Having read that article, I thought that clearly the Deputy Leader of the
Opposition stood firmly behind AWAs and firmly behind Work Choices. One would have to give her points for bravery. A bit like the Black Knight in Monty Python, she was going to fight on—that election loss was ‘just a flesh wound’. She was going to defend Work Choices. Then, last week, this belief that the opposition stood behind Work Choices and AWAs was further reinforced when the former Prime Minister gave a speech in the United States defending Work Choices and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition described it as an excellent speech.

One could only conclude from that statement that they were going to fight on in defence of AWAs and in defence of Work Choices.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, a point of order on relevance: my recollection of the question is that it did not ask for alternative views and I ask you to bring the Deputy Prime Minister back to the question that was asked of her.

The SPEAKER—The question related to an update to the timing and implementation of the laws. The Deputy Prime Minister will address her response to that aspect of the question.

Ms GILLARD—I am addressing the matter of timing because of course the timing is contingent on the bill going through the parliament. Whether or not quick passage of this bill is going to be facilitated depends in part on the position of the opposition. It is a material fact to the question of timing.

Then we got a different position from the opposition—hence the confusion and hence the risk to timing—on the weekend, when the Deputy Leader of the Opposition appeared on national television and said that the opposition did not support but did not oppose the government’s bill. Is this a riddle that we are supposed to puzzle out? What is the meaning of this nonsense? By the standard of these contributions, the next thing that we will hear from the opposition—and I am surprised that we did not hear it today on climate change—is them wandering out telling age-old riddles like, ‘If a tree falls down in a forest and no-one’s there does it make a sound?’ That will be the next quality contribution.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. The Deputy Prime Minister will bring her answer to a close.

Ms GILLARD—On the question of timing, what we are seeking is a straightforward answer from the opposition to a very simple question. It is not a trick question. It is not a hard question. It is a simple question. The question is: if a division on Labor’s bill is caused to be held—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Those on my left are not assisting. The Deputy Prime Minister will not debate the answer and she will bring it to a close.

Ms GILLARD—in either house of parliament will the opposition vote for the bill, against the bill or will they try to hide in the corner hoping that no-one notices that they are still supporters of Work Choices? That is a key question on the timing of the bill. It is a question the Australian people, who voted for fairness and certainty in workplaces, are entitled to an answer to.

Budget 2008-09

Mr ABBOTT (2.48 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. If it is the Prime Minister’s position that someone must suffer in the fight against inflation, why has he decided that carers and pensioners should be the sacrificial victims? If it was right to pay carers and seniors lump sum payments last year, when the surplus was $12 billion, why is it wrong to do so this year with an even
higher surplus? Will these lump sum payments be made: yes or no?

Mr RUDD—In response to the honourable member’s question—from the new party of compassion opposite: given the longstanding commitment that they have to bonuses for carers and pensioners, it is pretty interesting when you look at the actual forward estimates produced in the last budget. Where do you see any commitment on the part of the previous government to the payment of this one-off bonus? Next year? The year after? The one after that? In fact, it is missing in action; it is not there. If you go to the fine print of the previous government’s position on this, it was, ‘We don’t rule these one-off payments out for the future, subject to economic circumstances.’ Such is the depth of the continued commitment of compassion on the part of those opposite. I return to what I said before: when it comes to bonus payments to carers and pensioners, they will not be a dollar worse off as a consequence of the upcoming budget.

Iraq

Mr ADAMS (2.50 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister advise the House on progress on the implementation of the government’s election commitment to withdraw troops from Iran? From Iraq—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ADAMS—You did not quite get there, did you? You always had it on the agenda but you did not quite get there. Will the minister advise the House on progress on the implementation of the government’s election commitment to withdraw troops from Iraq? What community support is there for the government’s actions?

Mr Wood interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for La Trobe will be sent somewhere!

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I am asked about the government’s election commitment so far as troop withdrawal from Iraq is concerned and the community support for that. Members would of course be aware of the government’s election commitment to withdraw the combat forces, the combat troops, from Iraq—the so-called Overwatch Battle Group—and to do that by the middle of this year. Members will also recall the fierce criticism that that election commitment was subject to by the then government, by the Liberal Party and by the Leader of the Opposition, who was then Minister for Defence. There was a stark contrast between the approach of the Labor Party to withdraw troops and the approach of the Liberal and National parties, who said that this would be a disaster of mammoth proportions, that this would split the alliance. I am pleased to advise that the government is implementing this election commitment, in consultation with the United States and the United Kingdom, and that implementation is on course and going very smoothly.

The Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence raised this matter when they visited Iraq in December of last year. I raised this issue and spoke to the Secretary of State and other officials when I was in the United States in January, and recently the Minister for Defence and I, when we hosted the AUSMIN conference here, discussed the matter further with the United States. Our approach to withdraw at the end of the current rotation with minimum disruption has been welcomed by the United States.

I am asked about community support. There is widespread community support for the implementation of the government’s election commitment in this respect. It is so widespread it is spreading to areas previously unthought of. Despite his trenchant criticism of the government’s election com-
mitment, recently the Leader of the Opposi-
tion said:
... our position is that the combat troops would
actually be withdrawn at the end of June also ... 
One policy before the election; a different
policy after. One position before the election;
a different position after. We know that the
Liberal Party and the Leader of the Opposi-
tion have lost their way. We know that the
Leader of the Opposition has lost his way. But
there is one area where the widespread
community support for the government’s
election commitment has not spread: John
Winston Howard. In a speech recently in the
United States, he said, ‘The implementation
of the government’s election commitment
was disappointing and could lead to a trag-
edy.’ Despite the fact that overwhelming and
widespread community support has not
spread to John Winston Howard, the gov-
ernment will persist, the government will
continue. The government will not be de-
terred from implementing its election com-
mitment. The government will stay the
course in the implementation of its election
commitment to withdraw troops from Iraq.
Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, unlike
the Liberal Party, there will be no cutting and
running from the previous position—as there
was cutting and running by the previous
Prime Minister, John Winston Howard.

Pensions and Benefits
Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Leader of the
Opposition) (2.55 pm)—My question is
to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime
Minister to the case of Mrs Pat Stafford, who has
motor neurone disease and who says that the
carer’s bonus enables her and her husband to
keep their 25-year-old car on the road. Is the
Prime Minister aware that her husband,
Henry, thinks that without the lump sum
payment Pat would end up in an institution?
Is the Prime Minister aware that over the
weekend Pat Stafford said, ‘John Howard
was the quiet achiever but Kevin Rudd has
turned out to be the quiet deceiver’? In the
light of his failure to guarantee that carer’s
lump sum payments will be paid, will the
Prime Minister have the decency to apolo-
gise to Pat and Henry Stafford and the
400,000 carers who feel betrayed?

Mr RUDD—In response to the honour-
able member’s question, I would say to Mr
and Mrs Stafford that when it comes to the
upcoming budget they will not be a dollar
worse off when it comes to their bonus pay-
ments—and that is our guarantee. The reason
it is our guarantee is that these are among the
most vulnerable Australians and, therefore,
they need to have an assurance from the
government and from the parliament that
their payments are in order. It is not exactly
the assurance that they had from the previous
government in its election commitments on
this matter. The previous government’s pol-
icy, contained in the ‘Coalition government
policy: Election 2007’, on this very question
says:
If re-elected, the coalition will consider continu-
ing to pay these bonuses—

Government members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—wait for it: comma—
depending on the economic circumstances at the
time.
I take it that that equals a rock solid com-
mitment from those opposite! Carers have
from this government a guarantee that, when
it comes to their bonuses, they will not be a
dollar worse off. I stand by that commitment,
and this underlines the hypocrisy of those
who sit opposite.

Rudd Government

Censure Motion

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Leader of the
Opposition) (2.58 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this House censures the Prime Minister and
the Government for its plans to cut the benefits

CHAMBER
received by 400,000 carers and more than 2 million seniors, in particular:

(a) for failing to guarantee that the carers and seniors bonuses paid in the last Budget when the surplus was $12 billion will be paid in the forthcoming Budget when the surplus is expected to be much larger;

(b) for failing to detail any alternative means to ensure that carers and pensioners will not be worse off as a result of the Budget, as promised; and

(c) for leaving two and a half million Australians in a state of uncertainty over the future because this Government doesn’t understand how to manage the economy.

The Liberal and National parties in government built a strong economy for Australia. It was an economy of sustained and strong growth, an economy that delivered record low unemployment, an economy that delivered strong business confidence and investment. It was also a government that delivered surplus budgeting to Australia, which had been unknown when there was a change of government from the last Labor government in 1996. The Liberal and National parties in government built a strong economy so as to give Australians confidence—confidence in ourselves and confidence in our future—but it also built a strong economy to enable this nation to care for its weak, its vulnerable, its sick and its elderly.

In its last four budgets, the previous government delivered, amongst other things, a $1,600 lump sum cash payment—a carer payment and a carer allowance—to some 400,000 carers, at a cost of just under $400 million. Disability and carers support over 11½ years benefited from a 75 per cent real increase in funding under the previous coalition government. In 2005, Access Economics in its study of the contribution of Australia’s carers to this nation estimated that carers contribute 1.2 billion hours of care, which is equal to more than $30 billion of formal aged and disability care services.

So who are these carers, some 400,000 or so? They are men and women who are frequently faceless, who neither seek nor receive reward in any visible or public way for what they do every single day. They are men and women who are caring frequently for adult disabled children. They are caring for someone whom they love who is in desperate need of support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They are men and women who have adult parents who are in desperate need, who have children of all ages, who frequently juggle a job—if they can find any time at all to do it. They live across a 24-hour cycle on anything from one to three or four hours of sleep, and they do so seven days a week, 365 days of the year. They are the unsung heroes of this nation. They are the real saints of Australian society.

When we talk about an Australian community, these are the men and women who give real meaning to what it is to be a community, who give effect to the thing that we describe colloquially as mateship—to put yourself out for someone else, to go the extra mile, to do the things that are important—and they do so with a limited amount of support and, under this newly elected government, even less confidence in their economic future. As I said to the Prime Minister last week, ‘For God’s sake, these are the real heroes of our nation. They are the real saints, and they deserve our strong support.’ So it was with a great sense of alarm that I saw, when the Australian arrived on Friday, a headline that said ‘Razor gang slices out compassion as carer bonus slashed’. There was a photograph of Mr Ashley Norman and his wife, Pat, in the outer suburbs of Mackay, whom I visited, and a cartoon of our Prime Minister letting a man in a wheelchair go down the side of a mountain.
I might point out to the House that the chairman of the razor gang, the chairman of the Expenditure Review Committee—according to the government’s own online directory of government services—is the Prime Minister. This is the man whose background as a public servant is now coming to the fore, the bureaucrat who in Queensland was responsible for the dismissal of so many working Australians, who went from being working families to workless families.

It is important for us to appreciate that the extent to which we reach out to and support carers and those whom they love and for whom they provide—the elderly and the frail—are the critical measures of a caring society and the critical measures of a caring government. The response to this headline and this story was not for the Prime Minister or any one of his ministers to come out and say, ‘No, it’s not true,’ to say instead that the lump sum payment is guaranteed. The Prime Minister may say that he has not got it in his budget for his so-called forward estimates, but I can sure as hell tell the Prime Minister that these 400,000 carers have got it in their budget.

When I went to Mackay on Saturday to visit the victims of flood, and to support and thank the carers, volunteers and emergency services, I went to see Mr Ashley Norman and his wife, Pat. They live in a modest, small dwelling in the outer suburbs of Mackay. Ashley Norman is 73 and he is dying. He is oxygen dependent, he takes 20 medications a day, he has had major heart surgery, his lung capacity is down to 35 per cent, he has an abdominal aortic aneurism which can rupture at any time, he has severe diabetes and he has peripheral neuropathy, which means he, for different reasons, but like our Prime Minister cannot feel what is going on in his extremities. His wife of 52 years, Pat, looks after him 24 hours a day—looks after him, as he described to me, ‘as a baby’. His wife of 52 years of marriage—that woman—gives him support 24 hours a day. ‘Without her,’ as he said to me, ‘Brendan, I would be dead. D-E-A-D.’ And as far as that $1,600 is concerned, it may not mean much to a Prime Minister or a minister of a government with the incomes that we collectively earn in this place, but it sure as hell means a lot to Ashley Norman and Pat, and it means a hell of a lot to the 400,000 carers throughout this country.

What has been the response of the Prime Minister? He said something publicly yesterday—it was not lunchtime on Friday; we had another issue involving care recently, and the problem was sorted by lunchtime. We did not have this one sorted by lunchtime on Friday. We did not have it sorted by Friday night. It was not sorted by Saturday, when we got up to a headline which said, ‘Now razor gang goes for seniors’. Instead the Prime Minister sent his ministers out to run some drivel about budget process. They sound like a bunch of bureaucrats being run by a bureaucrat. What does that mean to someone struggling with a husband dying from motor neurone disease? What does it mean to an adult who has an ageing mother with Parkinson’s disease, incontinent at three o’clock in the morning and who desperately needs to buy a new fridge? What does it mean to Ashley and Pat Norman and their family, who have not had a holiday for 20 years? What it means is that they cannot budget.

The government are going through the process—as they should—of budgeting for our nation’s finances. We just hope that they know what they are doing and that they get it right. But there are some things that rise above it. Whoever was the source of this story out of the razor gang chaired by the Prime Minister was trying to do something to protect people, because, unlike our Prime Minister and our new government, that per-
son at least appears to appreciate what this means to everyday, fair dinkum Australians. I am talking about people who are struggling not only with grocery prices but struggling, if they can afford a 25-year old car like Pat Stafford’s, to be able to run it. These are people who are struggling not just with their credit cards; these are people, Prime Minister, who are literally struggling to survive, for whom life is a day-to-day struggle for survival.

The lump sum payments delivered by the previous government in the last four years were a consequence of the strong economy that had been delivered. They were a consequence of tough decisions made by the member for Higgins as Treasurer, the former member for Bennelong and everybody who was then sitting on the other side—decisions that were opposed by those who are now in government. When we were in government we said: ‘Right, who’s at the top of the list? Who are the people—now we’ve paid off the Labor government’s debt, now we’ve got interest rates down to a manageable level, now we’ve got lots more working families, because we have unemployment at a 30-year low—that we put at the top of that list?’ At the top of that list we put the Pat Staffords, the Ashley and Pat Normans, the men and women of this country who are the most deserving people and who are so desperately in need of financial support. We delivered to them a $1,600 lump sum payment. And we delivered it every year for four years.

So I say to the Prime Minister and the government: put aside your pride and embarrassment about being caught out on this; put aside the fact that the all-controlling Prime Minister would not allow his ministers to sort this out and end the grief and distress amongst Australia’s vulnerable carers, seniors, elderly and frail. I say to the Prime Minister—notwithstanding the fact that we feel so strongly about this that we are censoring the Prime Minister: just get up; for God’s sake, get up, stand in front of that microphone and say to the carers of this country, ‘I, the Prime Minister of Australia, believe in you and will deliver you a lump sum payment in the budget.’ It is not that hard. We were lectured and told it was not hard to do some other things, and we on this side have gone through a process of supporting things which we believe are in the nation’s best interests. This is not only in the nation’s best interests; this is in the interests of men and women who feel that they have no voice.

The reason why the carers have all been out and saying the things they have is not that they are political activists. They have differing political views. Some of those carers who received that $1,600 lump sum and the seniors and the elderly who received a $500 lump sum payment from the previous coalition government did not vote for us. That is not what this is about. This is about them. It is not about us. It is not about bureaucrats. What is it that the Labor Party does not get? It is now so occupied by former union officials, political apparatchiks and bureaucrats that it has lost sight of what government is about. The reason why the people in the gallery and the people watching this on television elect a government is that they expect men and women of decency who understand and care for them to stand between them and the bureaucrats that could otherwise run the country. That is why this is so important.

The Prime Minister said yesterday that these people will not be a cent worse off. He said it again today in the House, which is why we have had to move this motion of censure against the Prime Minister—a very, very serious thing. He said they will not be a cent worse off than they are. He has refused to guarantee the lump sum payment. For someone earning $250,000 a year, a lump sum payment of $1,600 would probably
make them think: ‘What’s that? It’s my credit card payment or whatever.’ Can I just say to the Prime Minister, having spent much of my professional life, when I was practising medicine, working with these families—and sometimes I was with people at three o’clock in the morning who had not slept for 24 hours and who had not one but two severely autistic children—that a lump sum payment is everything. If you are hanging out for that lump sum payment, it is absolutely essential for your budgeting. It is the difference between sinking and swimming. That is why the coalition government and the Liberal and National parties delivered it. That is why it is so important—not for the political interest of the government but for the men and women that this censure motion and this debate are about—that this has to be delivered.

This morning I listened to AM. I also listened to Radio National and I listened to Fran Kelly interview Nell Brown. I hope the Prime Minister heard the interview. If the Prime Minister did not hear the interview, I ask him to get one of his many helpers to get the audio of the interview. Nell Brown has an adult daughter in her 20s. The daughter does not just have an intellectual disability; she also suffers from schizophrenia. Nell Brown was asked this question by Fran Kelly: ‘There has been some talk about stretching over the course of the year. Would that help?’

So the question is: would the $1,600 payment, instead of a lump sum, if it was about $30 a week parked into your payment, help? She is asked that question. This woman is not some sort of political activist. For God’s sake, she is trying to work a part-time job and look after her adult daughter. What did she say when she was asked whether it would help to spread it over the year—which would be the Prime Minister’s ‘she won’t be a cent worse off’ remark? I might add this was after five days—not on day one, not on day two; it took him five days to say any-thing. At the same time he was overseas. She said:

No, not at all.

She went on to say:

But when you actually get a lump of money put in your hand, well, if you are desperate for something, you can have it.

‘Desperate’—these are lives that are lived in quiet desperation, with limited support.

Imagine, Prime Minister, being in a situation where you have a child who has an intellectual disability, then compounded by developing schizophrenia in their young adult life. Then you would find out what the services run by the states are actually like and how poor they are—particularly in Queensland, as a result of a certain fellow known as ‘Dr Death’ in an earlier government up there. That is when you would find out just how lousy the services are. ‘Desperation’ is the word. These men and women are desperate every day, and they desperately need a lump sum payment, because, if you are struggling on $12,000 or $15,000 a year, there is a hell of a lot of difference between $30 a week and $1,600—as it has been under the Liberal-National coalition over the last four years.

That may not mean much to some people that earn high incomes. They may wonder what this is all about. My plea to the government and to the Prime Minister is: walk a mile in their shoes. You do not have to spend a week with them; just spend 24 hours with them. You have sent your members out to visit schools. We have had bread and circuses for the past 3½ months of this government. One of the little things they did was to send all of the Labor backbenchers out to visit schools—the education revolution. My challenge to the Prime Minister is: send them out to spend 24 hours with a carer and ask the carer whether the $1,600 lump sum pay-
ment is important to them. That is what you actually need to do, Prime Minister.

We believe Australians have been betrayed. We believe that Australia’s carers, her seniors, her frail, her elderly and the Ashley and Pat Normans of this world have been betrayed. It is absolutely essential that the Prime Minister not only redeem the confidence that they must have in the government of the day but redeem himself by coming to that dispatch box now and saying, ‘They will receive a $1,600 lump sum payment so they can get on with their lives and literally live those lives.’

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Abbott—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr Rudd (Griffith—Prime Minister) (3.18 pm)—The problem with this censure motion is that it is just based on a false premise. The charge is that, in relation to the bonus system, the government will not guarantee that pensioners and carers will not be financially worse off. We have made a very clear-cut commitment. When it comes to the bonus system, we have guaranteed that carers and pensioners will not be financially worse off as a result of the budget. That position was made absolutely clear by the government before parliament convened. It has been made absolutely clear on the Hansard here in parliament today that pensioners and carers, when it comes to their bonus payments, will not be a dollar worse off. Despite the fact that that assurance was provided prior to coming into the parliament, despite the fact that that assurance has been provided on at least four or five occasions in the parliament in response to various questions legitimately asked by those opposite—we are here to be responsible to those who constitute the opposition—despite having said that time and time and time again, because it is in the prepositioning of the opposition tactics committee to have a censure motion on this matter, off they go. The answer that you wanted, the guarantee that you wanted provided, has been provided, and it has been done in absolute black-and-white terms.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition was heard in silence. This is a serious matter. The Prime Minister should be heard in silence.

Mr Rudd—Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. The guarantee is clear-cut. When it comes to carers and pensioners and the impact of the bonus system on them, they will not be a dollar worse off. Beyond that, what we have said is that we need to work through ways and means by which those who receive these bonus payments can have payments made to them on a more secure footing into the future. We believe that is a reasonable way to proceed.

It does contrast with the position which has been taken by those opposite on this matter. When we went into the last election, what was the commitment of those opposite? The first thing you look at to see whether a government has had a serious, systemic commitment to making bonus payments to either carers or pensioners is one document: it is called the budget papers. Within the budget papers, you go to the forward estimates and the relevant subprogram entry. What do you find there? You find no commitment at all on the part of our predecessors—none whatsoever. So there has been no long-term commitment by those opposite to these bonus payments in past. That is simply a fact. The fact is reflected in the actual construction of the budget papers.

I then go to the next point, dealing with this in the election context. Here I quote from the colourful document Better support
for carers: “go for growth”. Flip over to page 6:
More Financial Support for Carers
This is not ripped out of context; it is in this section. Go to the relevant paragraph, neatly tucked up the end, because you usually tuck things up the end and hope no-one actually gets that far—the last sentence in the last paragraph on the page says:
A re-elected Coalition Government will consider continuing to pay these bonuses ...
That is the first qualifying clause. The second qualifying clause is:
... depending on the economic circumstances at the time.
There has been no firm commitment by those opposite at all—none whatsoever.

Mr Hockey interjecting—
The SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney is warned!
Mr Rudd—It is grossly misleading on the part of those opposite to put a view to carers and pensioners across the country that they were locked into doing this were they re-elected. It is untrue. It is demonstrated by the document to be untrue. It is there in black and white. Then we go to how these matters were treated by the previous government in previous years. Every budget night—and I have attended a few—when the member for Higgins would stand here and deliver the budget, you will see if you look at this statement that he said repeatedly, ‘Tonight I announce that.’ In terms of bonus payments for carers he said: ‘I announce this one-off payment.’ It was the same in 2004, the same in 2005, and I have here for 2007 a one-off seniors bonus payment. These are one-off announcements. That is how you have described them each budget that you have done them. You have done them in four previous budgets in the case of the carer payment and in one previous budget when it comes to the $500 payment for pensioners. These are one-off statements, one-off announcements, and are described as such by the former Treasurer himself.

Where does the evidence leave us? The evidence leaves us as follows. First of all, there was nothing in the forward estimates on the part of those opposite, nothing whatsoever. Secondly, we have an explicit statement in the colourful document which says that they may consider this, depending on the state of the economy. Thirdly, when you look at the way in which this has been handled in previous years they are explicitly addressed as a series of one-off statements announced—repeat, announced—on the night. What you therefore have on the part of the government is something considerably in addition to what has been provided by those opposite.

Mr Laming interjecting—
The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Bowman is warned!
Mr Rudd—We are in March; the budget is not due until May. The previous government’s practice, if we are applying the same standards, would be to shut up and say nothing until budget night in May. The Treasurer stood up in the past and said, ‘Here is the one-off announcement.’ What we are doing in March is standing up and providing this guarantee to carers and pensioners now. That represents a significant departure from previous practice. Of course, on top of that there are a range of other measures which we have embraced as well. They go to what we can do for utilities payments for carers and pensioners. We are committed to a $4.1 billion program that will benefit over three million Australians. This will go to 2.6 million aged income support recipients, 277,000 Commonwealth seniors health card holders, 700,000 disability support pensioners and
160,000 carer payment recipients. To over three million Australians there will be a $4.1 billion payment and in each case there will be a quarterly payment of $125 in a utilities allowance. This is of real and measurable benefit not just to pensioners but also to those who are providing services as carers and are recipients of the carer payments.

What we have, therefore, is not only a guarantee when it comes to these bonuses but also a guarantee from us when it comes to these utilities allowances: four by $125 in allowances. The reason we have done that is that the bills for electricity and rates and the rest come in regularly for people. This is not just an annual payment and not a biannual payment, because a lot of these bills come in quarterly. The reason we designed these payments on a quarterly basis was to ensure that carers and pensioners and others would have access to these payments to assist them as the bills rolled in the door. In fact, we were attacked for doing it on a quarterly basis, I seem to recall, by the former Treasurer, the current member for Higgins, who did not think it was the right way to go. Unlike our predecessors, who treated this as a budget night one-off announcement, you have from us in March, two months before the budget, a clear-cut guarantee. Beyond that you have a clear-cut guarantee on the question of utilities allowance payments, which go to more than three million Australians. Both of those measures are radically in excess of any such undertakings on the part of those opposite in the lead-up to the last election. Of course, the question which arises is: why are we having this debate in the first place, when it goes to the other part of the censure motion on the question of the economy?

The reason we are having a very difficult budget process at the moment is that we have been left with a very difficult economic challenge. I know that those opposite find it very difficult to confront some facts but I think it is important that they actually go one by one through the facts that present themselves to the nation right now in terms of the economy we have been left with.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr Rudd—There is a suggestion by the Manager of Opposition Business that it is not relevant to the censure motion. The censure motion deals with the government’s management of the economy. I would suggest that the Manager of Opposition Business actually read the censure motion before he interjects to say that these remarks are somehow not relevant to the censure. They are. They are directly relevant to the censure. I read the censure motion when it was handed to me. Why are we having a difficult debate about budget priorities and about expenditure? We have inherited a very difficult set of economic circumstances from our predecessors and from the circumstances which now arise from the international economy. Fact No. 1: when our government was elected inflation was running at a 16-year high. It is now projected by the RBA to remain high until 2010. Is that incorrect?

Honourable members interjecting—

The Speaker—Order! Members on my left will cease interjecting!

Mr Rudd—We inherited inflation running at a 16-year high. Is that incorrect? That is fact No. 1. There is no dispute from those opposite. Fact No. 2: when our government was elected, interest rates had risen 10 times in a row and were the second highest in the developed world. That is fact No. 2. Any dispute? Fact No. 3: productivity growth is running at its lowest level in 15 years and, as the Treasurer said in parliament today, it has now ground down to zero. That is fact No. 3.

Honourable members interjecting—

The Speaker—Order! I issue a general warning!
Mr Rudd—Fact No. 4: since 2004-05 Commonwealth spending has grown at an average of around four per cent real per year, which is more rapid growth than in any other four-year period in the last decade and a half. If I recall the presentation in parliament the other day by the Minister for Finance, in the last financial year it was running at 4½ per cent real. That is simply unsustainable. That is fact No. 4. Fact No. 5: at the time of the election, despite the best terms of trade in 50 years, we had generated 5½ years of monthly trade deficits, the longest sequence in Australia’s economic history, contributing to Australia’s record foreign debt, which has tripled to a record at $570 billion. That is fact No. 5.

If you put all these things together, what you have is a clear-cut summary of the dimensions of the economic challenge that we, on this side of the House, the government of the day, have been presented with in terms of the economic performance of those who preceded us. It is a very uncomfortable and confronting set of facts for those opposite as they realise that they actually left Australia with a series of far-reaching economic problems on the inflation front, on the interest rates front, on the productivity front and with government spending out of control. All these are problems which now confront us and actually require a course of action to deal with them rather than our pushing them all to one side. So framing a budget under these circumstances is difficult when combined with and compounded by the fact that the state of the global economy means that we have revised downwards growth projections for the United States economy, revised downwards growth projections for Europe and revised downwards, somewhat, projections for Japan. Therefore we have a difficult set of global economic circumstances and we have an economic legacy from those opposite, uncomfortable and disquieting as they may find it, which, frankly, registers as a fail mark against each of the five or six measures that I just ran through.

So when it comes to priorities our challenge is this: how do we manage to maintain responsible economic management, draw government expenditure back under control and eliminate unnecessary spending programs while at the same time making sure that we are extending the hand of support to those in the community who need it? Front and centre among those in the community who need support are carers and pensioners. They are among the most vulnerable. It has been interesting in this debate today to listen to the faux expressions of compassion by those opposite—a political party and a previous government which for 12 years did not lift a finger to address the five or six key economic facts and challenges that I ran through before and instead squandered their inheritance. On the compassion register, look at Work Choices, look at the impact on working families and look at the impact on those who are struggling to make the family budget balance at the end of each week. Instead, we had minister after minister standing at this dispatch box in the time of the previous government saying: ‘Not our problem. We’re not faintly concerned about the interests of working families.’ Beyond working families and beyond those who need a decent and fair industrial relations system, we go back to the core needs of those who are the most vulnerable in our community: carers and pensioners. I cannot think of a more clear-cut commitment than what we have given in terms of carers and pensioners for the future. We have a commitment that goes to them not being any worse off on the question of the bonus payments to carers and pensioners and we have that commitment when it comes to utilities, a commitment in both cases which precedes the budget by two months, transcending anything which was
ever provided by those opposite in previous
budgets.

I would suggest that those opposite take a
long, cold, hard look at themselves against
the record that they have left the government
on the economy, given the documents I have
referred to, specifically about the handling of
this bonus matter in the time during which
they occupied the treasury bench. What I fear
is happening is this: our government is ap-
plying to us on this side of the House a stan-
dard which those opposite never applied to
themselves when they were the government
of this nation and in office for 12 years. The
government rejects this censure motion. The
core reason for doing so is that it is absolu-
tely predicated on a false argument that
pensioners and carers would be worse off as
a consequence of this upcoming budget on
the question of the bonus payments.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah) (3.33 pm)—I
think any fair-minded Australian listening to
the Prime Minister’s contribution to this cen-
sure debate would come to the sad conclu-
sion that this government is suffering from
compassion fatigue after just three months in
office. Anyone who listened to the contribu-
tion of the Prime Minister, who now turns
his back on the opposition—and on the car-
ers of Australia, for whom the opposition is
speaking—would conclude that, as far as this
Prime Minister is concerned, it is all about
the economy; it is not about people.

The Prime Minister and members opposite
said that they have inherited a difficult situa-
tion. What is so difficult about a $20 billion-
plus surplus? They have inherited a $20 bil-
lion-plus surplus and they will not commit to
give any of it to the carers and pensioners of
Australia by way of these lump sum pay-
ments. Shame on you, Prime Minister, shame
on you, minister for families, and shame on
you, Deputy Prime Minister, for abandoning
and dumping the most vulnerable people in
our society in this way. Let us make it absolu-
tely crystal clear, to a Prime Minister and a
minister who do not know, exactly what their
policy is. This was stated in the Sydney
Morning Herald last Friday:
The Federal Government faces criticism from
carer groups after it decided not to match a $1600
bonus payment made to carers by the Howard
government in recent years.

Listen to this, Prime Minister, and listen to
this, minister for families:
A spokeswoman for the Minister for Families,
Jenny Macklin, confirmed the decision last night,
saying it was part of the Government’s plan to cut
spending.

So dumping the carers lump sum payment
and dumping the pensioners lump sum pay-
ment is ‘part of the government’s plan to cut
spending’. This is about the bonus payment
that the Howard government has paid for the
last four years. Will it or will it not be paid
this year?

Instead of guaranteeing that it will be
paid, this Prime Minister is now trying to
cook up some kind of a fix with the Leader
of the House. I tell you what, Prime Minis-
ter: if you want to get out of this mess do not
consult the Leader of the House, the author
of the manic Fridays. This Prime Minister
has refused to give a guarantee that the bo-
nus payment will be made, saying instead
that people will not be worse off. He said
that this meant that they could all relax and
be reassured. In other words, what he tried to
do in response to the censure debate today
was to give the guarantee that he had refused
to give in question time through a series of
tortuous evasions and circumlocutions and
equivocations.

I will tell you what a guarantee would be.
A guarantee would be a letter signed by the
Prime Minister of this country saying to the
carers and the pensioners of Australia: ‘Your
bonus payments and your lump sum pay-
ments are safe and will be paid in this budget because the surplus will be bigger than ever, our economy is better than ever and you deserve a dividend this year from economic growth, as you have had in the last four years from the Howard government.’ Have the guts to sign a guarantee and then people will give you credit for at least having the heart to accept that you and your government have made a mistake over the last four or five years.

The cardboard Kev that appeared in this parliament on the last sitting Friday has more heart than this Prime Minister has shown in the course of question time and the censure debate today. Let us examine exactly what the Prime Minister has said. I quote from an AAP report yesterday:

Mr Rudd said Families and Community Services Minister Jenny Macklin was investigating how the system could be improved, saying one-off payments and bonuses were an inadequate way to deal with welfare on a long-term basis.

So there was the Prime Minister, who now says that the one-off lump sum payment and bonus is guaranteed for this budget, saying yesterday that it was inadequate. He went on to say yesterday:

The challenge that Jenny Macklin and others have been wrestling with is how do we put all this on to a more secure, predictable basis for carers and pensioners into the long-term future, rather than having to deal simply with a series of one-offs …

The carers and the pensioners of this country can be trusted with money. They can be trusted to know what to do with $1,600 or $500, and that is what they would prefer, as has been made abundantly clear over the last few days. But what we had in question time today was a Prime Minister who not only would not guarantee the lump sum payment but would not guarantee any alternative way of ensuring that these vulnerable people would not be worse off. He comes in here and he piously says to this chamber, ‘They will not be worse off by one dollar,’ but he refuses to describe a mechanism to ensure that that will be the case.

I say to the carers and the pensioners of Australia: these are weasel words that we have seen from this Prime Minister. You cannot trust this Prime Minister, and these bonuses will not be paid until we have a guarantee in writing, signed by this man, that they will be paid. Do you know what we have seen today? We have seen the Prime Minister reverting to type. Last year we saw caring Kevin, we saw pious Kevin, and we saw statesman Kevin.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member for Warringah will refer to the Prime Minister by his appropriate title.

Mr ABBOTT—I will tell you what we have seen today from the Prime Minister. We have seen him reverting to type: a heartless bureaucrat who thinks that people are something to be the object of government policy. The carers of Australia are going to find out over the next few weeks precisely why this Prime Minister was called ‘Dr Death’ by the public servants of Queensland when they had to work with him, when they had to experience what the Prime Minister’s compassion was really like. What we have also seen today is a striking contrast between a heartless bureaucrat, who sees people as items to be moved around on a policy chessboard, and someone who has spent most of his adult life as a doctor in general practice, who understands that human beings are creatures of flesh and blood and they have to be dealt with with decency and compassion by governments.

I regret to say that this government, which was elected with so much hope by so many Australians—to the disappointment, admittedly, of people on this side of the House—is already dashing their hopes. It is one thing to
sign up to Kyoto. It is one thing to apologise for the past. It is one thing to promise to change legislation. But it is quite another to consistently deliver decent benefits to the people of Australia.

The fact that members opposite think that it is more important to deliver the mother of all budget surpluses than it is to deliver benefits to the people of this country who need it most just goes to show the extent to which modern Labor has lost its soul. There are too many millionaires sitting opposite. There are too many people who spend their time talking to developers and the big end of town. That is the only possible explanation as to why this government has completely forgotten the most vulnerable people in our society, the carers and the pensioners who are doing it tough, who, but for government benefits, entirely miss out on the prosperity that this country has enjoyed in recent years and who deserve better from a government which calls itself a Labor government.

Because of this Prime Minister’s ineptitude, because he is unable to reconcile the conflicting demands of his hairy-chested economic ministers and his backbench—who understand, I suspect, just what this is going to do to the carers and pensioners of Australia—we have had five days of vacillation and muddle.

John Howard, the former Prime Minister, was never one to boast about his compassion credentials. He was never one to strike his chest and say, ‘Look how good I am.’ Unlike the current incumbent Prime Minister, he just delivered. That is what John Howard did: he delivered four years of lump sum payments to the carers and pensioners of this country. That is what he did: he delivered. He did not boast. What we have from this Prime Minister is a series of pious platitudes, a series of empty assurances not backed up by any specific assurances whatsoever.

What we have seen from members opposite, in the words of one of their former leaders, is ‘a circus of symbolism’. The first time they are actually put on the spot, the first time they actually have to come up with a hard commitment, the first time they are faced with a difficult choice, what do they do? They choose a bigger budget surplus over tangible, concrete benefits for the carers and pensioners of this country.

I am more confident than ever, having watched the stumbling, halting, embarrassed, shamefaced performance of the Prime Minister today—attested to by the shocked, white faces of the backbench behind him, who know he is getting himself into a hopeless muddle—that the longer this government lasts, the better the Howard government will look. The longer that members opposite take the $500, the $600 and the $1,000 lump sum payments away from vulnerable people, the more the Howard government years will look like a golden age of compassion and decency.

This Prime Minister is the person who opined at great and pious length in The Monthly magazine at the end of 2006 about how all John Howard was interested in was ‘me, myself and I’. I tell you what: John Howard delivered. John Howard gave the people of this country the support that they needed. This is the Prime Minister who attacked what he called ‘Howard’s Brutopia.’ Who is running a brutopia now? Is it a brutopia to pay people a $1,600 lump sum payment yet somehow a nirvana to take it away? There is something rotten in this government’s make-up if this Prime Minister cannot find it in his heart to give those decent, struggling carers and pensioners of this country the lump sum payments that they have been given over the last four budgets, which they have increasingly come to rely on and which they deserve as a dividend from the economic prosperity of our country.
In conclusion, the Leader of the Opposition had some very good advice for this L-plate Prime Minister: stop talking to the bureaucrats, stop cutting deals with the faction chiefs, stop trying to bail out the debt-ridden state governments at the expense of the carers and pensioners of this country. The Prime Minister said to his members: ‘Go visit a school. Go visit a homeless shelter.’ As the Leader of the Opposition has said: ‘Spend a bit of time with the carers of our country. Feel their pain; see their need.’ It does not stop; it is 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They deserve this payment and this payment should be paid. (Time expired)

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (3.48 pm)—Labor do have a very clear understanding of the enormous contribution that carers make to the people whom they love. I know from my own family the enormous personal sacrifices that people make, and they do it because they love the people they care for. We also know that an enormous lifetime of contribution has been made by the senior members of this country. We recognise that, we respect that, and that is why we want to ensure that, as they grow older, they are both supported financially and provided with services. We know that for many carers the cost of the sacrifice they make is both deeply emotional and financial. It is a very tough task that so many people take on. They want to take it on because they care so much about the people whom they care for.

It is the case that so many carers in this country earn a lot less than other members of our community. In fact, one-third of primary carers are in households that rank in the poorest 20 per cent of households in Australia. We as a government do understand it; we understand it from our own families. Many of these people have significant additional costs, whether it is for that special medication, for the equipment they need to help care for their loved ones or for the additional transport costs they have in visits backwards and forwards from hospital. All of these issues do impose an extra financial burden on so many carers.

Also, for many carers there is often a very significant cost to their own family lives—for example, the pressure placed on other members of the family. One woman said to me that the hardest thing for her is not only having to care for the individual child whom she has to take on a regular basis to the hospital but recognising the impact of those many hospital visits on her other children, who often do not have their mother to care for them as much as other children have.

These are very significant issues that so many carers do face. They are enormous personal sacrifices and enormous financial sacrifices that each and every one of us understands very deeply. Right at our core we do have an unshakable belief, an unshakable principle, that all Australians should share in the economic prosperity that this country is experiencing. Labor thinks each and every person should share in that prosperity. That is why we are making changes to the utilities payment, and I will talk about that a little later.

The Prime Minister has said quite categorically that the reports in the media that pensioners and carers may be worse off are wrong. He has made it absolutely clear that those reports are wrong. He has also said that, when it comes to the bonuses that have been paid in the past, senior Australians and carers will not be worse off. That is a guarantee that the Prime Minister has given to senior Australians and carers. One of the things that the government is prepared to do, unlike the previous government, is to give some certainty past this budget to those carers and seniors. We want to give both of those
groups greater security into the future. Rather than having to deal, as they did, with the previous government’s series of one-off payments, we are proposing to look for new ways to make sure that we can give both older Australians and carers greater certainty into the future. We know that this will provide them with a much greater sense of security than the previous government was ever prepared to do.

A few minutes ago the member for Warringah said that the previous Prime Minister, John Howard, had delivered. One thing the previous Prime Minister did not deliver was any sense of certainty into the future about these bonuses. We know that all the current opposition was prepared to do before each budget was to say, ‘We’ll give a one-off bonus.’ Before the last election, as the Prime Minister indicated in his earlier remarks, the opposition was not prepared to give any guarantee that it would pay this bonus if it won the election. It certainly gave no guarantee that it would pay the bonus or give any security into the future for seniors or carers. One thing that is very clear from the current opposition’s election statements and the state of the budget is that, when we look at the budget papers from last year, we see that this bonus payment was not on the books. If ever we needed any evidence whatsoever of its intentions, the previous government had no intention of paying this bonus in a secure way. It had no commitment whatsoever.

The previous government had no commitment to continuing these bonuses. The Leader of the Opposition and the member for Warringah have stood up in this place today and made an enormous amount of noise, but I think they should be honest with the carers they speak to individually and through this parliament. They made no commitment in the budget last year and in the lead-up to the election that they would pay these bonuses. There is no money in the budget for them. A little bit of honesty from the opposition would be welcomed by the carers they are speaking to. All they were prepared to do was offer short-term election year bonuses. They were not prepared to make an ongoing commitment to carers. They were not prepared to do so because they had no dedication to resolving the issue and giving people the security they deserve. Unfortunately, from the previous government there was a decision to deliver things on a one-off basis and not in a continuous way so as to give people security.

There is another area of hypocrisy from the opposition that is quite breathtaking. These are the same people—the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Warringah—who proposed taking the carer allowance away from nearly 30,000 parents of children with a disability. This is what the *Canberra Times* reported back in August 2003:

Nearly 30,000 families who care for children with disabilities are expected to lose their government carer allowance.

The article went on to say:

These figures show that almost 30,000 fewer families will receive the allowance this financial year.

That was a proposition from those in opposition now who are making the most extraordinary hypocritical statements in this debate. It got much worse in 2003 for these parents of severely disabled children. Following the outcry, the *Age* reported on 13 August:

Parents of more than 5,000 disabled children have lost their $87 fortnightly allowance under a Howard government review.

That is what the previous government were on about. There has been a lot of noise today and lots of suggestions that things were different, but, when you look at the record and at what the previous government were on
about, you find that they were not about providing any certainty for the future or making sure that carers and seniors were able to cope with the significant financial pressures that they faced.

Unlike the opposition, the government is all about giving certainty to carers and seniors because we do not want to leave them hanging. We do not want to leave people hanging until budget night, year after year after year. That is the task that we have taken on, because it was never taken on by the previous government. There was no previous commitment in the budget to deliver these bonuses. There was no previous commitment given by the now opposition just before the election that they would pay these bonuses. The Prime Minister has made it absolutely plain that, as far as these bonuses are concerned, no carer and no senior will be worse off. He has also given a guarantee that we will give some security to these people so that they are not hanging out every budget night for information on whether or not the bonuses will be paid.

I want to also make a few remarks about the very important election commitments that we are about to deliver to over three million Australians—to seniors, carers and people with a disability—in increasing the utilities allowance from its current level of $107 to $500 a year, and we are going to pay it on a quarterly basis. We know just how important this is for those who are on the seniors concession allowance, so eligible self-funded retirees too will be getting the $500 utilities allowance and it will be paid quarterly to them. The opposition needs to make sure that there is no nonsense in the Senate when this issue is debated this week. The government wants to make sure that this utilities allowance is paid on 20 March as we promised. We promised that it would be paid on a quarterly basis and we promised that the first installment would be paid on 20 March, and the only thing standing in the way of that promise is the federal opposition. We want to be able to give this additional help to senior Australians, to carers and to people with a disability, so I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to guarantee that there will not be any delays in the Senate while this issue is debated so that we can make sure that the seniors, carers and people with disabilities actually get what they need.

We hear from those opposite that they wanted to do this. They actually had 11 years to increase the utilities allowance. They had 11 years to make sure that the utilities allowance was available to carers. They had 11 years to make sure that the utilities allowance was available to people with a disability. Each and every one of us knows—but, more importantly, each and every senior Australian, each and every carer and each and every person with a disability in Australia knows—that that utilities allowance was, firstly, not increased to $500 by the previous government and, secondly, was not extended to carers or to people with a disability. This money is very important in helping people with the rising cost of living. The first installment will be delivered on 20 March—next week—as long as the opposition make sure that it is quickly delivered through the Senate.

I did say at the outset that we understand the concerns of carers. We understand the very significant financial pressures they are under. We also understand the very significant financial pressures that senior Australians are under. That is why we have made sure—the Prime Minister has assured these most vulnerable members of our community—that, when it comes to these bonuses, they will not be one dollar worse off under the forthcoming budget. It is important that people are given that financial security, and this government will give it to them. *Time expired*
Question put:
That the motion (Dr Nelson’s) be agreed to.
The House divided. [4.07 pm]
(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes............ 59
Noes............ 81

Majority......... 22

AYES


NOES

Question negatived.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

The SPEAKER—The member for Warringah.

Mr Abbott—My question without notice is to the Prime Minister.

The SPEAKER—No. The member will resume his seat.

Mr Abbott interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member will resume his seat. Members will resume their places.
Quarantine

Mr TURNOUR (4.15 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Can the minister inform the House of the latest—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The continuation of question time was identified by the member for Warringah—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. I know what is going on here. It is a try-on because of an incident in the last sitting fortnight, in completely different circumstances, where people were still resuming their seats. If the member for North Sydney were to have taken a full picture of the chamber he would have seen that the member for Leichhardt was standing on his lonesome in his place at the same time that the honourable member for Warringah was attempting to get the call. There is a limit to the amount of nonsense that I will take—there is a limit.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, If you call that nonsense—

The SPEAKER—I am calling it something which I believe it to be: deliberately disruptive.

Mr Hockey—It is not deliberately disruptive. It is about the standards of the House.

The SPEAKER—That is exactly the point that I am making. The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. In the other example I gave a full explanation of what happened. The member for North Sydney might claim that there was some confusion, but the member who did not seek the call could have done something to make sure that that confusion was not the same. In this case, when people were resuming their places, I could have quite easily given the call to the member for Leichhardt straight away because members were on their feet running around. I am really trying to get the chamber to a point where there is a bit of respect shown to everybody—and, in fairness, I have tried to do the right thing in rotating the call. As I have said to the member for North Sydney privately—and I do not wish to embarrass the member for Wentworth—I wish the member for Wentworth had not dropped the two inches on that occasion. Then this would not be a point. The member for Leichhardt has the call.

Mr TURNOUR—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Can the minister inform the House of the latest developments in quarantine?

Mr BURKE—Shortly before question time today I was advised of a certification error by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service which may have a significant impact on the beef industry in New Caledonia. AQIS has advised that, under the previous government, on 23 November last year cattle were exported to New Caledonia from Australia that were vaccinated against the disease babesiosis instead of being treated with a chemical treatment, as required by New Caledonia’s import requirements. Animals vaccinated against babesiosis can be a source of infection to ticks. I am advised that the export of vaccinated cattle to New Caledonia has allowed the disease to enter their tick population and has caused a disease outbreak in their local cattle.

While information on this issue is still coming to hand, it seems clear first of all that there was a certification error by AQIS and that, as a result of that error, there may be a significant impact on the beef industry in New Caledonia. On hearing this information prior to question time I immediately held a telephone conference with the secretary of my department, who is also the Director of Quarantine, and I am urgently seeking more
information, including what assistance measures can be provided to New Caledonia. I hope to meet with their ambassador later today. I understand that AQIS is seeking expert advice from the Queensland Tick Fever Centre on ways to manage the exported cattle and cattle which have been in contact with the exported animals in New Caledonia.

Preliminary advice is that treating all the cattle—those exported from Australia and the New Caledonian cattle in contact with them—by injecting them with the chemical Imazol would kill the organism in the cattle and prevent further transmission of the disease to ticks. I understand that AQIS is also seeking advice on how to ensure that the disease is eradicated from the New Caledonian tick population. I also took the opportunity during the last hour to speak with Russell Bock from the Queensland Tick Fever Centre. He has confirmed that the centre is willing to assist the New Caledonian authorities in whatever way it can to help them deal with the outbreak, including with serological testing. Russell Bock told me that in order for them to be able to receive the samples they will require cooperation from AQIS. I have received an email in the last couple of minutes from the Director of Quarantine and the secretary of my department confirming that AQIS will expedite the import permits for samples from New Caledonia to be sent to Australia for serological analysis by the Queensland Tick Fever Centre. Members will already be aware that I announced a review into Australia’s quarantine services. It is critically important both for the protection of biosecurity in Australia and for our neighbouring countries to which we provide a service under agreed protocols that our quarantine and biosecurity services are robust. This review will help inform that process. We are also making sure that we meet all our obligations with respect to the government of New Caledonia.

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

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Member for Moncrieff

Mr NEVILLE (4.22 pm)—Mr Speaker, this is a question to you and it is asked not with any malice nor to prolong an unfortunate incident. I ask you to reflect on an incident that occurred in respect of the member for Moncrieff when he was excluded from the House under 94(a) on the Friday afternoon that we have been discussing today. He was excluded under 94(a) and indeed escorted from the chamber by the Serjeant-at-Arms. It seems to me, then, that you imposed the penalty and that it was executed in his removal. The business of the House continued, albeit somewhat disruptively, for a number of minutes and you subsequently said, ‘I name him.’ I put it to you, Mr Speaker, that that was improper, as it would constitute a double jeopardy, and I ask you to reflect on that and report back to the House.

The SPEAKER—As I have indicated to the House, it is not my intention to enter into a question and answer session about the proceedings of the parliament. I will make an exception in this case because I just wish to remind the member for Hinkler that I thanked the member for Boothby for his primer about what was the appropriate action that I should take, having invited the Serjeant-at-Arms to escort a member from the chamber and that I was obliged to name him. That is how we proceeded to that point. As to whether we should then blame the member
for Boothby for the action that happened to the member for Moncrieff, I do not think we should be that harsh. But that was simply the course of action that was carried out. Intuitively, I may have been trying to give the member for Moncrieff an hour, but having been reminded of my obligations we got to the point in time which had its conclusion today. So the doc will have to answer to the member for Moncrieff.

Standing Orders

Mr BROADBENT (4.24 pm)—A number of the standing orders and procedures of the House now refer to the Friday sitting. Can we act on those procedures and standing orders at this time when they actually refer to a Friday sitting and not other sitting times of the House?

The SPEAKER—I am in the hands of the House; they represent the standing orders at the moment. I understand that they will be dealt with.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (4.24 pm)—Mr Speaker, on indulgence, this was asked by the Manager of Opposition Business before question time today and I indicated that a series of standing orders have been drafted with the assistance, as usual, of the clerks in terms of making sure that they are in order. Those I intend to put on notice today. I intend to put them on notice for debate later in the week so that no one on that side of the House can say that they did not have an opportunity to peruse them. It is within my ability to seek leave to have those standing orders debated and voted upon at a time of my choosing, but that would require leave to be given by the opposition and, frankly, given the lack of goodwill that has been—

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

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (4.26 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Ms MACKLIN—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Ms MACKLIN—The member for Warringah repeated a report in the Sydney Morning Herald, dated 7 March, about comments one of my staff made about bonus payments. I have written to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald indicating that my staff member did not make these remarks as they were reported.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Reports Nos 24, 25, 26 of 2007-08

The SPEAKER (4.26 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit reports for 2007-08 entitled Audit report No. 24, Performance audit: DIAC’s management of the introduction of biometric technologies, Department of Immigration and Citizenship; Audit report No. 25, Performance audit: Administering round the clock Medicare grants, Department of Health and Ageing; and Audit report No. 26, Performance audit: Tasmanian forest industry development and assistance programs, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (4.27 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.
ELECTION PETITION

The Clerk—I present a copy of the order of the High Court of Australia remitting the election petition Mitchell v Bailey and Anor to the Federal Court of Australia.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Economy

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

The need for a clear commitment to protect vulnerable Australians and ensure they benefit from a strong economy.

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

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

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Leader of the Opposition) (4.28 pm)—Earlier this afternoon, a censure motion was moved against the Prime Minister and the Australian government. That censure motion was moved because on this side of the House we do not have confidence that the government and the Prime Minister in particular understand the importance of building a strong economy so you can actually assist the weak, the sick, the unfortunate and, in this case, especially carers, the elderly and the frail. You do not attack the vulnerable to make a strong economy. In fact, if the government really wants to pick on someone its own size, it should go no further than the state governments, which at the moment have in excess of $40 billion of debt—which is headed over the next three years to more than $80 billion. Instead of that, the government and the Prime Minister in particular, as the chairman of the so-called razor gang, have chosen to use Australia’s carers and the vulnerable as human shields in their campaign against inflationary pressures.

I ask: is this government so obsessed with media management and bread and circuses that it has become blind to what, in the end, is the real purpose of government? Has it become so deaf to the pleas of anguished despair coming from this nation’s most vulnerable that it simply cannot say with certainty that these lump sum cash payments to them are guaranteed? Why is it so hard for the Prime Minister, given every opportunity through questions and through a censure motion, to stand at the dispatch box and say not only or so much to this House but, more importantly, to the 400,000 carers that are behind this and those Australians above the age of 65 and the elderly, especially, that are so reliant on that cash payment of $500, that they will receive the payments of $1,600 and $500? Why is the Prime Minister—and the government—not able nor man enough to actually guarantee them that they will receive a lump sum payment? Instead of that we have had these mealy-mouthed words: ‘They won’t be worse off. They won’t be a cent worse off.’

We on this side—and I, as a former cabinet minister for six years—know only too well that, as you go through the budget process, there is debate. There is debate about the defence budget, about the health budget, about the education budget, about roads—there is a whole debate about those things. But I say to the Prime Minister: when he gets back to the Lodge tonight, he should ask one of his staff to get for him a recording of his contribution in the censure motion on this issue of carers and seniors. He needs to sit down in a quiet place and actually have a look at himself and listen to what he was saying. He sounds more like—and increasingly looks like—a bureaucrat running an economy and running a public service than he does a Prime Minister, leading a group of
men and women, who should be committed to building a better and more caring Australia. The one thing the Prime Minister has not got on his balance sheet is people. In the end, that is what it is all about. I go, for example, to Mary-Lou Carter. She said to the *Daily Telegraph* on 11 March:

If this was about symbolism, it’s a terrible thing to have to prove how tough you are by attacking the weakest in the community.

The chief executive of Carers Australia, Joan Hughes, said to Channel 7 on 8 March:

I don’t get why they would be picking on some of the most vulnerable people, who are really struggling to survive. It’s a real kick in the face for many family carers.

There is Mr Ashley Norman, a 73-year-old man in Mackay who is dying, cared for by his wife of 52 years, Pat. He said to the *Australian* on 7 March:

My wife gets $100 a fortnight to look after me. …

She’s got to do everything I did, everything she did and care for me like a baby.

What he’s (Kevin Rudd) doing is criminal. To take $1600 off us after giving it to us every year for four years, it’s criminal.

He also said of the Prime Minister, on the ABC program *Lateline* on 10 March: ‘He is an absolute Jekyll and Hyde. Prior to the election, for God’s sake, everyone thought he was a wonderful man. Since he’s been elected, he’s turned into an absolute ogre.’

There are Pam and Wal Beckhouse, whose 37-year-old son John is autistic and profoundly deaf. Pam said this to Channel 10 on 7 March:

I just can’t believe that a Labor government would do that. The carers have given up a lot to do that caring, and they don’t deserve to be treated like rubbish.

Wal said:

There’s a lot of cranky people out there.

That is an understatement. There are a lot of cranky people out there, but they are more than cranky. These are desperate people who live quiet lives of desperation trying to look after people whom they love and, in the process, saving this country an enormous amount of money in the effort that they make for those they love and for whom they care.

I say to the Prime Minister, after more than three months as the Prime Minister of Australia: whatever you do, Prime Minister, remember, in the end, it is about building a better society; it is about building a more caring society; it is about reaching out to people who feel they have neither power nor a voice in this country and making absolutely certain that decisions are made with them foremost in mind. Whatever the bureaucrats have told you and whatever you tell yourself as a former bureaucrat, the most important thing the Prime Minister needs to do at the moment is to reassure these 400,000 carers and to reassure pensioners, seniors, elderly and frail that they will receive the lump sum cash payment in this year’s budget.

Whilst, Prime Minister, as a bureaucrat being driven by a bunch of bureaucrats, you sound like a man dealing with a balance sheet rather than a man who is actually grappling with day-to-day human struggles and desperate concern to look after others in greater need than yourself, just remember that in the end, in addition to income and expenditure, the government’s balance sheet must always include people. This is about human beings. This is about dignity of human life. As far as we on this side are concerned, and on behalf of the 400,000 carers, the seniors, the elderly and the frail in this country, we say to you, Prime Minister: be honest and open with them and guarantee them that they will receive their lump sum payment. In doing so, whatever the niceties of the bureaucrats and the balance sheets, that will give more comfort and certainty for
these people—some of whom will not even live until the budget—as to how they will be able to manage their finances in the year ahead.

Mr Bowen (Prospect—Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, and Assistant Treasurer) (4.36 pm)—It appears that the Leader of the Opposition could not even find five minutes more of hypocrisy to fill his speech—he finished five minutes early.

The hide of the opposition knows no bounds. Let us deal first with the matter of carers bonuses. The opposition leader says that the government are ignoring carers because we will not guarantee, on 11 March, the exact detail of what will be announced in the budget; we will not outline, on 11 March, every last dollar that will be in the budget in relation to carers. It is instructive to go back and look at the record. At the 2004 budget—the first budget that introduced the bonus for carers—the then Treasurer, the member for Higgins, said:

Tonight I announce that around 80,000 people on Carer Payment will receive an additional one-off payment of $1,000.

That was announced on 11 May 2004, not 11 March as it is today. On 10 May 2005 the then Treasurer said:

… tonight I announce as I did last Budget …

So there was not this great concern from the Liberal Party that in March or February or April they had to put carers’ minds at ease about whether they were going to get the bonus; they left it until budget night. In 2006 what did the then Treasurer say? He said:

… tonight I announce as I did in the past two Budgets an additional $1,000 …

That was announced on 9 May, not 9 March. The previous government left it until budget night. Then, on 8 May last year, 2007, what did the then Treasurer say? He said:

I also announce tonight, for the fourth consecutive year, that recipients of the Carer Payment will receive a bonus of $1,000 and recipients of the Carer Allowance a bonus of $600 for each eligible person in their care.

So, for each of the last four years, on budget night the then Treasurer outlined that these bonuses would be paid. The then government did not take it upon themselves in March or April or February to make that announcement; they announced it in May. In opposition, they now say that it is incumbent upon the government of the day to clear this up on 11 March, that it is outrageous, callous, heartless, unless we tell people on 11 March exactly how the payments will be paid.

Of course, at each of those budgets never once did the Treasurer of the day say, ‘And I am announcing tonight that we are budgeting for this into the future.’ Never once did he say, ‘I am announcing tonight that it will be in the forward estimates.’ Never once did he say, ‘We are going to put money aside going into the future to provide certainty to carers.’ On every occasion, he said it was a one-off bonus. And yet the hypocritical opposition waltz in here and have the hide to suggest that this government is not being caring when it comes to carers. Being lectured by this mob about vulnerable people is like being lectured by Paris Hilton on public modesty. Their hide knows no bounds. If hypocrisy were a crime, they would all be serving time at Her Majesty’s pleasure, because this is a cheap political stunt from a desperate opposition.

These people have the hide to come in here and lecture us about carers. More importantly, they have the hide to come in here and lecture us about vulnerable people generally. Of course carers and our elderly are vulnerable people, but there are more examples. The people who had the hide to propose this matter of public importance are, to a man and a woman, the same people who
voted for Work Choices—not once, not twice but on multiple occasions. The number of vulnerable people in this country will be reduced dramatically the day that the stain of Work Choices is removed from the legal record of this country, when this government is able to remove Australian workplace agreements and Work Choices from the official record of the laws of this country. If you need any evidence of that, let us have a look at the list that the Deputy Prime Minister released earlier this year of the working conditions that vulnerable people had taken off them by the previous government. Seventy per cent of AWAs removed shift work loadings—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—We’re talking about carers!

Mr Bowen—We are talking about the MPI on vulnerable people. Sixty-eight per cent removed annual leave loadings, 65 per cent removed penalty rates, 63 per cent removed incentive based payments and bonuses, 61 per cent removed days to be substituted for public holidays, 56 per cent removed monetary allowances, 50 per cent removed public holidays payments, 49 per cent removed overtime loadings, 31 per cent removed rest breaks and 25 per cent removed declared public holidays. The limited data revealed that 75 per cent of the 1,500 AWAs sampled did not provide for a guaranteed wage increase. Do not come in here and lecture us about vulnerable people. You created vulnerable people. We know you are in favour of vulnerable people; that is why you created so many in your 11 years in office, with your Work Choices regime, which the Australian people passed judgement on on 24 November.

It would not be so bad if the opposition had learnt their lesson. It would not be so bad if they had recognised that the Australian people had passed judgement on 24 November and Work Choices was now dead. Over the last few days we saw the unedifying spectacle of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition saying that the opposition neither support nor oppose the government’s moves to eradicate Work Choices. This is her grand plan: to neither support nor oppose the government’s moves to abolish Work Choices. Billy Snedden-like, she says, ‘I have the solution: we’ll neither support nor oppose it.’ No wonder the Australian people have come to the conclusion that the Liberal Party have lost their way.

I will say one thing about the former Prime Minister: at least we knew where he stood. At least we knew what he believed in. At least we knew—as strongly as we disagreed with it—that he believed in Work Choices. These people refuse to admit it. The opposition refuse to guarantee how they will vote on Work Choices, because they neither support nor oppose it. They just do not get it. They just do not get the message that the Australian people gave them about vulnerable people. They think that they can score a cheap political point on the backs of hard-working carers in this country. They think that they can use that as the way out of their political problems, as the way out of their leadership speculation. Well, they cannot, because the Australian people know what they really think about vulnerable people. The Australian people know what they really think about workers and working families who are vulnerable—the industrial relations system had its balance tipped so far in one direction that the Prime Minister of the day became the second Prime Minister in Australian history to lose his seat.

The Australian people see through this mob, and coming in here and posturing about vulnerable people will not work. Don’t lecture us about putting people first. Don’t come in here and lecture us about how important it is that the balance sheet includes
people when you imposed Work Choices on the Australian people—the longest suicide note in Australian political history, which the Australian people passed judgment on.

We had the spectacle of the former minister for workplace relations on *Four Corners* just a couple of weeks ago saying that members of the cabinet, when he took over the portfolio, did not know that vulnerable people could have working conditions removed under Work Choices. He said:

Quite frankly when I took over the job I don’t think many ministers in Cabinet were aware that you could be worse off under WorkChoices and that you could actually have certain conditions taken away without compensation.

Liz Jackson said:

You’re saying to me that Cabinet colleagues were unaware that you could be worse off?

The member for North Sydney said:

Some were, yeah, yep.

Well, they have not learned.

Of course, there is another category of vulnerable people in this country. They are the people who are vulnerable because of the prospect of losing their homes. They are the people who are at the tipping point at the moment, who are wondering how many more interest rate increases there will be because the previous government could not get inflation under control—the people throughout Western Sydney, represented by the member for Lindsay, the member for Blaxland, me, the member for Fowler and the member for Reid, who are struggling in the killing fields of Western Sydney mortgages and who have the highest repossession rates in Australian history. They are vulnerable people. That is why this government is taking difficult decisions. That is why this budget, delivered in May, will increase the surplus to 1.5 per cent of GDP to put downward pressure on interest rates—something that they could never do, something they could not be bothered to do. The previous Treasurer said, ‘Inflation is right where we want it.’ Well, it is not right where we want it for the people of Western Sydney who are struggling to keep their homes, because it is putting upward pressure on interest rates, and that is not something this government is prepared to stand by and watch, which they were.

Vulnerable people are people who are at risk of losing their homes. These are the people who the current alternative Treasurer, the member for Wentworth, said on his way through the doors into the House were over-dramatising a 25 basis point increase in interest rates. He said: ‘We shouldn’t get too concerned about this; it’s only a 25 basis point increase. It’s only a quarter of one per cent. It’s being overdramatised.’ That is what they think about vulnerable people. They believe that it is a small increase in interest rates that should not be overdramatised. It is pretty dramatic if you are at risk of losing your home. It is pretty dramatic if your life’s dream, the house that you have built up, is in danger of being lost forever. These guys, who come in here and have the hide, the temerity and the hypocrisy to lecture us about vulnerable people, should go and look in the mirror. They should say: ‘We never put the carers bonus in the forward estimates. We never budgeted for it. We never had the wit to put aside the money in forward estimates. We never cared about the people who we put on the heap with our Work Choices reforms’—so-called reforms—’and we certainly never cared about the people in danger of losing their houses in Western Sydney.’

The Australian people are smart enough to see through an opposition which suddenly discovers compassion on 25 November 2007, which suddenly decides that a balance sheet should include people and which suddenly decides that carers are so important that we should put aside money for them into
the future, we should put the money in the forward estimates. The Australian people understand that this government will not make those sorts of mistakes. This government has made very clear that, when it comes to improving the resources for carers, we can always do better. Carers fulfil a vital role in society, and no government, frankly, will ever do enough—no government ever could do enough—for those people. But what we can do is, for the modest support we can give them, be fair dinkum about it and make an allocation for it going forward.

We will not leave them hanging until the budget night, every year on 9 or 10 May, for the Treasurer of the day to say, ‘Tonight I announce a bonus.’ What we will do is ensure that they are no worse off as a result of this budget and they have some guarantees going forward. That is an essential difference between the approach taken by the heartless government which preceded us and the government which was voted in by the Australian people on 24 November. The Leader of the Opposition is a member of the cabinet which approved Work Choices, which did not make an allocation for carers payments and which included the Treasurer who said, ‘Inflation is right where we want it, so we will not take any action on fiscal policy.’ It is the epitome of hypocrisy for him to come in here, blush, bluster and froth at the mouth in his confected way and say, ‘It’s time for the Australian people to be shown some compassion,’ because they are the people who, for 11 years, left vulnerable people hanging. They are the people who for four years put a bonus into the budget but did not allocate it going forward. They are the people who have made cheap political points off the back of hardworking carers, who have used carers as a political hobbyhorse to get themselves out of their current political difficulty, because nobody knows what they stand for anymore. The once great party that once stood for something has been reduced to crocodile tears and frothing at the mouth about this issue when it refused to make any allocation in the budget going forward. It refused to put the money aside; it had other priorities. Vulnerable people in Australia know this government will always have them as their first priority.

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (4.51 pm)—One would have to wonder listening to the previous speaker if we actually are talking about the most vulnerable people in our communities—our senior Australians and our carers. And that is what we have been talking about this afternoon. I would ask the previous member: have you not been reading the press over the last four days? These are the people in Australia who have been threatened by your government. You are the ones who have gone out to the media talking about the bonus. You are the ones who are causing the anxiety and the stress for senior Australians. They are the ones feeling unsure of the future because you as a government will not commit to a bonus that they have received for the past four years, a bonus that has helped make their lives easier and given them a choice about what they do with that bonus. That bonus was paid because of our surplus. We gave back to the people who had given to us. You need to think about that too.

It is my belief that the Rudd government is dudding our carers and our pensioners. It is dudding them. This government is causing so much anxiety amongst our carers and amongst our aged. You will not commit to the bonus. All you will say is that they will not be worse off under a Rudd government under the budget to be brought down in May. But at no time today have we heard how they will not be worse off. You will not spell out and the Prime Minister will not spell out how those people are going to be paid. They do not want to be drip fed. Every caller to my office who has spoken about this wants a
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lump sum payment because it gives them choice about what they do with those extra dollars. It gives them choice about where those dollars are spent. There is a concern that, if it is paid as part of their age pension or as part of their carer payment, it can be taxed. Do we need to impose more taxes on older Australians or carers? Will you guarantee that it will not be taxed if it is paid as part of their age pension or their carer payment? I can tell you that people calling my office—the pension groups, the individuals—feel cheated. They feel let down by this government. They do not believe this government is listening because, if you had listened over the last few days, the Prime Minister would have come into this House today and told those Australians—those most vulnerable Australians—exactly what you are going to do in the budget. Instead, the anxiety and the worry are there, and they are going to be there for two months—two months of worrying about how this is going to be paid.

An opposition member—Despicable.

Mrs MAY—It is despicable. The Prime Minister says they will not be worse off, but that is not guaranteed because he will not outline how those people will not be worse off. Carers and senior Australians need to know where they stand in relation to the carers and the seniors bonus.

Today we have heard a lot about the carers in our communities. The Leader of the Opposition has detailed those personal stories. I ask today in the House a question of the Prime Minister on behalf of Mr Norman, who contacted my office: where are those seven letters? The Prime Minister has lost the seven letters. He has denied that a senior adviser said to Mr Norman that the carers bonus and the seniors bonus had been scrapped. That was a senior adviser advising Mr Norman that that was what was going to happen. We have heard Mr Norman’s story from the Leader of the Opposition today. He contacted my office on a number of occasions to discuss what was going on. This is the human face of what we are talking about today, the human face of the most vulnerable in our communities who are going to be the most affected.

You talk about us not being caring when we were in government, but for four years we paid these bonuses. We were able to pay them because of our good economic management. It was because we had a budget surplus that we were able to give back to those people. They came to expect that every year. They want to see it again this year. The former government left a budget surplus of double digits. Why can’t part of that surplus be given back to those people in our communities? I am sure everyone sitting on the other side of the House in government today has had calls to their office—concerns raised with every member in this House about these bonuses and whether or not they will be paid. I guarantee that every one of you has had a call, and I dare you to come to the dispatch box and say that you have not. These people need to be looked after.

I will say on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition that Mr Norman wrote to the Leader of the Opposition as well. Not only did the Leader of the Opposition visit Mr Norman but he actually answered his correspondence. Mr Norman wrote to the Leader of the Opposition on 13 February, and he received a response on 18 February. Does that say something about how much we care about people like Mr Norman? Our leader even went and visited Mr Norman. Where has your Prime Minister been? He certainly did not answer any of the letters written by Mr Norman outlining what was happening in his life.

The Minister for Ageing, in the newspapers in our local area at the weekend, said
that she would represent local interests. I say to the Minister for Ageing that she is the national Minister for Ageing and she should be representing all older Australians, each and every one of those older Australians who have contacted all of us regarding these payments. It is important that they know that they have a representative sitting in this House who is prepared to go in to bat for them. They deserve nothing less.

Another thing that has also not been said is that this is going to affect veterans in our communities. Do you know that many of our veterans receive these bonus payments? These are the men and women who have served their country, and they have served it graciously, with dignity, under our flag. What are we doing about our veterans? Are we ignoring the contribution they have made to our country, the contribution made by all older Australians in building this wonderful nation of ours? They deserve this bonus. They deserve to know what this government is going to do when the budget is brought down in May. What they do not deserve is two months of uncertainty and anxiety.

The Prime Minister of this country needs to tell older Australians and carers what he intends to do in the May budget. You are the ones that have brought this to the media. Now you have all these older Australians worrying about their future, their bonus and whether or not they will have the flexibility and the choice to spend that very small bonus in the way in which it is most going to benefit them. They need to know it is coming. I call on the Prime Minister and the Minister for Ageing to ensure older Australians, our veterans and our carers that they will be looked after with a one-off bonus in the May budget this year, 2008, so they can make those choices about how that money is spent to the best advantage for themselves.

Mr Shorten (Maribyrnong—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services) (5.01 pm)—On the one hand in this debate we see that Labor is proposing a raft of measures to protect the vulnerable and to ensure that they benefit from a strong economy. On the other hand, I have to say, the previous government disappointed and failed to protect vulnerable Australians during their tenure in government. Appropriately, this debate has been about carers and pensioners. I would like to draw particular attention to people with disabilities, who are at the centre of potentially being the most vulnerable people in our community. If we look at the policies of the Rudd Labor government and contrast them with the scoreboard of the last 11 years, we can only draw the conclusion that if you are vulnerable in this society you are far better off having a Labor government in Canberra. When I try to assess what it means to be vulnerable, I think it is someone who lacks human rights and someone who lacks the opportunity of education and to enjoy wealth, home ownership and access to buildings, jobs and income.

I heard at question time very clearly—as we have heard over the last number of days—our Prime Minister saying that in this budget whatever will be done will be done fairly and that this government appreciates carers and seniors and the invaluable work they do for the community. In fact, we in the Labor Party have a century-long commitment to the fair go, and that certainly will not end on budget night. That is why, when carers and seniors compare their bonus payments this year with what they received last year, they will be no worse off. In addition, the government has increased the utilities allowance to $500 per year and for the first time ever it is extended to recipients of the carers payment.

We also know that carers and seniors need more financial certainty than they have been
receiving in recent years. The bonuses, which the opposition is so loudly shouting about now, we found out about in budget speech after budget speech. They were one-off payments. There was never a guarantee under the old mob—no promise into the future, no commitment and, sadly, no plan. This is the system which we have inherited. This is the system we are working with. Mr Speaker, I can reliably assure you that things will get better.

The idea that Labor lacks compassion is simply laughable. As I have said in this place before, Labor has always been the party which cares about all Australians, which understands the need in our community for support and assistance. The Whitlam government was the first to commit to indexing pensions to cost-of-living increases. It delivered in its first six months the single mothers benefit, the first Commonwealth income support payment to single parents. In the late eighties and the early nineties the reformist Hawke and Keating governments introduced the family assistance package and child support payments, and replaced the unemployment benefit with the Newstart and Jobstart allowances, linking for the first time social security payments with an active non-punitive employment participation scheme. They introduced the sole parent pension, set at the same level as the age pension. They in fact replaced the invalid pension with the disability support pension. Let us not forget that in 1991 it was the superannuation guarantee charge which provided low-income Australian working families with the opportunity and prospect of some retirement income. This is why we go on with this debate: Labor has always been the party which has protected the most vulnerable in our community.

We hear the opposition say that they are now the models—that they are the Mother Thereras and St Bernards of compassion. Where was their compassion in 2003, when they planned to cut 30,000 families off the childcare allowance? What is it about Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, epilepsy and PKU that would require those disabilities to be taken off the list of recognised conditions for the childcare allowance? It was only through the efforts of Labor, carer groups and, no doubt, a few quiet voices of conscience in the now opposition that these savage cuts were reversed.

In looking at my own portfolio area of disabilities and children’s services, I look at the opposition, who had the chance for 11 years to demonstrate their commitment in the disabilities area. I take nothing away from individual members of the opposition, such as the member for McMillan, who has already approached me about issues in disability and government. But, apart from those individual contributions, the scoreboard for the past 11 years has reflected that the most vulnerable in this community, people living with severe and profound disabilities, were missing out. In fact, the number of people pushed onto the disability support pension grew from 500,000 to 720,000. Indeed, this was despite the Howard government’s much vaunted, although significantly punitive, Welfare to Work. All that happened was that people were pushed off the pension, and the endeavours to punish people created fear. It was about money saving. It was never about people with disabilities.

I have had a look at some of the numbers which the OECD have reported about disability in Australia at the coming to power of Labor. The numbers are not pretty and do not reflect well on the treatment of the most vulnerable in this community in the last 11 years. There was a fall in spending on sickness benefits by the previous government. The employment rate of people with disability has been falling. It is under 40 per cent,
which puts us well down the bottom of the charts in the OECD.

Mr Hunt interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—The member for Flinders may not be aware of these numbers, because I assume that he is not saying that they are wrong. Under the previous government, the proportion of people with a disability below 50 per cent of the median income rose, so the relative poverty of people with disabilities increased. The incomes of people with a disability relative to those without a disability fell under the previous government. Why does it take four years for the Building Code of Australia to be reviewed to ensure that access to new premises lines up with the Disability Discrimination Act? Why did we have people acting as a disability discrimination commissioner for 11 years? They are the people who speak up on issues. Why was it that, in Australia, for the last 11 years, it was not viewed as a scandal if you could not go into a shop, if you could not catch an aeroplane, if you could not get a job or if you had half the educational outcomes of people without disabilities? Why were things not done by the previous government to remedy these issues? If you could not access entry to a shop, if you could not get a job, if you suffered relative poverty because of your skin colour or your gender, there would be a hue and cry, but what about someone with a disability—the most vulnerable in society—over whom we are now seeing crocodile tears in respect of the one-off bonus payment issue? Where was the now opposition, the previous government, when it came to championing the rights and equal treatment of people with disabilities? I am hearing a debate about protecting the most vulnerable, yet I look at the second-class treatment that people with disabilities have received and I realise that there has been something terribly unfair happening in Australia.

It was an initiative of the now opposition to set up special trusts. It was not a bad idea, but the problem was that it was executed poorly. Only 22 families in Australia have been able to access the special trust opportunities to secure people’s futures. It was a good idea that was poorly executed, and it will be up to Labor to fix it. We welcome the suggestions of the opposition on how to improve it.

Why was it that, if you worked in what was once known as a sheltered workshop, now known as a business employment service, that the previous government paid you $25 less in mobility allowance? That taxi you get to that work site is no cheaper than the taxi you get when you go to open employment. Why is it that, under the current arrangements, if you are on the disability support pension, as you would have been under the previous government, and you wanted to do work experience, then you had to lose your pension? The opposition, when they were in government, created a culture of fear, so when we hear a debate today about standing up for the carers of people with disabilities, I want to understand where the now opposition was collectively, as opposed to the individual efforts of some in the opposition, on the rights of the disabled.

Mr Hunt—It was the work and support bill, and you know it.

Mr SHORTEN—The member for Flinders realises that the point I am making cannot be debated, because he understands that Australians, by virtue of having a physical impairment, an intellectual disability or a mental illness, have fewer chances of getting a job, of owning a house, of getting an education, of getting access to buildings and of receiving equal treatment. Please spare us the hypocrisy of the debate about the one-off bonuses, when the Prime Minister has made it perfectly clear what will happen.
Peter Martin, the economics editor of the *Canberra Times*, says it more eloquently in his article today than I suspect I can. It is worth reading into the record what he said today. He said:

Carers themselves, while grateful for the Coalition’s last-minute budget-balancing exercises, were never happy about the way in which they were being treated. The head of Carers ACT, Dee McGrath, told The Canberra Times last week that “the problem with the bonus payments was they were nonrecurrent and this was setting up false expectations and that is always a very dangerous thing.”

He goes on:

It is the Coalition that should be condemned for the way in which it treated carers, not the Rudd Government. Had it recompensed them properly, it would have cost it a lot more ... it would have been a permanent part of the budget ...

The Prime Minister and the minister for family and community services made it clear— *(Time expired)*

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP** (Mackellar) *(5.11 pm)*—I trust the parliamentary secret ary opposite will go and give a lecture to his leader, because the Prime Minister’s performance here in the debate on the censure motion this afternoon was an absolute disgrace. He showed absolutely no care or compassion at all. The question was put to him: would he rise to the dispatch box today and say to those carers and the people they care for that their apprehension and their feeling of uncertainty as to whether or not they will be able to cope could be laid to rest. All the Prime Minister had to do was to come to the dispatch box and say that the lump sum payment would continue. That was all he had to do.

I turn to this fascinating use of weasel words. First of all the Prime Minister said, ‘We won’t leave these people in the lurch.’ Really? What does that mean? Secondly, ‘They won’t be one cent disadvantaged.’ Really? That can only be delivered if that lump sum payment is made, because many of the people who receive that bonus payment, which is a tax-free bonus payment will be subject to taxation if it is rolled into a pension-type payment. Every individual circumstance will be different. There is no way in the world that you can make a collectivist guarantee that each individual will not be one cent worse off. The only way that that can be done is to continue the tax-free lump sum payment. The Prime Minister had it within his capability to do that today.

As the shadow minister for veterans’ affairs, let me tell you about the plight of one war widow who receives the carers payment. She is 80. She looks after her mother, who is 105. She keeps her mother out of an institution, out of an aged-care home, by managing the best way she can. At Christmas her refrigerator broke down, so she had to go out and find someone who would give her 12-month terms to pay it off. The mother, who is 105, has a pet. The pet is important to her. The bonus payment would assist with the cost of an operation that that pet requires.

The bonus payment is used for all sorts of things that enable people to have a payment ready and gives them an advantage that they might otherwise be denied. An example is the wives of people who are TPIs. The wives are not in receipt of gold card coverage because they are looking after their husbands who are still covered by the gold card; however, they can put the one-off payment they receive—because they are in receipt of either the carer payment or carer allowance—towards their own private health insurance. People can make individual decisions about how it can best suit them. The lump sum is what comes through as being important. It is preferable to have it as a lump sum rather than dribbled out over several payments—rolled into a pension-like payment. They can then make a payment which is meaningful
for them. It has been factored into their way of life.

The Prime Minister, when he wanted to be elected, said, ‘We will be economic conservatives.’ Every time we made a statement, he said, ‘me too’. The much-vaulted utility allowance, which was talked about today, was our policy. A ‘me too’ meant that the legislation was introduced. This lump sum payment was also a ‘me too’ policy. The Prime Minister said, ‘me too.’ With regard to veterans, we have 33,000 TPIs—totally and permanently disabled people. About one-half of those people will be affected by this policy to get rid of the lump sum payment. When it comes to extremely disabled people, again a large number of people will be affected. When I listened to the Assistant Treasurer try to make an equation between an able-bodied working person and a carer of someone who is totally disabled, I found that comparison obscene in the extreme. In the speech by the parliamentary secretary, he started to ask for compassion. He needs to give that lecture to his own leadership. He certainly needs to instil it in the Assistant Treasurer. These people cannot go on until May with this indecision. (Time expired)

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (5.16 pm)―I want to address what I see as cynicism from the other side of the House. There has been some discussion of the hypocrisy—I think that has been well covered and proven—but I want to comment on the cynicism and what has been happening over the last couple of weeks. This story about bonus payments broke in the media towards the end of last week, and the opposition immediately jumped on it, saying: ‘We’re going to whack the government around the ears for taking $1,600 off people. It is outrageous. How could those people possibly survive, having lost that money?’ When the Prime Minister made it clear that, despite the debate about the nature of the payment within the budget process, he would guarantee that carers and pensioners would not be $1 worse off, what did the opposition do? They panicked: ‘How do we keep this rolling as a political issue? How do we continue to get some political mileage out of this? I know; we’ll make it about the fact that it is a lump sum payment. We’ll say that they can’t do without a lump sum payment. They are not capable of handling any other sort of payment. It has to be a lump sum payment.’ That is what today is about. Today is about a last-ditch political attempt to try to drag out an argument that gives the opposition something to say in this House.

The reality is that, if this one-off lump sum payment is so vitally important—so absolutely critical—to the wellbeing of carers, what did the opposition in government do about it for four years? When they brought it in the first time, one would assume that carers said: ‘Thank you. Finally, a lump sum payment. That is what we’ve always needed,’ and the previous government would have said: ‘That was a great idea. Obviously, it is important to these people. We’ll make it a permanent payment.’ Did they do that in the first year? No. Did they do it in the second year? No. What about the third year or the fourth year? No. Did they ever make it an election promise? If it is so critically important and they were so profoundly concerned about carers, did they make it an election promise? If it is so critically important and they were so profoundly concerned about carers, did they make it an election promise? No. Now the opposition have come in here and are trying to tell us that our commitment that carers will not be one dollar worse off is not good enough. Why is it not good enough? Because it does not suit the opposition’s political advantage. That is the only reason: because the commitment that carers have been given is that they will not be one dollar worse off.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop―Have you talked to any carers?
Ms BIRD—The shadow minister at the table may like to know that I actually have a sister-in-law who is a carer—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Have you asked her?

Ms BIRD—and I have spoken to her.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—And what did she say?

Ms BIRD—Her comment, if you would like to know, is that she would rather have a regular payment than a one-off payment. I am sure there are others who would prefer it the other way. The argument we are having is about the financial wellbeing of carers. Do not get personal by taking cheap shots about whether people personally know about people with disabilities.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—I am sorry; it is relevant.

Ms BIRD—It is not relevant, because you are making a presumption about me that is inaccurate; and you do not want to go down that track because it would be very unfair. Let me also tell you about my experience as a member of the IR task force when we were in opposition. If you want to talk about caring about carers, let’s talk about the woman who appeared before the IR task force who was a secretary in a medical practice. She had always worked 15 hours a week. Why did she work only 15 hours a week? She was a grandmother of a profoundly disabled child and she could only do those hours because she relieved her daughter one day a week to give her daughter some respite from looking after her child. What happened to her? She was offered an AWA. She was offered an AWA that would not give her a guarantee of hours. She had to be available at any time during the five days of the working week to do the 15 hours. So she could no longer give her daughter a guarantee that she could provide her with respite for one day a week. Let’s talk about the reality of understanding the lives of carers and their families and what sort of certainty they need in their lives in order to be able to meet their commitments. The Work Choices legislation—in this woman’s very direct, personal experience—ripped that from underneath her. Because she would not sign that AWA—because she would not say to her daughter, ‘I can’t help you out’—she ended up losing her job. So do not lecture us on the understanding of the dilemmas facing carers and their families in our communities. The reality is: this is simply a desperate attempt by the opposition to drag the last political gasp out of this so that they have something to talk about in this House. The reality for carers is that they have been given a commitment by the Prime Minister that they will not be $1 worse off. At the end of the day, an ongoing, guaranteed income is going to be far more important to carers and families than the one-off payments. (Time expired)

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (5.31 pm)—I would like to be the voice of the carers in my electorate just for this moment and not actually throw bombs across the chamber. I would like to say to the Prime Minister, from Jenny, Tony, Mark, Katie, Toby, Jodie and many other people in my electorate: please understand the issues that carers are facing at this point in time and listen to their concerns. Please understand that not everybody qualifies for a utilities allowance. Please know that the lump sum, as paid by the former government, can be multiplied depending on the number of people in care. So, if you have—as Jenny and Tony have—two profoundly autistic children, you get $1,200 as a carer’s bonus, not a $600 one-off payment. These are the issues that are facing and concerning the people in my electorate.

A utilities allowance, as has been noted by many of the people across my electorate, is a payment that is generally not commensurate with the numbers in care; and we do have
numbers in care. We certainly have Robert and his mother. Robert’s mother cares for two people in her family who have severe intellectual and physical disabilities. Robert has said: ‘My mother and I both voted for the Rudd government in the hope that things would get better in our community. We now feel very uneasy and unsure as to what the future holds with the Rudd government.’ This is not about politics. This is the concern of the people. Hear, understand and respond to the issues that the member for Mackellar has raised. It becomes taxable if you make it part of the payment, so the benefit of that payment is eroded away. A one-off bonus each year is not eroded away. A one-off bonus each year, announced with the budget, has common-sense proportions that do not allow these moneys to be eroded away.

The opposition have clearly articulated the concerns of carers. In response, we hear from the government that it was not in the forward estimates. How many times did we sit in the government benches and hear the opposition carp on about the dental program that the Howard government cut out in 1996 when they came into being? They cut the dental program. And again it is not do as I do; it is do as I say. It is one rule for one and one rule for the other. Now that the former opposition are in government they are saying, ‘Oh, it must be in the forward estimates.’ We remember that that dental program was not in the forward estimates either. It was a one-off program. How many hours did we spend listening to those from the other side of the House commenting ad nauseam whilst we were in government? What happens in the forward estimates is now all so very important. I appeal to the Prime Minister and to the minister on behalf of carers not only in the Riverina but in all electorates—Labor, Liberal and National—right across the spectrum and right across Australia. They are right to have concerns and they are right if the reports that are coming out, saying that it would be in a utilities allowance, are true. Even though the Prime Minister may think that the carers will not be one cent worse off, please look at this carefully; please understand the concerns of the carers and please respond appropriately. This is not a political issue. This is not just political bun fighting by an opposition with a government across the chamber. These are the lives and the concerns of real people who matter. These are the concerns that the carers are raising with us and, if the truth be known, they will also be raising them with members of the government. We sincerely ask that the Prime Minister ensures that he looks at this carefully so as not to disadvantage any further those carers who do a magnificent job on behalf of the people of Australia. If we were to put just 10 per cent of our people with disabilities into care, we would not be able to manage the budget that is responsible for caring for them. So, rather than be playing time across the chamber, I just appeal for common sense to be had.

The SPEAKER—Order! The discussion is now concluded.

COMMITTEES
Membership

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (5.27 pm)—by leave—I move:

That Ms Grierson be discharged from the House Committee, and that Members be appointed as members of certain committees in accordance with the following schedule:

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<th>COMMITTEE</th>
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<td>Mr Laming, Mr Abbott, Dr Stone, Mr Katter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts</td>
<td>Dr Washer, Mr Cobb, Mr Scott, Mr Wood</td>
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<td>Treaties</td>
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As the list is a lengthy one, I do not propose to read it to the House. Details will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

Question agreed to.

THERAPEUTIC GOODS AMENDMENT (POISONS STANDARD) BILL 2008

Report from Main Committee

Bill returned from Main Committee with amendments; certified copy of the bill and schedule of amendments presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Main Committee amendments—

1. Schedule 1, item 3, page 4 (line 9), omit “that Division”, substitute “that Act”.
2. Schedule 1, item 3, page 4 (line 22), omit “that Division”, substitute “that Act”.

CHAMBER
The SPEAKER—The question is that the amendments be agreed to.
Question agreed to.
Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Third Reading
Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Minister for Ageing) (5.28 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

TRADE PRACTICES AMENDMENT (ACCESS DECLARATIONS) BILL 2008
Report from Main Committee
Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.
Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.
Bill agreed to.

Third Reading
Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Minister for Ageing) (5.29 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

APOLOGY TO AUSTRALIA’S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
Report from Main Committee
Order of the day returned from Main Committee; certified copy of the motion presented.
Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the motion be agreed to. I ask all honourable members to signify their approval by rising in their places.
Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

CONDOLENCES
Hon. Kim Edward Beazley AO
Report from Main Committee
Order of the day returned from Main Committee; certified copy of the motion presented.
Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the motion be agreed to. I ask all honourable members to signify their approval by rising in their places.
Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

Mr Peter James Andren
Report from Main Committee
Order of the day returned from Main Committee; certified copy of the motion presented.
Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the motion be agreed to. I ask all honourable members to signify their approval by rising in their places.
Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

Special Forces Sergeant Matthew Locke
Trooper David Pearce
Special Forces Commando Luke Worsley
Report from Main Committee
Order of the day returned from Main Committee; certified copy of the motion presented.
Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the motion be agreed to. I ask all honourable members to signify their approval by rising in their places.
Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

CROSS-BORDER INSOLVENCY BILL 2008

First Reading
Bill received from the Senate, and read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Minister for Ageing) (5.34 pm)—I move:

That order of the day No. 2, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S SPEECH
Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 21 February, on motion by Mr Hale:

That the Address be agreed to.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Page, I remind the House that this is the honourable member’s first speech. I ask the House to extend to her the usual courtesies.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (5.35 pm)—I come to this place as the first female to represent the people of Page, and I come to this place as a fighter, having first fought my way out of the housing commission estate where I grew up. I do not mean the locality, which is still a nice place to live; I mean the thinking that confined and constrained me. We never went to university or did things like that. That was not our world. Although I lacked confidence, I always had a yearning, an intellectual curiosity, that drove me to seek something more. I have achieved some good things—great things, really, for a girl with no education who went up the ladder, so to speak. My instincts and therefore my responses to situations are still very much rooted in the working-class girl from One Mile, Ipswich. I have to say these instincts have served me well.

Ipswich was my stamping ground for the first two decades of my life, and I accept membership of the parliamentary Ipswichians, Shayne.

Mr Neumann interjecting—

Ms SAFFIN—Ipswich formed me, and Lismore, my home for more than 30 years, gave me the substance that makes me an effective representative for the people of Page. So you see, I too can say: ‘Hello. My name is Janelle Saffin. I’m originally from Queensland and I’m here to help.’ And I truly am. It is my mission in life to serve and to serve well. Today in this great institution I pledge to do just that: serve all the people of Page, just as Kevin said he would serve all of the nation in his acceptance speech on election night.

I said I was a fighter. I fought my way into university without the credentials, into jobs without the experience and into politics without the network but with the passion to make the world a better place, to make a difference—and it was very much locally driven—to get women who were victims and survivors of domestic violence and rape access to services not available, to get laws created and laws changed, to get housing for homeless young people not old enough to be eligible for public housing, to get recognition, services and a voice for the mentally ill and for people living with disabilities and to change laws and policies so that they reflected and responded to our entire community.

The first time I went to our then local MP with some other women of action from our local community—and he was someone I respected—it was to ask him if we could get a house on a peppercorn rental for women escaping domestic violence. He said he did not see the need. That motivated me. It got
me going—or, as my mum would say, it got my goat up—and we got the house, and it is still in public use today. We then went to open a bank account, and we were told that we needed some men of means to be our trustees or some such nonsense. We got our bank account open in our own community name. We could not get solicitors to effectively represent women and children, so we set about finding some and educating others, and I became a lawyer myself. I thought: ‘I’ll show them.’ As Edna Ryan used to say, ‘Don’t get mad, get active.’

At the local level, I have fought for and secured many services, many firsts, and I am proud of it. I say this in full recognition that I was never alone and took up many issues collaboratively but always with the determination to get us what we needed and a better deal. I got millions when others could not for the Summerland Way, the regional baseball stadium, the establishment of the North Coast Community Housing Company, the North Coast Breast Screening Program and the Far North Coast Domestic Violence Liaison Committee; policy firsts: internet in schools—I wrote it; community justice centres in our region; regional domestic violence coordinators; and many more. This experience as a community advocate has equipped me well for this job.

I am here to make a difference, to make our patch of Page a better place for all of us lucky enough to live there. As federal MPs, we are charged with local leadership, we are charged to listen and we are charged to be community facilitators. During campaigning, especially when doorknocking in Grafton and Lismore, it was evident to me that people felt abandoned and taken for granted by the coalition government, by National Party representation and by not being listened to on any score. I pledge to listen no matter what, and I have been doing my best to do that since I was elected.

I know my way of working puts a bigger burden on my staff—Carmel, Lee, Paul, Peter, Maryn and Sarah—and for that I say, ‘Sorry, but that’s how it is.’ I am not one to let things sit idle. If I see a problem, I hop to and help fix it. There has been so little listening over the years that people are literally coming out of the woodwork. People expect us to be compassionate, and we are, and they expect us to be good economic managers, and we are. This is a challenge—a challenge we are up to.

I was very motivated to run as a candidate for Page for two compelling reasons. The first was that John Howard’s coalition government had taken Australia to a place I did not like. I was working and living in Timor Leste—or East Timor, as we call it—and coming home to the Northern Rivers every few months. I had the advantage of looking through another lens at my beloved community and homeland and did not like what was happening. Mr Howard played wedge politics on so many issues. His brand of ruling, not leading, encouraged us to give vent to our most unkind view of others. He never managed to lead us and inspire us to be better human beings. I never thought I would see attack dogs and men in black balaclavas on our wharves, locking out workers. I saw it with my own eyes the first night it happened. I was then a member of the Legislative Council in the New South Wales parliament, and we went down to express our solidarity with the workers on the wharves. I was stunned. ‘Children overboard’ was the last straw. This was not the Australia of the fair go.

I marched in Sydney, along with what seemed to be hundreds of thousands of others, against the war in Iraq, along with Judy Reid, a long-time friend of mine from Ballina and previous member of my staff, who is here with me today, and also Cameron Murphy, who is another previous staff
member of mine—he is here as well. Thank you both for being here. I also thank my staff members Lee Duncan and Peter Ellem—they are up in the gallery—and my good friend Susan Conroy. Thank you all for being here.

John Howard dismissed us as a rabble, taking no notice. It was amazing though how many Aussies, those who marched and those with whom I have a beer on Friday night at the local pub, knew that we were going to Iraq on a lie to find WMDs that were non-existent, yet we still went in. Aussies are basically a kind lot and would give a neighbour a helping hand before they would turn them away. John Howard’s coalition led us into a more selfish and aggressive way of doing politics. Every issue became a battleground.

This brings me back to why I stood and why I was singularly determined to win Page. Like other community members, I watched as we got less of the pie than we needed, after being continually told that we were in times of economic prosperity. But, worse than that, our representative was not even discussing the issues with us—not saying, ‘Okay, let us talk about it.’

Before I turn to the attributes of Page—and there are many, primarily the good, down-to-earth people—I want to say thanks to Kevin and to Tony for listening to us in Page regarding our floods in January, the worst in some areas in over 50 years. In Kyogle they are still talking about the first-ever visit by a Prime Minister. We got some extra dollars in Page and so did the people of Richmond.

My friend Harry Woods held Page for Labor from 1990 to 1996. He went on to become the state member for Clarence. Harry now lives in Yamba with his wife, Sandra, and I am pleased to say that he came with me to the declaration of the polls on 17 December last year. I want to place on record my thanks to Harry for his engaged and tireless representation and also for his wonderful sense of humour.

Page comprises over 16,000 square kilometres. It is rural and has a significant coastal community. It stretches from Ballina in the north through Wardell, Broadwater, Woodburn, Evans Head and Iluka to Yamba in the south. These coastal communities are under pressure from development and climate change. I live in Bundjalung country, the original nation of the Northern Rivers, and we have about twice the number of Indigenous people in Page as we do country wide. Our industry base comprises agriculture, beef, dairy, sugar, oilseed, horticulture, aged care, retail sector, hospitality and construction, and 42 per cent of all voters in Page are seniors. We have many sea changers as well, who are all coming to find a more relaxed but stimulating lifestyle.

Page goes from Lismore, my home town, to Casino, Coraki and Kyogle, up to Woodenbong on the Queensland border, back down through Tabulam, Bonalbo, Old Bonalbo, Urbenville and Baryulgil—and what a tragedy has beset the people of that village. James Hardie mined asbestos there, and friends of mine are still pursuing their compensation claims now. Down at the southern end we have the North Coast’s first city, Grafton. We also have Rappville, Mallanganee, Mummulgum, Copmanhurst, Lawrence, Coutts Crossing, Nymboida, Tyingham and Dundurrabin through to Hernani. It is a poor seat. About 13 to 14 per cent of people living in it are at or below the poverty line—and I am not sure what the National Party were doing about that. They have held the seat, in some way or another, for nearly a century. I want to do something about reducing that number and later this year will run a poverty forum, marshalling some of the best and the brightest to help.
I now turn to some of the concerns of young people, particularly those that my son, who is 23, raises with me all the time. He keeps me honest and keeps harping at me about issues of concern—issues, he says, that we do not talk about but that concern many people. I look at their websites and I look at their blogs, so I know some of the things that they are seized with. In general, they are concerned about things like corporate power, particularly that of the chemical industry, with its vast empire stretching out across the world. Most of the chemicals that we find in our food—and there are many—were not made for such use and are not necessary.

Other issues of concern—and they are ones that concern me—include the death penalty. I remain an active campaigner against it, having worked for a long time with the Asia-Pacific anti-death-penalty coalition. I am concerned about child abuse in any form and how to give better protection to children. There is child pornography and the violence that has permeated our daily lives through our films and our television—our media. There are the late hours that pubs and clubs are open—and I am not a wowser—when many of our young people spill out drunk, out of control and have more fights, more violence and more sexual assaults. Another issue of concern is why, in 2008, we do not have paid parental leave. That just seems ridiculous to me, when our economy depends on parents making their contribution to the economy. We do not have childcare rebates for all types of child care; public transport is not available in rural areas; and dental care is not covered by Medicare.

Mr Speaker, our first sitting week was a momentous week for me in two ways. I came to parliament, this great institution, after having won the seat of Page in a fiercely contested election battle, wresting it from the increasingly out-of-touch, lost-touch Liberal and National Party coalition. What a privilege it was to be part of a parliament that said sorry to Indigenous Australians. How humbled I felt to be in the presence of people who had been wronged so cruelly yet found it in their hearts to accept the apology and to forgive.

For me, that first week was momentous for another reason: events in Timor Leste. Mr Speaker, it is known that I lived and worked in Timor Leste from 2004 to 2007 as His Excellency Dr Jose Ramos Horta’s senior political adviser. Jose is a man of peace, a man of vision, a pragmatic man, an international statesman, a diplomat and a leader. I was with him in foreign affairs and cooperation, in defence—I learned a lot about defence; he was the Minister for Defence when he was Prime Minister and then when he became President.

On the first day of parliament I had just arrived and done a brief doorstop, announcing myself, as proud as punch, as Janelle Saffin, member for Page, dah de dah de dah, and was walking down the hallway when I got a call telling me that Jose had been shot and was in a critical condition. Jose is my friend, my colleague—or amigo and kolega, in his language. I was devastated. That week I maintained focus on my duties to the people of Page, feeling delighted but also devastated at the same time. I was with Jose when the crisis broke out in East Timor in 2006 and witnessed his heartbreak and determination to make things work. For me, it was a singular and unique experience, one that was formative, and it made me fearless.

I have to say that Jose inspired me to ‘go for it’ in the election campaign, although he told all publicly—also in the local media—that he hoped I would lose so that I could continue to work as his adviser and for his country. I can see my colleague Gary Gray laughing; he knows him well too. When I worked in Timor Leste, I used to see Gary
quite regularly, so I know he understands just what I am saying. Timor Leste is a country I love with a people that I miss, but it is one that I am happy now to support from within the framework of our government, the Rudd Labor government. I have faith that they will make it, and I am so pleased that Jose will resume his duties as President in the not too distant future. He is healing well and sends his thanks to all of us in this place—and I mean all of us—because he knows that we support him. He is back to SMSing me, so I am getting messages; I know he is healing.

I have faith in people, particularly in the people of Page. They are not demanding more than their fair share. They just want a fair go for their kids and their families, and they want their communities to be safe and sustainable. I have faith in our representatives, our government led by Kevin, and I have faith in politics. I have to say that on our side we are blessed to have such talent on the front bench and on the back benches. So watch out, Justine; there is a lot of talent here. We are very lucky. I also acknowledge my colleague the Hon. Justine Elliot, who represents the electorate of Richmond, which is next door to mine. She is the first female to represent Richmond. Justine goes before me and is someone who also has inspired me.

Mr Speaker, let me recount, in brief, just some of the legacy of the coalition that has impacted on services in Page. Up to $1 billion was taken out of the public health system in New South Wales alone. There was the axing of the Commonwealth dental scheme, causing untold misery for people—some in Page have waited years for treatment and dentures. The coalition also ripped the guts out of public housing—a huge disinvestment.

In coming to the close of my first speech in this place, I will cite the monetary election commitments that I gave, supported of course by the leadership. There was $780 million for Pacific Highway projects from Ballina to Ewingsdale—covering the two electorates there, Page and Richmond—$90 million for the Alstonville Bypass; $23 million for Grafton Base Hospital to upgrade the operating theatre and emergency department and for a GP superclinic with no strings attached; $15 million for radiotherapy services at Lismore Base Hospital to accelerate its opening; $3 million for the Casino community centre; $2 million for the Casino town centre revitalisation; up to $2 million for the Yanba Sport and Recreation Centre; $1 million for the South Grafton town centre; $250,000 in recurrent funding for the Northern Rivers Business Enterprise Centre; and $200,000 for the Lismore homeless shelter. That was the first commitment that we made, showing our concern for homelessness. There was also $125,000 for the upgrade of the Grafton saleyards and about $2 million spread across the region for community projects under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy so that they could have continuity for the next three years. I will be working over the next three years to add many more much-needed projects to my list of priorities.

I would like here to make some acknowledgements. First of all, to the Your Rights at Work campaign, spearheaded by the ACTU and Greg Combet, I say well done. Greg Combet’s uncle lives in my seat. Greg has family in my seat, and his uncle talks to me endlessly about Greg. They are very proud of him. To the local Your Rights at Work campaigns and the two people I most interacted with, Graeme Flanagan and John Hickson: thank you. Thank you to USU, Craig, CFMEU, Bluey, LHMU, Carmel, CPSU, ASU, AWU and AMWU. When I say thank you to the AWU, I thank my now colleague Bill Shorten. He campaigned with me in
Page when he was still the National Secretary of the AWU. They campaigned hard on Work Choices, as did I. It was very unpopular. It was a big issue in the seat of Page. To my Page campaign team, thank you. I thank Elma Stewart, whose blood pressure I caused to rise but who stuck by me through every day of a relentless campaign; Doug Myler; Felix Eldridge; Colin Clague; Kevin Bell; Liz and Richard Adams; Marg Barden; Glenys Ritchie; Jenny Dowell; Rick Smith; Ron Tinker; Wally Mulgrave; Don Blackmore; all the boys from Ballina; Melanie Doriean; Eric Kaiser; Andy Moy; Therese Shier; the Iluka Maclean mob; Mark Kingsley; Ron McGeorge; Cave and Ray Emily; and Megan Lawson, who is in the gallery today and now works in this place. She worked in my Grafton office. There are many, many more, and I know I have forgotten some.

I want to give two personal significant acknowledgements: firstly, to His Excellency President Jose Ramos Horta, whom I have already mentioned; and to Brigadier Mick Slater, who was the force commander of the joint task force in East Timor in 2006. Over a cuppa one day at Camp Phoenix—I used to go there to get better food—I was considering whether to run for parliament and just chatting about it. He said, ‘Janelle, if that’s what you want to do, do it. You only have one life’. He had no interest in the politics, and it was a personal chat, but that one really made me sit up and take notice and I never looked back.

I will finish by also thanking my husband, Dr Jim, as he is known; my son, Ned; my sisters, Denise and Donna; my mother, Oriel; and my dad, Phil, who is over 80 and came out and doorknocked with me. My father was the only person I allowed to have a beer while he was doorknocking. No-one else was allowed near it. I know that they are very proud of me. In closing, I will speak of a remarkable woman I know, one who has great strength of mind and character. It is Burma’s Aung San Suu Kyi, who is still under house arrest. Suu is a beacon of hope for over 50 million people who are held prisoners not by any occupying army but by their own military dictatorship. Suu is a Buddhist and there is an enlightened principle in Buddhism which Suu refers to in her writings. It is instructive for all of us in public life. She says: ‘Just continue to do what you believe is right. Later on the fruits of what you do will become apparent on their own. One’s responsibility is to do the right thing.’

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

Mr IRONS (Swan) (5.57 pm)—As I rise to speak today, I congratulate the Speaker on his election and all the other members on their success in the 2007 election. I would like to thank the people of Swan for putting their trust in me, and in return I pledge to represent you with the same determination as I and my dedicated campaign team of volunteers displayed during the campaign. I will ensure your voices are heard loud and clear on this side of the Nullarbor and, most importantly, in parliament. Last week I was fortunate to hear the former Wallabies Captain John Eales speak, and he reminded me of some good advice I received from friends before I entered the political arena: be yourself and don’t change. I will do that today and give you some of my and my family’s history and the values and beliefs that have helped lead me to be here today.

I would like to put on record that I actually live in the electorate I represent and that I am extremely proud to represent the federal seat of Swan. I acknowledge all the previous members of Swan—particularly the three
previous members: Don Randall, the member for Canning; Kim Beazley, a former Deputy Prime Minister; and Kim Wilkie—and recognise their contributions. I am going to tell you about the electorate of Swan and, with respect to the other new members who have spoken before me, I will state that the electorate of Swan is a great place to live in. The people who live there are fantastic and as diverse as you will find in any electorate in Australia. I will not lay claim to the electorate being heaven or paradise but there is no other electorate that I would rather live in or represent in this place.

The electorate of Swan is east of Perth and takes its name from the famous river which forms one of the electorate’s boundaries. The Swan River was the birthplace of European settlement on the western coast of Australia. It is the scene of much cultural and community activity, the site of festivals and concerts and a meeting place for family and friends, with sailing, skiing, restaurants and barbecue and picnic areas along its foreshore. Swan has many landmarks, institutes and buildings that add to its character and give the residents plenty of opportunities for various education, entertainment, lifestyle and family recreational activities. We have the Belmont and Ascot racecourses; the Perth Zoo; the Burswood Casino; the Curtin University of Technology; the Cannington greyhounds; the Clontarf Aboriginal College; three golf courses; the Perth Football Club; more than 50 primary and secondary schools, including a TAFE college and three Islamic schools; the Perth domestic and international airports; the state tennis centre; and many more clubs and associations that the constituents in my electorate participate in. Another popular waterway, the Canning River, provides a natural border on the southern side of the electorate, which spans over 108 square kilometres and encompasses a variety of industries, small business and professional offices.

Swan has about 21,000 businesses—far more than any other electorate in WA—which include the intrastate and interstate freight and transport terminals, both road and rail. These are vital to the Western Australian economy, as are all businesses in our great state. After being involved in small business for more than 25 years, I understand the commitment and sacrifice that the small business people of Australia make to strive for and achieve their goals in life. They are a major employer in Australia but are treated with indifference by the vast majority of Australians due to the demonising of them by the ALP and union advertising during the election campaign and past decades. No doubt the new government will wind back the clock to make it harder to run your business, with draconian compliance regulations and the reintroduction of unfair dismissal laws, which will act as a disincentive to employ staff. As an ex-small-business man, I know that just means small business men will work harder and longer hours to make sure they do not have to bear the risk of financial ruin under unfair dismissal laws, which is exactly what they will be—unfair. The Liberal Party in opposition will continue to support small business in Australia and fight for them to ensure the government provides the necessary framework for them to prosper and run their businesses with a minimum of interference.

The demographics in Swan are broad, with diverse ethnic groups: Asian, Middle Eastern, European and Indigenous Australians. The issues in Swan are just as broad: crime and antisocial behaviour, road infrastructure problems, health care, mental health care, aged care and protecting our unique waterways and natural environment. These are the major concerns which feature prominently across the electorate. On the
matter of health: the state Labor government is planning to close the Royal Perth Hospital, which services many of my constituents. There is a groundswell of support to prevent this from happening, and I have joined that fight. The airports and access highways could be described as infrastructure bottle-necks due to the lack of commitment from a state Labor government bursting at the seams with budget surpluses. The airports and highways in Swan are the gateways to Perth and Western Australia for both interstate and international visitors and can only be described as inadequate when compared to those of other cities around the world. I urge the government to bring forward the commitment it made to Swan during the election to upgrade the Great Eastern Highway.

During the election campaign, as I have in my life, I met people who inspired me and helped shape and mould my values in life. In the gallery today as my guest is a gentleman I met during the campaign. In 2007, this man had his and his father’s medals stolen from him, and they were not recovered. I approached the Minister for Defence of the day, Brendan Nelson, to replace them. He arranged to have the medals reminted and then personally presented them during a visit to WA. This man’s name is Fred Harper. He lives in the suburb of Redcliffe in Swan, and he is a remarkable man.

Fred was born in South Australia on 4 April 1907. His family moved to WA, and, at the age of seven, he was removed from his family by the state and placed in the Clontarf Boys Home. Fred tells me that he escaped from Clontarf with another 25 boys and, once they had been found, he was placed with the Christian Brothers. Fred served with the ADF during World War II and left Fremantle in 1941 on the *Queen Mary*. Fred was stationed in the Middle East, serving in Palestine and Egypt. He also served in Java and Ceylon. Fred has many stories which I would love to tell the House, but maybe he should put them in a book as he seems to have time on his side. Fred and the men and women of Australia who laid their lives on the line so that all Australians could continue to live the lifestyle and have the freedoms we now enjoy are the true heroes of this nation and must never be forgotten. I honour you, Fred, and it has been a privilege to have been able to bring you to the Australian Parliament House. Please enjoy the rest of your trip and your visit to the War Memorial and museum.

In a similar vein, at the tender age of six months I was removed from my family, placed in a babies’ home and made a ward of the state in Victoria until I reached the age of 18. Nearly 50 years on, it is remarkable to reflect on just how far we have progressed as a nation in our short but proud history and that I can stand here amongst Australia’s leaders as an equal. It has set in concrete my belief that we are the land of a fair go, where we are not afraid to back the underdog with that sense of hope that he or she may achieve something special. I know that not all people who have been through an experience similar to mine and those of the Fred Harpers of this world during their childhood will go on to stand in federal parliament, but these experiences in life should not stop anyone from achieving their goals in a nation such as ours. I hope that our stories can inspire young children going through the same experience now that they can still achieve great things with their lives and that there are plenty of good people out there willing to back them.

My first priority as the member for Swan will be to pursue the Rudd-Gillard government to make good on all the promises it made to the Swan electorate during the recent election campaign. These include upgrading Great Eastern Highway; more than $1 million for crime prevention initiatives in the city of Belmont; the installation of lights at EFTel Oval, home of the mighty Demons,
who won their first premiership in 1907, the year Fred Harper was born; funding for the restoration of the historic Old Mill in South Perth; and a Medicare office in Belmont.

I was born in Melbourne as the sixth child of 10 in the Dix family. As I mentioned previously, my mother and the state had me placed in a babies’ home at the age of six months. Two of my elder siblings were also in foster care and a younger brother was adopted out, who, to this day, I have never met. I did not meet my father until I was 23 years old and some of my siblings until I was 35. I was fortunate enough to be fostered by the Irons family at the age of three. My foster father, David, was a church minister and went on to be a social worker, and my mother, Mary, was also a social worker. Because of their commitment to helping people who were going through tough times, I was given a start that many other children in my situation never had.

I grew up in Box Hill in the federal electorate of Chisholm, then known as Deakin, in what would be described as a middle-class area, with many of its residents working in the manufacturing sector or as tradesmen. There was a perception that bosses, no matter whether they ran small or medium sized businesses, were wealthy and were tight fisted towards their workers. This perception still exists today and is promoted by the ALP and the unions. It was not until I operated my own small business in Perth many years later that I found out just how difficult it was to be the boss. Contrary to what I had always been told, I found that being the boss was not a licence to print money. It was hard work, there were plenty of bills to pay, and every one of your workers’ livelihoods relied on the decisions you made on a daily basis. This was my introduction to Liberal politics—where people are rewarded, not envied or chastised, for their initiative and where enterprise and the rights of individuals are valued and respected, as is the freedom of association.

It probably would not surprise you then that both sets of my parents were Labor supporters. My biological dad was a member of the old painters and dockers union and my uncle, Bob Dix, was actually the secretary of that union for some time. He was believed to be one of the few secretaries of that union who died of natural causes. I am still sure that, even though three of my parents have passed away, they would be extremely proud that their son is now a member of parliament.

After finishing my apprenticeship I left my employer and did various jobs, which included digging sewers, shovelling chook manure out at a farm in Hastings, working a jackhammer at an abattoir in Dandenong and then travelling on the roads for 18 months for the Gas & Fuel Corporation in Victoria. In 1981, I packed my bags and headed to Western Australia to play Australian Rules football for East Perth—a great club steeped in tradition and full of the values and principles that I still carry with me today. While my football career did not end up the way I had imagined, the move to the west has been fantastic. I have enjoyed mentoring and supporting young footballers for the past 10 years in my role as a junior coach at the South Perth Football Club and as the Director for Junior Development at Perth Football Club. It is one way of giving back some of the support I received as a child. I believe sport has an important place in teaching our children the value of teamwork and discipline. With the rising incidence of obesity in our children and throughout the community, I encourage all parents to make sure that their children are active and scoring goals—not just on PlayStation but out on the field of sport as well.

Another epidemic which we must seriously address as the nation’s legislators is the
growing binge-drinking culture which we have inadvertently encouraged over many decades. When the rest of the world labels us as heavy drinkers, we wear it as a badge of honour and brag about how many we had the night before. We have fostered the development of a culture which looks to the weekend as a time to get smashed. It is a culture that we have accepted as a nation. While most of the community has condemned the use of illicit drugs in society, getting blind on the weekend is an accepted part of being Australian. We might be losing the war against illicit drugs, but at least we are trying to mount a fight. We need a sustained assault on the binge-drinking culture. I support the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill, and I urge the government to make responsible drinking part of its education revolution.

A report released by the WA Department of Health last month found that Western Australians were now drinking 30 per cent more than they did 10 years ago. According to that report, 3,975 Western Australians died from alcohol related causes between 1997 and 2005—and that does not include road deaths. One of those people who died during that time was my sister Margaret Dix. My younger sister Margaret came to Western Australia about seven years before her death, and we were able to develop a strong bond as brother and sister, which had not been possible earlier. On 12 August 2004, Margaret was drinking at the Rendezvous Observation City Hotel’s lobby bar, catching up with a friend from Victoria, before she fell to her death from the balcony of the 15th storey of the hotel. Toxicology analysis indicated that Margaret had a blood alcohol level of almost seven times the legal driving limit. The bartender, bar manager and licensee of the hotel were charged with four counts each of supplying alcohol to a drunken person. A magistrate later ruled that they had no case to answer. Unfortunately, Margaret is not the only sister I have lost to an alcohol related incident. My older sister Jennifer was killed in a hit-and-run accident by an alleged drunk-driver in Victoria more than 35 years ago.

I am not a wowser, and I am certainly no saint when it comes to alcohol. I enjoy a few beers on a warm day and a couple of glasses of wine with friends. But I strongly believe that we all have to work together in this parliament, with the states and with the community to make binge drinking un-Australian. Changing the nation’s attitude towards binge drinking cannot be achieved in the short term, but it must begin. It will be a long-term battle that has the potential to change the very nature of our national identity, but it will help save relationships, marriages, jobs, sporting careers and lives. I dedicated my victory in Swan last November to my sister Margaret, and I am committed to making sure that all Australians understand the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption.

Someone else who has given me inspiration since the day he was born is my son, Jarrad. Jarrad was born in 1992 during one of the toughest business periods of my life, coming out of the recession we had to have. He gave me a new purpose in life, and since he came to live with me three years ago we have become great mates in our home in South Perth. At a young age, Jarrad has given me great support during the campaign and has been a constant reality check for me since he came to live with me. Jarrad is in the gallery today. I salute you, Jarrad, and I hope that we have many years of mateship ahead and that you achieve all your dreams in life.

I would also like to thank my mother and family for all the love and support they gave me while I was growing up and for the support they offered me during my run for federal parliament. I have heard family mentioned many times in this House and would
join in the chorus of how important families are to Australia and our way of life.

There are many people who I have to thank for their assistance during the long and arduous election campaign. Some of my campaign team and mates are in the gallery today, and I thank them again for their support and for travelling all the way from WA to be here. I am sure to miss some people, but I will never forget the fantastic and enjoyable ride to achieve the remarkable victory in the 2007 election in Swan. My thanks go to Keith Ellis, a small business man with six kids—Keith turns 66 this month; Travis Burrows, also a small business man; Jim Crone, an Irishman who insisted we use the campaign motto of ‘Refuse to lose’; Gordon Thomson—the boss; Richard Basham; John and Karen McGrath; the Tyler family; Adrian Lawson and my brother Rob Dix; Sandra Brown; Anne Jones; Sue Chown; Dawn Stratton; Helen Leslie; Collette Wiltshire; Paul Everingham; Robyn Nolan; Danielle Blain, the Liberal Party State President; Mark Neeham; Jason Marocchi; Zak Kirkup and all the staff at Menzies House in WA; the local chambers; and the CEO, Charles Bellow.

I thank all the federal ministers, members and senators who visited Swan during the campaign—Senators Eggleston, Cormann and Johnston. I also thank Darryl Lathwell and Lindsay Albonico, a couple of mates of mine who are here today; all my mates from the Floreat Aquatic Recreational Cricket Club; all the members of my golf club who assisted with my campaign; Rob Dunn, who mentored me and gave me an opportunity in the early eighties; and the people in the Swan division of the Liberal Party, who had confidence in me as a candidate. Finally, my thanks go to John Howard, Peter Costello and members of the previous government, who left this country in a better shape than when they inherited it in 1996.

On 13 February this year I was in parliament when the apology was given to Indigenous Australians, and I think it was an important initial step in the process of resolving the real problems Indigenous Australians face today. However, I believe this apology disregarded the good that can come from removing children from abusive situations. Perhaps one day we should apologise to all the young children of Australia who were not saved by being removed from abusive or non-caring parents. I mention the case of the seven-year-old girl Shellay Ward, who died last year after being seriously neglected by her parents, and I call on all communities to make a concerted effort to bring cases like this to the attention of the proper authorities. We should have also thanked and congratulated all foster parents and staff of institutions who have cared for these children during the past century. The efforts and sacrifices they make are underestimated and should be recognised officially. On the matter of compensation, which continues to be debated throughout Australia, I call on the Rudd-Gillard government to establish a compensation fund which all Australians can donate to. This will give the population of Australia the opportunity to show their level of commitment to compensation.

In finishing, I would like to voice my concern about reports that the federal government plans to change the requirements for provisional voters to prove their identity on polling day. Surely a country that sends delegates overseas to observe the fairness of other countries’ elections would not introduce a system where someone could easily vote without proof of identity. Our citizens need proof of identity to get a passport, a motor vehicle licence and many other licences and registrations just to perform normal day-to-day activities. But we have a government that is promoting the idea of ‘Don’t bother to register; just turn up and
vote and, while you’re at it, vote early and vote often.’

I look forward to the next three years in this House with a fantastic opposition team with the sole purpose of gaining back the role of government—not because we were born to it; we are just better at it.

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

Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (6.17 pm)—Political leaders and governments impact the daily lives of the citizens they represent. The good ones provide leadership and vision that can inspire great endeavour and achievement and that can heal historical pain and suffering. Through legislation, they shape the foundations of the country and the society they envision. So the decisions we make in this parliament can improve the lives of every Australian, whether they know it or not. And I can think of no more important or rewarding work than to be part of a government ready to provide that leadership, to be part of a government ready to shape the foundations for a fairer and more prosperous society that ensures that every Australian—no matter their economic, social or cultural background—has the opportunity to participate fully and reach their potential. This is the Labor ideal, and I am proud to be part of a Labor government. I therefore come to this parliament recognising the power that we as a government possess and determined not to waste the opportunity that I have been given to help shape a fairer and more prosperous Australia.

As the member for Leichhardt, I represent a large and diverse electorate, stretching from Saibai Island in the Torres Strait bordering Papua New Guinea, through Cape York Peninsula to and including the great city of Cairns. Leichhardt, more than any other seat in our federation, is a microcosm of Australia. It contains remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, small rural towns built on mining and agriculture, and popular tourist destinations like Cairns and Port Douglas.

Cairns is a rapidly growing regional city, with sprawling outer suburbs and inner city communities where old Queenslanders are making way for new unit developments. The population is expected to grow from 125,000 to 180,000 over the next 10 years. We have mortgage-belt aspirational, blue-collar battlers, sea changers, tree changers, farmers, graziers, miners, Islanders, Aboriginals and, of course, strong migrant communities. The economy founded on agriculture and mining continues to diversify, with tourism, construction, marine, aviation, defence, film and education playing important roles in our developing regional economy.

It is no wonder that the many challenges confronting Australia in the 21st century are being experienced by communities in my electorate of Leichhardt. Businesses are crying out for skilled labour, and there is an urgent need for investment in roads and community infrastructure like sporting facilities and childcare centres. Our major hospital, the Cairns Base, experiences chronic bed shortages, and patients have to travel away to receive many specialist services, including oncology and cardiac procedures. Working families are struggling under rising interest rates, petrol and grocery prices. Many young people are, for the first time, starting to question whether they will ever be able to afford to buy their own home, while many Indigenous people are welfare dependent, have limited opportunities for full-time employment and suffer poor health and educational outcomes. Climate change is also placing at risk our World Heritage Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics rainforest, our agricultural
industries and low-lying coastal communities.

These are major challenges requiring long-term planning and investment, while for working families they are practical problems they face every day. I am proud to be part of a government that brings new leadership—that understands and responds to everyday problems but remains focused on ideas to build a modern Australia equipped for the 21st century. I am working hard to lend a helping hand on the everyday problems being faced by my constituents, while building a long-term plan to tackle the challenges facing my communities. I am proud of the many local commitments I secured during the recent election campaign, including increased road funding for the Bruce Highway and Peninsula Development Road, and new health services through a GP superclinic, an MRI for Cairns Base Hospital and funding to improve oncology services.

In the tropical north our natural assets, our close proximity to Asia and the Pacific region and our tropical expertise provide us with unique opportunities to grow and strengthen our local economy. To take advantage of these opportunities and to prosper into the future Australia must remain a technologically advanced country. That is why the Rudd Labor government is investing in nation-building infrastructure and an education revolution. Our high-speed fibre-to-the-node communications network will go beyond the capital cities and will connect our rural and regional communities to the global economy. If we unlock the creative potential of our population through education and training and have world-class infrastructure then we will be able to compete and do business anywhere in the world.

Our human creativity and access to world-class infrastructure is also key to our fight against climate change. Leichhardt is home to some of the world’s great natural wonders in the Great Barrier Reef and Daintree rainforest, which are both at risk from climate change. Island communities in the Torres Strait like Saibai and Boigu are also under threat from rising sea levels. The problem of climate change has arisen because of a failure of our market-based economy to cost in pollution in the form of greenhouse gas emissions. This classic example of market failure has produced climate change that now poses a real threat to our environment, our local economy and our way of life. This problem requires practical local action and a global solution. An enormous challenge for our government will be how we intervene in the market to ensure that the real cost of greenhouse gas emissions is reflected in the market for fossil fuels. Getting this right will be critical not only to tackling climate change but to ensuring that our quality of life does not decline as we develop and adopt new renewable fuels and technologies to replace old ones.

The market-based economy that, although not perfect, has allowed for the creation of so much of our wealth is also under threat from uncertainty in financial markets and the increasing power of global corporations. The uncertainty in financial markets generated through the United States subprime mortgage crisis is a factor in Australia’s rising interest rates. Financial markets have failed halfway around the world, yet the impacts are being felt by families with mortgages in Leichhardt and all across Australia.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, in a report into petrol prices released in December last year, found no evidence of price fixing by major oil companies but found that they were operating in a comfortable oligopoly. Labor has since announced a petrol commissioner to monitor prices and improve transparency in the fuel industry. Legislation to protect con-
sumers from monopolistic market power and unethical behaviour in the marketplace is critical to our long-term economic and social prosperity. Climate change, the subprime mortgage crisis and the domination of large corporations in the supply chain for basic goods and services like food and fuel underline the important role that governments must play in regulating markets so they create prosperity not only today but into the future for the broader community. Increasingly, though, regulating these markets requires agreements that cross national borders. We need leadership and a new effort to develop global solutions to the problem of market failure. Australia is well placed to play a leadership role in developing these solutions. To do this we must participate fully in the global community, and that is why it was so important for Australia to have signed the Kyoto protocol and joined the global effort to tackle climate change.

Critical to our long-term future is also our agenda for reform through the Council of Australian Governments. The fact that the federal and every state government is Labor provides us with a unique opportunity to put aside the blame game, which we must not squander. In a report for the Business Council of Australia, Access Economics estimated that cost shifting, duplication and other inefficiencies in Commonwealth-state funding arrangements cost some $9 billion per year. Of this, $5 billion is related to spending inefficiencies, including around $1 billion in health related inefficiencies.

In areas like health, where there will always be more demand than funding, it is imperative that we make the best use of available resources. When we squander precious resources we make those who may be waiting for treatment suffer longer and we have fewer resources available to take much-needed action to prevent people getting sick. New medical technologies have improved the quality of life of many people suffering debilitating illnesses and ensured that we all live longer and enjoy a better quality of life. The spiralling cost of these technologies, however, creates huge challenges for governments who want to ensure that it is not only the better off within the community who have access to these new treatments. Preventable diseases like diabetes and heart disease that develop over a person’s lifetime are also increasingly threatening the sustainability of our public healthcare system. Reform is required to reduce waste and duplication and improve service delivery across government. This is not only an economic but a moral imperative in areas like health and Indigenous affairs.

Leichhardt is home to wonderful Indigenous cultures and the historic Mabo and Wik native title decisions. I would like to pay a special tribute to the numerous Indigenous traditional owners and elders from my electorate who have fought to maintain not only their culture and rights but those of other Indigenous Australians. In Leichhardt, like in other parts of Australia, Indigenous people statistically have poorer health and lower levels of education and are more likely to be on welfare or in jail than non-Indigenous Australians. It is no wonder that Indigenous life expectancy is 17 years less. We need practical action by government in partnership with Indigenous communities to close this gap. We need an evidence based approach that holds people accountable and delivers action and real improvements in health and education and creates economic opportunities while tackling the debilitating impacts of welfare dependency and substance abuse. We also need leadership that inspires and heals, and I am proud to be part of a government that has shown that leadership by apologising to the stolen generations as its first order of business during the opening of this parliament. It is this combination of leadership
that touches a deep emotional chord and up-
lifts the human spirit and that, when com-
bined with real and substantial practical ac-
tion, starts us down the road to closing the
gap in life expectancy between Indigenous
and non-Indigenous Australians. As Paul
Keating put it in his famous Redfern speech,
how we respond to Indigenous Australia:

... is a fundamental test of our social goals and
our national will; our ability to say to ourselves
and the rest of the world that Australia is a first
rate social democracy, that we are what we should
be ... the land of the fair go and the better chance.

I believe Australians believe in equality of
opportunity, enshrined in what we term the
‘fair go’. We believe in a fair go that embod-
ies rights and responsibilities. Australians
expect everyone to get a fair go when it
comes to the basics, including health, educa-
tion and a job, but we also expect everyone
to have a go and contribute depending on
their ability and circumstances. We are prac-
tical people, common-sense people, who
look for straight answers to the challenges
we face in everyday life. ‘Does it work?’ and
‘Is it fair?’ are simple but powerful values
that Australians understand and that I learnt
growing up.

I was born the third of four children. My
parents, John and Joan Turnour, who are in
the gallery today, grew small crops and ran
cattle at Coomalie Creek, near Batchelor, 56
miles south of Darwin, in the Northern Terri-
tory during the 1950s and sixties. They es-
lished the block from scratch, building
their house from home-made bricks, and ex-
perienced the hardships of bush life. My par-
tents would make a career of pioneering, set-
ting up properties firstly in Australia and
then overseas in Indonesia and the Philip-
pines. Dad is a do-it-yourself man who can
fix pretty much anything with whatever is at
hand; even the kitchen cupboards were fas-
tened to the wall in one of our homes with
eight-gauge wire. My Mum is an only child
who came to Australia as a ten-pound Pom in
1952, aged 21. She never seems fazed by
anything and has always been active in the
local community, whether it is at the Country
Women’s Association, the parents and
friends association or the local church. I
proudly carry her maiden name, Pearce, as
my middle name.

My parents were determined that all of us
kids would get a good education. I boarded
at Brisbane Grammar School and subse-
quently went to the University of Queens-
land, where I graduated with degrees in ag-
riculture and, later, economics. So I grew up
with strong role models, surrounded by dif-
ferent cultures, learning to use what re-
sources I had to find practical solutions to
the challenges of everyday life. I was taught
to treat people fairly, even if the world is not
always fair. So thank you, Mum and Dad and
my sisters, Jennifer and Caroline, who are in
the gallery today, and my brother, Matthew,
for your love and support and the lessons
learnt.

The support of my family, my education
and the practical skills I learnt growing up
have held me in good stead throughout my
working life. For almost 20 years I built a
career working with farmers and graziers for
the Department of Primary Industries and as
an agricultural consultant in Australia and
overseas. Most recently I managed Operation
Farm Clear, a large project that employed
more than 200 people and assisted more than
1,000 farmers to recover following the dev-
astation of Severe Tropical Cyclone Larry.
Politics, though, has always interested me. At
home we always talked about politics and I
was at university at the end of the Bjelke-
Petersen era and experienced the great mood
for change that elected the Goss Labor gov-
ernment in Queensland.

My younger sister, Caroline Turnour, has
had the greatest influence over my political
career. She told me to stop whingeing about John Howard back in 1998 and join the Labor Party. In 2001 she suggested I contact Senator Jan McLucas, who is in the chamber today, and work for a politician and see what it was really like. I was so glad my sister was there last year when I finally won after the disappointment of the 2004 campaign, so thank you, Caroline, for always being there and for your advice and support.

I want to pay tribute to my wife, Tiffany, who is in the gallery today. Politics is tough on families, but she knows I love this job and how hard we have both worked to get here. I thank you, Tiffany, for the love and support you have given me and for the sacrifices you have made and the many more ahead. To my beautiful daughter, Zoe Joan: the size of my electorate and its distance from Canberra mean that I am going to miss some of your growing up. I am going to work hard not to miss too much, and I hope that you appreciate and enjoy some of the unique experiences you will have as the daughter of a parliamentarian.

In Leichhardt we achieved a massive swing approaching 15 per cent, and I want to thank my campaign and the Your Rights at Work campaign for the effort they put in. The timing was right and the national swing was on, but you do not achieve 15 per cent without a great local campaign. I was endorsed in April 2006 and we ran a mini-campaign later that year, thanks to the efforts of my campaign director, Mike Bailey, and Toni Fulton and the financial backing of the Cairns branch. This campaign leveraged off the national Your Rights at Work campaign and the local Where’s Warren? campaign, driven by Stuart Trail and the Electrical Trades Union. Stuart Trail would go on to become the ACTU Your Rights at Work co-ordinator in Leichhardt, and there is no doubt that the community activism the entire union movement created on the ground in Leichhardt galvanised opposition to the Work Choices laws and drew people back to the Labor Party. Thank you, Stuart Trail and Kevin O’Sullivan, for leading the campaign and all the unionists who worked so hard to get rid of the Howard government. We could not have done it without you.

Leichhardt is an electorate of more than 150,000 square kilometres with diverse communities and it requires great logistical planning to run a good campaign. Lesley Clark, the former member for Barron River, came on board to coordinate the overall campaign in the last few months, enabling me to focus fully on my job as the candidate. Her knowledge and experience of marginal seat campaigning is only exceeded by her generosity of spirit when it comes to supporting the Labor Party. I could not have had anyone better running the local Labor campaign. She and Mike Bailey were ably supported by so many fantastic people, but I need to name a few who have supported me over many years or have given up so much of their time during the recent campaign. Thank you, Hazel Lees, for so professionally managing the finances. Thank you, Cathy Lovern, my campaign director from 2004, who I have so often turned to and who has never let me down. Thank you go to Jan Lahney, who is also in the gallery today, John Pratt, John Tuite, Sue Tom, John Thompson, Dorothy Grauer, Cam Muir, Jackie Clarkson, Alison Alloway, Andrew Lucas, Les Francis and all the others who have worked so hard on the campaign. A thank you goes to Allen Ringland, who ran the best corflute campaign ever. John Adams did a great job organising the Cape and Torres Strait while Martin Hurst similarly did a great job organising the polling booths.

I want to pay tribute to my Senate colleague Jan McLucas, who is in the chamber today, for her support over many years. I learnt a great deal about politics while work-
ing for Jan—so thank you very much. I also want to thank my Senate colleague Claire Moore for her support during the recent campaign. State members Jason O’Brien, Steven Wettenhall, Warren Pitt and Desley Boyle have all supported me wherever they could. I look forward to working with them to improve the lives of the communities we represent. I also want to thank the Queensland and national ALP campaigns, who so ably supported our local effort. Finally I want to pay tribute to the candidates and members who went before me. To Chris Lewis and Matt Trezise, who ran for Labor in 1998 and 2001: the time just wasn’t right. To John Gayler, Peter Dodd and Warren Entsch: I hope you are enjoying your retirement from parliament and thank you, John, for your support and advice.

I hope to have a long career in this place achieving good things for my communities and my country. Everything we achieve in life we achieve through the support of others, and that is particularly the case when it comes to politics. I am so lucky to have had a supportive family growing up and now such a wonderful partner in Tiffany. I have great staff and a strong base of support in Leichhardt and I am now looking forward to working with members of this House and of the Senate and their staff over the years ahead because political leaders and governments really can make a difference!

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (6.37 pm)—Before I begin, may I once again congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the role of Speaker. I rise today to join the debate on the address in reply to the speech given by His Excellency the Governor-General. The electorate of Hume is continually changing. Sometimes this is due to the regular Redistributions that require the boundaries to move and, therefore, various towns and villages and their inhabitants to be omitted or included. The demographics of Hume also continue to change with the movement of, first, young people and, then, other job seekers into larger urbanised areas. This affects the emphasis to be placed on different types of services and infrastructure. Then there is the changing nature of business. To be viable, rural properties have had to grow in size and diversify their earnings streams to minimise risk and improve the capital-to-earnings ratios. These are terms that would not even have been used 20 or 50 years ago. Back then, the value of the dollar—or the pound—would have been measured in terms of what it could buy at your local shop. Now, any farmer can tell you the value of an Australian dollar in terms of international exchange rates. Farms have become highly effective international agribusinesses.

One of the things that have not changed is that we all still talk about the weather and measure the amount of rain that falls on our properties. When much of your livelihood and quality of life depends on the weather, despite the best laid plans it can become something of an obsession. This is especially so in Australia, where the vagaries of our weather are so well known and recorded in terms of human suffering, depression, poetry and folklore.

Another thing that has not changed is the tremendous spirit of the people who live in Hume. Take, for example, Scott and Belinda Medway, a farming couple who one day decided to meet the drought head-on and take further financial risk by gambling on their confidence in their ability as excellent businesspeople. They decided to do something positive rather than allow the drought conditions to slowly erode their confidence in being able to survive another bad season. A victim mentality was definitely not part of their survival kit. They opened a cafe restaurant, aptly named the Merino Cafe and Country Bakehouse, in their village of Gun-
ning. Through determination and sheer hard work, the Medways quickly established a popular venue in a historical building in the main street. Their enthusiasm has culminated in the business expanding to include a takeaway outlet in the Old Hume Cafe just down the road and the employment of farming women who also have been hit hard by the effects of the drought. The business sources 98 per cent of all the food and products it uses from local people and outlets, thereby generating income for others in the village and the district. This is a classic example of rural people getting out there and helping themselves and others.

In the process, the Medways are putting the village of Gunning back on the map by attracting visitors who have heard on the bush telegraph about these gutsy rural Aussies who are determined to be successful in what has been a difficult period in their lives. The spirit shown by this couple, who now employ over 20 other local people, augurs well for the future—and they are not the only ones. This is why when I hear people from urban landscapes talking in derogatory terms about the government’s assistance for farmers I wonder just how well they would travel in the same circumstances. If you are on a salary or wages, do you run low as your weekly or fortnightly payday approaches? Just imagine getting paid twice a year. How well could you manage your money? What if, purely because of the weather, the paymaster does not pay you for three months? Could you continue your quality of life? What if the paymaster did not pay you for a year? Forget quality of life—would you even survive? Try no pay for four years!

At the same time, as highlighted by my able colleague the member for Farrer, input costs are rising faster than CPI. Today it costs about $1,000 per acre to sow a crop. For a smallish farm of 200 arable acres, it would cost $200,000. I wonder how many people could find that amount of money three years in a row and watch the crop not even sprout or, worse, sprout and then die before maturity. Yes, rural people have suffered through this long drought but, as demonstrated by the Medways’ positive actions, they are resilient, resourceful people who manage their affairs carefully and efficiently. They are the progenitors of the self-help attitude in Australia, and what they do not need is a Labor government that is determined to cut rural and regional programs. What the ALP must realise is that these are people who will look after themselves as soon as circumstances allow. In the meantime, any resource that is provided to them will be very effectively managed, giving excellent value for each and every dollar of assistance provided. So there is no excuse for reducing the programs that assist rural people in times of difficulty.

These programs of assistance provide a form of job security for farmers, dependent businesses and their employees. They help prevent working families and young workers from leaving for the big smoke because things are becoming just too hard. Goulburn, in the electorate of Hume, one of the larger cities in New South Wales, has experienced an acute water shortage during the prolonged drought, so our community are fully aware of the drought’s impact. In fact, they have experienced the full measure of it. Rural people just adapt to the pressures of water rationing in drought periods, to the extent that they not only understand what a precious resource water is but also appreciate what needs to be done to ensure their limited water supply is used only for life’s bare essentials.

My constituents cut their daily average consumption of water by as much as 60 per cent per household. This level of rigour is commonplace for country people, who willingly step up to the plate when asked to cut
back on their water usage. Similar sacrifices are also undertaken by all businesses, including pubs and clubs. So, at least, the climate of self-help in the country is predictable: it does not change.

I hope that this Labor government does not cut the programs that assist rural and regional people through the hard times. However, so far the signs are not good. The Labor government has delayed funding of $65 million needed for critical rail maintenance, demolishing its claims of concern about infrastructure bottlenecks fuelling inflation and damaging our transport efficiency. It seems that working rail lines throughout New South Wales and Victoria will now not be upgraded in 2008 and 2009, as we the coalition in government had planned and fully funded. The Minister for Finance and Deregulation claimed that the funding pushed back from this year and from 2008-09 until 2009-10 related only to the inland rail proposal. This claim was repeated by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government in parliament. However, as pointed out by my colleague the shadow minister for infrastructure, transport, regional development and local government, Treasury papers revealed that the $65 million was to be used by the Australian Rail Track Corporation for maintenance and upgrading of a number of existing rail lines which could contribute to a future inland rail corridor. In other words, this Labor government has slashed funding for rail lines which are already operating and allowing farm and mine products to move up and down the eastern states.

At a time when we are emerging from drought in many places, farmers will want to move more food and fibre to market, not less. Constricting trade will drive up prices for consumers and drive up inflation and make us less competitive internationally. We hope Labor realises the mistake it has made here and reinstates the $65 million immediately. Otherwise, this government will stand condemned for letting rail lines run down and breaking election promises about fixing infrastructure bottlenecks.

Then there is Labor’s decision to cut crucial education and training programs for rural Australians, which will worsen the nation’s skills shortages. The Prime Minister apparently believes that skills and staff shortages start and finish in the inner suburbs. Labor plans to cut $98 million from four key training and education programs for rural and regional workers.

The coalition left the Labor government with record workforce participation and historically very low unemployment. This has meant that local communities all over Australia have struggled at times to find the right people to fit into the right jobs. With many communities emerging from a cruel drought and needing skilled workers, now is the wrong time to be cutting programs that provide skills to tens of thousands of rural and regional workers and making it harder for apprentices to survive financially.

Labor has announced four major cuts to education and training that directly affect primary producers and people living in rural and regional areas: FarmBis, the Advancing Agricultural Industries Program, apprenticeship incentives for agriculture and horticulture, and the living away from home allowance for school based apprentices. It is hard to understand why these programs, which have already assisted more than 165,000 farmers as well as fishers, land managers, apprentices, women, young people, Indigenous Australians and small businesses, should face the chop. I chaired the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in the last parliament. There are members in this chamber today who travelled with me throughout
Australia taking evidence about skills shortages. We—including you, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams—saw the positive outcomes of commitment by rural Australians to these programs. It is shameful and disgraceful that a Labor government has removed funding, which will see these wonderful programs disappear.

An estimated 70,000 workers left country areas during the drought. Many will return and it would help if they came back with better skills and prospects. With the Prime Minister and Treasurer talking about how important it is to tackle skills shortages, Labor’s actions will speak far louder than its words.

One action that the government can take is the duplication of the Barton Highway and the construction of the Murrumbateman bypass. This is a very important piece of infrastructure not just in my electorate of Hume but also in the Labor electorates of Fraser, Canberra and Eden-Monaro. Every year, thousands of tourists drive down the Barton Highway to Canberra, to the coast and to the Snowy Mountains. Our constituents benefit from the millions of dollars they bring to businesses in our respective electorates. I understand that no decision has been made yet. It would be remiss of me if I did not say that the commitment by some members of the former government, particularly ministers for transport, to the priority of people rather than to safety left a lot to be desired. I have said it publicly before and I will say it now: I saw questionable decisions, particularly with regard to the Barton Highway, made on the basis of popularity in marginal seats at the expense of safety in places like the Hume electorate. Prior to the 2007 election, following my criticism of this, finally common sense prevailed. Under the AusLink 2 program, $264 million was finally promised for these works between the 2009-10 and 2013-14 financial years. This promise has not yet been matched by Labor.

In 2006, $20 million was committed for the project, with $3 million to be spent in 2007 for the relevant land purchases and the remaining $17 million to be spent on infrastructure and preconstruction planning during 2008 and 2009. As I understand it, that money is still there and that process is still going on. I hope that is right. I will certainly be talking to the new minister for infrastructure about that particular project to confirm that is still the case.

There was a lot of hype made by the Labor Party candidate who ran against me in the electorate of Hume. Thankfully, I and my constituents sent him the way that I have sent a number of Labor candidates over the years. It was interesting that he made a lot of criticisms of the lack of funding for this particular highway in the past, and it will be interesting to see whether the Labor Party matches the rhetoric of its candidate and makes the funding available for this much-needed project. To date, I also have heard nothing of the 20 per cent funding to be provided by the New South Wales Labor Party government towards this project. As many parliamentarians and their staff would know because they travel the road between Yass and Canberra, the Barton Highway has a long history of serious and fatal accidents. While not all accidents are actually caused by the road, we should do everything we can to reduce the potential for serious injury and damage when accidents do occur. For the safety of our community, it is imperative that this road be upgraded—and soon.

As one of the few parliamentarians in the coalition who has experienced time in opposition, I am here to say that I will be working with the government to deliver programs that make good sense to the people of Australia, especially the constituents of Hume. I respect
the right of an elected government and its ministers to deliver to the Australian people the governance that it said it would deliver. However, it has to respect the fact that I am a member of the coalition and I will vigorously and rigorously pursue it out in the public arena if for purely political reasons it deprives my constituents of their rights as Australians to taxpayer funds—funds that are needed for projects that are essential to the ongoing viability of rural communities, particularly those projects that centre around infrastructure. The current government is talking a lot about this matter but has not yet demonstrated to the community at large that it is going to actually deliver positive infrastructure outcomes to the rural and regional areas of this great country of ours. As I said, I will be watching the government to ensure that it does what needs to be done without fear or favour. I thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to make a contribution on this address-in-reply motion.

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

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (6.55 pm)—Thank you, Mr Speaker, and may I begin by adding my congratulations and good wishes to you on your election as Speaker of the House. I begin my first address in this place by thanking Matilda House and the Ngunawal people for their very gracious welcome to Canberra on the opening day of parliament. I congratulate other members of the House on their election or re-election last November, and I compliment the class of 2007 on the very impressive first speeches that have been made so far. For new members there is a lot to learn in this place, and I also thank the Parliament House staff, the officeholders and my parliamentary colleagues for all their assistance as I settle in. I also thank the people who have travelled from interstate to come along and hear me as I present my first address in this place. I particularly acknowledge Tony Catanzariti MLC from New South Wales.

I speak in support of the motion moved by the member for Solomon in response to the address to parliament by His Excellency the Governor-General. His Excellency’s address outlined the Rudd government’s agenda for the 42nd Parliament. It is an agenda which Labor took to the Australian people last year and which was resoundingly endorsed on 24 November. It is an agenda which responds to Australia’s needs of today, which responds to the challenges of the 21st century, which restores international respect for Australia, which restores fairness and decency in our society and which treats all people as equals.

To be a new member of a new government with a new agenda for Australia gives me cause for much optimism. That optimism was certainly justified when, on the second day of this parliament, the parliament said sorry to the stolen generations of Indigenous Australians. To be here as a government member on such a historic occasion was both an inspirational beginning to my time here and a matter of personal relevance. Shortly after Sir Ronald Wilson presented the Bringing them home report to the government, I asked him to address a public forum in Salisbury. I can vividly recall him emotionally recounting some of the heart-wrenching stories that were conveyed to him in the course of his inquiry. I have also, on other occasions, discussed with Elliott Johnston his earlier report on Aboriginal deaths in custody and I count as friends many of the Kaurna people of the Adelaide Plains, some of whom came to Canberra to hear the Prime Minister say sorry.

Since Federation, the national parliament has shaped our nation. It is where our civic
leaders have met to discuss and debate the national and international affairs of our nation. It is where elected members have brought the grievances, the aspirations and the expectations of the Australian people. And it is where our future will be forged. Those of us elected to this place bring with us the hopes of so many Australians. We bring with us the hopes of the most vulnerable, the most disadvantaged and the most in need. We bring with us the hopes of those who, for reasons beyond their control, do not have the ability to stand up for themselves and whose only influence is their right to vote—and sometimes they do not even have that—and whose only hope is that they will be heard by the people they elect every three years.

I am the 1059th person and the 95th South Australian to be elected to this place. I am most grateful to the people of Makin for placing their faith in me and for giving me the opportunity to represent them. Over the years I have met with literally thousands of people from the Makin electorate and I value the friendships that I have formed with so many of them. What I value just as much, however, are the efforts so many people in Makin make every day to help others or manage our environment through their voluntary work with organisations such as the RSL; the National Servicemen’s Association; school councils; Lions, Rotary and Zonta clubs; sports clubs; Meals on Wheels; Trees for Life; Friends of Dry Creek Trail and Friends of Cobbler Creek; and so many other local community groups or through simply being a grandparent or a friend. These people do what they do because they care.

The seat of Makin takes in many of the northern and north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide. The seat was created in 1984 and was named after Norman Makin, a former distinguished member of this House. From 1984 until 1996 the seat was held by Peter Duncan and from 1996 until last year by Trish Draper. I acknowledge the contribution they both made in public life. The people of Makin elected me to this place and they will determine how long I remain here. The issues I campaigned on in the 2007 election I intend to now pursue as their member of parliament.

As I listened to the first speeches of others, the words ‘privilege’ and ‘honour’ were used often. Indeed, it is a privilege and an honour to be elected to this place. Regrettably, the privilege and the honour are not matched by the esteem in which politicians are held by the wider populace—and perhaps for good reason. Politicians have not always covered themselves in glory, and parliamentary processes have increasingly come under question. In particular, over the last decade the decrease in transparency and accountability of government, the erosion of human rights, the manipulation of electoral laws, the abuse of public office, the process of appointment of people to high public office and the behaviour of politicians in this place have all contributed to the cynicism and mistrust that people have of politicians and governments. The words ‘rights’, ‘respect’, ‘liberties’ and ‘democracy’ underpin the oath of allegiance that new citizens swear on becoming Australia’s citizens. There should be no greater example of upholding those values than by the Australian parliament. Democracy is fundamental to the Australian way of life. Democracy, however, is only as good as the level of engagement of the people it serves, and people will only engage in the political process if they have confidence in that process. That is why it is so important to restore the faith of Australians in this parliament and why I support the accountability and transparency measures already announced by the Prime Minister. On the question of rights, I have for some time supported and publicly spoken about an Australian bill
of rights, and I was encouraged to hear the
member for Fremantle and the member for
Blair express the same view in their first
speeches.

It is expected that your first speech will
define who you are, what you value and what
your agenda might be. I cannot do all of that
in 20 minutes but I will provide some an-
swers to those questions. Firstly, I am a
Christian who respects the views of others. I
was raised in Pooraka, a working-class sub-
urb, and that is where I still live. I was
drafted into the ALP in the late 1960s by Reg
Groth, the then member for the state parlia-
ment seat of Salisbury. Reg Groth and his
personal assistant, Lynn Arnold, encouraged
me to stand for Salisbury council when a
casual vacancy arose in 1977. Lynn Arnold
was at the time a Salisbury council member.
He went on to be Premier of South Australia,
and I learnt a lot from him. I was elected
and, whilst never intending to, remained on
the council for 30 years, serving as mayor for
the last 10 years.

I believe that my time in local government
has prepared me well for my time in this
place. As Mayor of Salisbury, I saw firsthand
families struggling to make ends meet; old
Australians, particularly single pensioners,
living a life that should shame us all; Indige-
nous people living a life that none of us
would want for ourselves; defence forces
veterans neglected as they try to cope with
the horrors of war that they live with every
day of their lives; people with disabilities or
health issues struggling through life, when
just a little more help could make so much
difference to their lives and those of their
carers; and the grief in so many families
caused by drug abuse or gambling addiction.
For these people and so many others, life is a
constant struggle. I know that there are no
simple solutions to their needs but I do not
accept that we could not do more—yet we
could find $3 billion for an unnecessary war
in Iraq.

As Mayor of Salisbury I also saw the best
of Australian life. I saw the new arrivals
from all over the world—from the UK, from
South America, from Europe, from Africa,
from Asia and from the Middle East—settle
into their new land and quickly contribute to
Australia’s development. I saw my friend
Hieu Van Le, a Vietnamese boat arrival, be-
come Lieutenant Governor of South Austra-
lia. I saw the generosity of the Australian
people in moments of hardship, natural dis-
aster or tragic events. I saw the success sto-
ries of local businesses, built on hard work,
family sacrifice, long hours and financial
risk. I saw the extraordinary talents of young
people in the schools, in our TAFEs and in
our universities, I saw the Christian churches
reach out to the refugees, the homeless and
the hungry, and I saw young paraplegics like
Neil Fuller, Mathew Cowdrey and Richard
Maurovic become local heroes.

As mayor and councillor I also saw the
important role of local government in com-
nunities. Today I do not have time to speak
about local government but I will make the
following point. Local government was es-

tablished in Australia in 1840—that is, 61
years before this parliament. After being en-
trenched in our system of government across
Australia for 168 years, it is time that local
government was recognised in our Constitu-
tion.

The environment, the economy and social
policies are inextricably linked, and in the
time I have today I want to briefly touch on
all three of these areas. Australia is a pros-
perous country, rich in natural resources,
and, by most comparisons, is considered a
wealthy country. But that wealth is unevenly
distributed, and there is too much inequity of
income and assets across Australia. For the
year 2005-06, the poorest 20 per cent of
households received about eight per cent of national income, while the richest 20 per cent received approximately 38 per cent. Of greater concern is that two million Australians are today living in poverty, and more and more people are facing financial pressures, with household debt reaching $1,170 billion and credit card debt now at almost $43 billion. As I talk to people, it is clear that the greatest cost pressures are coming from home repayments, food and fuel costs. It is worth noting that last financial year the four major banks, the two grocery retail giants and the four major oil companies made a combined profit of over $21 billion. That equates to nearly $1,000 for every man, woman and child in this country, yet they keep increasing their prices and, in the case of the banks, their interest rates and fees, and they pay their CEOs millions of dollars per annum.

I am also concerned that many young people may never own their own home. It is my view that home ownership creates stable households and individual security, builds stronger communities and provides the best environment in which to raise children. I support the Rudd government’s housing policy announcements to date, but I suspect more will need to be done. Shortly before I stepped down as mayor, Salisbury Council endorsed a shared equity housing scheme which would make homeownership considerably more affordable. It is a sensible scheme that should be looked at by all levels of government, and I intend discussing the scheme with the Minister for Housing.

On another matter, I welcome Senator Kim Carr’s announcement of a tariff policy review in Australia. Over the last 40 years we have lost too many manufacturing jobs to overseas countries. In doing so, we have lost many of the trade skills which are now in short supply and on which we are spending large sums of money to re-establish. From 1949 until the late 1960s, about 29 per cent of Australia’s labour force was employed in manufacturing. Today, manufacturing accounts for only 10 per cent of employment, and there has been a corresponding decline in manufacturing’s share of Australia’s GDP, which has also fallen to around 10 per cent. Furthermore—and more concerning—we have lost our manufacturing capability, leaving Australia vulnerable to overseas countries in the future. The manufacturing sector is particularly important to my home state of South Australia and to the region I represent, and I am appreciative of the Rudd government’s $20 million commitment for a manufacturing innovation precinct in my region. The closure of the Mitsubishi plant in Adelaide, in which 1,200 jobs will be lost, highlights an additional disturbing reality. Today our economy and the livelihood of so many Australians are at the mercy of overseas boardrooms.

The issue which concerns people around the world is climate change and environmental mismanagement. In 2001, in a public address, I warned of water shortages, and in January last year, in another public address, I said that the greatest threat facing humanity was not terrorism but climate change and global warming. Regardless of what is causing our climate to change, our failure to prepare has already cost us dearly. The drought we are experiencing, the worst in 100 years, has over the last two years totally changed the way we value and use water. Of particular concern is the critical state of the Murray-Darling system. This river system contributes in excess of $50 billion annually to Australia’s GDP, sustains hundreds of towns and tourism destinations along its water course and creates a 2,000-kilometre ecosystem corridor through Australia. In the late 1970s, Ralph Jacob, the member for Hawker at the time, raised in this place his concerns about the demise of the Murray River. Unbeliev-
ably, the response from subsequent governments was to issue more water rights. Sadly, our mismanagement of the Murray has cost lives and export income and brought financial ruin to many farming families. The only useful outcome from the drought is the acceptance by most people that climate change is real, that it affects us all and that we must act now.

There are solutions to our water needs, but they require tough decisions and political will. Thirty years ago, the City of Salisbury began a visionary concept of collecting rainwater, cleaning it through wetlands, storing the water underground and then re-using it when required. Today the city supplies billions of litres of water annually to homes, industry and playing fields from the wetlands, and the City of Salisbury is an acclaimed world leader in stormwater harvesting and re-use. There should be more of these schemes around Australia, if for no other reason than because they are a very cost-effective way of providing water.

My journey to this place has been a long one, and today time does not allow me to acknowledge all of the people I would like to acknowledge and thank. I could not, however, let this occasion pass without acknowledging at least some of the key people who influenced or helped me along the way. From 1976 until his retirement in 1981, I worked for Senator Jim Cavanagh. During that time I formed a friendship with Ralph Jacobi, whom I mentioned earlier. They were both good men; neither was self-serving and both had a social conscience. They both influenced my political outlook.

I also thank the small team of people who helped me when I contested Makin in the 2004 election. We did not win in 2004 but we went against the tide and reduced the margin to less than one per cent. In 2007 there was clearly a mood for change across Australia and, whilst I do not intend to offer an election analysis, there is no question that Kevin Rudd’s leadership of Labor was a determining factor in the election result. I thank Kevin Rudd, his deputy, Julia Gillard, and all my parliamentary colleagues, both state and federal members, for their assistance over a long campaign period.

I am extremely grateful to the hundreds of volunteers who campaigned with me day after day, door-knocking, letter-boxing, putting up posters, working on polling booths, answering phones and so on. I especially mention David Gray and Lee Odenwalder—I see David and Lee are here tonight and I thank them for coming—Matthew Deane, Justin Hanson, Georgie Matches, Nina Gerace—I think she is here as well—and Mike Tumbers. I also thank the many union members from the Your Rights at Work team, the LHMU, the AWU, the NUW, the ASU, the MUA, the CFMEU and the HSU, who campaigned tirelessly alongside me so that we could bring to an end the Howard government’s 11-year assault on working Australians.

Mr Speaker, may I digress a moment. It is interesting—in fact, hypocritical—that those who are the most vitriolic in their attacks on unions are themselves more likely than not to be members of professional associations or business associations, and they use their associations to attack and vilify working Australians who dare to organise themselves just so that they can defend the human rights of people who have only their labour to bargain with.

I was raised to value my family, and my family has always been there for me. I would not be here today without the support, understanding and encouragement of my wife, Vicki, who is here tonight as well; my children, Rocky, Francesca and Concetta; my brother Dominic and his wife, Anna; my
brother Frank and his wife, Frances; my brother Pat and his wife, Jo Anne; and my sister, Rosa, and her husband, Dominic. They have all been an incredible help to me right throughout my life. Of course, it all began with my parents, who sacrificed so much of their lives so that my brothers, my sister and I could have a better life. My deep disappointment is that my father did not live to see me elected to this place. It was my father who brought politics into our lives and who instilled in me the belief that it is only through politics and education that you can change society.

We live in challenging times. We have never been wealthier or more knowledgeable, yet never has the future been so uncertain. In a complex, integrated world, global problems become Australia’s problems. Information technology changes our world faster than we can adapt and faster than we can reskill our workforce. We face massive workforce shortages and serious environmental dilemmas. We face the challenges of managing an Australian economy heavily influenced by external forces and multinationals over which we have very little control. These are just some of the difficult responsibilities of government. It is my view that those countries which manage their environment well, which educate their people and which minimise global influences over their economies will prosper most. I know that we cannot change the past, but we can change the present and build the foundations for a better future for all Australians. When my time in this place ends, I want to walk away with a clear conscience that I have done all that I can to create a more prosperous, a more sustainable, a more just and a more compassionate Australia.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (7.15 pm)—It is my honour and privilege to be here this evening, having been elected for the third consecutive time to the electorate of Canning. I would like to thank everyone who assisted me in my 2007 Canning campaign. Many volunteers generously gave their valuable time to help me get re-elected as the member for Canning. Special thanks go to all those who helped on the 46 Canning polling booths on 24 November—which turned out to be a very hot day in Perth, I might add. Most of all I would like to thank the people of Canning, who continued to show me strong support. I would also like to take this opportunity to say with sadness that a number of my colleagues and friends are no longer joining me in this chamber. I congratulate them on their service to this parliament and for their time spent working for their constituents. I wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

If I could indulge for just a moment, I would like to congratulate my Western Australian colleagues in particular for such a strong election result in the campaign in Western Australia. It is a true reflection of the prosperity of the state of Western Australia that voters clearly endorsed what the coalition government had done for them over the past 11 years. Eleven of the 15 federal seats in Western Australia are held by Liberal members. The swing against the coalition in WA was only 2.14 per cent, well below the average national swing of 5.44 per cent.

I make special mention of those new members who will be joining us in parliament and on the regular flights to Canberra: the member for Cowan, Luke Simpkins—‘Luke the local’, as they called him—and the member for Forrest, Nola Marino, who ran a special campaign. I also want to make particular mention of the member for Swan, Steve Irons. Many would have heard him here in the chamber tonight. His story is unbelievable, and it is a credit to him that he has become a member of this esteemed place. As some know, I have a strong affiliation with the seat of Swan, and I congratulate
Steve for being the only Liberal MP in the
country to have won a seat from a sitting Labor member during the 24 November elec-
tion. That is a credit to his hard work and dedication and to the campaign that he ran.

I have continued to work hard for my electors, fighting for infrastructure, working with residents on local issues and represent-
ing those who may need help with govern-
ment bodies, local government or other au-
thorities. I thank the Canning electors for their vote of confidence in me as their repre-
sentative. I hope my re-election is an ac-
knowledgement by the local community that they are happy with my representation. With that comes my obligation to work just as hard on their behalf in the next three years as I have done for the last three years. I have no hesitation in saying that I intend to do so.

I need to talk about the union campaign. I have listened to many maiden speeches in this House, and we have heard a number to-
day. It is no secret that the union movement was very active with its Your Rights at Work campaign. It was entitled to do that, but there are some more unseemly aspects of the union campaign which I will make clear. Even in their maiden speeches many of the new members have acknowledged that they would not be here without the campaign run by the local unions.

In August last year, for example, I re-
ported to parliament that the campaign by the unions had reached a new low in my elector-
ate. The TWU had been ringing its members in Canning and asking them how they were voting—basically standing over them and telling them how to vote. A local truck driver, who contacted me about this behav-
iour, said that the TWU representative had asked him if he would be voting the right way. When my constituent asked, ‘What do you mean by the right way?’ the TWU repre-
sentative said, ‘Well, are you going to be voting for Kevin Rudd or not? We’ve got to win that seat.’ My constituent was quite of-
fended by being told. He got on to the two-
way system and talked to all his mates in the other trucks and told them how appalled he was. He was just as appalled as, I am sure, many other union members would have been to see that their union dues were not going into looking after their own particular situa-
tions but were going into a national Labor Party campaign—the unions’ campaign slush fund. I understand that my opponent was able to convince the Australian Labor Party that he should be the candidate because he would be getting funding from the Australian Workers Union. That would have been the tipping point that allowed him to gain prese-
lection for Canning.

On that point, there is this letter from Tim Daly, the local AWU representative, solicit-
ing votes on behalf of the union in Pinjarra and largely around Alcoa—and this letter is an interesting one. In it, the member for Maribyrnong, Bill Shorten, is telling people that they should vote for the Labor candidate in Canning because he is the right man for the job. It is interesting also that he was running on the campaign slogan ‘A fresh face for Canning’. But if you have a look at this photo, it is not a very fresh face. Mine might be weathered and quite worn, but certainly at 54 it is a bit fresher than the 58-year-old who said that he would be a fresh face for Canning. In this letter from Bill Shorten, he asked the electors of Canning and the AWU to give $5 a week to the campaign and to put it in the Halls Head community Bendigo Bank. It provided the account number and who the signatories were.

I wonder if they are still collecting these union dues off the AWU workers who, in Western Australia, I might say, have never had such good wages and conditions in their lives. In my electorate, for example, of about 95,000 people, 23,000 people are on flexible workplace agreements. They actually want to stay on them because they give them more money and greater flexibility and they are able to tailor their job conditions to suit themselves and their families. So what is wrong with having a more flexible workplace where you actually earn more money and have greater choice in what you do?

Interestingly, on election day it got a bit ugly with the people manning the booths, but I will get to that in a moment. I want to talk a little more about Your Rights at Work campaign. We do know, for example, that the campaign did not have that much effect in Canning, but in the neighbouring seat of Hasluck, which was won by Sharryn Jackson—and I congratulate her because she worked hard to get back in—they ran a voracious campaign.

The weekend Financial Review reported on 9 February that the ACTU paid full-time organisers in 24 marginal seats to work for the whole 18 months. We know that they spent $8½ million in those seats. In the 24 targeted seats, there was an average swing of 2.5 per cent or higher to the Labor Party. Obviously their campaign worked in those targeted marginal seats. But these so-called disclosure laws about who donates to campaigns make you laugh. The Labor Party can give $8½ million to run a targeted campaign, putting ACTU workers into 24 seats, and nobody seems to take any notice. If somebody puts $10,000 into my campaign, it is insidious, horrible and wrong, and they are buying favour and votes. Shock, horror! It is absolutely wrong and all it is designed to do is try and demean anybody who wants to be involved in the political process. But this is what we can expect for some time. I have been a good fundraiser in campaigns and I am sure that the people who support me will continue to do so because I not only work on their behalf; I trust that they consider the money is well invested in the representation that they get.

The Australian reported on 14 February that the ACTU collected another $9 million this year, which will add to what it already has in its coffers from its 1.8 million members. It has been estimated that this year it may collect close to $1 billion in union dues around this country. Talk about slush funds for the next election campaign. You can see the sort of bank that is being built up by the union movement for and on behalf of the Labor Party. The same article said that ACTU union officials are ‘irritated’ that they are still being levied when:

... the Coalition has been ousted and Labor remains committed to abolishing Work Choices.

And why wouldn’t they be irritated? The deal has been done and there is no explanation as to where the money is being spent.
now that the election is over. In Adelaide, for example, it was found that members of the United Firefighters Union, who were on duty at the time, were handing out Your Rights at Work flyers at shopping centres and railway stations during the last campaign. Of course, the union bosses claim that they were not bullied or coerced to do so; nonetheless, these firefighters were on duty and they were entrusted to be out saving lives, not distributing union propaganda while being paid to do so. I am told that Teresa Gambaro, the former member for Petrie, said that public servants in Petrie were given the last two weeks of the campaign off on full pay to campaign full time against her. Those are the sorts of campaigns that we are up against, and we will expect them again but obviously we will be ready for them.

On election day in Canning, the union thuggery was out there to be seen. There were fisticuffs amongst union members themselves at various polling booths as they were setting up. The police were called, and that is on the record. It was reported in the media—and of course the media is always right, is it not? In Waroona, for example, in the south of my electorate, the people handing out ALP how-to-vote cards were abusing those people who went by and did not take a card. Poor old ladies who did not take a Labor how-to-vote card were given certain hand signals and were called very unsavoury names as they went in. One of the guys in the orange T-shirts was heard to say, ‘Look, I really don’t like doing this, but I know that if I don’t do it I will be in trouble when I go to work on Monday.’ That is the sort of thing that they were up against. We know that people had their signs stolen, for example. At one of the polling booths at Falcon, while setting up in the dark the union guys involved on behalf of the Labor Party grabbed all my T-shirts and took off with them. We know who the bloke is, but they are the sorts of tactics we expected. That intimidation was the ugly side that was manifested in an election campaign for the first time, as far as I am aware.

In the electorate of Canning, the then Rudd opposition promised a number of things to the people of Canning throughout the campaign. I will be making sure that these campaign promises are delivered: $5½ million was committed to the Mandurah business centre for a revitalisation project, with the aim of revamping the town precinct to grow tourism and business; $345,000 was dedicated to the completion of the final stages of the Waroona town square redevelopment, which will include street paving, picnic areas et cetera—the Howard government committed funding to the initial stages of this project and I am keen to see this project completed in such a vibrant part of my electorate. That is one Labor promise I will be keeping an eye on. Further, $200,000 was promised for the compilation of the water cycle management plan to address the impact of development on the Mundijong town site; and another $200,000 was promised for climate change adaptation strategies for both Serpentine Jarrahdale and Mandurah.

Importantly, the member for Batman, Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism, assured $65 million funding towards the construction of the Mandurah Entrance Road. At the outset I must say that this is an important state government road, but it is just that: a state government road. The state government originally pulled the Mandurah Entrance Road off the Perth-Bunbury Highway project as a way of reducing costs. Now the state government has the federal government picking up the tab for its responsibility. I recognise the benefits of the entrance road and I will work closely with the City of Mandurah to see it happens, because I want to see that Peel motorists get access to this. But, realistically, the govern-
ment are just bailing out their Labor state mates, who are flush with funds in any case.

As the parliament would be aware, the Perth-Bunbury Highway has been a landmark project since the time I was elected as the member for Canning. I fought hard to get this project on the road and secure $170 million in coalition government funding. This is a 70-kilometre dual carriageway extending from the end of the Kwinana Freeway to Lake Clifton, taking haulage vehicles out of Mandurah’s town centre and cutting at least 30 minutes off the trip to Bunbury. In order to see the Perth-Bunbury Highway get on the road, the Howard government made the original AusLink funding agreement conditional on construction beginning in 2006 and being completed by 2009. If we had not surrounded the state transport minister Alannah MacTiernan with this, the road would not even be started now.

The original cost of the Perth-Bunbury Highway was $340 million. The member for Batman admitted during the election campaign that the cost has blown out to $660 million, of which the federal government will now provide an extra $160 million. All this is doing is rewarding the mismanagement on the part of the state government, who stalled this project, mismanaged it and allowed the blow-outs. The minister, as I have said on many occasions, has not delivered one project on time or on budget. However, the state government are being rewarded now by being propped up by $160 million from federal Labor, as they are in government. But it is good that we are going to get the road.

As I said, I am proud of my achievements in Canning through the last couple of terms. I remain committed to bringing essential infrastructure to the region, fixing dangerous roads and community facilities. The constituents of Canning can be assured that I have not forgotten them as I represent them here. I will urge the new government to honour the coalition’s $10 million promise for the Pinjarra bypass, with a total cost of $22 million. The expansion of mining activity around Alcoa and Boddington has really pushed this. Other promises include funding of $650,000 for the Pinjarra sporting complex and $125,000 for lighting for Falcon Reserve. I will be calling on the new parliamentary secretary and member for Brand to look at these proposals, because it is in his region of Peel. I am sure he will take an interest in this.

One of the biggest issues concerning my constituents is crime—graffiti, hooning and antisocial behaviour. I will be working with all authorities to see that this is addressed. It is the biggest cancer in our society at the moment—the disgraceful antisocial behaviour to the rest of the community. I compliment the attack on binge drinking and support my colleague from Swan and his comments. We need to take a firm stand on all sorts of antisocial behaviour that wreck the fabric of our society.

Improving broadband access is obviously something that is high on my list. Because of the diverse nature of the Canning electorate, there are many black spots. I will continue to fight for better coverage and a better deal. I will ask Telstra to turn on their enabled exchanges. Many of them have been enabled for ages; Telstra have just refused to turn them on. However, they are not on their own. They need support from a wide area.

Canning schools did well under the Howard government through the Investing in Our Schools Program. It is very sad that they are going to be missing out on this sort of funding. Bob Hawke said no child would live in poverty after whenever it was; no child will live without a computer now. The strange thing is most schools have got computers for...
every child in the school. At any rate, they are going to get new ones now. The computer companies are very happy about that, because they are going to turn them over pretty quickly.

During the last parliament I worked very hard to get a fairer deal for franchisees. I was involved in a dispute assisting former Leonard’s franchisees in my area. It is a very sad case in which many of these franchisees have lost their houses—their homes—and their livelihoods and have gone broke as a result of being done over by what I consider to be a rogue franchise organisation. I will be talking more about this later. I am going to be asking ASIC to do their job—particularly the small business manager, Mr Martin—and toughen up the compliance regime in this area. I will also continue to work with my colleagues in this place—the member for Hasluck and I have already talked about this—in relation to 410 visa holders.

Finally, I remain an outspoken critic of the current situation at Perth airport. There are long delays in queues for check-in. I have written to Prime Minister Rudd about this. It is a disgrace that Perth airport, in a booming state like Western Australia, is little better than the Lagos airport in terms of confusion, congestion and unsafe transit through the airport. It really needs the federal government to take a strong hand to modernise the master plan for that airport and make sure that Western Australia benefits from the boom that we are going through. This is another project I will continue to work on on behalf of Western Australia and my constituents. (Time expired)

Debate (on motion by Mr Forrest) adjourned.
priorities and standards, and certainly different outcomes. Over recent years the federal government has sought to take a leadership role to help try and standardise the laws and deliver better cooperation between the states. Some issues, like the rail gauge, will be very difficult to resolve, but some progress has been made and some barriers which made it difficult to do business when industry crosses borders have been broken down.

In addition, the federal government now provides significant funding for the first time for infrastructure projects—for example, rail funding, particularly through the establishment of the ARTC, which has done an excellent job in helping to develop a national rail network for the first time in this country. The previous federal government developed and funded AusLink, which provides—for the first time again—a significant financial contribution from the federal government towards the national road system. But the previous government also worked at a local level, through very successful programs like Roads to Recovery, to help ensure that local roads and streets are also improved and become part of a national infrastructure plan. The federal government made strategic contributions at a national level to important projects which, although not on the national highway or the national railway, are nonetheless vital to ensure the progress of commerce and industry in a particular region.

And there is no doubt at all that the Australian government’s involvement over the years now has made a difference. There have been significant advances. On the other hand, it has been disappointing to note that the more money the Australian government has put into infrastructure development, it seems, the less the states have chosen to provide. States have pulled back on expenditure, when in fact they should have been encouraged by the Commonwealth investment to do more. Instead, when they see a project of importance, the states tend to demand that the federal government pay, rather than recognising that their revenue flows are sufficient to cover many of the vital infrastructure projects that are particularly a state responsibility. Many of them have sought to avoid their share when a project has had a shared responsibility. They have cut back also on their support for local government, which has meant that local roads have not had the full benefit of the Roads to Recovery program because, in the end, local government has had to raise additional funds to cover for the state Labor governments withdrawing financial assistance to them. It is disappointing that the states have, almost without exception, responded to the generosity of the federal government over the last decade or more by cutting back their own contributions. So the real benefit of some of this federal investment has not been seen at the local level.

In addition, project management by the states of the infrastructure funded by the federal government has been poor—in some cases, frankly, disgraceful. The states have so run down their capacity to manage projects that rarely is any new infrastructure scheme completed on time or on budget. Indeed, it is not uncommon for federal funding to sit in state treasuries for years, eroding away while the states get around to finally drawing up the plans and getting on with the project. Almost always, after a project is announced, there is a massive build-up in the costs between the time of the announcement and when the project actually begins. As a result of that, particularly under programs like AusLink, projects have had to be deferred to fund the cost overruns on the ones that have already been announced. Projects are being deferred because the cost has gone up, and the cost has gone up because the state simply has not got on with the job of building the road. There are many disgraceful examples
of projects—to deal with traffic congestion or with flooded roads, for example—for which the federal government has actually already provided the funding but the project has not yet begun. That demonstrates a disappointing decline in the capabilities of state governments around Australia to deliver projects.

I know that, in a strong and robust economy such as Australia has enjoyed now for some time, quality people, quality managers, are in demand in the private sector. Many are attracted to the mining industries and to infrastructure projects funded and developed by the private sector. That has meant that the states have lost a lot of their talent. In many cases there has also been fundamental incompetence at a political level in the state governments. There is an inability to make decisions, there is corruption in some states and the decision-making processes inevitably take years and years.

In the 2005 budget, for example, the federal coalition government provided grants to the states for a wide range of road projects. Those projects could only be funded because the states gave an assurance that they were ready to start. The funds were provided immediately in that financial year. Money was paid in lump sums to the states—an issue that the Auditor-General commented about subsequently. But, sadly, some of that money is still sitting in state treasuries today, even though the states promised that these projects were ready to go and could be funded under the rules that applied to Commonwealth-state funding. The projects simply have not been built.

There have also been clear examples of poor or no planning at state level. The Pacific Highway was a classic case of there being not only no funding provided to build this vital piece of road but no corridor identified for the new road network. So when some money becomes available you have to go back to the very basics and try to identify a suitable route for the road. In my own electorate, the Cooroy to Curra bypass is an essential piece of infrastructure and yet no corridor has been developed to this day. At this stage that road should be under construction.

There has been a failure of planning at the local level by the various state governments. When the planning starts, it is often inept, the community consultation process is flawed and it inevitably takes forever and there is no genuine listening when it comes to identifying new transport corridors. We all know that these issues are always contentious. No-one wants a four-lane highway going past their property. They all want the four-lane highway because they want to get somewhere else, but they do not want it in their own yard. So it is always going to be difficult and trying for governments and others associated with identifying a suitable corridor and then putting the planning into place. That simply has not been happening strongly enough at state level over the years.

The final point I want to make in relation to the role of the state governments in developing and providing road infrastructure is about the poor quality of workmanship that is often delivered, particularly by state owned road construction authorities. I have been appalled to see many road projects fail within months of construction—projects that have never been quality jobs right from the beginning and have failed again and again. Many of the states under the funding arrangements actually have an incentive not to do the job properly. They are expected to contribute towards maintenance but, if the
whole road packs it in, they expect the Commonwealth to go in and fund the reconstruction. As a result of this, there has been no incentive for the states, which have a responsibility for managing a lot of the national infrastructure, to do the job properly. States have certainly not done their job when it comes to planning, constructing and funding the road system of our nation.

The states have also failed in relation to rail. It is a national disgrace that rail continues to lose market share. Freight shifts on to road all the time. In many cases states have given up on their rail system. Queensland Rail owns more trucks than trains. If you take freight to your local train depot, it is almost certainly going to be carried by truck to its destination. If the state governments who own this rail system have given up on its competitiveness and effectiveness, why would anybody else have any confidence in using trains? The reality is that our national transport task is going to double by 2025. If rail does not do much, much better, we will have so many extra trucks on the road that the road system will simply not cope. Even if train doubles its contribution to the transport task, we will still have twice as many trucks on the road, and that is unacceptable. Trains and the rail system must do much, much better.

I am concerned that the states have lost confidence in their rail system. They are allowing the branch networks to deteriorate and are not prepared to put in the investment that is necessary to ensure that we have quality rail around the country. Even in states where the rail system is underpinned by large-scale commodity movements, a failure to invest has meant that that infrastructure has deteriorated over the last decade or two. The classic case has been the disappointing performance of Australia’s coal exports over the last couple of years. At a time when the world wants our coal, prices are at record levels and there is enormous capacity to sell Australian coal around the world, our trains and ports have been unable to deliver. That has been a national disgrace and an embarrassment. We have to say to people that they cannot get the coal that they want because we cannot deliver it. We have all seen the television pictures of 30, 40, 50 or 60 ships lined up at a port unable to come in and take on cargo, because the port facilities are inadequate and the rail facilities to get it there are inadequate. Infrastructure failures have damaged our growth and our quality of life over the years. We have not achieved maximum value for the enormous investment that the previous federal government put into infrastructure development because of the difficulty of engaging the states in delivering the projects more effectively.

Part of Labor’s answer to this problem is to establish Infrastructure Australia. However, this particular body is unlikely to be able to make much impact on delivering infrastructure services in an efficient and effective way. Currently Labor is worried about the inflationary effect of bottlenecks in our infrastructure, and dealing with that is one of the points in its five-point plan to address inflation. Of course, fixing infrastructure is important, and I have just, I think very strongly, made the case for undertaking infrastructure investment. But spending more money on infrastructure is not going to make any positive contribution to inflation for a decade or more. It takes a long time to build the roads, fix up the ports and get the shipping systems working properly. And, in the short term, spending more money on infrastructure is actually likely to be inflationary rather than to reduce inflation. We do need to spend the money on infrastructure, but to suggest that this is a relevant part of a five-point plan to address inflation just demonstrates how economically illiterate the government is.
Labor is complaining about the policy challenges of handling success—an economy that is booming and providing historically high opportunities for young Australians to participate in the workforce. This economy is, of course, the result of the competent economic management of the previous government. The five-point plan will do nothing to improve the pressures of inflation in Australia. While some of the ideas are worth while and need to be done, they are not part of a plan that will ease the pressure of inflation on Australian working families today, next month, next year or even in five years time. For that reason, Labor needs to develop a genuine capacity to manage the economy if it is to earn any confidence from Australian business and the Australian community for its economic management.

By 2012-13, the export value of Australia’s commodities will have grown by 34 per cent. Similarly, the export earnings from Australia’s energy commodities are forecast to increase by 51 per cent. Farm commodity exports are expected to rise from $26.7 billion in 2007-08 to $31 billion in 2008-09, an increase of 18 per cent. So we do need to continue the investment in infrastructure.

Labor is wrong to say that there was no national planning framework for infrastructure under the previous government. AusLink was established by the former coalition government in 2004 and represented the most significant change since Federation in the way we tackled the national transport task. AusLink was a comprehensive planning arrangement that covered both road and rail and involved both the Commonwealth and the states. Under AusLink, jurisdictions were able to develop long-term strategies for key major transport corridors, to rate projects according to merit and to give ample lead time to the private sector. Industry knew the program years ahead and was therefore able to plan for it. The reality is that AusLink did develop a national planning framework for road and rail. The state governments, which are all Labor, were involved in that planning process and in the choice of projects.

Labor should also be aware of the entity called the Council of Australian Governments. We have heard a lot about it since the election of the Rudd government. They should also therefore know that in June 2005 COAG agreed that each state and territory should prepare an infrastructure report every five years and that the first of those reports was to be completed by January this year. Presumably they are sitting on the minister’s desk, so he already has an audit of each state’s infrastructure needs. He has a report on their progress in meeting those challenges. So what is Infrastructure Australia going to do that is not already being done under the current AusLink process? It is not the first national planning framework. We already had that in place for some years and it involved federal and state governments with an overview from COAG. Bureaucrat Prime Minister Rudd is now building a new $20 million bureaucracy to do a similar task.

Mr TRUSS—The planning process exists and Infrastructure Australia runs the risk of being just another bureaucratic creation completing a task that is already done. I return to a number of the other Labor comments about the previous government and our infrastructure investment. Under the first AusLink program, 2004-05 to 2008-09, the coalition government provided $15.8 billion in funding for land transport infrastructure. Under AusLink 2, the previous government were to invest $22.3 billion in the Australian land transport system. We actually went further than that during the election campaign, putting another $3 billion to $5 billion to-
wards our commitments for roads. That would have been the largest investment in land transport infrastructure ever made by an Australian government. The reality is that Australia has been spending significantly on its infrastructure. It is not as good as we would like and it will require constant investment year in year out, but we have been able to provide infrastructure that has underpinned a world-class economic performance.

A second point of importance is that the previous government had an infrastructure planning framework. Claims by Labor that we did not are wrong. Labor also claim that the former coalition government did not take infrastructure challenges seriously. That is also wrong. The records show that the former coalition government under AusLink had spent more than any other government on infrastructure programs. Indeed, it is interesting to note that, in spite of the fact that the government say that infrastructure expenditure is a part of their five-point plan to tackle inflation, they actually plan to spend less on roads and rail and infrastructure than the previous coalition government spent. They are cutting the funding, not increasing it, which further undermines the credibility of their claims. As an example, we have already seen Labor scrap the F3 to Branxton link road. Many of you will recall the comments of the federal transport minister in this place that this critically important road to remove bottlenecks around the Newcastle and Hunter Valley area did not add up. This statement was astonishing given that the member for Hunter, who is now the Minister for Defence, had promised before the election that a Rudd Labor government would absolutely match the coalition's commitment of $780 million for the link road. This broken promise is a devastating blow to the people of the Hunter and makes a mockery of Labor's claims that it is determined to fix infrastructure bottlenecks as part of its anti-inflationary strategy.

The Rudd Labor government has also delayed funding of $65 million for critical rail maintenance in regional Australia. You may recall the misleading statement made in this place by the federal transport minister that pushing the funding back to 2009-10 related only to the inland rail proposal. That was wrong. Treasury papers show that $65 million of this money was to be used by the Australian Rail Track Corporation for maintenance and upgrading of a number of existing rail lines that could contribute to a future inland rail corridor. They have also taken $500 million off the promised funding of the Cooroy to Curra section of the Bruce Highway—the worst accident stretch in the state and lowest ranked road in the whole of Queensland. Under Labor’s timetable for the upgrading of this accident stretch, which has already had 34 fatal accidents in the last five years and another two or three in recent days, it will be 2070 before the four laning of this high-priority section is completed.

The Labor government are slashing funding for road and rail lines which are already operating and allowing products to be moved up and down the eastern states. I also observe the failure of federal Labor to prod their state counterparts into completing the projects for which funding has already been provided. These bottlenecks mean that funds already offered are simply not being spent and therefore the cost blow-outs will eventually be met by federal taxpayers. As always, when Labor say something you have really got to look at their deeds, not their words. If they were truly determined to remove infrastructure bottlenecks as part of a strategy for fighting inflation, they would not be making these kinds of decisions to cut projects and to slash road expenditure; they would in fact be increasing it.
In relation to Infrastructure Australia, there are a number of issues which I think need to be addressed. Federal Labor are on record as saying, and I refer to the member for Batman’s comments on 18 July last year at the Australian Rail Summit 2007 in Sydney, that they are absolutely committed to the retention of all AusLink programs. So Labor are committed to supporting the $15.8 billion to be spent on inland transport infrastructure over the five years to 2008-09 under AusLink1 and the $22.3 billion worth of land transport investments under AusLink2 from 2009 to 2013-14. Labor have also said that all of their election promises will be honoured. But they spent the whole of that $22.3 billion during the election campaign on their promises, so I ask: what is Infrastructure Australia going to do between now and 2014 while we are waiting for new funding to be made available? Infrastructure Australia is not going to be allowed to reassess Labor’s election promises, so in fact there will be no money available for new projects and new investments in infrastructure until 2014. So why are we setting up a $20 million bureaucratic body when it will have no money to spend and no projects to prioritise? Is it going to work between now and then just on developing the next list of AusLink3 projects for funding or is it going to fill some other kind of bureaucratic process which delays projects rather than advances them?

We already have the infrastructure reports. They should be on the minister’s table and therefore he should know now what projects need to be funded and what the priorities are. Infrastructure Australia’s first task, we are told, is going to be a 12-month review. I hope that review is not just a vehicle for Labor, both at the federal and state levels, to simply duck the hard decisions and provide a convenient excuse to delay expenditure on very important infrastructure projects. I also hope that the function of Infrastructure Australia to evaluate proposals for investment in nationally significant infrastructure does not become a bureaucratic hurdle for the private sector to overcome when it is proposing projects, which already have to go through a very complex and involved approval process.

The opposition will move some amendments to this bill to try to improve its operation. I note that the bill as it is currently drafted stipulates that Infrastructure Australia may only evaluate infrastructure proposals on advice from the minister. Therefore it is unable, as I said earlier, to independently consider, for example, the ALP’s infrastructure election promises. If this is to be an independent body to assess where the money needs to be spent on the highest priority projects, why can’t it look at what Labor has already promised—particularly since Labor has spent every cent that will be available between now and 2014? It is a rather restrictive component of the legislation that significantly constrains the capacity of Infrastructure Australia to engage in reviews of its own volition. I for one would welcome an independent analysis of the rigour and appropriateness of Labor’s election promises, and I am disappointed that Infrastructure Australia will not be able to undertake this task.

I also note that the minister may give directions to Infrastructure Australia without reference to parliament. I think that, in the interests of transparency, directions by the minister to Infrastructure Australia should be tabled in each house rather than be buried, as currently proposed, in the annual report of Infrastructure Australia. I also think that the minister, when making appointments to Infrastructure Australia, particularly the appointment of infrastructure coordinator, should be compelled at the very least to consult the members of Infrastructure Australia before making such appointments. The last thing we want to see is Labor using Infrastructure Australia as a vehicle for handing
out jobs to its mates. They have already announced that Sir Rod Eddington is to be the chair of this new body, so we have got the chair announced before we have even got in parliament the legislation to set the organisation up. That is hardly a logical process. I know they owe Sir Rod quite a deal. They humiliated him before the previous election by appointing him to a business consultancy role and then making all the decisions without even speaking to him, so this is obviously some kind of an apology get-square by the government for Sir Rod. It is an embarrassment to Sir Rod that he was treated so badly by Labor, and I am surprised that he has accepted this kind of post from a government that obviously values his advice so poorly.

I will be moving some technical amendments to rectify many of these weaknesses in the bill. We will not be opposing the establishment of Infrastructure Australia but we do want it to work better and we want to place on record our firm rebuttal of Labor’s attempt to rewrite history in relation to the provision of infrastructure over recent years. The previous government has a proud record of investment in Australian infrastructure needs. We do need to have a strong planning framework and there was one in place. I presume that will continue with AusLink but there will be a second planning process. There will be a bureaucratic creation that will make the rollout of national infrastructure, I suspect, harder rather than easier. So while we wonder whether this bureaucratic entity will in fact provide significant advantages for Australia, we do believe it is important to have a clear process for planning and investment in the nation’s infrastructure. This bill will be useless unless the Australian government adds the funding that will be necessary to upgrade the roads, the rail and the ports that are so essential to keep the Australian economy strong in the years ahead. (Time expired)

Debate (on motion by Ms Kate Ellis) adjourned.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS (INTERCEPTION AND ACCESS) AMENDMENT BILL 2008
DEFENCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008
SCREEN AUSTRALIA BILL 2008
NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE BILL 2008
SCREEN AUSTRALIA AND THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE (CONSEQUENTIAL AND TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS) BILL 2008
INFRASTRUCTURE AUSTRALIA BILL 2008

Referred to Main Committee

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (8.07 pm)—I move:
That the bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.
Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES
Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings Committee
Electoral Matters Committee
Treaties Committee
Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (8.08 pm)—Mr Speaker has received a message from the Senate informing the House that Senator Parry has been discharged from the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings and that Senator Cormann has been appointed a member of that committee; that Senator Fierravanti-Wells has been discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters and that Senator Fifield
has been appointed a member of that committee; and that Senator Cormann has been discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties and that Senator S Macdonald has been appointed a member of the committee.

**FINANCIAL SECTOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REVIEW OF PRUDENTIAL DECISIONS) BILL 2008**

First Reading

Bill received from the Senate, and read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

**SKILLS AUSTRALIA BILL 2008**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 13 February, on motion by Ms Gillard:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Dr SOUTHCOTT** (Boothby) (8.09 pm)—Many factors have contributed to Australia’s current skill shortages. It is the result of trade training or technical education being talked down over the past 20 to 30 years, leading to a perception in the community that trade training is a second-best option to a university education. It is due to 16 years of uninterrupted strong growth in the economy and, as a consequence, strong jobs growth. We have an unemployment rate now at 4.1 per cent, the lowest since November 1974, and a growing workforce with growth in part-time jobs particularly strong. Some of the shortages are due to where we are in the business cycle. In its 2002 report *Nature and causes of skill shortages: Reflections from the Commonwealth National Industry Skills Initiative Working Groups* the then Department of Education, Science and Training, looking back over 20 years of skills needs, found that shortages in some areas, such as the construction trades and metal trades were evident at the peak of the business cycle whereas shortages in other areas, such as chefs and pastry cooks, have been widespread for most of the last 20 years. In other words, it is where we are in the business cycle.

The economy has been expanding for 16 years, and it is worth pointing out that in the most recent recession in the early 1990s there were no skill shortages because there was massive unemployment and almost a million people were out of work back then. However, Labor claim that skills shortages in Australia are a direct result of the former government’s neglect of the vocational education and training sector. This is simply not true. It is due to a strongly growing economy over 16 years and, as a consequence, strong jobs growth. In 1996, $1 billion was allocated to the vocational education and training sector. In 2007-08 the former government allocated $2.9 billion to the VET sector, an increase in real terms of 97 per cent. In total, the former government invested $24 billion in skills and training over 11½ years.

In 1996, 30,000 apprentices on average were completing apprenticeships and only 16,000 people over the age of 25 were undertaking one. Compare that to now. Over the last four years we have seen 544,000 apprentices completing an apprenticeship. In 2006 we had over 142,000 people complete an apprenticeship and we now have 160,000 people over the age of 25 currently undertaking an apprenticeship—that is a tenfold increase for mature age apprentices since 1996. We have also seen strong growth in recent years in traditional trade apprenticeships.

By comparison, and despite all their rhetoric about addressing skills shortages, one of the first decisions of the new government has been to scrap incentives for apprenticeships in agriculture and horticulture which provided apprentices with $800 for a tool kit and up to $1,000 to help meet training fees.
To meet future skills needs, the former government was establishing 28 Australian technical colleges and had committed during the election that a re-elected coalition government would take that number to 100, at a cost of $2.1 billion. We now have over 2,000 students already receiving high-level training from ATCs—colleges which were opposed by Labor. We forecasted before the election that by next year 10,000 students would be receiving training from Australian technical colleges. Regrettably, these outstanding facilities will be transferred to schools after 2009. In addition to the technical colleges, we invested profoundly in work skill vouchers in order to meet popular demand. We pushed for more autonomy within the TAFE system and we were committed to supporting apprentices throughout their training because we believe there is more to skills and training than just providing training places. Most apprentices receive low wages, particularly during their first two years. That is why we introduced the Tools for Your Trade incentives, Commonwealth trade learning scholarships, Apprenticeship Wage Top-Up, training free vouchers and the living away from home allowance, which we extended to school based apprentices in October 2007.

The bill we are now debating, the Skills Australia Bill 2008, provides for the establishment of Skills Australia. The Rudd government have said that they will invest in additional training places and introduce an advisory board to tell them where these additional places should go. Skills Australia, an independent statutory body that will provide advice to the government on current and future demand for skills and training, will be created by this bill.

We are told this body will provide advice to the government on where to allocate the additional training places promised in Labor’s election policy document Skilling Australia for the future. It is expected that it will collect information and put together data on Australia’s current and future skills needs. There is nothing new about this. This function was done by the Australian National Training Authority. It is now being done by the National Industry Skills Committee and by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. This is another of Labor’s boards that were announced during the election campaign to give them, on last count, 81 new bureaucracies.

The seven-member board which will make up Skills Australia will be appointed by the Minister for Education and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. To be appointed to the board, members must have between them experience in academia, in the provision of education and training and in economics and industry. However, despite this, who exactly will sit on the board is unclear. While we support the introduction of Skills Australia, its success will rely heavily on the people who sit on the board. Labor continues to stay quiet about who will be on the board.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry have called for the chair of the board to have an industry background. Again, there has been no response from Labor. The coalition believes it is critical that the new structure envisaged by Labor has strong business input at all levels. The first concern is that, unfortunately, there is inadequate business input in the proposed model outlined in Labor’s policy. The second concern is that the establishment of Skills Australia will create a second advisory body to advise the government on future workforce needs. Currently, there is the National Industry Skills Committee and also, as I said, DEEWR. They both currently perform this function. While Labor is putting a lot of faith in Skills Australia, it is merely a third source
of advice for the government on where to allocate training places.

A case in point is that 20,000 training places have been allocated to begin on 1 April. Where these training places are to be allocated was not determined by Skills Australia; it was determined by the National Industry Skills Committee or by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations itself. Skills Australia is expected to provide advice to the government as to where the additional training places promised by Labor—that is, the additional 450,000 training places over the next four years—should go. This process relates only to these additional places. The arrangements under the 2005-08 Commonwealth-State Agreement for Skilling Australia’s Workforce will not be affected, including the functions of the National Industry Skills Committee. Under that agreement, the National Industry Skills Committee provides advice to the ministerial council on issues such as workforce planning and future training priorities within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The opposition would like to know what the relationship is between Skills Australia and the National Industry Skills Committee. What are the differences between Skills Australia and the National Industry Skills Committee? What will Skills Australia be doing that is not currently performed by the National Industry Skills Committee?

If Labor is serious about reducing duplication and reducing government spending then it should guarantee that Skills Australia and the National Industry Skills Committee will not be undertaking similar duties, duplicating work and research and thus wasting taxpayers’ money. Another concern is that labour forecasting is an imperfect science. Labor is putting enormous faith in the capacity of Skills Australia to forecast future skills needs.

In the Australian on 12 December, Gavin Moodie pointed out that ‘the experience of labour market forecasting has been poor. Anticipating future skills shortages is not easy.’ In fact, Mr Moodie stated that there is no record of any country successfully anticipating future skills needs.

In addition, the opposition has concerns about Labor’s centralised approach. We are told that, with Skills Australia’s advice on which industries are experiencing skills shortages, the government will allocate places directly to those sectors. This will work by the government allocating the additional places, on the advice of Skills Australia, to the industry skills councils, who will allocate the places to employers in those sectors experiencing skills shortages via a tender process and will set up training packages for training providers. In other words, instead of allocating places according to demand from the workforce—that is, where individuals themselves would like to train—the places will be allocated centrally by the minister. This puts enormous power in the hands of the Minister for Education and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. It concentrates unprecedented power in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Labor have stated that this model is a demand-side approach. It is nothing of the sort. What they are doing is replacing a market based demand-side policy—the Australian skills vouchers—with a central planning solution where supply is provided by industry skills councils.

In an article in Campus Review entitled ‘Out in the cold’, Amy Owens, a former TAFE manager, had this to say about Labor’s policy:

... these arrangements are predicated on an unprecedented degree of centralised control over the distribution of training effort. They bypass the
states and territories, current “user choice” mechanisms and other direct client-provider training transactions, and institutionalise Commonwealth controlled entities as the sole brokers of relations between employers and training providers.

Industry skills councils are bodies which provide training packages. There is considerable concern about the capacity of industry skills councils to deliver these places while focusing on the development of training packages.

A further concern the opposition has is that Labor have to realise that if their intention is to address skills shortages in certain sectors then providing training places has to be met with incentives to enter these particular sectors. If prospective students do not find a particular sector attractive then they will not enter that sector. As one columnist said:

… prospective students will choose to do something else rather than fill empty places in engineering, education and nursing if they don’t find them attractive.

People study what they want to and undertake vocational training in an industry they want to work in. People will follow their dream and find a career which suits their background and interests. If young students do not want to study science at university then they won’t. If they do not want to be a teacher, an accountant, a carpenter, a plumber, an electrician or a mechanic then they won’t. We can encourage people and provide incentives to alleviate the concerns that prospective students may have about undertaking a trade apprenticeship, such as the low apprenticeship wages they face in the first two years of training.

In fact, as a direct result of that concern we introduced a tax-free payment of $1,000 per year for students in the first two years of an apprenticeship in an area of skills shortages. In 2005 we introduced the Tools for Your Trade incentives, providing $800 tool kits to people undertaking an apprenticeship in an industry experiencing skills shortages. Up to 34,000 apprentices were able to receive tool kits each year—although not apprentices in agriculture or horticulture in rural areas—which is more than the number of completed apprenticeships in the last year of the former Labor government. In 2007 we extended that offer to people taking up training in agricultural and horticultural industries and provided them with up to $1,000 to pay for their training fees. Labor have now scrapped this initiative.

Here is another concern. Labor have announced a five-point approach to reduce pressure on inflation. Addressing bottlenecks and constraints in the economy was done by the previous government and it makes good public policy sense. However, sometimes I get the feeling that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. Case in point: the Minister for Finance and Deregulation is scrapping incentives for apprentices in the areas of agriculture and horticulture while the Minister for Education is proposing 60,000 additional apprentices over the next four years. It is great to have a plan to deal with inflation, and it is great to have five points, but you have to make sure that there is not an internal contradiction within those five points. It is always good for the left hand to know what the right hand is doing.

While the opposition offers qualified support for Skills Australia, we do not agree that the establishment should come at the expense of important incentive packages. If Labor do not support apprenticeship places with extra incentives then we will end up with a whole lot of research on where we have skills shortages but we will not have any students undertaking the training, because they will not be able to afford to pay their training fees or get a tool kit. There has
been a shortage of chefs and pastry chefs for 20 years, and there are much more fundamental problems than simply providing the training places. While it is good in principle to allocate additional training places, it does not mean much if the people cannot afford to pay their training fees or cannot complete their apprenticeships due to financial hardship.

We also introduced a living away from home allowance for those who had to move away from home to complete their training. We extended that last year so that school based apprentices could receive this support. That is another thing that has been scrapped by the minister for finance’s razor gang cuts of February: Labor did not believe that school based apprentices required support and have scrapped that initiative as well. While it is good in principle to allocate additional training places, it does not mean a lot if secondary students cannot afford to move away from home to complete their training.

To encourage people to take up additional places, we also need to raise the perception of trade training. An apprenticeship should be, and needs to be, seen as important and as prized as a university degree. The former government’s Australian technical colleges were part of a longer plan to raise the prestige of trade training. Labor’s trade-training centres for all secondary schools will do nothing to raise the prestige of trade training—in fact, if anything they may do the opposite. The introduction of FEE-HELP into the VET industry was also part of this process to remove the barriers for people who want to upgrade their qualifications or take a higher VET qualification by attending a full-fee course. Labor are talking about introducing these places into the VET sector, but they are yet to provide us with any detail on how it will work in practice. For example: how will TAFE and the registered training organisations cope with the additional places?

We wanted to see greater autonomy given to TAFEs, to the level enjoyed by universities. With greater autonomy, TAFEs could respond to emerging labour needs much better than any politician can. If Labor really want to address skills shortages then they should not rely on these additional places and Skills Australia alone. The point is this: we offer qualified support for the establishment of Skills Australia, we support the extra training places and we agree with competitive tendering in the allocation of packages. But this has all been funded through the scrapping of the popular work skills voucher program. We are concerned about Labor’s approach of scrapping the work skills vouchers, which allow people to take up the training that they believe will benefit them in the courses they would like to do.

Workforce planning is difficult. When Labor were last in government they relied heavily on the Bureau of Labour Market Research. It failed to anticipate many workforce shortages. Their proposed model is a top-down approach which does not allow local TAFEs or registered training organisations to respond to local emerging needs. It has no way of responding as to where individuals would like to train themselves. The idea of Skills Australia is not a bad one, but our concerns are that under Labor’s proposed model there is insufficient input from business, who will be providing these future jobs, and that we have moved from a more responsive, demand-side approach to one where the supply of training places will be allocated in Minister Gillard’s surplus office.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Employment Participation) (8.28 pm)—I rise to support the Skills Australia Bill 2008. The bill will provide for the establishment of a statutory authority, Skills
Australia, which will enable the government to properly establish what skills are needed and where they need to be located. Skills Australia is a key plank in the Australian government’s five-point plan to fight inflation. The Prime Minister and other ministers, and indeed other members of government, have made the point very clear that we have a 16-year-high inflation rate. It is a legacy that was left by the Howard government and something that we have to attend to. It occurred as a result of a number of factors, not least of all the failure of the previous government to anticipate the skill deficiency. I will accept some of the assertions made by the opposition—and indeed, by the shadow minister—that you cannot anticipate precisely all of the skill deficiencies that will beset the country. But to think that after almost 12 years in government the Howard government could not have anticipated the lack of skills that were causing concern to employers and industry across the country is a hard thing to accept. The fact is that the previous government stopped thinking about public policy and stopped considering the importance of this particular area. This bill will start to get the country back on track to have a policy in the area of skills that will be demand driven.

Debate interrupted; adjournment proposed and negatived.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—That is one of the problems that we confront. We have had a government that ignored this area of public policy. It did not acknowledge that the problem was as big as it was, and as a result we now have hundreds of occupational groups which need people with expertise and qualifications to fill positions. Skills Australia, as a statutory authority, will provide expertise to the government in order to attend to this particular shortage. As I was saying before being interrupted procedurally, we are going to ensure that this is a demand-driven approach, to the extent that we will ensure that employers will be given an opportunity to identify the skills they need to ensure a successful business.

Over the last decade employers have been disengaged from this area, to a point where people are acquiring skills that are not necessary. Indeed, in the case of the shortages, there has not been sufficient involvement of employers and industry in the area of skills. We believe Skills Australia will provide leadership and will advise the government appropriately in order to ensure that we focus on those needs. We know that there are major problems. We have got capacity constraints in the economy. We are attending to our fiscal responsibilities by ensuring that the budget surplus this year will be 1.5 per cent or more of GDP. We are encouraging private savings. We are going to ensure that there is a proper focus on removing bottlenecks in the economy. And we are focusing—and this bill exemplifies that particular focus—on the skills requirements of this nation. Fifthly, we are going to increase employment participation because it is critical that we do so in order to fight inflation and to prevent, wherever possible, increases in interest rates. This bill is part of the approach that the government is taking. We are filling the void that was left by the Howard government.

With respect to my own portfolio, it has been announced by the government that there will be 450,000 VET places over the course of the next four years, 175,000 of which will target people who are not in work, who are looking to enter the workforce or who are marginally attached to the workforce. I am very happy to be working in that area. It is a critical area because it provides the wherewithal for jobseekers to have the requisite skills to be in demand by employers who are crying out for labour.

A series of reports outlined in recent times have gone to the problems that have beset
the country as a result of the previous government’s inaction. Firstly, VECCI made the point that the Work for the Dole scheme was deficient in many respects. Indeed, VECCI indicated as recently as last week that the Work for the Dole scheme should be overhauled or even scrapped because it does not give the unemployed useful skills. That is certainly one of the contentions in the submission they provided to the government as a result of the review that we are undertaking to look at the effectiveness of employment programs and employment services generally. VECCI were clear that that scheme is deficient in providing activities that would lead to employment. In fact, I am aware of occasions on which job seekers are having greater difficulty finding work because they are undertaking nonsensical activities in some of the Work for the Dole programs. I have been to a number of Work for the Dole programs and I have seen some elements which I am happy with. I am not particularly keen on other elements, because there seems to be a lot of contrivance when it comes to the activities for job seekers, but I am certainly keen to maintain any elements that will provide the participants with work skills or work experience that provide them with a greater capacity to find work. But VECCI do have a point when they suggest that there are areas which are seriously deficient and where some of the activities would not lead in any way to improving the likelihood of a job seeker finding work.

I can also point to comments made with respect to this particular area by the BCA. The BCA has made it very clear that the previous government neglected the skills crisis. They had been warned time and time again by all sorts of bodies, not least of all by the Reserve Bank of Australia. Indeed, employer bodies for the last decade had been warning the previous government about the growing skills shortages in this country, effectively saying they must attend to them. That particular plea by that employer body and other employer bodies fell on deaf ears because the government, of course, did not seek to attend to that particular problem. Mr Greig Gailey, the President of the Business Council of Australia, is the author of a recent article in a daily newspaper. He said:

More than ever, governments need to focus on fiscal policies and broader reform agendas in areas such as infrastructure, education, skills and workforce participation that collectively enhance the nation’s capacity to grow.

But recent federal budgets have not kept pace with the economy’s structural needs.

Instead of focusing on policy settings that invest in those areas of the economy that drive long-term growth, recent budget spending has remained fixed on driving even greater demand and consumption in the short term.

The BCA president is quite right in identifying the failure by the previous government to attend to those matters. This bill is about rectifying that problem. This bill is part of the solution that will be undertaken by this government in attending to this very important area of public policy, so I am very happy to be speaking today on this matter. It is very important that we get this right. Establishing Skills Australia will be one of the first of many steps that this government will take as part of a comprehensive approach to confronting and dealing with the skill challenges of our nation. When we establish Skills Australia we will be helping to ensure that this nation can maintain its prosperity and improve its productivity, which, in recent times at least, has been in decline. We need to do that as a matter of urgency.

I acknowledge the comments made by the shadow minister who, whilst criticising some areas of the bill, welcomed the fact that there would be some attention given to the skills area. He has asked some questions about the composition of Skills Australia, which are
legitimate questions to raise, and I think those answers will be forthcoming. It is reasonable to put to the government the question of whether the seven personnel on the board of this statutory authority are in keeping with the criteria set down in the bill, and I am confident that that will be the case.

The main area of disagreement is that we on this side say that the previous government did not focus on this area. As the economics editor of the *Age* said in February, only a few weeks ago, the Howard government dropped the ball on the skills agenda. It turned to other matters, one of which was its own survival. But it would have had a better chance of survival if it had attended to the things that ordinary Australians need. What ordinary Australians need is a job or the skills that are attractive to a prospective employer. As the Minister for Employment Participation, I want to ensure that the programs we have out there for job seekers to participate in are effective, that the training is meaningful and that the employers are engaged with the government and other bodies to make sure that we match the skills needs to the skills. I understand the argument put by the shadow minister that, if somebody does not want to acquire a particular skill or attain a form of education, it cannot be forced upon them. I understand that, if someone is averse to acquiring a particular skill, it is not easy to suggest that they do so. But, equally, it is critical for us to ensure that job seekers are focused on skills that are in demand. It is going to be futile, in terms of the vocational prospects of job seekers, if we do not ensure that the skills they are acquiring have something to do with the real world and something to do with the demands of employers in this country.

This is a very important debate that we are having in this chamber. The bill itself is critical because it is going to set the path for the way in which the government will be advised as to the skills that are needed in this country. It is seeking—in a better way, I would argue—to anticipate the skills required. Again, I accept that you cannot precisely anticipate all skills that are needed, but I think the previous government could have done more in this area to ensure that there were not so many employers crying out for people with the requisite skills.

There are, of course, other ways in which employers can seek the right labour with the right skills. They have the capacity to attract labour from overseas. That mechanism was used by the previous government and a similar mechanism will be used by this government. There are other areas of policy to attract people back into the workforce. You can have incentives that will see second income earners coming back into the workforce or working longer—for example, the tax cuts that have been announced and that will take effect. Those tax cuts, by increasing the incentive, will increase the likelihood of, for example, second income earners coming back into the workforce or working for longer hours. There are other areas of public policy that you can change to encourage people to stay longer in the workforce. But my primary focus is to ensure that those people who are unemployed or underemployed and who can work and want to work—indeed, in many cases they are compelled to look for work—are provided with proper targeted training in order to fill the skills need. On that basis, I commend the bill to the House and hope that the opposition accede to the bill and to the reasoning behind it.

Mr *ANTHONY SMITH* (Casey) (8.44 pm)—I will just take a brief moment to support the earlier remarks of the shadow minister for employment participation, apprenticeships and training, the member for Boothby, on behalf of the opposition. As he said, we give this bill qualified support but we do so
thinking that there are a number of pitfalls and potential flaws that the new government should very much take heed of. Let me first of all deal with some of what the previous government did. Over a 12-year period from 1996 we had record apprenticeship funding and record apprenticeship growth. As the member for Boothby outlined, we introduced a range of incentives and initiatives to promote trades and apprenticeships. A great number of those—nearly all in fact—are being scrapped as the price of Skills Australia.

But let me first deal with some of the substance, as the member for Boothby did, and deal with the remarks of the previous speaker. Forecasting of this nature is notoriously difficult. I know the previous speaker acknowledged that. He also needs to acknowledge that the track record of this is not good, not just in Australia but anywhere in the world. That is a fact. Throughout the world no-one has done this well, and to put all of the eggs in one basket with this new body is certainly ambitious. If it works everyone will be happy. This is not a political point, but that needs to be recognised very much up front. As the member for Boothby said, the personnel of the seven-member board, how the board works, how those personnel interact with the industry skills councils and how all that plays out on the ground where it really matters will be critical. As he also said, creating places of itself looks and sounds good but creating a place does not mean that that place will be filled. In that sense, it will very much need to be the slickest and smoothest bureaucratic operation that this town has ever known if it is really going to work in the way those opposite hope it does.

As I said earlier, and as the shadow minister outlined in great detail, this body is being created at the cost of a number of key initiatives and incentives that were introduced by the previous government. Work skills vouchers are being scrapped, business skills vouchers are being scrapped and the Australian technical colleges are being scrapped. There are a range of other initiatives that are also being scrapped, including the living away from home allowance and, as we saw in the first days of this government, incentives for apprenticeships in the agricultural and horticultural areas. That is $47.7 million worth of cuts. We point out in this debate that those cuts are not in keeping with the government’s pre-election commitments at all. That has been acknowledged by those in the agricultural and horticultural sectors. The previous government pledged that none of the incentives whatsoever—

Dr Southcott—Or subsidies.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH—or subsidies—would be reduced or scrapped. We note that for the record. The government should at least acknowledge that. It cannot hide that fact. It cannot hide the fact that what was in its pre-election policy is completely at odds with the early action of the minister for finance. That is something that the agricultural and horticultural industries are becoming well aware of. Specifically, we refer to the $800 to purchase tool kits and the contribution of up to $1,000 to their fees. On the one hand, members opposite claim that nothing was done by the previous government yet that their abolition of all these incentives is necessary for the creation of this body to do all the things they hope it will do. You cannot have it both ways. That range of incentives was there to provide resources to people wanting to take up a trade and an apprenticeship. They were extended to the agricultural and horticultural areas and they were extended in a number of other ways, as the shadow minister outlined.

Those opposite should at least acknowledge that the incentives were all there. They are abolishing them all because they have
one single solution which they are sure will work. We are giving this qualified support. We have our doubts but we say to those opposite that while advice is good—and I do not speak disrespectfully of the advice that they are getting from their departments—quite often it is worth having an open mind about these things. We will not know for quite a period of time whether this is working. This is the only shot in the locker for those opposite on this important area so I urge them to implement it very carefully and, as the shadow minister said, to ensure that those who are appointed to that body are of the best calibre and include a good mix of representatives.

I also want to address some of the other initiatives that those opposite have mooted, particularly in the pre-election period. The trades training centres in schools in particular are another plank, I suppose, of their approach to skills. I urge those opposite to re-examine this. It will not work. There are 2,650 secondary schools across Australia. The Prime Minister, when he was Leader of the Opposition, stood here at this dispatch box giving his speech in reply to the budget and promised to create a trades training centre in every single one of those 2,650 secondary schools. It sounded good. It was designed for a budget night reply but it was not designed with any deep policy thought. This is the government’s alternative to the Australian technical colleges. We had established, I think, 23 heading towards 28 and pledged another 100 during the election campaign. Leave aside the election promises and what was popular and what was not, the reason the previous government did not say we will have a trade training centre in every single school is that in policy terms it was clear it would not work and it cannot work. If those opposite backflip on this policy, I will applaud not criticise. It will not work. For those ministers responsible for this, you will be explaining this away for a long period of time.

The technical colleges were established so there was a scale of things. These were to be real, dedicated colleges, and some exist today. There was key business input at the board level in their establishment, creating a clear link and pathway into the job fields in those particular local communities. Local community input is critical. There is no group of politicians or bureaucrats in Canberra that is expert on a particular local community and the job prospects that are going to be there in the next two, three, five or 10 years. Getting industry involvement in the creation of these technical colleges, having them part and parcel of the board of management and having a scale of things and a scale of investment so that the students attending them actually got the best possible trades education were the motivations behind it. Those opposite in their heart of hearts know that. Their policy was created for television consumption and to get through an election campaign. It was not created to help fix the skills crisis.

When you think there are going to be 2,650 trades training centres in name with an investment of between half a million dollars and $1.5 million—on average, I think, $900,000, as the shadow minister said in earlier remarks in this House and in the media—anyone with the most paltry knowledge
of trades will know that is not going to buy very much. It will buy the trades training centre sign to hang onto the workshop door, and those opposite will dutifully go round and open the centres. It will buy some equipment. If you look at the hospitality industry, with which I am familiar, it is not going to purchase much. It will purchase an oven—not a good one; not one you would get at a proper Australian technical college. So you will have these small centres, many of which will be glorified garages, but what happens if the school decides its trades training centre is going to be in hospitality and a significant proportion of the school population want to do automotive? They will be studying in the kitchen or they will be going to another school.

I appeal to those members opposite: this will not work. It is over a 10-year period and it is a small investment spread across 2,650 locations. Twenty and 30 years ago, we would all agree, unless I am mistaken, that it was a mistake for state governments, both Labor and Liberal, to abolish technical schools. That is what happened, and I have heard members on both sides of this House say that was a mistake. The reason there were not small-scale facilities at every single secondary school is precisely that they did not give the scale necessary. That is why the solution is to right what was wrong and go back to the way it was.

Let’s take suburban Melbourne, because the member opposite and I are from the great state of Victoria. When we grew up—and I think we are about the same age; he just looks a bit older than me—

Mr Brendan O’Connor—I am older and wiser.

Mr Anthony Smith—And he declares, in line with the new government’s approach, that he is wiser. That is good. He can make some remarks on that at another time. Roughly speaking, you had two or three high schools for one technical school, all in one community. We know that the bureaucrats are advising the government that this policy cannot work. We know that. We know that there is pressure to water this down and to try and get them to cluster in as many as they can. Those opposite should recognise that, whilst their policy was popular, this is not going to work in a practical sense. As I said, if they backflip, we will applaud. The shadow minister and I will applaud that.

Mr Perrett—Schools have changed a bit since you were there—

Mr Anthony Smith—The new member may wish to interject; it will only prolong me in my remarks. He will learn from his whip that Labor actually are trying to move through this rather quickly tonight. I advise him to get back to his emails on his computer. We want to see improved trades and apprenticeships. As we said, we will give qualified support to this bill. As the shadow minister said, taking away those incentives that provide funds for people in a real, tangible and meaningful way is a mistake. I would ask those opposite, as they go forward, to consider that and consider their trade training centre policy, which is not going to fulfil its objective.

Ms George (Throsby) (8.59 pm)—I will return to some of the comments made by the member for Casey in terms of the debate about the Skills Australia Bill 2008. He did stray from the topic quite considerably. I guess there will be opportunities at different times to return to the issues that were canvassed in relation to trade centres in the secondary school system. But the bill before us tonight has come to the chamber as a priority piece of legislation. It was decided to fast-track the creation of Skills Australia to do a number of things, including to help lift the
productive capacity of our economy by dealing with the very severe skill shortages that exist. It seems the member for Casey is still finding it hard to acknowledge the profound problem that we have in terms of those skill shortages. In trying to address that systemic problem, we hope that it will also help in the commitment that we have to fight inflation.

As the member for Gorton indicated in his contribution, we hope the outcome of this legislation will lead to the provision of some additional 450,000 training places. With a sense of urgency, as I understand it, the first 20,000 of these places will be coming on-stream by 4 April. Very importantly, over the four-year period, up to 65,000 additional apprenticeships will be supported. I think that gives you a sense of the urgency and the dimension of the problem that the minister and this side of the chamber are trying to comprehend and deal with.

You only have to look at report after report from a range of employer organisations to heed the warnings—and the alarm bells should have been ringing a long time before. Over the period of the life of the Howard government it seems all we had were knee-jerk reactions and ad hoc decisions, but it was really a failure to grasp the fundamental problems in the economy. According to even recent AiG reports that I looked at, they talk about the fact that one in two firms are still experiencing difficulties obtaining skilled labour and yet one in five young adults have not completed year 12 or a certificate III vocational qualification. So I think it would be wrong to see, as the member for Casey did, this as our only response to the issue of apprenticeship training and upgrading of skills and the skill shortage. There will be a whole raft of complementary initiatives and programs that will be undertaken by the Rudd Labor government.

This is a very important issue. The government’s own estimates show Australia facing a shortage of more than 200,000 skilled workers over the next five years. That is a huge problem that we are contending with. It is a big challenge made greater by the fact that, according to the Ai Group, nearly 90 per cent of all available jobs now require a post-school qualification. But, as we know—and I know it is the case in my electorate—around half of our current workforce lack these qualifications. So there is a great need to also upskill the existing workforce in higher levels of skill attainment.

These skill shortages—certainly in my own region—span right across our regional economy from unskilled jobs through to managerial and professional occupations but, very importantly, in the skilled trades we have a major problem throughout Australia. It is a problem that the former government really did not comprehend in terms of the magnitude of the issue. As the member for Gorton made very clear, the Reserve Bank had been warning of the consequences of skill shortages for more than a decade and continues to talk about the capacity constraints that the skill shortages are creating in our economy. The interrelationship between capacity constraints and the inflation genie being out of the bottle is one thing that is of concern to us all.

The member for Casey resorted to the usual obfuscation that members of the Howard government did when they were on this side of the chamber. I think he made reference to the record level of apprenticeships under the Howard government. The fact is, of course, that the Howard government and its ministers were very adept at obfuscating the issue of just what an apprenticeship was, and combining apprenticeships with traineeships to inflate the figures. In fact, I think our record under Labor prior to the Howard government stands up pretty well.
Over the 11 years that the Howard government were in office, the average annual number of traditional trade apprenticeships was about 120,000. This compares to the 137,000 annual average traditional trade apprenticeships under the previous Labor government. So in fact we had a better record than was occurring under the Howard government, despite the fact that they were constantly berating the then opposition as being an opposition that had lost sight of the importance of traditional trades training and the apprenticeship system. The facts tell quite a different story. I think it would be wise for the member for Casey and the shadow minister to have a look at the record of the Howard government.

We also know that when the Howard government were first elected there were substantial cuts to the TAFE and vocational system. They reduced Commonwealth investment by about 13 per cent in the three years to the year 2000. After that, despite the huge unmet demand and thousands of people being turned away, the allocations increased by roughly one per cent between 2000 and 2004. So I do not think the record is as the member for Casey has tried to portray it this evening.

I said earlier that the member for Casey resorted to obfuscation on the issue. I can remember the Howard government saying that 544,000 people completed apprenticeships over the last four years. The truth was quite different to that. Of the 142,000 apprenticeship completions in 2006—the apprenticeships as they were determined by the government, which included traineeships—less than half of those, just 56,000, were in the traditional trades. So they have got away with a lot of obfuscation and a lot of inappropriate criticism being directed to the then opposition about our lack of regard for the area of trade training and apprenticeships.

The member for Casey got up and made a virtue out of the Australian technical colleges. Really, when you look at the half a billion dollars spent on a stand-alone network of Australian technical colleges, that at best will only produce 10,000 graduates by 2010, you have to wonder what the merits are in the duplication of services and the wasteful expenditure of taxpayer funds that we saw invested in these colleges. The member for Casey talked about the issue of scale. Let me tell you, down in the Illawarra the scale was very small. I hope I am absolutely correct: I think the projected enrolment for the first year of our college was 50, and they did not make that; and, in 2008, the projected enrolment of 191 students simply will not be met. And yet the Rudd Labor government, in honouring the contracts that were entered into, is about to spend up to $13.6 million in building a brand new building for this small number of students. I do not think one can justify that at all. I think the Howard government’s belief that somehow these ATCs were the centrepiece of their attempt to deal with the skills crisis has been found very wanting.

In conclusion I just want to say that I am delighted that the Minister for Education and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations has brought this bill to parliament very early in its sitting. It establishes the urgency with which we are dealing with this huge problem—a problem that has been building up over the last decade, a problem that came as no surprise to anybody, a problem that was talked about by employer organisations, by the ACTU and by a whole raft of people, including the TAFE directors. We all saw it coming, and the government’s response was too little, too late.

The member for Casey bemoans the fact that some of the programs that had been instituted are not going to continue into the future. I guess the reason for that would be
that many of those ad hoc responses were not sufficient to deal with the endemic problem of skills shortages. This new body, Skills Australia, will provide the Rudd government with high-quality advice about current, emerging and future skills needs in Australia. It will have industry as its focus and will try to identify priority skills and training needs. Skills Australia will also provide advice on the allocation of skills training places, and those training places will be allocated according to industry demand.

I think this is a great initiative. I commend the minister for the speedy way in which she has managed to bring this legislation to the parliament. It shows the urgency of the problem and the fact that we are really serious about it. We believe that this new authority will provide our government with strategic advice about current and future skills needs so that our policy response and programs can do much more to address the gap between the demand for and the supply of skilled labour and skilled workers, which was sadly neglected by the former Howard government.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (9.09 pm)—I rise this evening to support the Skills Australia Bill 2008. I think it makes sense. I welcome anything that looks at enhancing and increasing opportunities for employers and young people in rural and regional Australia. I am hopeful and optimistic that the intention behind creating Skills Australia is to ensure that it is for all Australians, including those in rural and regional areas.

I have spoken many times in support of measures by the previous government to alleviate the skills shortage, particularly measures that are continuing strongly in my electorate. For nine years, I made it a point, when everyone was focused on university degrees, to focus on apprenticeships, trades and certificates. I will not change that point of view, because that is where the majority of Australian opportunities lie. As I have said before in this House many times, we cannot all be chiefs; there have to be some indians. It is vitally important that our young people in the electorate of Riverina and in other electorates are given opportunities to work and to own their own businesses as a result of having done an apprenticeship in some trade or other occupation.

In my electorate I have an ongoing issue with employers being unable to find skilled workers locally. It is becoming increasingly difficult. More and more of the employers in my electorate are having to source skilled workers from overseas. They do not want to do that. They do not want to go to the expense of doing that. But the local tradespeople and the local businesses, in order to secure their current employment, to get productivity gains up, to meet their forward contracts and to cater to their market, do need more workers. At this point in time many of them are forced to go overseas and look for skilled workers to bring in under the skilled migration program.

The establishment of Skills Australia, in my understanding from reading the bill, will enable the government to receive quality advice about the current, emerging and future skills needs of Australia. That is a bit questionable. I am not sure that anybody has ever been able to forecast or anticipate what skills are going to be available and required. I hark back to the Intergenerational report, which the former Treasurer, Peter Costello, was master of. I look at that and see the difficulties that the new body will have in forecasting and anticipating the needs for the future. Today we talked a lot in this House about carers, elderly people and aged care. I am very concerned for the disability sector. I wonder, when there will be such a small number of people entering the workforce between 2020 and 2030, how on earth we are
going to actually get the people with the skills and the training to be able to care for and meet the needs of the disabled and the elderly. It is a very big issue and, hopefully, Skills Australia will have the adequate expertise to make provisions for the future.

In supporting the bill, I urge the Minister for Education and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations to ensure that Skills Australia will have an adequate representation of a cross-section of rural and regional industry and rural and regional people, because we are every bit as entitled as everyone else to have our views and issues reflected when these forecasts are happening and decisions are being made.

It is my understanding that the Skills Australia concept has received wide support from the industry. But, again, I want to ensure that there is strong rural and regional business input at all levels. I am not quite sure—it has not been clear—of the relationship that will be formed between Skills Australia and the National Industry Skills Committee. I think that is something that needs some very careful thought.

There must be incentives to encourage people to undertake training in areas of skills need. Supplying additional places will not automatically ease the skills shortage; you have to put incentives into place in order that business operators and others will take up the opportunities. There has been no real action to date from any Labor government—and I do not single out this Labor government, but I talk primarily about that of New South Wales, the state that I hail from—to ensure that incentives are put in place. In fact, I am very concerned about the current Labor government’s first 100 days. I have to be critical about this because it affects the people that I represent. I am not criticising the government purely for the sake of being critical; I think I have grounds for being critical about the cuts that have already been made to the incentive program for agricultural and horticultural trainees. Cutting the apprenticeship incentives for the agriculture and horticulture program—a $47.7 million assistance scheme designed to encourage workers to return to agricultural industries by providing grants of $800 for tool kits and up to $1,000 to help with training fees—is very sad and is not a very good signal of the commitment to and understanding of the needs and issues of rural and regional youth who are looking to enter the workforce.

It is very important that we encourage our young people to stay and work in regional areas. I try to encourage them to stay and work in the Riverina. I have worked tirelessly with Charles Sturt University and Riverina TAFE to give our kids opportunities in exciting career pathways. We now have veterinary science, dentistry, clinical sciences and pharmacy at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga. These are the sorts of career options that many young people want to follow. If you introduce them into a rural and regional university you are more likely to get rural and regional kids staying and working in regional areas. I have worked similarly with TAFE. We have some fabulous joint programs, diplomas and degrees with Riverina TAFE and Charles Sturt University. To see this assistance scheme scrapped was very disappointing. We need to keep strengthening our regions, and I am concerned that the opposition does not really understand the needs of rural and regional areas and the support that rural apprentices require.

Ms Neal—they certainly don’t; the opposition is completely clueless.

Mrs HULL—I am sorry—you are dead right. I am so used to it; it takes a little bit of undoing. I am concerned that the government does not understand the training needs of rural apprentices. Unless we do something
really serious and continue with the incentive programs to ensure that young people remain in rural and regional Australia, there will be a price to pay, and all Australians will pay that price. It is absolutely imperative that agriculture is considered one of the fundamental requirements of the Australian people.

We have some significant issues that we need to confront. I would like to read out some statistics. I am not quite sure where the member for Throsby got her statistics from with respect to the former government’s approach to apprenticeships. In 2006 there were 3,750 apprenticeships in training in the Riverina electorate. That is not a fudged figure. There was no smoke and mirrors or cloaks and daggers to get those numbers. In March 1996 there were 1,420 apprentices. That figure well and truly more than doubled in that period of time.

As a medium-enterprise businessperson and a prolific trainer of apprentices, I know the difficulties in the years prior to the Howard government’s election in getting any incentives or recognition for training apprentices. It was simply all about university degrees. Those who wanted to go to TAFE or do the admirable trades and services apprenticeship in any area were simply considered not worthy. I raised it in this House with the government that I had been part of since my election in 1998. I was very concerned about the way in which parents were considered unsuccessful if their child was not doing a university degree. If you were at a barbecue and somebody asked you what your child was studying at university, the drop-dead barbecue stopper was to say, ‘My son is a panelbeating apprentice.’ The peer pressure on parents to send children to university regardless of whether or not it was really their forte was quite strong, and a lot of young people were in university doing degrees that did not lead to better employment prospects.

We saw the decline of apprenticeships over that period of time. It took some time before the former government picked up and ran with this issue that needed to be addressed. Thankfully, they finally did and I congratulate this government for continuing on that pathway. I hope there is particular consideration for those rural and regional people who make up such a great part of the nation’s prosperity and GDP.

The New South Wales state government has issued a press release through Adrian Piccoli, the member for Murrumbidgee, announcing that there will be a trade school in Griffith. I congratulate the state government for putting a trade school in Griffith. I have long sought a technical college in the Griffith area because I think it is one of those areas that desperately require some sort of functional area where kids can concentrate on entering a valuable trade. I do congratulate the New South Wales state government and hopefully we will see that school opened in 2009. Surely the construction of that facility will be on track.

In supporting the bill we have before us today, I say to the minister: well done for pursuing the skills that Australia workers require. I do not accept the criticisms and accusations of lethargy directed at the previous government because I think that our track record on vocational education and training genuinely speaks for itself. You cannot fudge the truth. You can allege percentages and use smoke and mirrors, but you simply cannot fudge the truth. The truth is there to be known. I am sure there is further growth that can take place with Skills Australia. All I ask of the minister is that she ensure Skills Australia has adequate representation from rural and regional Australia, because we are certainly entitled to have access and support as well. In supporting the bill, I urge and encourage the minister to ensure rural and regional Australians are in-
cluded and that we do govern for all of Australia.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (9.25 pm)—The Skills Australia Bill 2008 establishes a vital element of Labor’s skills strategy, Skills Australia. This will provide the Australian government with independent, high-quality advice to assist with better targeting of support for the workforce development needs of businesses and workers across the country. Skills Australia will comprise seven experts drawn from a range of backgrounds including economics, industry, academia and training providers. The legislation establishes the operational arrangements to support the independent body, including provisions relating to conflict of interest issues, arrangements for the appointment and service of members, remuneration of members, procedures about conduct and arrangements for working groups to provide it with the capacity to investigate issues deeply by drawing on a wide range of stakeholders.

This is sorely needed legislation. We now have a skills crisis of massive proportions. In vocational education and training, on the former government’s own estimates, Australia faces a shortage of more than 200,000 skilled workers over the next five years. By the year 2016, that will be 240,000 skilled workers. This skills crisis has been building for a decade. Indeed, the Reserve Bank of Australia warned the previous government as far back as 1997 that a skills shortage was one of the capacity constraints in our economy adversely affecting our economic growth. The previous government ignored the warnings; they simply were not interested. Indeed, they attacked the TAFE system. They slashed funding to TAFE, which is the largest single provider of training in Australia—back in 1997, they reduced the Commonwealth investment in TAFE by 6.6 per cent for the following three years to 2000. This had damaging flow-on consequences for TAFE, including that TAFE has not been able to adequately meet the demand for training. Over the life of the previous government more than 325,000 people were turned away from the TAFE system.

I want to make a couple of remarks about the importance of TAFE to underscore what a debacle this was. In 2005 there were 1.64 million students in the vocational education and training system in Australia—more than one in four persons aged between 15 and 19; indeed, more than 10 per cent of all working age Australians. Of those students, 1.26 million—that is to say, 77 per cent—studied in TAFE. Since 1997 enrolments in the vocational education and training area have grown by over 13 per cent and in 2005 TAFE provided 304 million annual student hours of vocational education and training. Clearly, from these figures TAFE is a vital public asset which is the engine and heart of the whole vocational education and training system. TAFE plays complex and multifaceted roles in the development of Australia’s education and skills base, in strengthening industry, in the achievement of broader government objectives and in the social cohesiveness of communities, particularly in regional areas.

During the Liberal years vocational education and training funding decreased in real terms, especially in relation to the growth in the system. Commonwealth government funding of TAFE declined by 24 per cent between 1997 and 2004. At the same time we had the introduction of Australian technical colleges. They were introduced at a cost of $343 million over five years to the Australian taxpayer, in the process rising to more than $580 million in real funding with further election promises made in 2007. The previous government promised that these technical colleges would address the skills shortages and provide vocational education and training to young people, which the former
Prime Minister claimed was otherwise not available. This was simply not true. This is exactly the role which TAFE carries out, and the previous government’s hostility towards TAFE was very damaging to this nation’s best interests. The technical colleges simply duplicated the TAFE system. They were set up as a private provider in competition to the public system, the TAFE system, which has been literally starved of growth funding by the Howard government. Indeed a Senate estimates committee found the ATCs to be an outrageously expensive way to train apprentices when compared with the TAFE system.

The bottom line is that TAFE is and must be a major player in addressing skills shortages. A serious funding shortfall has shown itself in the form of higher class sizes, reductions in TAFE courses and cuts to student services. There has been a high level of unmet demand for vocational education and training courses at a time when we need potentially qualified and skilled people in the Australian workforce. In my state of Victoria the TAFE teaching workforce has an average age of 53 years. There are serious skills shortages in the TAFE teaching profession. There is a need to attract and recruit to the profession—and retain—expert industry professionals. There is clearly a need to address the professional development of this teaching workforce as a priority. We need qualified plumbers, accountants and the like in TAFE and we need them to have teaching qualifications to address the literacy and numeracy difficulties in the general population.

I want to mention the particular problem of casual employment in TAFE, and I thank Gillian Robertson and Rob Stewart from the Victorian branch of the Australian Education Union for the information that they have provided to me and no doubt others on this issue. A 2002 study estimated that more than 50 per cent of TAFE teachers in Australia were casually employed, with a figure as high as 70 per cent in some states. Casually employed teachers are often paid only for the hours that they teach, so they are not able to cover a great deal of the other work that their teaching generates, such as administration, managing student issues, student counselling and so on. This casual employment undermines quality. These teachers often work large amounts of unpaid time to manage the workload generated by their teaching. They are neither funded nor encouraged to participate in the professional life of their TAFE. Most often they are neither encouraged nor funded to participate in their own professional development. Many casually employed teachers in TAFE report unmanageable levels of travel as they attempt to cobble together enough work to survive.

Underfunding forces TAFE employers to use casual employment. Indeed many TAFE employers acknowledge the unacceptably high levels of casual employment and point to government underfunding as the cause. This effectively means that TAFE teachers, whether casually or securely employed, are carrying the burden of underfunding. Casual employment acts as a disincentive to experienced industry teachers coming into TAFE. Most industries report that poor working conditions and low salaries are a disincentive to those working in industry to take up TAFE teaching. In trades areas in particular, people nominate the inability to get secure employment as a major reason for not pursuing teaching in TAFE as a profession. These are very serious issues and problems. I hope that this government will be able over time to progressively address these very important issues.

Over the years, I have taken a big interest in unemployment because of its impact on the community that I represent. I have come to the conclusion that unemployment nowadays is all about education and skills. If you have got the education and you have got the
skills then you will get a job; if you haven’t, best of luck! I think it is regrettable that the path that we have gone down as a nation is to import skilled migrants to meet our skills needs rather than to put a decent investment into our own young people in the form of skills training and education. I have talked about what has happened with TAFE. We have seen the same thing with tertiary education, with domestic undergraduate commencements essentially flat-lining during the era of the previous government. At the same time we had undergraduate commencements by overseas students dramatically increasing—thanks to a government which preferred overseas students because they paid full fees—we also had cutbacks in federal government support for universities and cutbacks in federal government support for TAFE and therefore a move to meet our need for skilled labour by essentially outsourcing our demand for skills and training. This has led to a growing addiction to skilled migration. It has gone up from 24,000 back in 1996 to over 100,000 now, so it has quadrupled. I think this is a short-sighted approach. I think that the answer lies in training young Australians and providing proper educational and training opportunities. I commend the government for introducing this bill and for its attention to skills issues, and I commend this bill to the House.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (9.36 pm)—Little is more important to a parent than their children’s future. It has often been said in this place that education really is the key to our economic future. It is also the key to our kids’ future. Clearly our economic future is very important to us all. As a matter of fact, it is probably the single biggest motivating force for members representing their electorates in this place—at least, I would hope so. We clearly acknowledge that there is nothing more important than the future growth of our economy and that one of the things we must do is ensure that there is an adequate supply of skilled labour. The Skills Australia Bill 2008 is a tangible response to the need to provide this country with a supply of skilled labour. It is the first response in 11 years to address the economic constraints imposed on our productivity by the distinct shortage in the supply of skilled labour at present. This bill is part of Labor’s five-point plan to address the inflationary pressures on our economy that we see at present, and one of the major things is the economic restraint imposed by the limited skilled labour available.

I have seen this up close and personal. I have two sons who now are both tradesmen. One of my boys works in the construction industry and the other works in the mining industry. Having knowledge of someone who works in the mining industry over recent times, I know the actual effects of the skills shortage there. Without putting too fine a point on it, the money that can be earned in that industry is certainly very big and it attracts a lot of young people. My son comes from the outer metropolitan areas of Sydney but he works at Blackwater, which is very close to your electorate of Maranoa, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott. He works side-by-side with a lot of young fellows out of Melbourne, Launceston, Hobart and every other mainland city. He works as an electrician.

The reason why skills are in short supply in other areas of our economy, particularly in the skilled trade areas, is that so many young people are now working in the mines. Mining companies can afford to pay good money, but, if you live in an outer metropolitan area of Sydney, or indeed any other area, it becomes a very difficult exercise to get a power point fixed or essential trade work done. This all came about because, when it was elected some 11 years ago, the Howard government saw fit to wind back the commitment to trade based training. It saw fit to wind back by 6.6 per cent Commonwealth
investment in TAFE. What we have seen since 1997 is some 325 young people turned away from TAFE. These young people would have been our future electricians and carpenters but never got their start. At the stage where they were winding back their investment in those areas this same government saw fit to abolish the Australian National Training Authority because they thought: ‘Industry will take care of all that. We don’t have to worry about that. They will do that themselves.’ That was just a failed judgement on the part of the Howard government because, quite frankly, what we are now seeing is the direct product of years of neglect in attending to the supply of skilled labour in this country.

It is not simply the member for Werriwa standing here now and saying this; this is something that was put to the Howard government over the years since 1997. It was put to them by the Reserve Bank of Australia, who indicated the economic need for the government to address the mounting skills shortage they observed throughout the economy. It was put to the government no less than 20 times over a decade that it needed to act and do something about looking at the deplorable state of skills development within the Australian economy. As a consequence, as the member for Wills correctly pointed out, it left industry with no alternative but to apply short-term fixes to the skills problem by relying on 457 visas for the temporary importation of labour into this country to do the work that should have been performed by Australian labour. This should demonstrate that we cannot take a short-term fix to the issue of financial debt—as the Howard government did in those days—and cut off funds to the thing that can actually generate job growth and economic growth within the country.

But what was probably more disturbing, apart from the 20 warnings that were given by the Reserve Bank and apart from abolishing the Australian National Training Authority, were the comments by the then Minister for Vocational and Further Education, Mr Andrew Robb. At an industry forum he admitted: ‘We have got a problem with skills shortages. I mean that we knew it was coming but it has arrived with force and now it is going to get worse.’ That is not bad commentary from a minister who was responsible for skills development! He could hardly claim to be prophetic. Of course they knew there was a problem. There were 20 warnings that suggested as much from the Reserve Bank. And he was right in one respect: it is going to get worse unless it is addressed—and that is what this bill is designed to do. This bill is a tangible response to addressing the skills shortage. It is the first response in 11 years, but it is certainly one that, first and foremost, actually addresses vocational education. It has regard to, for instance, what the ACCI and St George Bank have been saying in their annual survey over the last three years, which is that the prime economic constraint in the economy at the moment is the skills shortage.

This bill will establish the independent body Skills Australia. It will be responsible for providing advice to the government on skills needs and skills development. It will work very closely with industry. As an independent statutory organisation it will consist of seven members drawn from a range of backgrounds, including economics, industry, academia and training providers. It will take a focused view on the provision of skills in this country. It will not only look at what is required now; it will address what will be required as a result of our projected economic growth in the future. It will do what the Howard government failed to do—that is, plan ahead. This organisation will be the key organisation to provide advice on the allocation of 450,000 skilled training places from
2007 to 2011. These are crucial, established training positions, if we are serious about addressing the economic constraints in our economy as it presently stands.

The Rudd Labor government is committed to tackling skills shortages and tackling them head-on. We understand the urgent need to increase the supply of skilled workers. We will ensure that investment is targeted where it is really needed. We will ensure that the results of this achievement are in line with the current demands of industry and also with the projected position of industry over the decades ahead.

This is a far-reaching bill in what it seeks to establish. It will be as visionary as when the Australian National Training Authority was first introduced under the Hawke administration. It will not only seriously address the skills shortages in this country; it will lay down the foundations to give skills development a real future in Australia.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (9.46 pm)—It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to the Skills Australia Bill 2008. This bill represents the first instalment of Labor delivering on its election commitments to address the skills crisis that is restricting our economic growth and fueling inflation. Delivering on another election commitment, this bill will allow for the establishment of Labor delivering on its election commitments to address the skills crisis that is restricting our economic growth and fueling inflation. Delivering on another election commitment, this bill will allow for the establishment of Skills Australia. Skills Australia will be a statutory body and will provide independent expert advice relating to the nation’s workforce skills and development needs. It will be steered by a chair and six other members drawn from industry, economics, academia and educational backgrounds. Skills Australia will advise the Minister for Education and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations directly.

The bill outlines the constitution and membership of Skills Australia, including the chair and six other members, to be appointed by the minister. Skills Australia will present to the minister an annual report, which the minister will table in this place.

The creation of Skills Australia represents a significant shift in skills and training planning in this country. Gone are the days of the Howard government and the narrow and failed voucher system which was driven by the supply of labour. Skills Australia will make sure that Australian government policies to address the skills shortage are driven by the real and emerging demands of industry. We need to ask ourselves how we got to the point where skills shortages are one of the biggest impediments to economic growth through gains in productivity.

Addressing the skills crisis is a top priority for the Rudd Labor government, unlike those opposite who chose to ignore the 20 warnings over the past years from the Reserve Bank that skills shortages were limiting economic growth, driving up inflation and therefore driving up interest rates. Those opposite reduced funding for the TAFE system, denying more than 300,000 Australians the chance to gain further vocational education and training during the life of the previous government.

I do not have to look too far myself to see the impact that skills shortages are having on our economy. I just need to look at my own electorate of Canberra and the ACT more generally. In the ACT we have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, currently at 2.1 per cent. We have the highest number of job advertisements, in proportion to the workforce, of anywhere in Australia. We have the nation’s highest workforce participation rate, at almost 73 per cent, and we actually have far more jobs advertised than there are people unemployed.

Whilst this is a great position, in one sense, for the ACT economy, it highlights the impacts that those skills shortages are having
on local businesses. As I talk to employers in my electorate, they constantly state that the skills shortage is their biggest impediment to growing their business. While the Howard government sat on its hands, the state and territory governments have been quite active in taking steps to identify skills shortages and finding ways to fix them. The ACT Labor government established the ACT Skills Commission, which released its interim report in October last year. I congratulate the ACT Stanhope government for taking this significant step and getting on with the job of attacking the skills shortages problem in our community. I note that the interim report has been well received here in Canberra by business groups, unions, training providers and the broader community. I commend the Canberra Business Council and its CEO, Chris Peters, on their positive contribution and leadership through the business community in addressing the impacts of the skills shortage here in the ACT.

Of course, the skills crisis is a national problem. It requires national leadership from the federal government and, ultimately, a national solution. Establishing Skills Australia is an important first step in tackling those skills shortages. The Rudd Labor government will be funding the creation of an additional 450,000 training places over the next four years. Unlike those opposite, we on this side of the House recognise that we cannot afford to sit back and allow this lack of attention to continue. We believe in swift action to address the skills crisis, which is why we will have an additional 20,000 training places available from April this year.

That is a real, immediate change. From next month, an additional 20,000 Australians will be able to access vocational training. These places will be directed at those people who are currently outside the workforce. This will mean another 20,000 people, with newly attained skills, can enter the workforce on completion of their training. This will make a huge difference to employers around the country and to my own town of Canberra. Labor will also be supporting 65,000 apprenticeships over the next four years.

I have in my hand the skills in demand list for the ACT, provided by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. It makes for some fascinating reading and clearly shows the breadth of the skills crisis in my community. In the ACT, we have critical shortages in all engineering trades, all automotive trades, all electrical and electronics trades, all food trades, and all construction trades bar one: stonemasons. We also have serious shortages in professions and in information and communication technology sectors. This means that vacancies cannot be filled for occupations such as architects, metal machinists, locksmiths, welders, sheet metal workers, motor mechanics, panel beaters, spray painters, electricians, refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics, computer programmers and other IT specialists, roof tilers and even brickies, through to butcher, baker and cabinet maker—the list goes on and on. It really makes one wonder how on earth a government of 12 years could allow this situation to develop.

It is only with real, direct and timely action that we can begin to address the skills crisis left unaddressed for so long by the former government. I am very pleased to be part of a government that is taking swift action and definitive action on this critical issue. The establishment of Skills Australia is the start. It will lay the foundation for continued positive action from the Rudd Labor government to address the skills crisis. I am looking forward to both the establishment of Skills Australia and a turnaround in the deplorable state of affairs left by the previous government.
Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Parlia-
mentary Secretary for Disabilities and Chil-
dren’s Services) (9.53 pm)—I would like to
start with what we all agree on. I think that
every inaugural speech from both sides of
politics has extolled the virtues of education
and skills. They are all correct: learning has
real power. The acquisition of skills, be it a
certificate III or a four-year apprenticeship,
can have the power to change a life, to trans-
form and diffuse technology and to assist the
rise and rise of consumer wealth. For all of
us here who love education, the influence of
skills is not news. Imagination, innovation
and entrepreneurship flow from a fertile and
well-trained mind. But an educated, skilled
nation does not simply wake up to find itself
highly skilled. Knowledge is a process of
accumulation, not instant genius. Our nation
and our people, more than ever, need the
persistent and consistent promotion of skills.
The notion of one job and one organisation
for life is no longer relevant to the fluid and
transient 21st century. The requirement for
labour skills and talents will rise and change
with market trends. Jobs once thought safe
will evaporate. In our new century, our
workers must be able to rapidly adapt to a
changing work environment and have to be
supported in their need to train and retrain
and be students and apprentices again to ac-
quire multiple skills for multiple careers.

I think one of the real capacity constraints
facing our nation is the underdeveloped tal-
et of our workers. Australians have innate
talent; there can be no doubt about that. But
they need leadership and they need skills
training to develop their abilities. One of the
most important things that we can do in this
place is to help build an individual’s skills,
giving them not only what they need to have
a satisfying working life across many careers
but also the wherewithal to contribute to
our society and our community to their full
potential. Corporations, governments and,
indeed, nations who support and build workers’ skills will, in turn, build their own com-
petitive edge, ensuring their future success in
the global marketplace. Yet one of the major
failures of the Howard government was its
cavalier, leave-it-alone attitude towards our
future prosperity, evidenced by its neglect of
skills formation in Australia. Australia has
not trained enough new or existing workers
to keep up with the demands on our econ-
omy and our workforce.

There is an unprecedented demand for our
resources across the world. Mineral and en-
ergy resource prices are at all-time highs.
Our iron, steel, alumina and aluminium ex-
ports are contributing to building and shap-
ing the future of the world. But the previous
government sorely neglected our need to
remain globally competitive and the sustain-
ability of our prosperity. Twenty times in the
last three years the Reserve Bank warned
that capacity constraints, including skill
shortages, were driving up inflation. Indeed,
the Minerals Council estimated that projects
in excess of $100 billion were under threat
from capacity constraints, including lack of
skills training. Substantial growth opportuni-
ties, particularly in regional and remote parts
of Australia, may be lost. It has been left to
Labor to repair the legacy of the previous
government.

Skills Australia is a key plank of the gov-
ernment’s five-point plan to fight inflation
and to secure higher living standards for all
Australians. Labor recognises that our econ-
omy is constrained by limits to its capacity to
sustain higher growth without inflation, in
large part because of a lack of skilled work-
ers. The Minister for Employment and
Workplace Relations outlined in her second
reading speech on the Skills Australia Bill
2008 the depth of the skills shortages, in par-
ticular in the mining and construction sec-
tors. Whilst in the last five years there were
54,000 new jobs created in mining, there has
been a fivefold increase in vacancies in the sector, and we see the delay, mothballing and increasing costs of many projects. Indeed, by 2015 there will be a requirement for another 70,000 people in the resources sector. These are problems that Labor needs to solve.

In my own electorate of Maribyrnong, over 7,000 people work in manufacturing. It is the single largest industry employing my constituents. Policies which invest in the skills of the people of Maribyrnong will also, in turn, secure a competitive future for manufacturing. Policies about skills training are particularly relevant in my electorate because there are more technicians, trade workers and machinery operators and drivers than there are workers in any other collective group of occupations in the seat. Investment in skills creation is fundamental to the next wave of economic reform. As the minister indicated in her second reading speech, Skills Australia is the first step of many that this government will take as part of a comprehensive approach to secure a prosperous future which maximises workforce participation and productivity. Having people outside of the workforce is a waste of the national economic potential. International research shows that without substantial and significant upskilling in the workforce our relative skill level will be lower than those of our international competitors in the future, affecting our future performance economically.

The Productivity Commission revealed that the surge in productivity growth from the 1990s was by far the major factor behind average income acceleration in that period. Indeed, much of the high productivity growth through skills development and high performing industries in the nineties was passed on to consumers in the form of lower prices at the time. The legislation establishing Skills Australia sets out the objectives of the new statutory body, which are to provide for expert and independent advice in relation to Australia’s workforce skills and development needs. This will target what the government is doing in line with what industry is demanding. Industry demand, in the analysis of the workforce skills needs across industry, will be at the heart of the skills training program. I am also pleased that Skills Australia holds the promise of developing and maintaining relationships with the states and territories and with their relevant authorities and others interested in workforce development across all of our workforce.

Labor’s focus on new training places—an extra 450,000 training places over the next four years—with many of these training places leading to higher level qualifications, such as certificate III level or above, will enhance the quantity, the quality and the depth of the skills of our workforce for years to come. The consultative and cooperative approach adopted by this bill, and the Skilling Australia for the Future policy, shows the government’s commitment to working constructively to align skills development policies and training with industry priorities. I applaud the support for up to 65,000 apprenticeships over the next four years under the Skilling Australia for the Future policy. Apprentices play a crucial role in building Australia’s skills base, and acquiring new skills will help lift the participation rate and lower the unemployment rate for 15- to 19-year-olds in particular. After all, people with high qualifications have higher rates of participation and employment, and their working lives tend to extend longer than those without qualifications.

But this Skilling Australia proposition is also vital to lifting those outside the social and economic mainstream into employment. Under the Howard government the Australian training system insufficiently helped those who were outside the workforce to re-enter it. Australia’s record on training those without employment is, in fact, poor. Under
the previous government, Australia spent 0.04 per cent of its gross domestic product on training those who were not employed. We were the fifth lowest in the OECD—a shameful result. There are an estimated 526,000 15- to 24-year-olds not engaged in full-time work or study. Skilling Australia provides the opportunity to potentially rescue a lost generation and to ensure much more engagement in the workforce. Also, another 544,000 people who are underemployed in Australia will have greater access to skills training and will be able to participate more fully and satisfactorily in the Australian workforce. Enhanced vocational training is critical to delivering a genuine full employment economy, where existing workers’ jobs are secure and where those outside the workforce have the wherewithal to participate more fully. That is why I am particularly pleased by Labor’s commitment to allocating more than a third of the additional new training places to people currently outside of or marginally attached to the workforce to equip them with the skills that they need to gain employment. Indeed, the remaining places will be targeted at training people who are currently employed but need to upgrade their skills.

In my capacity as Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services, I have become acutely aware of the impediments to entry or re-entry to the workforce for people with a disability or mental illness. Rudd Labor certainly recognises the merits of certified training and assisting people on income support payments to acquire skills and gain lasting employment. Our government understands that those with a disability or mental illness should be given the vocational and employment opportunities that they deserve to gain and retain work. As I said in my first speech to this House, it will do this:

... not so people with disability receive special treatment but so they receive the same treatment as everybody else—the rights which are theirs, with the dignity that they deserve.

The government’s commitments under Skilling Australia for the Future and other policies, such as Labor’s national strategy for mental health and disability employment, chaired by the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and me, will contribute to the government’s social inclusion agenda. This legislation enhances the lives of people in many ways which we can only begin to appreciate. In conclusion, I believe that the Rudd Labor government understands that Australia will be what it knows. I congratulate the minister on this bill and commend it to the House.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (10.03 pm)—Tonight I rise to speak on the Skills Australia Bill 2008, which is currently before the House. This bill highlights the determination of the Rudd government to tackle Australia’s worsening skills crisis, a crisis that has been compounded by a decade of inaction under the previous government and one that has significant economic and social implications for limiting Australia’s ability to meet its future challenges. The purpose of the Skills Australia Bill 2008 is to establish an independent statutory body, Skills Australia, whose role will be to provide the government with high-quality advice about the current, emerging and future skills needs of Australia. The establishment of Skills Australia is an important part of this government’s commitment to safeguarding Australia’s long-term prosperity. This includes making sure that the right conditions are in place to guarantee Australia’s continued economic development. Among other things, this depends heavily on our capacity as a nation to produce a skilled workforce and to lift Australia’s flagging productivity rate. It also requires a more sustained focus on
social inclusion, a term which describes a society where all have an opportunity to participate fully and meaningfully in the workforce and in community life.

The establishment of Skills Australia will help to identify specific skills shortages in our economy. It will also help identify and plan for the relevant pathways to address these shortages. Comprised of seven members drawn from a range of backgrounds including economics, industry, academia and training providers, its mandate will be to match more closely the range of skills training available in Australia with the needs of our changing economy, especially when it comes to those areas where skills shortages are most acute. Skills Australia will help industry and business plan for a future where people with the necessary skills and training will be available to take them forward. It will help us inform young people of job market openings and optimum training options. It will help us advise existing workforce participants who are looking to retrain, take advantage of new pathways or, indeed, return to the workforce following redundancy or other interruptions to their working lives and it will help schools, universities and TAFE colleges tailor the courses they offer to suit the needs of both students and local employers.

We know that Australia faces a shortage of more than 200,000 skilled workers over the next five years. Within eight years that figure is likely to reach 240,000. The need to combat Australia’s skills crisis has never been as immediate or as pressing as it is now. This crisis has been building for a decade, but the previous government simply ignored all the warnings. The net result is that today’s skills shortages have already started to hold this country back. The situation was made worse by the Howard government’s decision to slash funding to the TAFE sector, the largest single provider of training in Australia, and by the abject failure of its Australian technical colleges program. More than 325,000 people were turned away from the TAFE system during the years of the previous government. Skills Australia will provide important information to this government, which is committed to turning the situation around as quickly as possible.

The commitment to matching up the demand for skills and training with an increased skills capacity in the workforce will benefit the whole nation, but it will particularly be important for the people and industries in my electorate of Calwell. Currently, large numbers of the people I represent in Calwell depend on the manufacturing industry for their jobs and wellbeing. Indeed, statistics for the northern region of metropolitan Melbourne, of which Calwell is a part, show that employment in manufacturing accounts for over 60,000 jobs. Many of our local industries, however, face an uncertain future. A number have closed altogether, others have drastically reduced in size and made long-serving workers redundant, and others are busy restructuring and downsizing in a desperate bid to stay viable. We have many experienced and well-trained workers who face employment uncertainty, while we have an economy limited by a lack of people with the necessary skills for the future. We have an obligation to avoid the terrible waste of such a situation.

A complete lack of interest at the national government level in local manufacturing over the last decade—in procurement policies which favour home-grown manufacturing, in nurturing innovation or in actively encouraging research and development—has left local industry exposed to the onslaught of global competition with little to defend itself. Australian manufacturing has a proud tradition. We cannot compete with low-wage countries when it comes to old-style mass production. Where Australia’s future lies is
with high technology creation and innovation. We need to utilise the brains and creativity of our community, and that is where skills development and training become crucial. We can compete internationally by investing in skills and training and by looking to new products, new markets and new methods of production. To do this, we need specialised skills, we need targeted training and we need creative minds and forward thinkers.

One such innovation that the Rudd government will nurture is the development of green cars. Automotive manufacturers in Calwell will benefit from a $500 million green car innovation fund. This measure will help generate $2 billion in investment to secure jobs and tackle climate change by manufacturing low-emission vehicles in Australia. Calwell has a number of companies in the automotive sector. If we can match existing industry and existing skills with a properly targeted program for skills development and readiness to meet the growing demand for environmentally sustainable transport, we will achieve a great deal for the future of our local and national economy as well as improve our air quality. It is precisely this sort of integrated policy development that we need in the 21st century.

In Calwell, we also need housing, infrastructure and a range of human services—all areas which suffer from the crisis in skills shortages—yet we have higher than average unemployment and underemployment and not enough training places for people who want them. Here is a typical picture of mismatch between supply and demand, between willingness to participate and the opportunity to do so.

Most importantly, Calwell’s manufacturing history means that we have a plentiful supply of the most valuable asset a healthy economy needs—namely, our people. The people of Calwell, like those of so many other multicultural urban communities of working people around Australia, are resourceful, hardworking, resilient and very adaptable. We have a diverse community with an enormous range of existing skills and great potential for the acquisition of more skills. We speak a wide range of languages—surely one of the most overlooked skills in this country, especially in an increasingly globalised economy. We have a wonderful TAFE college, Kangan Batman TAFE, which is giving its students excellent training and support to enter the workforce as well as practical experience in the workplace. We have Victoria University’s Sunbury campus, serving tertiary students in that community and beyond.

Our local schools in Calwell are producing some wonderfully bright, enthusiastic, ambitious and dynamic young people. I recently hosted a reception for the highest achieving VCE students of 2007 in my electorate. Looking around at the kids in the room that day, I felt proud that in this part of the world we are producing Australia’s future leaders, thinkers and creators. A number of schools in my electorate have introduced some very innovative programs to give their students every possible chance of going out into the world with the intellectual tools to engage with technology, inquiry, knowledge and problem-solving. The Rudd government is committed to encouraging such programs and to boosting the federal government’s investment in education.

The work of Skills Australia in identifying short-term and longer term needs in the economy is just one component in the overall plan to reskill Australia. Investing in Australian schools to ensure that today’s students are able to successfully tackle the challenges of a rapidly changing workforce is another complementary component. Providing our children with a world-class education system
is crucial not only to their future success but also to Australia’s ability to compete globally. The National Secondary School Computer Fund is one such component of the government’s plan to meet this challenge head-on. Enabling schools to provide their students with new or upgraded information and communications technology as well as improved access to high-speed broadband internet is central to ensuring that students develop computer literacy, greater independence in learning and problem-solving and familiarity with up-to-date technology. These skills will form an important foundation for students who move on to more specialised education, training and work.

Trades training centres are another important initiative that this government is introducing. In 2001, the Northern Melbourne Area Consultative Committee initiated research to identify the causes of skill shortages in northern Melbourne. One of the major findings of this research was that most schools were aiming to prepare students for university education but were failing to adequately cater for those students who were not considering a university pathway. These students were not receiving information or exposure to opportunities in trades training areas aligned with regional industry needs, such as manufacturing, engineering, furnishing, construction and the automotive sector. This lack of information was compounded by negative perceptions about the nature of jobs available in these industries. For instance, many students and their parents still saw trades jobs as menial, dirty and often dangerous, despite the enormous changes in computer and other technology, safety and career prospects in so many of the trades.

The new trades training centres supported by this government, in partnership with the states, will have a major impact in reducing skill shortages across Australia. In Calwell, this policy provides us with a unique opportunity to establish a number of trades training centres in strategic locations across the electorate and to align these centres with the skills base sought by regional industries in areas like manufacturing, engineering, construction and the automotive sector.

By building stronger partnerships between local industry and local education providers, a core aim must be to make sure that these training centres are relevant to the local context so that students in Calwell who do not opt for university have the sorts of skills and training that local employers are looking for. This is one way to ensure the long-term viability and success of trades training centres. It also means providing strong employment opportunities and a seamless transition to apprenticeships for local school leavers whilst making sure that local industry has access to the skills it needs to grow. I congratulate the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion for introducing this important bill and I commend the bill to the House.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (10.14 pm)—in reply—Can I thank everybody who spoke on the Skills Australia Bill 2008 in the course of this debate. Whilst I obviously do not necessarily agree with every comment made by every member of the House during the course of the debate, I thank all members for their input. I think the large number of speakers from the government side shows just how seriously the Rudd Labor government takes the skills agenda. The Skills Australia Bill 2008 will establish Skills Australia, a statutory body that will provide the Australian government with independent, high-quality advice to assist us in targeting government investment in training. It will give the Australian government advice that we can use to assist businesses and workers across the country.
Skills Australia is a key plank in the Australian government’s five-point plan to fight inflation. This is a plan that addresses both the demand side and supply side pressures on inflation. Establishing Skills Australia is the first of many steps this government will take as part of a comprehensive approach to overcoming the challenges our nation faces in securing a prosperous and productive future for Australian working families. Skills Australia will provide advice on the causal factors and impact of future and persistent skill shortages. Skills Australia will be comprised of experts drawn from a range of backgrounds, including economics, industry, academia and education and training provision. It represents an intellectual as well as a financial investment in the skills agenda.

Skills Australia will play a pivotal role in boosting productivity and participation in the economy by providing high-quality advice to the government. This will ensure that policies can be directed towards closing the skills gap—the gap between demand for and supply of skilled workers. Our Skilling Australia for the Future policy will increase and deepen the skills capacity of the Australian workforce and ensure demand for skills and training is better matched to training opportunities.

The Australian government’s plan for our future skilled workforce will help close the skills gap in the Australian economy in three ways. First, we will fund an additional 450,000 training places over the next four years. The government will take the advice of the Reserve Bank of Australia—the advice ignored by the former government—and we will act seriously and with urgency to make 20,000 of these new training places available from April 2008. These initial places will be directed to those outside the workforce and will help many Australians gain employment and stimulate workforce participation rates. Secondly, we will ensure that most of the 450,000 places lead to a higher level qualification, such as at certificate III level or above. Thirdly and most importantly, we will place industry demand at the heart of the skills training system. The Australian government will align skills development policies and training delivery with industry priorities and position the training system to better meet the needs of individuals and industry. New training places under the Skilling Australia for the Future policy will therefore be allocated according to industry demand.

These measures, combined with other initiatives being progressively announced and implemented by the Australian government, represent a significant investment in addressing skill shortages, reducing inflation and securing a prosperous future for all Australians. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (10.18 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Deputy Prime Minister) (10.19 pm)—I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

Water

Mr SECKER (Barker) (10.19 pm)—It is interesting to look at this parliament on the ninth day of sitting of the new government. We have had three disasters already. On the first day of sitting we sat until two o’clock in the morning, we all know about the disaster of the first Friday sitting and here we are on
the ninth day of sitting and we are already two hours beyond our normal adjournment time. If the government cannot manage the parliament, how do we expect it to manage the $1.1 trillion economy of the state?

I speak tonight of a far more important issue in my electorate, and that is the devastating impact of declining water access and quality on the Narrung Peninsula. To make it a bit easier for those opposite to understand where the Narrung Peninsula is, it is basically on the east side of Lake Alexandrina in South Australia. Meningie is the nearest town of some significance, to give people some idea of where we are talking about. More than 40 farmers along the Narrung Peninsula are facing the prospect of going out of business this year as water in the lower lakes drops below sea level. In fact it is now, I believe, about two feet below sea level. If it were not for the barrages instituted 80 or 90 years ago down there, that whole area would be immensely salty now. This is a result of what is happening with the whole Murray-Darling Basin.

The problem is one not only of the saltiness of Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert, which might be called an offshoot of Lake Alexandrina, but also of access to the water. In normal situations over the last 100 years a simple pipe only a few metres out could provide access to water for stock and in some cases irrigation. Irrigation basically has not been a possibility there for some time due to the lack of water.

We actually have farmers who go out in silt that is knee-high, and in some cases waist-high, for up to three kilometres to try and get access to water for their stock and for their households. In fact, many of them now have no access to water for their households or for their stock. As a result they are losing the ability to farm in that area. Carting water is an option for some landholders, and they have been forced into that. But at $1,000 a day for freight and with no emergency water-c frosting assistance from the state government, most have been forced to drastically destock. The fact is it is very hard to live if you do not have water. You cannot live in a household without water.

Several proposals have been submitted to state and federal governments on how to resolve the Lower Lakes issue, including a River Murray Wellington weir and, most recently, the piping of water from Lake Alexandrina into Lake Albert. This is robbing Peter to pay Paul. What that is going to achieve, I am not sure. It will not actually achieve better access to water; in fact, it will have a detrimental effect on Lake Alexandrina.

Not so long ago, we had about 22 quite large dairy farms on the Narrung Peninsula and now there are only eight, and I suspect that before long there will be zero. South Australia simply cannot afford to lose primary industry in the region.

Last month I met with 40 or more irrigators and farmers desperate to get some answers. They told me of having to take pipes up to three kilometres offshore of Lake Albert through dangerous, thigh-high silt.

Unfortunately, the state Labor government and the federal Labor government are not doing much about this at all. In fact, when asked, the Minister for Climate Change and Water, the senator from that other place, said that she was not likely to get to that area before the end of the year—even then she could not guarantee it and even though this is in her own state and a mere 150 kilometres away from Adelaide.

Minister Wong’s ignorance has resulted in Victoria gaining key concessions to the detriment of the management of the Murray-Darling Basin and in particular
South Australia. Meanwhile, the Lower Lakes is in a desperate plight. *(Time expired)*

**Hindmarsh Electorate: Volunteers**

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (10.24 pm)—I rise to speak tonight on behalf of some of the wonderful volunteer groups within the electorate of Hindmarsh, which I represent.

I recently had the pleasure of holding a lunch in my electorate office in honour of some of these volunteers who freely give their time, day in and day out, to assist their peers and the wider Hindmarsh community. These individuals are constantly devoting their spare time to others and the community groups they represent.

These individuals include people such as Pam Nayda and Jean Leunig from the Lockleys senior citizens group, Betty and Malcolm Bollenhagen from the Active Elders group and Rhonda Tully from the Australian retirees and pensioners association from Glandore.

I want to spend just a couple of moments recognising the work that all of these wonderful individuals perform on a daily basis. Firstly, the Bollenhagens give their time to support senior members of the Active Elders Association. They spend countless hours organising events and outings and they assist members in small projects around their houses. The Active Elders Association is also involved in a paper recycling program that not only is environmentally friendly but also raises much needed funds for their association. I have seen them all working tirelessly on a few working bees that I have had the pleasure to visit.

Secondly, Rhonda Tully, a magnificent woman, performs a similar role for the Australian retirees and pensioners association at the Glandore community centre by raising funds and organising activities for the association’s members.

And, finally, Pam Nayda and Jean Leunig of the Lockleys Senior Citizens, who run various projects for their members, have devised an admirable program that unites young students from the Lockleys Primary School and a local nursing home—bridging young and old. Projects such as these bring together individuals who may feel themselves socially isolated for a number of reasons and benefit from the social contact.

Overall, volunteering all over Australia has contributed to the involvement of thousands of individuals in community based activities. Volunteering brings together individuals of all different backgrounds with diverse interests. The volunteers I have mentioned are only a few of the many extraordinary individuals who come together to freely contribute their skills and time by helping others.

There is no doubt that as a society we rely very heavily on the economic and social contributions of these wonderful people who give their time freely. At the moment, the work that volunteers contribute free of charge is worth billion of dollars to the South Australian economy.

Volunteers keep the wheels on in a range of community and not-for-profit organisations. It is not just the financial value of what you do that is so important; it is also the personal touch that is of real value—the time taken to listen to someone’s troubles, the friendship in a smile or the generosity of spirit that comes with a cup of tea. These are the things that you just cannot put a dollar value on—small personal touches and the knowledge that you are touching people’s lives in very modest but important ways. These are the things that keep volunteers, such as the people I mentioned earlier, coming back to voluntary work, week in and week out, year in and year out. The lunch I held in my electorate office was a small
acknowledgement on my behalf of the tireless contribution of these people.

Today, I want to say that these individuals and all the other volunteers within the Hindmarsh community are the bedrock of the community. Each of the small acts of generosity they carry out, however modest or simple, have laid the foundations for a stronger, better community. In my four years of being a federal member of parliament, I have greatly benefited from the wisdom, warmth and friendship of our older citizens.

Without the incredible number of voluntary hours that so many people contribute each and every week not only would hundreds of organisations cease to exist but the lives of thousands of South Australians would be substantially diminished.

Tonight I devote this speech to Pam Nayda and Jean Leunig from the Lockleys senior citizens group, Betty and Malcolm Bollenhagen from the Active Elders, Rhonda Tully from the Australian retirees and pensioners association and all the other volunteers around Australia who give their time to their communities. I think we should all value and honour their contribution to the Australian community as well as the effort and work that they put into caring for others. 

( Time expired)

Pensions and Benefits

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom) (10.29 pm)—I am pleased to return to the parliament today. I come on the back of a very strong wave of community anger, uncertainty and fear from my electorate about the Rudd Labor government’s refusal to rule out slashing the lump sum payment to members of my community who need it most. Within hours of the first reports last week of the Labor government’s ruthless razor gang setting its sights on the $1,000 and $600 payments to carers, my office was inundated with calls from concerned locals. In the days since, the phones have kept ringing, I have been sent emails, people have personally come into my office, and I have been stopped in the street by people terrified that one of the major lifelines to them is about to be unceremoniously snatched away by an uncaring and inexperienced government.

I would like to allay the fears of my constituents and their carers, but the shameful truth is that the Prime Minister, with whom the buck stops, even today has refused to provide any surety and clarity by failing to explicitly state his position on any future assistance for some of the most vulnerable and deserving members of our community.

It is all very well for the Prime Minister and his merry gang of axe-wielding budget slashers to speak of reviewing spending and keeping a close eye on inflationary pressures, but that is something that should not be done at the cost of driving fear and uncertainty into the homes and hearts of the nation’s and of my electorate’s hardworking carers. This is an unthinkable and, in fact, shameful act. Perhaps the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation should cut back on their clandestine and conspiratorial gatherings where new targets are primed for the razor gang and instead rejoin the real world where carers do unending work 24/7 to the good not only of their close friends and relatives but of the community. Perhaps those who do not value carers in this community, like the Prime Minister, should speak to the people in their own electorates and judge for themselves whether funding carers is as expendable as the Prime Minister would like to think.

My electorate has a very large group of carers, many of whom come together in fellowship of support at community gatherings. I have been able to visit some of these, and I have heard firsthand their stories. I am in no doubt that the bonus to recipients of carers
payments and allowances is well deserved
and a vital supplement for the household
budgets where a family member is in need of
permanent care. It is especially so for those
carers who perform their duties with unas-
suming anonymity. These are people who
give up their time and sometimes their ca-
reers and social networks to care for family
members, whether they be their parents, their
children or members of their extended fam-
ily. They are people who perform their duties
without expectation of reward or recognition.
Often many people in the community may
not even be aware of their extra responsibili-
ties. Just because their work is done away
from the public spotlight, that does not mean
that carers’ needs should be swept aside by
this callous government.

Carers give their time in the fair belief that
they will not be left scrambling to feed,
clothe or support themselves or their loved
ones. This is exactly what this government
has done by creating uncertainty about future
funding arrangements. The Prime Minister
has created an environment of unease in
which carers and now seniors are left won-
dering what their futures will hold. These
question marks are adding unnecessarily to
the stresses of households that already have
more than their fair share of pressures. There
can be no taking back the emotional up-
heaval of the Rudd Labor government and
what it has inflicted on these families in the
past few days. At the very least, the Prime
Minister should bring this cruel guessing
game to an end.

Institutionalised Children

Mr MARLES (Corio) (10.34 pm)—The
love that a parent provides for their child is
about as fundamental to the human condition
as it gets, a sense of self-worth is about as
important a gift as any parent can give to
their child, and providing security to their
children is the most important obligation that
any parent has. These three things—love,
worth and security—are the essence of a
healthy childhood. They are the building
blocks of a life. And yet for half a million
Australians who grew up as wards of the
state in children’s orphanages, in children’s
homes and in other institutions, these three
things—love, worth and security—were de-
nied. This represents for them an unimagi-
nable abuse.

This abuse did not start with the state; it
started with parents, either through neglect or
circumstance, who were not able to provide
for their children or perhaps, for the worst
form of circumstance, where there were no
parents in the first place. For Leonie Sheedy,
who was born in 1954, it was a case of her
mother having left the home and her father
being unable to cope with four young chil-
dren, which led her and her two older sisters
and, later, her younger brother to grow up in
the St Catherine’s Orphanage in Geelong.

Large institutions looking after wards of
the state, people without parental advocacy,
were by their very nature harsh places to
grow up. Parental love could not be provided
across 100 kids, self-worth was a distant
concept, and these places were not secure.
Indeed, they were places where abuse could
happen, and it did. Leonie was not the victim
of any physical or sexual abuse but she did
shed the tears of pain of separation from her
parents and ultimately her two older sisters,
who both left the orphanage at different
times while she was there.

Whatever all of that meant for the children
who grew up there in their later adult lives,
and the consequences have been many—
drug dependence, depression, family break-
down, homelessness, prostitution and sui-
cide—their scars are only matched by the
scars upon our own nation. Because, ulti-
ately, as a society we are not judged by the
tallness of our buildings or the wealth of our
richest. Rather, we are judged by the care that we provide to our most vulnerable, and there are no more vulnerable than orphaned children. In their case, we did not provide enough care.

This is a very difficult issue. There was no malice of intent here in terms of the public policy. Indeed, to this day we still remove children from their parents where there is serious risk, and it is right to do that. But there are two ways in which public policy in those days did fail the people who grew up in institutional care. Firstly, the threshold for removing people from their parents then was far lower than what it is now. The significance of family relationships in the development of a person was not understood in the way that it is now. Secondly, putting these kids into large institutions was a recipe for disaster.

That public policy has now changed is the very reason why these people should now be acknowledged. Leonie Sheedy went on to become instrumental in the Care Leavers of Australia Network, CLAN. Through her courage and determination, and the determination of many involved in CLAN, there was the agitation for the Senate inquiry which ultimately led to the Forgotten Australians report. Senator Andrew Murray, who himself was a Fairbridge child migrant, has been the main advocate for the forgotten Australians in this parliament. Senator Murray’s term in this parliament will expire in the middle of this year, so CLAN have approached me to be the new advocate in this parliament on their behalf, a job that I see as a great responsibility and indeed, for me, a great privilege.

The reason I was approached was that Geelong had an unusually large number of orphanages in the area; indeed, the largest number of any centre outside a capital city. As a result, there are a large number of forgotten Australians who are now constituents in the electorate of Corio. While I will not be able to match the advocacy of Senator Murray in this parliament, borne of deep personal experience on his part, I do hope that I can play some role in ensuring that the forgotten Australians are properly remembered.

Folic Acid

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (10.39 pm)—I rise to my feet this evening to try and bring to the attention of this House and the people of Australia an unfortunate by-product of what I think was a very well-meant decision by FSANZ, Food Standards Australia New Zealand. The decision by FSANZ to request the mandatory addition of folic acid to bread-making flour from 13 September 2009 was made for all the right reasons, with the best of intentions, with the aim of reducing neural tube defects, which affect around 900 pregnancies a year. Neural tube defects cause conditions such as spina bifida and anencephaly—horrific, debilitating diseases which all of us would do anything we could do to reduce and, if possible, to abolish.

However, it has been brought to my notice by a small flour mill in my electorate and by the Flour Millers Council of Australia that the industry has severe doubts about its ability to deliver on the technical requirements of this addition. The specifications are that between two and three milligrams of folic acid per kilogram—there is a minimum amount and a maximum amount—should be delivered into the flour mix. It was deemed that, because we are already adding thiamine to bread flour at a rate of 6.4 milligrams per kilogram, it would be easy to add folic acid into this mix and that all would be pretty much right. But with thiamine there is no upper limit. The flour millers tell me that, for ease of application, because there is no damage from adding too much thiamine, they always add a bit extra. In the process of flour
making, there are often overruns, missed batches and things which do not quite measure up to spec, so they blend those back into the overall flour mix. If you have already added your thiamine and then it comes back at nine milligrams per kilogram, it is not going to be detrimental to anyone. It will probably do you more good than harm. But, if you follow this process in the case of folic acid, you will find that you go over three milligrams per kilogram, and, unfortunately, there is some medical evidence around that this is a harmful rate of folic acid.

The flour millers association were asked to respond to the committee on what the application costs of this would be. They felt as though they were a little rushed at the time and did not fully understand the implications of it themselves. They came up with figures of about half a million dollars per flour mill. Even if that is feasible, that means there will be a very uneven impact, because there are some very large flour mills in Australia—there are about 28 in this scoping study—and at the other end of the spectrum there is a flour mill in my electorate which is the smallest in Australia. The Cummins flour mill, situated in Cummins, on southern Eyre Peninsula, is a 77-year-old family company producing five tonnes an hour and employing eight people in that small community. The estimated cost to them, should this even be technically feasible, is around $150 per tonne of flour. That is going to put them right out of the market. The owner-manager there tells me that, if he has to raise the price of his flour by $150 per tonne, that will be the end of them.

Cummins is an EC-declared area. There have been bushfires in that area of southern Eyre Peninsula. I would be the first to admit that this should not impinge on a decision about public health, but it is a difficult situation. I am advised there are as many as nine mills in Australia classified as small which will be affected by this legislation. What the Flour Millers Council of Australia is seeking at the moment is a 12-month moratorium on the implementation of this while a full review takes place. I think this is probably not an unreasonable request. On top of that, the flour millers have also brought to my attention the United Kingdom government’s deferment of a decision on the mandatory addition of folic acid, following conflicting reports on its health benefits, including links to colorectal cancer. I am in no position to comment on the veracity of these claims, but I think, in the light of the fact that this appears also to have some severe economic ramifications—certainly an unintended consequence for these very small mills—that it is probably a fair request.

(Time expired)

Dental Health

Mr CLARE (Blaxland) (10.44 pm)—I rise tonight to welcome the implementation of two important election commitments that will assist the people of Blaxland: the re-establishment of the Commonwealth dental program and the establishment of the teen dental program. They are two steps in a long journey that will improve the dental health of our community.

‘There is no clearer indicator of socioeconomic status in Australia than the state of people’s teeth.’ Those are not my words; they are the words of Tony McBride, CEO of the Health Issues Centre. They are words that ring true, particularly in the electorate of Blaxland, and they ring loud and clear because of the neglect of the last decade. A recent study by the National Advisory Committee on Oral Health found that children in low socioeconomic groups experience twice as many incidences of tooth decay as those in high socioeconomic groups.

In the decade since the Howard government abolished the Commonwealth dental program, the public dental waiting list has
Our public dental health system is ailing. Last week I toured Westmead dental hospital in Sydney’s west and met with dentists at the coalface of the crisis. Under the Howard government’s watch, the dental workforce was allowed to run critically short. By 2010, there will be a shortfall of 1,500 dental staff in our public system. Only 10 per cent of the dental workforce is in the public system, but they are required to treat almost half of the population. Their task is made more difficult because they are also treating those with the most severe and complicated problems.

In its first 100 days the Rudd government introduced two new programs to start addressing the crisis in dental health. In 11 years the Howard government introduced one program, and only expanded it in its dying days, the dying days of a government fearing electoral defeat. The Rudd government’s programs will allocate half a billion dollars over three years. Over the same period the Howard government’s program only paid out $2.6 million. That is half a billion dollars compared with $2.6 million. The difference in dollars and the difference between the two parties is stark.

The re-establishment of the Commonwealth dental program means many more people will now have access to dental health—people like Michael Cross. I met Michael during the election campaign. He had been waiting since July 2004 for a set of dentures. Thirty per cent of Australians cannot afford private dental care, and Michael is one of them. He had been forced to wait with 650,000 other Australians on the public dental waiting list. Michael told me that life without a decent set of teeth had been very tough. It affected his ability to eat and make friends. I brought his plight to the attention of the local media, and we have been able to get him a new set of dentures. He tells me they have changed his life. People want to talk to him. There are a lot more Michael Crosses out there.

The sad story of dental neglect starts young in my electorate. A few weeks ago I visited Old Guildford Public School. The principal told me that during a nationwide school dental audit she was handed a list of names of children who needed urgent dental care. The list was three pages long. Twenty children on the list needed to go under general anaesthetic to have their teeth fixed. The principal, Kay Campbell, asked the dental nurse if these children were in pain. The dental nurse told her, ‘They are far beyond pain’—children as young as five years old.

In my first speech I told the House I believe education is ‘the great equaliser in an unequal world’. But it is hard to concentrate in a classroom when you have a toothache or an abscess. In the last 10 years the rate of tooth decay amongst five-year-olds has jumped 21 per cent. The Howard government failed these children. Our job now is to help them. Our dental health system needs a government with vision, a government that understands the real health and social benefits of investing in dental care. I am pleased to see the Rudd government is heading in that direction.

The place to start is with prevention: a ‘healthy kids check’ when kids start school, and the teen dental program. The objectives are worthy, but the test of all good policies is not in their design but in the outcomes they produce—how many Michael Crosses they help, how many children at Old Guildford Public School need urgent dental care in five years time.
We can make a difference for places like Blaxland. We can educate our children and we can make sure they are healthy enough to be educated.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 10.49 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Albanese to move:
That, unless otherwise ordered, the following standing orders be amended to read as follows:

1 Maximum speaking times (amendments to existing subjects, as follows)

| Committee and delegation reports on Mondays | 10 mins maximum, as recommended by the whips |
| in the House | Each Member |
| in the Main Committee | Each Member (standing orders 39, 40, 41a, 192(b)) |

| Grievances | 1 hour |
| Whole debate | Each Member (standing order 192b) |

| Private Members’ business on Mondays | as recommended by the whips |
| Whole debate | Each Member (standing orders 41 and 41a) |

29 Set meeting and adjournment times

(a) The House shall meet each year in accordance with the program of sittings for that year agreed to by the House, unless otherwise ordered.

(b) When the House is sitting it shall meet and adjourn at the following times, subject to standing orders 30, 31 and 32:

| day | meeting commences | adjournment proposed | House adjourns |
| Monday | 12 noon | 9.30 pm | 10.00 pm |
| Tuesday | 2.00 pm | 8.30 pm | 9.00 pm |
| Wednesday | 9.00 am | 7.30 pm | 8.00 pm |
| Thursday | 9.00 am | 4.30 pm | 5.00 pm |

31 Automatic adjournment of the House

(a) At the time set for the adjournment to be proposed in standing order 29, column 3 (times of meeting), the Speaker shall propose the question—

That the House do now adjourn.

This question shall be open to debate—maximum time for the whole debate shall be 30 minutes—and no amendment may be moved.

(b) If this question is before the House at the time set for adjournment in standing order 29, column 4 (times of meeting) the Speaker shall interrupt the debate and immediately adjourn the House until the time of its next meeting.

(c) The following qualifications apply:

Division is completed

(i) If there is a division at the time set for the adjournment to be proposed in standing order 31(a), that division, and any consequent division, shall be completed.

Minister may require question to be put

(ii) If a Minister requires the question to be put immediately it is proposed under paragraph (a), the Speaker must put the question immediately and without debate.
Minister may extend debate

(iii) When the Speaker interrupts the adjournment debate under paragraph (b), a Minister may ask for the debate to be extended by 10 minutes to enable Ministers to speak in reply to matters raised during the debate. After 10 minutes, or if debate concludes earlier, the Speaker shall immediately adjourn the House until the time set for its next meeting.

Question negatived

(iv) If the question is negatived, the House shall resume proceedings from the point of interruption.

Unfinished business

(v) If the business being debated is not disposed of when the adjournment of the House is proposed, the business shall be listed on the Notice Paper for the next sitting.

33 Limit on business

No new business may be taken after 10 pm, unless by order of the House before 10 pm.

34 Order of business

The order of business to be followed by the House is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2. House order of business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td>Government Business</td>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td>Government Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 noon</td>
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<td>9 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>2.00 pm</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>2.00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approx 3.30 pm Documents, Ministerial statements, petitions</td>
<td>Approx 3.30 pm Documents, Ministerial statements, MPI</td>
<td>Approx 3.30 pm Documents, Ministerial statements, MPI</td>
<td>Approx 3.30 pm Documents, Ministerial statements, MPI</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.30 pm Divisions and quorums deferred</td>
<td>6.30 pm Divisions and quorums deferred</td>
<td>Government Business</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8.00 pm Committee &amp; delegation reports and private Members’ business</td>
<td>8.00 pm Adjournment Debate</td>
<td>7.30 pm Adjournment Debate</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.30 pm Adjournment Debate</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.00 pm</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
35 Priority of business

Government business shall have priority over committee and delegation reports and private Members’ business except on Mondays as provided by standing orders 34 (order of business) and 192 (Main Committee’s order of business).

39 Presentation of reports

(a) Members may present reports of committees or delegations:

(i) as recommended by the whips, during the period for committee and delegation reports on Mondays (standing order 34); or

(ii) at any time when other business is not before the House.

(b) Members may make statements in relation to these reports:

(i) during the period for committee and delegation reports on Mondays in the House (standing order 34); the whips shall recommend time limits for statements, of not more than 10 minutes for each Member; or

(ii) at any other time, by leave of the House.

(c) The Member presenting a report may move without notice, a specific motion in relation to the report. Debate on the question shall be adjourned to a future day.

(d) If, on Mondays, the Speaker presents a report referred to in this standing order, the following steps are deemed to have occurred in respect of the report—a motion to take note of the report, debate on the motion to be adjourned to a later hour and the order of the day to be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration within any parameters adopted by the House on the recommendation of the whips.

40 Resumption of debate on reports

(a) After presentation of reports on Mondays proceedings may be resumed on motions in relation to committee and delegation reports moved on an earlier day.

(b) For debate in accordance with paragraph (a) the whips shall recommend:

(i) the order in which motions are to be considered;

(ii) time limits for the whole debate; and

(iii) time limits for each Member speaking, of not more than 10 minutes.

(c) During the period on Mondays provided by standing order 192, proceedings may be resumed in the Main Committee on motions in relation to committee and delegation reports referred that day or on an earlier day.

41 Private Members’ business

(a) In the periods set for committee and delegation reports and private Members’ business under standing orders 34 and 192, private Members’ notices and orders of the day shall be considered in the order shown on the Notice Paper. When the time set by standing orders 34 or 192 or recommended by the whips ends, the Speaker shall interrupt proceedings and put the question.

(b) If

(i) the whips have recommended that consideration of a matter may continue on a future day;

then

(ii) at the time set for interruption of the item of business or if debate concludes earlier, the Speaker shall interrupt proceedings and the matter shall be listed on the Notice Paper for the next sitting.

Private Members’ bills—priority

(c) The whips, in making recommendations to the House:

(i) shall give priority to private Members’ notices of intention to present
bills over other notices and orders of the day; and
(ii) shall set the order in which the bills are to be presented.

First reading
(d) When each notice is called on by the Clerk, the Member in whose name the notice stands may present the bill, together with an explanatory memorandum (if available), and may speak to the bill for no longer than 5 minutes. The bill shall be then read a first time and the motion for the second reading shall be set down on the Notice Paper for the next sitting.

(e) If, on Mondays, the Speaker presents a bill for which notice has been given by a private Member, the first reading of the bill is deemed to have occurred —the motion is deemed to have been moved and debate on the motion adjourned to a later hour and the order of the day referred to the Main Committee for further consideration in accordance with any parameters adopted by the House on the recommendation of the whips.

41A Selection of private Members’ and committee business
(a) For the period for committee and delegation reports and private Members’ business on Mondays, the whips shall recommend the order of consideration of the matters, the times allotted for debate on each item and for each Member speaking, and the matters to be considered in the Main Committee.

(b) The Chief Government Whip shall report the recommendations of the whips to the House and shall move without notice the motion—

That the House adopt the report.

(c) The Chief Government Whip must report to the House under paragraph (b) in time for the report to be adopted by the House and published on the Notice Paper of the sitting Thursday before the Monday being considered. The report shall be published in Hansard.

(d) The House may grant leave for the order of consideration of the matters, and the times allotted for debate on each item and for each Member speaking, set by the House to be varied.

42 Removal of business
The Clerk shall remove from the Notice Paper items of private Members’ business and orders of the day relating to committee and delegation reports which have not been called on for eight consecutive sitting Mondays.

43 Members’ statements on Fridays, to be omitted.

44 Grievance debate, to be omitted.
55 Lack of quorum
(a) When the attention of the Speaker is
drawn to the state of the House and the
Speaker observes that a quorum is not
present, the Speaker shall count the
Members present in accordance with
standing order 56.
(b) On Mondays and Tuesdays, if any
Member draws the attention of the
Speaker to the state of the House be-
tween the hours of 6.30 pm and 8 pm,
the Speaker shall announce that he or
she will count the House at 8 pm, if the
Member then so desires.
(c) If a quorum is in fact present when a
Member draws attention to the state of
the House, the Speaker may name the
Member in accordance with standing
order 94(b) (sanctions against disorderly
conduct).

97 Daily Question Time
(a) Question Time shall begin at 2 pm on
each sitting day, at which time the
Speaker shall interrupt any business be-
fore the House and call on questions
without notice.
(b) The business interrupted shall be dealt
with in the following manner:
(i) if a division is in progress at the
time, the division shall be com-
pleted and the result announced; or
(ii) the Speaker shall set the time for
resumption of debate.

106 Giving notice
(a) A Member giving a notice of motion
must deliver it in writing to the Clerk at
the Table.
(b) The notice may specify the day pro-
posed for moving the motion and must
be signed by the Member and a sec-
onder.
(c) A notice of motion which expresses cen-
sure of or no confidence in the Govern-
ment, or a censure of any Member, must
be reported to the House by the Clerk at
the first convenient opportunity.

133 Deferred divisions on Mondays and Tues-
days
(a) On Mondays and Tuesdays, any division
called for between the hours of 6.30 pm
and 8 pm shall be deferred until 8 pm.
(b) The Speaker shall put all questions on
which a division has been deferred, suc-
cessively and without amendment or
further debate.
(c) This standing order does not apply to a
division called on a motion moved by a
Minister during the periods specified in
this standing order.

138 Initiation of bills
A House bill may be initiated:
(a) by the calling on of a notice of intention
to present a bill;
(b) by an order of the House;
(c) without notice by a Minister under
standing order 178 (Appropriation Bill
or bill dealing with taxation); or
(d) by presentation under standing order
41(e).
A bill not prepared according to the standing
orders of the House shall be ordered to be with-
drawn.

139 Notice of intention to present bill
(a) A Member giving a notice of intention
to present a bill must deliver the notice
in writing to the Clerk at the Table.
(b) The notice must:
(i) specify the title of the bill and the
day for presentation; and
(ii) be signed by the Member and at
least one other Member.
(c) A notice of intention to present a bill
shall be treated as if it were a notice of
motion.

140 Signed copy of bill presented
(a) Member presenting a bill must sign a
legible copy of the bill and give it to the
Clerk at the Table, or to the Speaker for
the purposes of standing order 41(e).
(b) The title of a bill must agree with the notice of intention to present it, and every clause must come within the title.

141 First reading and explanatory memorandum

(a) Subject to standing order 41(e), when a bill is presented to the House, or a Senate bill is first received, the bill shall be read a first time without a question being put. A Member presenting a bill during private Members’ business may speak to the bill, before it is read a first time, for no longer than 5 minutes.

(b) For any bill presented by a Minister, except an Appropriation or Supply Bill, the Minister must present a signed explanatory memorandum. The explanatory memorandum must include an explanation of the reasons for the bill.

192 Main Committee’s order of business

(a) If the Committee meets on a Monday, Wednesday or Thursday, the normal order of business is set out in figure 4.

(b) If the Committee meets on a Monday to consider orders of the day relating to committee and delegation reports, these orders of the day shall have priority over other business, unless otherwise ordered.

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**Figure 4. Main Committee order of business**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.30 am</td>
<td>3 min statements</td>
<td>9.30 am</td>
<td>3 min statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approx 10.00 am</td>
<td>Government business and/or committee and delegation reports</td>
<td>approx 10.00 am</td>
<td>Government business and/or committee and delegation reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approx 1.00 pm</td>
<td>Adjournment Debate</td>
<td>approx 1.00 pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approx 6.40 pm</td>
<td>90 sec statements</td>
<td>approx 7.30 pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approx 6.55 pm</td>
<td>Committee &amp; delegation reports and private Members’ business</td>
<td>approx 8.30 pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approx 8.30 pm</td>
<td>Grievance debate</td>
<td>approx 8.30 pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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192 Members’ statements on Mondays

Before committee and delegation reports and private Members’ business on Mondays, the Deputy Speaker shall call on statements by Members.

The Deputy Speaker may call a Member, but not a Minister (or Parliamentary Secretary*), to make a statement for no longer than 90 seconds. The
period allowed for these statements shall extend until 6.55 pm.

* Including Assistant Ministers who are Parliamentary Secretaries

1928 Grievance debate

(a) At the conclusion of committee and delegation reports and private Members’ business on Mondays, the first order of the day shall be grievance debate. The order of the day stands referred to the Main Committee.

(b) After the Deputy Speaker proposes the question—

That grievances be noted—

any Member may address the Main Committee or move any amendment to the question. When debate is interrupted after one hour or if it concludes earlier, the Deputy Speaker shall adjourn the debate on the motion, and the resumption of the debate shall be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

207 Presenting a petition

A petition may be presented in one of two ways:

(a) The Speaker shall present petitions and the Clerk announce them each sitting Monday, in accordance with standing order 34 (order of business).

(b) A Member may present a petition during:

(i) the period of Members’ statements in the Main Committee, in accordance with standing order 192A and standing order 193;

(ii) adjournment debate in the House in accordance with standing order 31, and in the Main Committee in accordance with standing order 191; and

(iii) grievance debate in accordance with standing order 192B.

208 Action by the House

(a) Discussion on the subject matter of a petition shall only be allowed at the time of presentation as provided for under standing order 207(b).

(b) Each petition presented shall be received by the House, unless a motion that it not be received is moved immediately and agreed to.

(c) The only other motion relating to a petition that may be moved is a motion on notice that the petition be referred to a particular committee.

(d) The terms of petitions shall be printed in Hansard.

(e) The Standing Committee on Petitions shall respond to petitions on behalf of the House and report to the House.

Mr Albanese to move:

That the following program of sittings for 2008, dated 12 March 2008 be adopted in substitution for the program adopted on 12 February 2008.
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CHAMBER
Ms Gillard to move:

That:

(1) the Workplace Relations Amendment Regulations 2007 (No. 4), as contained in Select Legislative Instrument No. 306 of 2007 and made under the Workplace Relations Act 1996 and the Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act 2005; and

(2) the Workplace Relations (Registration and Accountability of Organisations) Amendment Regulations 2007 (No. 1), as contained in Select Legislative Instrument No. 307 of 2007 made under the Workplace Relations Act 1996,

be disallowed.

Mr Abbott to move:

That the House:

(1) calls on the Government to end the permit system preventing access to remote Northern Territory townships;

(2) calls on the Government to restore the pornography bans put in place by the former Government; and

(3) urges the Government to not further water-down the Northern Territory intervention.

Mr Georgiou to present a Bill for an Act to appoint an independent reviewer of terrorism laws, and for related purposes. (Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Laws Bill 2008).

Mr Broadbent to move:

That the House consider what action should be taken by the Australian Government in response to the humanitarian tragedy that is Darfur.

Mr Bruce Scott to move:

That the House:

(1) calls on the Federal Government to commit to ban by the year 2012 the inclusion of all plastic and glass bottles in landfill;

(2) notes the ban would be supported by implementation of a national program providing a cash refund for all plastic and glass bottles;

(3) calls on the Federal Government to reimburse grocery and convenience stores that provide collection sites for the empty bottles and provide cash refunds for each bottle, with larger bottles attracting a larger cash refund; and

(4) calls on the Federal Government to cooperate with local government bodies to ensure that smaller towns in rural, regional and remote Australia receive financial support to establish a collection centre and to transport bottles to the nearest recycling centre.

Mrs Irwin to move:

That the House:

(1) notes that the abuse of illicit substances is deeply implicated in Australia’s most intractable and costly social problems. These extend well beyond direct health and crime costs to issues like child protection, school drop out, suicide, mental illness, homelessness and poverty;

(2) notes that the full cost of illicit substance abuse to the Australian economy has not been accurately assessed;

(3) notes that the cost effectiveness of strategies devised to deal with abuse of illicit substances has not been accurately assessed in Australia;

(4) notes that the efficacy of supply reduction strategies as compared to the efficacy of other measures in reducing the harms of illicit drug abuse has not been accurately assessed in Australia; and

(5) calls on the Government to initiate an inquiry by the Productivity Commission into the cost of illicit drug abuse in Australia and the cost effectiveness of strategies to address illicit drug abuse and that in accordance with the Productivity Commission Act 1998, the Commission may also make recommendations in the report on any matters relevant to the matter referred.)
Mr Raguse to move:

That the House:

(1) notes that the seat of Forde now experiences an acute shortage of both publicly and privately provided housing and that a large number of constituents are also experiencing mortgage stress; and

(2) considers Forde and neighbouring electorates of the south-east corner of Queensland as areas that would benefit from the Federal Government’s investment in affordable housing.